

Teaching Toward Utopia:  
Promise, Provocation, and Pain in Pedagogies of Radical Imagination

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A dissertation  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

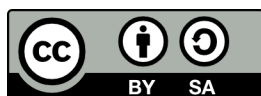
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington  
2014

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:  
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
College of Education

2014



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**Abstract**

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A review of literature about education for social justice revealed that while imagination is frequently invoked as one of the pedagogical goals toward which radical educators aim, its nature and processes by which it might grow are under-theorized. Furthermore, scant attention is given to the challenges that educators face in their work when imagination is integral to their efforts. This inquiry began with two key assumptions: first, that the goal of creating a more just social world is shared widely among radical educators, although the shape of this visionary world is contested, and, second, that imagination plays a vital role in bringing desired change about. This study engaged a group of 25 radical social justice educators who share these assumptions and whose efforts take shape in diverse contexts in conversations about their educational ideas and practices. This project had three areas of focus: the significance of radical imagination in the pedagogical and political work of social justice educators, the specific strategies they use to nurture it and the reasons underpinning their choices, and the difficulties they face in their efforts. The overarching purposes of the project were to construct theoretical and practical frameworks and to explore the significance of pedagogies of radical imagination for social justice education in light of the field's transformative aims.

The substantive chapters of the dissertation elaborate three main lessons I draw from the research conversations, some of which confirm dominant themes in related scholarly literature and others that challenge them. First, while conversations confirmed that one important way educators conceive of the kind of imagination needed in social change work is as a capacity to envision horizons of social-political possibility in new ways, they also illustrate that imagination can be conceived as an aspect of both

perception of existing realities and embodied action, modes highly relevant to learning for social justice and enacting change that warrant further consideration. Second, conversations affirmed the unique roles the arts can play in cultivating imagination, but illuminated a variety of other pedagogical strategies that can be used to provoke the imaginative modes my research partners spoke about. Third, the study challenges a prevailing idea among its supporters that imagination necessarily builds inspiration and hope by outlining significant and painful struggles my research partners say they – and those with whom they work – face in working to foster radical imagination. Looking across the dissertation process as a whole, I make two further arguments. I identify a set of creative tensions radical educators face in their pedagogical work. I also argue that as a field of inquiry and practice education for social justice is at its most potent when its varied transformative aims are kept directly in view as animating forces for our individual and collective efforts. In the dissertation’s “Afterwords,” I reflect on the personal significance of this project in the context of my life story, teaching, and activism.

Beyond the goal of contributing to the small but excellent body of movement-relevant theories of radical imagination, my overarching goal in this project is to help generate knowledge that can support the development of a broader range of imaginative practices among radical educators and more intentional and effective teaching and learning within social justice movements.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to the women of my family:

To my grandma, Rosemary Beger, who taught me how to drive, cuss, keep a sharp mind in dulling circumstances, and pass along the stories of resistance that are part of every family.

To my sister, Rachael Myers, who has dedicated a lifetime to working with others to ameliorate the worst harms of poverty and to going after their root causes, even when that means working in the Nonprofit Industrial Complex and with Republicans.

To my mom, Patricia Myers, who taught me to play with humor in the face of abusive power, to treat every person with the dignity that is their birthright, and to act on my dreams of a more just world every single day.

## **Giving Thanks**

A friend recently joked: Tamara will never finish her dissertation because writing acknowledgments will take her longer than writing the dissertation itself! If were to give gratitude I feel for all of the support offered during these 15 joyous and difficult years, she would be right. To the many students, colleagues, mentors, friends, lovers, partners-in-crime, comrades, housemates, family members, and “adopted” family who have offered me material, intellectual, emotional, or other support during this process, I hope my appreciation has been evident to you. There are a few people I would like to offer my gratitude by name:

Those who began this journey with me 15 years ago and have become an essential part of my chosen family: Cyndie Prehmus, Brenna Wolf, Amy Peloff, the Maupoux who came along not too far after.

My committee: David Allen for honest intellectual and political guidance and for always respecting my values, Nancy Beadie for consistent intellectual rigor, Ed Taylor for warmth and a dedication to creating a humanized university, and Wayne Au for down-to earth critical politics and the generosity to jump in so close to the finish line.

Members of the Beehive Collective and the other artists in my life whose music, visual art, film, theater, writing, and various creative expression lets me dance, cry, celebrate, remember, and see the world that is and that could be in ways that would otherwise elude me.

Educators working within the constraints of public schools and universities who have nevertheless particularly pushed, moved, and inspired me as long ago as elementary school and as recently as yesterday: Mrs. Smouse, Mr. Hilton, Mr. Fortin, Ms. Thaelke, John Walter, Marcia Sawyer, Joycelyn Moody, Donna Kerr, Anu Taranath, and Jeremy Louzao. Educators with whom I have been lucky to collaborate with and grow in the process: David Giles, Damarys Espinoza, Jeanette Bushnell, Third Andressen, Maria Elena Garcia and the many generations of Rethinking Diversity.

People who offered me not only wonderful friendship, but many tangible “auxiliary tools” (money, cars to drive, places to live, computers) that made this work possible in its last stages are too numerous to list, but in particular I would like to thank: Andrea Marcos, Carol Heinz, Erin Clowes, the whole Bushnell-Albright family, Mike Beebe, Sam Smith, Sye Laird, and webster walker.

Many radical comrades have sustained me over the years, a few not named above who have been especially important: Annie Sartor, Blair Taylor, Katie Howenstine, Elijah Saxon, Steve Araujo, Claudia Keinholtz, Libby Loft, Rebeca Rivera, Wilson Shook, Lily Sotoo; members of the Compound, Sunset, Emmas, Helen, Chez Muppet; plus a handful of amazing radicals relatively newer in my life whom I look forward to building with into the future: Carla Bergman, Son Edworthy, Cindy Milstein, and Chris Dixon.

The generations of students who have shared their brilliance and passion with me and who joined me on experimental journeys to see what we might do together as learner-teachers together. Although I cannot mention all of the significant connections here, I want to thank the badass crew of Women Studies students circa 2002, participants in the 2010 Auroville program, the wonderful Winter 2011 Utopias group, and each and every peer facilitator I have been so lucky to learn with over the years.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to those who generously shared their time and perspectives, who have provoked in me a whole array of new questions, and whose ideas made this dissertation possible.

Finally, my deepest appreciation goes to my best friend, partner, and fellow muppet, Marc, for supporting me in ways too numerous to count and sticking with me with consistent love and kindness through this difficult process over its zillion years. I can't wait to see what our life looks like on the other side. A bientôt!

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# Chapter One

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## Introduce

“I don’t think an anti-oppressive world is possible. I think trying to imagine it is like imagining living in a land of unicorns and rainbows.” The comments are offered in response to an invitation to quietly reflect about what it might feel like to live in a world without oppression. Glancing around the circle of thirty or so workshop participants, all of whom had chosen to attend a workshop focused on the practice of anti-oppressive facilitation, I notice heads nodding. I take this as a sign of at least some agreement with the sentiment among others in the room, although without more investigation it is impossible to discern the specific sources of these perspectives. In this moment, a montage of flashbacks to activist visioning sessions in which I’ve been involved as a participant and facilitator plays itself out in my mind’s eye. A dispiriting number of scenes I recall involve moans and groans, followed by allusions to rainbows, unicorns, or puppies or the similarly dismissive assertions that humans are inevitably greedy, that catastrophe is the only possible outcome to humanity’s current predicaments, and that even to try to imagine otherwise is hopelessly, embarrassingly naïve. In other words, these encounters say, why bother?

On one hand, resistance to the idea that imagining change might be a helpful step toward effective collective action is unsurprising. In his book *The Truth about Stories* Thomas King (2003) argues persuasively that the stories that surround us shape our perceptions of what is and what might be in profound ways. “Once a story is told,” he argues, “it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world” (p. 10). We are living in a historical moment in which stories about the inevitability of capitalism (Miller, 2004), neoliberal globalization (Sparke, 2012), self-enclosed individualism (Keating, 2009), and climate catastrophe (Lilley, McNalley, Yuen, Davis, 2012), for instance, surround us in an astonishing, ever-multiplying, and amplifying array of forms. These stories scream out that our dog-eat-dog world is here to stay, so we had all better get used to it.

While dissident narratives always exist alongside dominant accounts of what is and what might be, it can be very difficult for these counter-stories to gain traction or visibility. The twenty-four hour news cycle that bombards us on our phones, computers, and TV with graphic images of yet another war, humanitarian crisis, attempted genocide, species extinction, or other catastrophe couples with a barrage of popular film and literary dystopian narratives to push the idea that changes that might take us down a collective path toward a more just, peaceful, loving co-existence among humans and with other life on earth are impossible. In fact, alternative accounts that give extended attention to the many ways people resist the kinds of horrors I mention above or envision and actively pursue more just possible futures are frequently marginalized even in the texts, rhetoric, and actions of social movements made up of those seeking transformative changes toward liberatory ends who acknowledge the importance of more hopeful narratives. Perhaps to our chagrin, a variety of education traditions that ostensibly center the pursuit of justice are among the culprits. A brief example from a field that has shaped my own educational thinking, teaching, and scholarship – Social Justice Education (SJE) – illustrates how this can look in practice.

Comprised of chapters written by a collective of dedicated progressive and radical educators, the popular text *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice* (Adams, Bell, and Griffin, 1997/2007) offers theoretical, conceptual, and pedagogical tools for enacting Social Justice Education in a variety of settings. Its companion text, *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice* (Adams, Blumenfeld, Castañeda, Hackman, Peters, and Zúñiga, 2013), offer readers an enormous and diverse range of theoretical and personal accounts that describe and analyze the workings and harms of various systems of privilege and oppression. In the *Readings* text, Ximena Zúñiga (2013) argues that while an awareness of the sources and current manifestations of injustice is essential to social justice work, without a concomitant belief that we can do anything to create desired changes, and without some sense of the changes we seek, we may be left feeling overwhelmed or despairing. She explains that also essential to the work of pursuing change is “a vision for social justice and liberation that values critical consciousness, participation, connectedness, passion, bridge building across divides through dialogue and action, and alliances and coalitions for change, as pathways to individual and collective empowerment, equity, safety, and security for all social

groups in society” (p. 590). Yet Zúñiga’s assertion introduces the tenth and final chapter of the book – 590 pages into a 645 page text – and follows after 8 chapters that are organized using discussions of specific forms of oppression such as “racism,” “transgender oppression,” “ageism and adultism” as titles and anchor points for the discussions therein. In other words, even though the visionary term “social justice” figures centrally in the title of the book, it is largely a focus on *injustice* that takes center stage.

I offer a glimpse into these books because rather than being exceptional cases, I believe they reflect an approach that continues to be quite common in writing, teaching, and acting that aims toward social justice – an approach in which calls to broaden our visionary and imaginative capacities and develop practices to do so effectively are often present, but relegated to the final chapters of books, paragraphs of articles, sessions of a semester, or the last few minutes of workshops rather than being woven throughout these texts or educational processes. Although I have found both of the books I mention above, and others like them, invaluable in my own teaching, and want affirm the tremendous respect I have for the educators and activists whose stories, perspectives, intellectual work, and commitments comprise these texts, they are also powerful examples of what Tuck (2009) has called a “damage-centered” approach to the work we do in pursuit of justice. As Tuck has explained, damage-centered approaches draw on legalistic theories of change, emphasizing the establishment of harm or injury or the documentation of pain and loss in order to obtain political or material gains, usually to the exclusion of desire-centered or other types of narratives. In these frameworks, even when imagined alternatives, desires, and dreams of change are acknowledged as both integral parts of human experience and vital to the success of collective action for radical change that would bring about more desirable futures, these dimensions of our educational work are too often sidelined.

In this context, it is not surprising that the undergraduate students I work with at the university where I teach often articulate views similar to the one I opened this chapter with – that envisioning desired change is superfluous or otherwise a distraction from the “real” work of addressing oppression, abusive power, or other harmful hierarchies. When I ask students with whom I work to tell me about their dreams of change, some readily repeat various versions of the story that entrenched inequality and the many

permutations of domination that humans enact are inevitable and that the greed, competition, and violence they perceive around them are biologically-based urges, unavoidable parts of “human nature.” Others come up blank, explaining that they have never been asked to consider what kind of community or world they would prefer to inhabit. This is true even among students who say they are very dedicated to transformative change. It is true even as the pain many of them feel in light of these pessimistic worldviews is evident and their deep desire for alternative ways of understanding the world and creating material changes is palpable. As King (2003) has put it, alongside thundering monologues (for example, that the status quo is inevitable) dissident accounts that envisage dreams of what a healthier world might look like or those which even propose the idea that it might be somehow worthwhile to dream “have neither purchase nor place” (p. 21).

### **Visionary Activism, Imaginative Movements, and the ‘Politics of Yes’**

Yet, for generations, and probably always, some radical educators dedicated to alleviating suffering and pursuing peace, equity, democracy, and ecological health *have* persisted, often in the face of entrenched resistance, in advocating the idea that an awakened ability to imagine a better world and the sense of possibility and desire that can fuel sustained action to build it are critically important in the process of creating the transformative changes to which they are committed. The organizers of the workshop I described in the vignette that opens this chapter certainly saw value in exploring what a healthier, anti-oppressive world might entail and what it might feel like – it was significant enough that they opened their workshop with it. Although they may still be in an activist minority, they are in good company. At the center of many expressions of activism, organizing, and movement building, in the past and today, we can see the imaginative “politics of yes” (Litfin, 2014) – activist impulses and efforts that emphasize not what our communities and movements are struggling *against*, but what we are fighting *for*.

Although the slogan “another world is possible!” has been attributed to the alterglobalization movement, across the diverse range of movement tendencies and formations that make up the radical left an interest in the role of imagination in the pursuit of justice can be found. In fact, it seems to be

increasing. Conversations about the importance of imagination, and also such related ideas and practices as vision, possibility, hopes, dreams, and desires, in processes of creating change are animating conferences and other temporary gatherings (e.g., All Power to the Imagination! and the 2007 and 2010 US Social Forums), small- and large-scale collective action (Boyd and Mitchell, 2012; Duncombe, 2007; Reinsborough, 2010), the creation of public and community art (Naidus, 2009), and the creation of durable social spaces (Coté, Day, de Peuter, 2007a, 2007b). University based scholars and movement intellectuals who work outside academia are documenting and examining the significance of what scholars have referred to as “radical imagination” for collectivities and individuals (Castoriadis, 1997; Haiven and Khasnabish, 2010, 2014; Kelley, 2002; Khasnabish and Haiven, 2012; Shukaitis, 2009). In recent years, a spate of publications has documented some of the varied creative manifestations that visionary activism took in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the emergent forms it is taking today in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup>.

Animated by the question “What did the New Left want?” George Katsiaficas’s (1987) *Imagination of the New Left* examined shared desires among political actors in the eruption of new social movements that emerged in the wake of uprisings around the world in 1968. Robin Kelley’s (2002) popular book *Freedom Dreams* documented and examined expressions of radical imagination among African Americans across a range of revolutionary movements, from Surrealism and feminism to socialist and Third World liberation struggles, among others, in order to advocate not only that we better understand the ways past movements looked, but that “we tap our own collective imaginations” and “do what earlier generations have done: dream” (p. xii).

More recently, Linda Stout’s (2011) *Collective Visioning* reads as a passionate call and clear rationale for the importance of cooperatively imagining desired change among participants in social and economic justice movements; grounded as it is in Stout’s own experience in groups, communities, and movements pursuing justice, it also offers a glimpse of the landscape of these struggles. Chaia Heller (1999) has described the critical importance of what she and other social ecologists call “reconstructive visions” for global justice activists at the last turn of the century. Chris Dixon (2012, 2014) has argued that linking

visions of change with struggles to meet basic needs is one of the defining features of the contemporary “anti-authoritarian current” that his research describes. Shepard (2012) explored the idea of play as a form of imaginative intervention with a long history and many current manifestations; Boyd and Mitchell’s (2012) *Beautiful Trouble* is a compendium of theoretical and practical tools for imaginative action. Stephen Shukaitis (2009) and Stephen Duncombe (2007) both traced materialized expressions of radical imagination, Shukaitis within autonomist movements and Duncombe among progressives and radicals on the left. Books like Carlsson’s (2008) *Nowtopia* and Milstein and Ruin’s (2012) *Paths Toward Utopia* provide glimpses into the many and varied prefigurative approaches that activists are using to build the organizations (Cornell, 2011), movements (Crass, 2012), communities (Litfin, 2014), and world (Holloway, 2010) they want in the here and now. The projects described in these texts center the work of pursuing more just and desirable futures while those involved in them work also to build capacities for vigilance against the many forms of oppression which can seep in to alternative or oppositional projects even as these are the very structures we are fighting against.

Among the most exciting recent endeavors that focus on the significance of radical imagination for today’s justice movements has been Max Haiven’s and Alex Khasnabish’s (Haiven and Khasnabish, 2010, 2014) multi-year research project to probe, examine, and theorize the idea of “radical imagination” in the context of radical movements for justice today. Reflecting on their own embodied and active conception of radical imagination, these Nova Scotia-based scholars argued that “we do not ‘have’ radical imagination, no matter how dearly we wish for revolution or how unpopular our ideas might be. The radical imagination is something we *do* and something we do *together*” (Khasnabish and Haiven, 2012, p. 4). In order to explore an idea that they considered “slippery and difficult to pin down,” they “borrowed” a prefigurative methodology “from the future,” utilizing a strategy they called “convocation” to facilitate various processes by which activists could gather virtually and in person to share reflections about radical imagination. As editors of a special edition of the online journal *Affinities* they edited invited submissions focused around the question, “What is the radical imagination?” (Haiven and Khasnabish, 2010). The resulting assemblage of essays framed radical imagination in a fascinating array of ways. Their “radical

imagination project” created dialogical spaces in which social movement participants in Halifax, Nova Scotia could explore visions of change and important movement questions among themselves and with radical movement involved folks from outside Halifax. Their recent book about their several years of exploration theorizes how the radical imagination *works* in social movements and movement-engaged research methodologies (Haiven and Khasnabish, 2014).

All of the scholarship noted above has something to say to educational processes, concerned, as they are, with questions about what conditions might bring about politicized subjectivities capable of discerning some of the most egregious sources of contemporary harms, as well as envisioning desired changes and actively pursuing them. Yet these and other writings that address the significance of radical imagination and its related terrain in the context of the pursuit of justice remain largely disarticulated from writings focused squarely on what intentional educational or pedagogical efforts might and already do contribute to this work.

Among those who situate their theorizing and practice in the scholarly field of education, probably the best known argument that imagination is central to creating justice-focused, transformative change is Maxine Greene’s (1995b) *Releasing the Imagination*. In the book, Greene (1995b) describes a “mode of utopian thinking” that “refuses mere compliance, that looks down roads not yet taken to the shapes of a more fulfilling social order, to more vibrant ways of being in the world” (p. 5). Greene conceives of an imagination capable of inventing “visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society” (1995a, p. 5) and which, as Levitas (2007) has put it, might “enable us to think about where we want to get to, and how to get there from here” (p. 300) in order to create needed and desired changes. As she sees it, the ability to envision things otherwise, to “invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society” (Greene, 1995b, p. 5), can be a powerful tool in fighting indifference and despair (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Hutchinson, 1996) and in enabling action in pursuit of a socially just world (Generett and Hicks, 2004; Van Heertum, 2006). She believes firmly that educational processes can and should nurture these practices and the capacities needed for them and she proposes that the many arts offer some of the most potent experiences for cultivating the skills and capacities she describes.

Although Greene's decades-long argument (e.g., Greene 1977, 1995a, 1995b, 2000, 2006) that these ideas matter has certainly made hers the predominant perspective many in the field of education look to when invoking imagination as an area of pedagogical focus for those concerned with creating a more equitable world, hers is not a lone voice. While Greene and others (Bigelow and Christensen, 2001; Fischer, 2001) have used the nomenclature of *social imagination*, other scholars have used different terminology to further complicate or deepen these discussions, invoking and advocating such ideas as *critical* imagination (Cartwright and Noone, 2006; Weiner, 2007), *moral* imagination (Craig, 1994), *defiant* imagination (Clover and Stalker, 2007), *imagination-intellect* (Weems, 2003), or *social justice* imagination (Sweet, 2009). Furthermore, scholars in the field of education examine overlapping terrain as that which draws on the language of imagination by centering their theoretical or empirical investigations on themes like *hope* (Halpin, 2003a, 2003b; Hutchinson, 1996; Levitas, 2007; McInerney, 2007; Renner, 2009; Shade, 2006; Thrupp and Tomlinson, 2005; Van Heertum, 2006) *dreams* (Freire and Freire, 2007), *desire* (Amsler, 2011; Franz, Lindquist, and Bitner, 2011; Zembylas, 2007), *vision* (Webb, 2009), and *utopia* (Coté, Day, and de Peuter, 2007a, 2007b; Giroux, 2003; Haddad, 2005; Milojevic, 2006; Naidus, 2009; Peters and Freeman-Moir, 2006).

Although relatively disarticulated, the arguments that imagination and related phenomena have something to do with the pursuit of justice traverses the field of education as a theme in policy studies (Halpin, 2003a, 2003b; Shapiro, 2009), as well as in scholarship about teacher education (Cartwright and Noone, 2006; Darvin, 2009; Generett and Hicks, 2004), other higher education contexts (Winters et al., 2012), and K-12 teaching (Greene, 1995b; North, 2009; Weems, 2003). Outside of the scholarship focused on K-12 or higher education, the argument that imagination matters in the pursuit of justice appears in literature about community-based youth development and youth activism (Ginwright, 2010; Hung, 2010), in adult education (Clover and Stalker, 2007; Horton, Kohl, and Kohl, 1998; Newman, 2006; Preskill and Brookfield, 2009), and in discussions of "public pedagogies" (Duncum, 2011; Sandlin, Schultz, and Burdick, 2010).

All social action involves a theory of change and, as Tuck (2009) has argued, research and scholarly inquiry are likewise undergirded by theories of change. Amid their differences, and the inconsistencies within them, these scholars and movements share a basic sense that imagination has something important to do with creating transformative change toward a more just world. Taken together the movements and the research I point to above are a collective voice urging “the refusal to accept that living beyond the present is delusional, the refusal to take at face value current judgments of the good, or claims that there is no alternative” (Levitas, 2007, p. 294). The imagination advocated by scholars I note above is often, though not always, forward-looking, able to gesture toward and visualize at least the outlines of alternative ways of being human together that reflect the kinds of values held by those committed to radical change in the direction of social justice (contested though they are).

### **The Politics of Yes in My Teaching, Activism, and Research**

Over the past few years, my interest in the rise in imaginative movement work around me has combined with curiosities I’ve stewarded since childhood deepen my investigation of the significance of imagination in the pursuit of a better world. In the last decade, I’ve been fortunate to have the opportunity to explore imaginative activism through the lenses of community, arts and organizing, and education in the context of a variety of courses I have taught at the University of Washington (see Appendix A for examples of my approach to courses and syllabi) in learning settings on and around our Seattle campus, field trips to locations around the Puget Sound area, and experiences in international learning contexts. During this time, undergraduate and graduate student colleagues and I have attempted to draw on and build with others who argue that the heuristic “utopia” offers an invaluable and practical resource in our efforts to create change in our communities, movement organizations, and educational contexts, as well as at broader scales (see, e.g., Coté, Day, and de Peuter, 2007a, 2007b; Giroux, 2010; Levitas, 2007; Milojevic, 2006; Webb, 2009). In order to probe these ideas and enhance our own sense of social, economic, political, and ecological possibility, my student colleagues and I have explored a wide variety of creative methods that might help us and others more effectively ward off a sense that a radically

inequitable and unjust status quo is inevitable and we have examined what our own desires for change entail. We have examined various fictional and lived examples of *utopian-inspired communities* and *movements* to see what these might offer our own efforts to envision and build collectivities we desire. We have delved into the ideas of *utopian pedagogies* and *edutopias*, challenging the hegemonic – and some argue “delusional” (e.g., Chubbuck and Zembylas, 2008; Gabbard, 2012) – idea that traditional K-12 and university education is the only or best way to pursue education for social justice and asking what lesser-known pedagogies, philosophies, models, and contexts might offer those of us interested in transformative change. I have worked with undergraduate and graduate colleagues to examine what critical and imaginative notions of *diversity* might offer those of us interested in creating communities, societies, ecosystems in which all humans and all life are valued as integral to the well-being of these interconnected systems.

The comparative nature of these courses and the learning we attempted allowed me opportunities to look locally, regionally, nationally, and globally and across history for inspiring, vexing, or otherwise juicy examples of imaginative work that I might examine in collaboration with undergraduate colleagues and friends. It meant drawing on a wide range of academic scholarship, but also in line with arguments made by intellectuals like Hill Collins (2000), hooks (1994), and Kelley (2002), it meant drawing on a much broader array of materials than those typically considered “theoretical,” such as zines, films, music, visual arts, poetry, theater, and many other forms of creative expression, as well as field trips and guest visits. Of course a key element of this work has always also been our own collective experimentation with a wide range of relationships and community-building strategies, as well as many learning and teaching methods. In many ways, these courses have been “methods” courses, taking up Levitas’s (2007) idea of utopia as a *method* of considering desired change or the future. They have aimed at exploring through what means we might effectively expand our own imaginative capacities, including identifying our hopes and dreams of change and articulating these to others inside and outside our learning communities. In this way, these courses have resembled what Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) refer to as spaces in which I have attempted to “convoke” radical imagination in collaboration with others.

This teaching work also built from and complemented the off-campus educational and organizing work I have been involved in over the past several decades. At various points over the past twenty years, I have been involved in organizing efforts within feminist and reproductive justice, antiracist, student, global justice, peace/anti-war, and intentional communities movements. Although I consider myself an anarchist, my political positioning can be understood as part of what Dixon (2012, 2014) has referred to as the “anti-authoritarian current” and my perspective and commitments have been influenced by such theoretical foundations as multiracial/women of color feminism, critical race theory, several participatory democratic traditions, queer theory, and indigenous philosophies. I consider myself part of the broad anti-capitalist but eclectic, non-sectarian left. Similar to my formal teaching work, many of my community efforts have been animated by my commitment to intentionally work with others to expand our sense of horizons of possibility and to experiment with prefigurative relations in spaces that have ranged from large scale street protests to affinity group actions, from one-off community workshops to multi-year study groups, from anarchist collectives to the range of coops, communes, and collectives in which I have lived. I strongly value intergenerational partnerships and have worked hard to knock down walls between my role as a university-based educator and my pedagogical work in other spaces. While these collaborations have not always been easy, I have many experiences living, collaborating, organizing, and building friendships with people I have also worked with in classroom spaces. For me, what has been common in each of these endeavors is a commitment to striving our best to put into practice the idea that the Great Refusal (Katsiaficas, 1987; Van Heertum, 2006) is most effective when joined with the “politics of yes” (Litfin, 2014). I am pulled toward people and projects that couple a deconstructive impulse which acknowledges the many “anti”s of radical movements (Dixon, 2014) with a reconstructive one that seeks to move “against and beyond” (Holloway, 2010) today’s harmful realities.

At the outset of this dissertation process, between 2010 and 2011, despite my appreciation for the opportunities to deepen and evolve my understanding of the many shapes and significance of visionary activism and imaginative pedagogies that had resulted from my organizing efforts and university teaching, I craved still other methods of examining why imagination matters so much for our transformative

movements and how we might work to expand and heighten its effectiveness as an aspect of social struggle and movement building. I knew the sustained process of investigation involved in dissertation research and writing would allow me the chance to systematically pull together familiar resources and new perspectives, compare them, and delve into their significance for not only my own teaching, but also the broader movements of which I am part. So the idea for a project that would examine pedagogical ideas and practices related to radical imagination was born.

While scholars don't use consistent language to describe what I and others refer to throughout this dissertation as *radical imagination*, as I have argued, there is evidence that a body of ideas that surround it are playing an increasingly important role for a variety of radical left social movements. On what specific bases do radical activists, educators, and organizers advocate imagination as an important idea to pay attention to in transformative social change work today? What particular practices do we believe will nurture imaginative action that may actually pose viable alternatives to neoliberalism, capitalism, the state, and hierarchical social relations? And, what happens when, like the educators whose invitation to envision an anti-oppressive world I opened this chapter with, we put our ideas about imagination into action pedagogically and bump up against resistance among those to whom our invitations are issued, or our own resistances? These are the questions this dissertation takes up.

### **Overview of the Dissertation**

This inquiry began with dual assumptions: first, that the goal of creating a more just social world is shared widely among radical educators, although the shape of this visionary social world is certainly contested, and, second, that both imagination and intentional learning and teaching processes will be indispensable in transforming our world in deliberate ways that address the roots of our communities' and our world's most pressing contemporary problems. Through a series of intentional research conversations, this study explored the pedagogical and political perspectives of 25 U.S. and Canadian based social justice educators (myself and 24 others) who share these assumptions and who utilize diverse pedagogical strategies to cultivate what I refer to throughout this document as *radical imagination* in different

classroom, community, and movement-based learning contexts and brought their perspectives into dialogue with an interdisciplinary body of literature, and my own perspectives as a radical educator, in order to develop new theoretical and practical frameworks.

With my curiosity about the significance of radical imagination for the broad and multi-tendency tradition of education for social justice as both *launch point* and *anchor* for my inquiry, I settled on the following three areas of inquiry to help focus my exploration and writing:

1. What notions of imagination are at play in the pursuit of justice among radical educators today? Why are these notions of radical imagination considered promising for those seeking social justice in our current historical moment?
2. What range of pedagogical strategies do radical educators utilize to provoke and practice imagination in different kinds of learning contexts and communities? And why?
3. What struggles do educators face in their efforts to nurture radical imagination pedagogically? How do they respond to these challenges?

This dissertation has two purposes. The first is to deepen my understanding of the nature, practice, and significance of imagination for individuals and groups for whom radical change toward social justice is an aim and to create a document that encapsulates my key learnings. Second, by focusing on the perspectives of educators who work in a variety of settings, this dissertation explores some of the unique promises and challenges of pedagogical approaches to building a more just and healthy world in order to strengthen our movement-based praxis in our classrooms, communities, and organizations. Beyond the goal of contributing to the small but significant body of movement-relevant theories of radical imagination, I hope this project is one small step toward generating knowledge that can support the development of stronger, more intentional practices among educators, wherever we practice, and more effective social justice movements.

In the discussion below, I have organized the chapters utilizing key concepts, sometimes metaphors, as heuristic devices that organize my discussions in each. The dissertation has three main parts: introductory chapters that frame the project in several ways (chapters 1-3), substantive chapters that flesh out the project's main assertions (chapters 4-6), and chapters that step back to view the significance of the project with several audiences in mind (chapter 7 and the Afterwords).

In the current chapter, “Introduce,” I welcomed readers into the study by describing some of the reasons I believe now is a particularly ripe time for investigating and encouraging imagination and by describing a bit about my relationship to the ideas and processes under discussion in the chapters that follow. I conclude here with an overview of the dissertation’s chapters, as well as a few pieces of advice to guide readers in their journey through the project. In chapter 2, “Frame,” I situate my project in an interdisciplinary field of ideas, conversations, actions, and practices, about both imagination and pedagogy that are my focus in this project and offer a critical assessment of these literatures that helped guide my approach to this project. Chapter 3, entitled “Inquire,” describes the way I approached the inquiry, taking up a concrete discussion of the study’s design and how I set about to explore my research questions and describing my research partners, and my approach to data production, analysis, and writing. I conclude the chapter by outlining a set of political commitments that guided my approach to the inquiry.

The next three chapters each offer frameworks that display and describe the main assertions I make in response to the three points of inquiry enumerated above. In chapter 4, “Imagine,” I describe radical imagination as comprised of three broad types of imagination, each of which, in turn, is comprised of three distinct modes through which imaginative capacities may be expressed; I also elaborate the unique role each can play in struggles for radical change from my research partners’ perspectives. Chapter 5, “Provoke,” describes five broad strategies my research partners use to call radical imagination into being and practice it within different kinds of learning communities and examines the reasoning that guides my research partners’ use of the methods they describe. Chapter 6, “Struggle,” revolves around the reality that our work as radical educators is beset with challenges, even in the context of imaginative processes, and presents four main types of challenges described by my research partners. While my focus in the chapter remains on a narrower field of practice than social justice education, the chapter connects in important ways with the growing research literature on what is difficult about engaging in other intentional pedagogical work for transformative change. Thus, it can be read as a contribution to an emerging conversation that many scholars, myself included, indicate should receive more attention.

Stepping back from the project as a whole, in Chapter 7, “Project,” I describe my view of the study’s limitations and ways it could be strengthened and I reflect on the significance of the project for both individual educators pursuing an agenda of justice and for our transformative movements as a whole. Bringing the document full circle, I conclude with a set of “Aftewords” in which I reflect on the significance of the topics taken up in the dissertation in the context of my own life. For readers who would prefer a more reflective personal and political account of my investments in imaginative social justice work before examining the more traditional “academic” discussion that comprises the bulk of the dissertation, I recommend skipping ahead to read these Afterwords now, then returning to Chapter 2.

# Chapter Two

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## Frame

*If the process of education is so utterly multifaceted, how can we be confident that we have addressed all that we must to enrich our praxis and improve the quality of education if we do not have an equally multifaceted discourse about these issues?*

Jaylynnne Hutchinson, *Students on the Margins*

Like my other academic “homes,” I was partly drawn to the academic study of education because of its interdisciplinarity. Particularly in what the academic world calls the “foundations of education,” during my master’s work and early in my doctoral studies, I found myself in the company of others who were passionate and curious to bring many lenses to bear on the educational phenomena we had experienced and were experiencing. Like Hutchinson (1999), many of us seemed to share a desire to push down disciplinary walls in order to see what a variety of genres and modes of investigating and representing the world might offer our understanding of education and its broader context. Some of my most memorable experiences were in classes with (now retired) philosophy of education professor Donna Kerr in courses whose curricula coupled the reading of novels and more traditional theoretical texts in order to see how these different genres of theory speak to one another. The subsequent reflection of her students suggested that Donna’s course on the educational significance of Toni Morrison’s literature, for instance, was very powerful among the cohorts who took it.

My other main academic “homes,” those in which I teach and those in which I have studied – American Ethnic Studies, Women Studies, the Comparative History of Ideas – are interdisciplinary, as well. And each has persuaded me in its own way that the task of understanding complex phenomena, like teaching and learning, benefits from a comparative perspective. In her book describing her research about ecovillages around the world, Karen Litfin (2013) has used the metaphor of a small house with four

windows to describe her way of thinking about sustainability. Asking readers to imagine looking through each window, she proposed “from each perspective, the house looks different and yet it is still the same house” (p. 31). In her case, the “house” involved was “sustainability” and each window allowed a different vantage point on the ecological, economic, community, and consciousness dimensions that interested her. In my own case, concepts such as “social justice,” “diversity,” “utopia,” “pedagogy,” and “imagination” have been houses whose varied theoretical windows I have peered into via individual lines of inquiry and in cooperation with my community, student, and academic colleagues.

Other scholars examining the territory of education for social justice that this project takes up have proposed that interdisciplinary approaches offer important benefits. I share Winters’ and her colleagues’ (Winters et al., 2012) view that social justice work itself is an interdisciplinary endeavor that is hindered by artificial boundaries that have been drawn around art, philosophy and social science, as well as by the conventions of field specific academic argumentation and writing – our inquiries benefit, then, from interdisciplinary approaches. Scholars have argued, too, that radical imagination calls for and benefits from an interdisciplinary approach. For instance, Hung (2010) located her dissertation about the development of youth activists at the interstices of various disciplines because of the contributions each made to understanding the “geographical imagination” which was her focus. Khasnabish (2005) argued that his examination of political imagination in relation Zapatismo required the engagement of a “theoretical multitude.” Maxine Greene’s (1995b) philosophical examination of social imagination is notably interdisciplinary. I agree that imagination, education, and social justice are all necessarily interdisciplinary phenomena that benefit from an interdisciplinary approach. It is also true that although my research partners, whose ideas and words are an important anchor for my discussions in chapters 4, 5, and 6 below, all identified in some way with the language of education for social justice, their perspectives reflect an eclectic body of ideas and practices, politics and commitments, theories and understandings. Therefore, in my discussion in the following chapters, in working to make sense of their perspectives, I have chosen to draw on a variety of political and theoretical traditions and engage both academics and public and insurgent intellectuals whose efforts take place primarily outside universities.

The voices that weave through the following pages emerge from different fields of formal and nonformal educational practice, from a range of disciplines like anthropology, sociology, geography, political theory and philosophy, as well as interdisciplinary fields like cultural studies, women and gender studies, and critical race and Whiteness studies.

This chapter has three main parts, each of which aims to give readers a better sense of the literatures that were my starting points in exploring the topics this dissertation has taken up. First, I situate my inquiry and my research partners' practices within the broad tradition of education for social justice. Second, I introduce the theoretical framework for conceptualizing radical imagination that I constructed primarily from my reading of relevant literature and which was my starting point for the project. And, third, I turn to a discussion of literature focused on cultivating radical imagination pedagogically, in formal and informal learning contexts. In concluding the chapter, I offer several observations about these literatures that I used as a critical departure point for my own conversations with educators.

### **Situating the Project: Education for Social Justice**

At a party I attended recently, someone asked, "I know what social justice is, but what is social justice education?" In response, I paraphrased Bill Ayers: "The fundamental message of the teacher is this: You can change your life" while "the fundamental message of the teacher for social justice is: You can change the world" (1998, p. xvii). This simplistic framing was helpful at the time, but surely the reality is more complex.

Education for social justice has a strong theme of working to "change the world" and has had this agenda for some time. As Kathy Hytten (2006) has written, starting at least as early as the social reconstructionists, in the U.S., there has existed a long and significant history of "overlapping and interpenetrating" (p. 222) educational tendencies that take as their starting point that educational theorizing, inquiry, and practice can and should play an intentional role in alleviating suffering around the world, imagining the kind of society we want to live in, and bringing our visions of a more democratic and just changes into existence. Today, there is a wave of evidence that interest in social justice education

as a strategy for changing the world is increasing. Academic educational gatherings like AERA include a growing number of justice-related presentations (Chubbuck and Zembylas, 2008), conferences like *Free Minds, Free People* bring together students, K-12 and community based educators, parents, researchers, and activists from around the US to build resources for liberatory education, and grassroots networks of educators utilizing a framework for social justice to animate their efforts is visible at both national (e.g., the Education for Liberation Network) and local levels (the New York Collective of Radical Educators is just one example of organizations that bring together educators in more specific localities) continue to multiply. *Rethinking Schools*, *Radical Teacher*, and the *Zinn Education Project* gather powerful theoretical and practical writings and resources for those in the field and support educators in finding and learning about the efforts of like-minded others. Among scholars there has been a rapid proliferation of handbooks (Ayers, Quinn, and Stovall, 2010), sourcebooks (Adams, Bell, and Griffin, 1997/2007), essay collections (Chapman and Hobbel, 2010; Landreman, 2013), articles, and special issues of educational journals (Patton, Shahjahan, Osei-Kofi, 2010; Spalding, Klecka, Lin, Odell, & Wang, 2010), as well as a range of other texts focused on elaborating the various meanings and practices of social justice education.

Amid of this explosion of references to social justice, some of the most ambitious undertakings aimed at describing the state of the field over the last decade have been orchestrated by professor and social justice education scholar Maurianne Adams via a yearly review of justice themed literature under the auspices of the journal *Equity & Excellence in Education*, which also regularly publishes theoretical and research literature about social justice education (see, e.g., Adams, Briggs, Catalano, Whitlock, and Williams, 2005; Adams, Brigham, Cook, Whitlock, Johnson, 2009; Allen, Runell, Williams, Adams, and Whitlock, 2004; Briggs et al, 2006). Speaking about the challenges of stock-taking in the field, Adams and her colleagues have described the difficulty and magnitude of the process as an “increasingly daunting inter-and cross-disciplinary challenge.” They wrote that

in preparing YIR ‘08, we were struck by how much more difficult the job had become of winnowing the increasing number of social justice-identified articles we considered useful to teachers, teacher preparation faculty, school personnel, community educators, and people in higher education who are interested in this field (Adams et al, 2009, p. 525).

Within this context, can we speak about some common ground shared among people claiming a social justice agenda? Scholars who write about the field, as theorists, researchers, or practitioners (or all of the above) try. And although they conceptualize shared ground in various ways, in general we can observe three main concerns evident in most theory and practical frameworks for social justice practice: an analysis and critique of the causes of social, political, and economic harms; at least some attention to the values that could animate a vision of positive transformative change; and a theory of action that could lead from present circumstances to a more desirable state of affairs.

At its most basic, social justice education is an approach that assumes how and what we teach has something to do with the work of transforming social realities considered unsatisfactory, undesirable, or harmful. While they may draw on the differential terminology of eliminating suffering (North, 2008; Chubbuck 2010; Mintz, 2013), fighting oppression (Adams, Bell, and Griffin, 1997/2007; Kumashiro 2000; Mthethwa-Sommers, 2001), disrupting inequities or inequality (Patton et al., 2010; Shor, 2010; Spalding, et al, 2010), or intervening in injustice or unjust structures (Chubbuck, 2010; Chubbuck and Zembylas, 2008), all of these approaches “invoke a systemic approach to questions of inequality and disadvantage and to provide the critical and analytic perspectives and personal engagement that [...] are the indispensable attributes of *social justice*” (Adams, 2010, p. 75, emphasis in original). This aspect of social justice education takes for granted that structural or systematic inequalities exist and strives to help people positioned differently in relation to these structures understand, name, and cope with these realities.

In the opening chapter of this dissertation, although this agenda is frequently not carried out fully or given the weight of attention devoted to analyzing oppression or other social harms, I noted that it is also common within social justice education to point to the importance of developing an imagination for or visions of change alongside critique. Noting that education for social justice also advocates affirmative visions of a healthier world and communities, scholars have also tried to highlight congruence along more values-based or visionary lines, noting, for instance, a conception of social justice as “*a philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity*” (Chapman and Hobbel, 2010, p. 1, emphasis in original) and an educational process that encourages these

commitments and actions. Bell (1997) has highlighted the democratic impulse of SJE, arguing that the central goal of social justice education is “full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs” (p. 3). Shapiro (2009) envisions an education for social justice which entails “the effort to repair and heal our world as a place of generous and loving community, in which there is a just sharing of rewards and obligations, where human differences are mediated by respect and recognition, where there is ecological sanity and responsibility, and where there is the widest diffusion of opportunities for human beings to participate in shaping the world in which they live” (p. 13). Shor (2010) has proposed four “pillars” of *social justice learning*: democracy, peace, equality, and ecology, which together, he argues, “envision a nation at peace with itself and the world, an inclusive culture that subordinates and stigmatizes no group or identity, a society of material security in all homes that neither impoverishes nor lavishes any community, a sustainable economy that exploits no one’s labor and despoils no territory, and an education system that invests equally in all its children and citizens, where learning is not something done to students but something they do for themselves” (p. 311).

Although Sonu (2012) has described social justice education as a “highly variable” ideology and teaching practice, one common denominator she notes is “its adherence to the belief that education can cultivate within students a sense of civic responsibility, the duty to care about the plight of others, and the means to work in solidarity to transform the structural and ideological forces that benefit certain communities at the expense of others.” This is education for social justice’s action-oriented agenda, which “requires students and teachers to critically analyze the roots of systemic injustice, organize collaborative effort, and take action on behalf of the greater public good” (p. 244). This emphasis on the agency of students and educators alike is shared by many, echoed in the language of agentic roles (Richie, 2012), participation (Westheimer and Kahne, 2003), or a commitment to “social action” (Carlisle, Jackson, and George, 2006). As Cochran-Smith and her colleagues’ (Cochran-Smith et al., 1999) observations highlight an action-oriented stance for educators ourselves, noting that despite the many differences among justice focused educational traditions, “importantly, each constructs the role of educator as agent

for change in school and classroom contexts as well as in larger movements for a more just and democratic society” (p. 232).

But even as we can point to some outlines of shared ground, among many scholars who have attempted to map the field, there appears to be widespread agreement that both historically (Williamson et al., 2007) and today, what it means to teach guided by a commitment to social justice varies considerably (e.g., Adams, 2010; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; North 2008, 2006; Zajda, Majhanovich, and Rust, 2006). As these and other scholars have noted, political, theoretical, pedagogical, discursive, and strategic diversity characterizes the field, making it somewhat more difficult to respond to question of what social justice education *is* that partygoer asked me.

Hyttten and Bettez (2011) have noted that that in their efforts to map the field, they found it “difficult to sort through the social justice literature with any confidence as so many different discourses and theoretical movements claim a social justice vision, sometimes centrally and sometimes peripherally” (p. 10). The range of theoretical tendencies that contribute to the field mean that language used in referring to what might be considered the aims of education for social justice is highly variable. Social justice related educational theory and practice are sometimes categorized by practitioners or within electronic databases using the specific term “social justice,” but might instead invoke language like radical (Brookfield and Holst, 2010), equity (Argawal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler, and Sonu, 2009), transformational (Arnold, Burke, James, Martin, and Thomas, 1991), activist (Newman, 2006), or social change (Taylor, Deak, Pettit, and Vogel, 2006), or it might utilize metaphors like “against the grain” (Lane, Lacefield-Parachini, and Iskin, 2003). In the midst of this terminological difference, theorists and practitioners may be indicating similar social aims or, conversely, as the many studies of the meaning of “social justice” in the field are indicating, they may be using similar language to point in quite different social directions.

Another difference, as Adams and her colleagues at *Equity & Excellence in Education* have observed, is that the scholarship on education for social justice speaks to different audiences. Although the most dominant conversations about education for social justice focus on teaching and learning that occurs in such settings as public K-12 education (e.g., Chapman and Hobbel, 2010) and teacher education (e.g.,

Cochran-Smith, et al., 2009; McDonald, 2003, 2007; Sandretto, 2004; Sandretto et al., 2007), scholarship about social justice teaching and learning may also focus on and have most relevance to practitioners working in a variety of other institutional, organizational, or community settings. Literature on education for social justice may most directly address higher education in colleges or universities outside teacher preparation programs (e.g., Landreman, 2013; Winters et al., 2012) or on community-based (e.g., Hamako, 2005) or social movement-based educational processes, practices, and ideas, focusing on, for instance, social justice youth development (Ginwright, 2010; Ginwright and Cammarota, 2002; Ginwright and James, 2002), political education, or activist adult education (Brookfield and Holst, 2010; Newman, 2006; Preskill and Brookfield, 2009), or education in social struggle (Gouin, 2009). Some pedagogical theory and practice takes aim at the idea that “education” itself is a helpful container in which to talk about how liberatory learning, and related support for it, occurs (Illich, 1971; Stuchul, Prakash, and Esteva, 2002). Given this contextual diversity, the work of facilitating learning processes goes under different context-specific names, resulting in a body of scholarship about education, schooling, pedagogy, teaching, facilitation, mentorship, leadership, intergenerational partnership, parenting, and an array of other more specialized pedagogical modes and roles that become more expansive the more contexts outside formal schooling one considers.

In order to sort through the conceptual looseness and confusion they argue results from this situation, scholars have taken different approaches to the task of mapping the field in order to “get a better sense of how people are calling upon this idea and the range of priorities and visions they hold” (p. 10). Some scholars, have investigated historical roots, creating timelines and genealogies, drawing lines among key ideas, people, and traditions from past to present (Boyles, Carusi, and Attick, 2009), noting, for instance, not only the influence of school based practices, but how activist movements have shaped social justice education today (Adams, 2010). Others describe the diverse contemporary theoretical, pedagogical, and political territory of the field (Adams et al., 2009; Dolan et al., 2007; Briggs et al., 2006; Dover, 2009; North, 2006, 2008; McInerney, 2007; Wiedeman, 2002) and assess how the key conceptual contributions of well known justice theorists such as John Rawls, Nancy Fraser, and Iris Marion Young differ and map

onto contemporary scholarship. Still others seek clarity by empirically investigating the meanings of ideas like “social justice” (Cochran-Smith et al., 1999; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Makler, 1993; Park, 2008; Sandretto et al., 2007) or “socially just teaching” (Argawal et al., 2010) as they are articulated by teachers in order to identify different assumptions and interpretations at work in social justice pedagogies. Still others investigate how pedagogical beliefs take shape (or don’t) in teaching practice either via comparative empirical studies (Ayers, Hunt, and Quinn, 1998; de los Reyes and Gozemba, 2002; Michie, 2005; North, 2009; Ryan and Katz, 2005; Stovall, 2006) or in practitioner authored accounts (e.g., hooks, 1994; Shor, 1996). Finally, some offer normative arguments that particular political and pedagogical traditions – and with them, particular visions of education or social justice – *should* win out in ongoing debates and take a primary role in animating practice (e.g., critical theorists like Giroux, 2003, Freire, 1997, and McLaren and Giroux, 1995 emphasize theory; others like Adams, Bell, and Griffin, 1997, Arnold, et al., 1991, or Marino, 1997 offer more practical, hands-on resources).

Connie North, whose recent writing maps divergent meanings of the term social justice (North, 2006, 2008) and ways ideas about social justice are embodied pedagogically by individual teachers (North, 2009), has put considerable effort into surfacing assumptions and positions about social justice embedded in social justice education scholarship in order to make them visible for criticism and debate. Her work goes beyond others who may distinguish key tensions, but fail to situate these within the broad terrain of the field (e.g., Christensen, 1997, distinguishes *individualistic* from *communitarian* perspectives; Chubbuck, 2010, contrasts *individual* with *structural* orientations; Park, 2008, offers a conception that contrasts what he calls “*logocentric*” approaches with “*grounded*” approaches). North’s (2006, 2008) analysis of key tensions resulted in a three part model including (1) tensions between *redistributive* and *recognitive* paradigms, (2) tensions between *micro* and *macro* level focuses; and (3) emphases on developing *knowledge* and growing *skills* for social justice action (this last dimension replaced her discussion of the tension between approaches that emphasizes *sameness* or *difference* in an earlier article, 2006). Her effort to wrap the various assumptions within each dimension around educational examples reflects a substantial undertaking and her review of an expansive literature is impressive. Her wide-

ranging analysis and the simplicity of her three part model seems most practically useful when looked at as tensions in broad social justice *aims* sought by social justice advocates, ways *contexts* in which social justice is sought are imagined, and *educational means and goals* that might be used for seeking justice educationally. Chubbuck and Zembylas (2008) have similarly noted that tensions exist about how theorists and practitioners conceptualize the goals and *aims, domains, content, audience, and agents of change* that education for social justice seeks to engage (Chubbuck and Zembylas, 2008).

Recognition of the tensions evident in the field has provoked different responses. Some voice concern that the ranks of individuals, schools, projects, and practices associated with the term social justice seem to be swelling exponentially, acknowledging that not all projects that go under the name “social justice” share analyses or aims. Essays and books focused on social justice and education frequently begin with a statement that the term lacks shared definition or a clear delineation of the way it is being employed (e.g., Chapman and Hobbel 2010; Chubbuck, 2010; Cochran-Smith, et al. 2008; Cochran-Smith, et al. 2009; Hytten 2006; MacDonald and Zeichner 2009; North 2006 and 2008; Zeichner and Flessner, 2009). Many of these scholars (Boyles, Carusi, and Attick, 2009; Cochran-Smith, et al. 2009; Hackman 2005) are concerned that the absence of clear and consistent definition or theoretical grounding creates a vacuum that can be filled up with any meaning one might choose, thereby diminishing the transformative potential of a more radical discourse. North’s reference to social justice as “education’s latest catchphrase” suggests an almost faddish quality to these conversations; meanwhile Chubbuck and Zembylas’s (2008) observation that the term is often “hotly contested” gestures toward the political stakes of these debates.

Hytten (2006) worries that even though social justice educators on the left may share similar concerns, “one of the primary challenges of social justice work [is that] its richness and variety cannot be easily reduced, and its advocates are often not speaking to each other or drawing from the same traditions” (p. 225). “For critical work to have greater impact,” she argues, “we need to make a conscious effort to talk across theoretical traditions, to identify shared concerns, to respond in a strategically unified way to the problematic educational climate in which we find ourselves” (2006, p. 229), a climate in which progressive visions focused on equity, self-determination, and freedom are losing ground to neoliberal

mandates for increased standardization, accountability, predictability, and control and which is lamented by many (Picower, 2011; Sonu, 2012). For some, these emerging conversations may resemble a disorienting cacophony more than a harmonious chorus of voices that together point the way toward a more just world.

As a counterbalance to these concerns, Ira Shor is optimistic. “That marvelous concept—*social justice education*—brings together diverse trends and groups, offering a potential ‘big tent’ to gather all those who dream of a humane world, a big tent of opposition in which to learn from each other’s work, to mediate our differences, to imagine our options” (2010, p.310, emphasis in original). Read as an increased collective interest in systemic change to minimize harm and advance visions of peace, democracy, equality, and ecology that Shor (2010) sees as the bedrock of the field, this ballooning interest is more uplifting.

Although I do situate this study and my own pedagogical practice within this complicated and contested terrain, neither mapping the “complexly intersecting” (Adams, 2010) relationships among people who consider themselves under the “big tent” of education for social justice nor policing its boundaries has been my purpose in this study. Politically, my inquiry has been narrowed by its focus on the ideas of activist educators who consider themselves “radicals” and whose efforts can be considered part of the larger work of transformative social movements. It resonates with the ways Haiven and Khasnabish (2010) have described the idea of radical in their “Radical Imagination Project”:

The term radical stems from the Latin word for “root” and bespeaks a concern for the origins and “root causes” of things. It implies looking beyond surface or easy answers and a desire to uncover the deep reasons for our present reality. It also implies that answers to social problems will require fundamental solutions, not temporary fixes. Today, the term “radical” is contrasted to “moderate,” “liberal” or “reformist” and many activists and intellectuals brand themselves with the term, or are branded by it in attempts to discredit them (p. v).

The ideas of my research partners, and most of the scholarship on which I draw, can be understood as emerging from, contributing to, and co-existing within an ecosystem of activist movements for social justice, some of which have described by scholars like Adams (1997 and 2010), Oakes and Rogers (2006), Hytten (2006), Anyon (2005), Haworth (2012), and Coté, Day, and de Peuter (2007a, 2007b), each of

which nests the practice of radical education within larger struggles that aim to address social, economic, political problems at their roots. While it was beyond the scope of my project to resolve the many tensions among those claiming some commitment to “social justice” – including the tensions among my research partners – it is amid these tensions and against this backdrop that my study proceeded.

Within this still broad terrain of educators who view social justice through structural orientations (Chubbuck, 2010) and radically transformative lenses, in this project I take up a narrower challenge by focusing on the perspectives of educators who consider the cultivation of radical imagination as an important aspect of to their social justice praxis. Taking aim at “structures hostile to human agency [which have] placed a vice grip around our social and political imaginations” (Weiner, 2007, p. 72), these activist educators and those with whom they work argue that while appearing intractable, oppressive, exploitative, hierarchical, violent, or otherwise harmful economic, social, and political structures are human creations that are worthy of our imaginative attention and activism. Their efforts embody the belief that such structures can be fundamentally transformed or rejected and replaced through collective human action on the part of committed individuals, groups, and organizations. These educators articulate a creative and ultimately affirmative view that “another world *is* possible!” through their pedagogical ideas, words, and actions and seek to cultivate a similar spirit in others.

### **Radical Imagination: Scholarly Perspectives**

This dissertation examines the ways some educators think about their efforts to cultivate “radical imagination” as an aspect of their social justice pedagogy. In this section I discuss some of the conceptual territory marked out by scholars interested in radical imagination. Although I have drawn on additional literatures about imagination for discussions later in the dissertation, this chapter highlights the conceptual terrain that allowed me to embark on the study and ask a range of questions that generated responses that form the basis for my discussion in chapters 4 and 5.

In the last chapter, I identified a few of the educational voices which are theorizing what imagination for justice might entail. Several recent contributions are worth identifying in a bit more detail.

One has come from Connie North. Building on substantial previous efforts (2006, 2007a, 2008), North's (2009) collaborative study of the ideas and practices of five social justice educators resulted in her elaboration of five "literacies" these educators strive to nurture among the students with whom they work. She referred to the first four of these as *functional, critical, relational, and democratic* literacies. In concluding her study, she called for the cultivation of *visionary literacy*, "the courage and ability to visualize a different reality" that involves three processes: "developing a story for our personal lives and the world that we can not only tolerate but also desire; doing our best to realize that story through concrete, human, and, therefore, imperfect actions; and preparing for – even embracing – the maggots of life, as they are an inevitable part of this world and prevent us from forgetting that we need to keep pressing on" (p. 150-151). That her study drew on the collaborative efforts of a group of justice-oriented educators to examine and theorize about social justice education is noteworthy. Yet like the social justice texts I referred to in the last chapter, it is worth mentioning that her discussion of visionary literacy is much slimmer and less clearly articulated with other texts than the chapters that preceded it. Still, it is ideas and practices related to this aspect of education for social justice that resembles the phenomena I hoped to explore when I embarked on this study.

Another contribution has been made by Mary Weems, first in her dissertation *I Speak from the Wound In my Mouth* (2001) and later in a published book (2003). In both, Weems's "auto/ethnographic, sacred performance text" (Weems, 2003, p. xix) combined an investigation of the theoretical scholarship of people like Dewey and Greene with reflection on her own arts-based pedagogical practices to theorize what she referred to as "imagination-intellect." According to Weems, we can envision imagination-intellect as consisting of five core areas or dimensions, including aesthetic appreciation, oral expression, written expression, performance, and social consciousness.

While both North and Weems's books are directed to those concerned with K-12 public education, in her recent dissertation study, Hung (2010) examined the idea of "geographical imagination" as part of a broader project to "inform young people's efforts to claim their right to a society that responds to their needs, and to help bring that society into existence" (p. 175). As a result of conversations and

involvement with youth activists in Harlem and the adults who work with them, she proposed a theoretical model of geographical imagination with two main elements. One aspect of the model is comprised of a set of dimensions for describing the ways young people conceptualize their relationship to space and place. This aspect of her work describes geographical imagination as a “critical construct” comprised of ten dimensions: patterns, alignment (space and time), boundaries, proximity and density, location and access, environmental indicators, disparities, signs and symbolic meaning, scale, and impact. But Hung also proposed a framework for understanding geographical imagination as modes of action; that is, as the ways in which youth put geographical imagination into practice in their pursuit of justice in their communities. In this sense, geographical imagination reflects not only a particular conception or vision of one’s relation to space and place but involves “modes” which “designate the active manner in which young people *enact their geographical imagination as a critical capacity*” (p. 113, emphasizes in original), modes that she argues are “meant to be seen as interconnected and evolving dynamics of making sense of oneself and the world” (p. 113). In Hung’s model, these modes include reading and perspective taking, narrating and interpreting, mapping or countertopography, inhabiting, and creating an Other thirdspace.

Congruent with Hung’s model of geographical imagination, when I began this study, I believed that a useful framework to describe radical imagination would be multidimensional. There is evidence in the scholarship I investigated that many educators are concerned with both cultivating specific *characteristics* of imagination for change toward a more just world and with growing a range of imaginative *capacities* for and postures associated with putting visions to work for change. As a result, in the discussion below, I outline some of these characteristics, but also include attention to particular modes of thinking (Greene, 1995b; Levitas, 2007) sense-making (Hung, 2010), a type of literacy (North, 2009), and it involves the development of a host of other postures and capacities that can help guide the pursuit of justice on the ground.

I do not wish the discussion below to suggest that there is consensus among scholars or educators about the nature of radical imagination, which elements are most important, or which capacities may best

support it in blossoming. As the discussions below and in chapter 4 will illustrate, there are important tensions in how authors conceptualize various aspects of imagination and their salience for radical social justice education. It is important to note, as well, that while my initial interest was in theorizing an idea I referred to as “visionary social imagination,” both conversations with my research partners and recent and emerging literature suggested that the possibly broader conception of “radical imagination” could better help me to bring my project more in line with the goals, ideas, and aspirations of activist educators and placing me in conversation with others writing about the idea. I have slightly modified my discussion here to reflect my shift in lens, but readers may find that imprints of my initial interest in “vision” remain.

The table below synthesizes the many threads of conversations about radical imagination in the educational scholarship that I examined in embarking on the project, offering an initial way of thinking about radical education and its significance for those who may wish to nurture it pedagogically as part of a broader agenda of justice. The paragraphs that follow elaborate each dimension a bit further.

**Figure 1. Radical Imagination: Initial Framework**

<b>Radical imagination involves</b>	<b>Elaborated description</b>	<b>Significance for SJE</b>
Creating a vision of desired change	Learners engage creativity to invent vision or dream of desired change for oneself, one’s community, one’s world; involves developing stories, narratives, language to support vision.	Vision allows one to move beyond reactionary or oppositional stance (although it will often be inclusive of critique) toward a set of relations one hopes to bring into being in the world – a better state of affairs one hopes for.
Engaging the senses	Learners can engage sight, smell, touch, hearing, taste as resources to conceptualize justice.	Engaged sensory mode enables different kinds of learning and growth than intellect-focused approaches alone.
Engaging affect and emotion	Learners are able to mobilize desire, hope, empathy, love, care, indignation, and anger as imaginative resources.	Affective approaches are more holistic than rational, intellect focused processes alone.
Adopting a critical posture in relation to current problems and one’s own vision of change.	Learners can bring critical analysis of existing injustices into dialectic relation with future-oriented desire (e.g., vision of hoped-for-world may be tool to read and critique present injustices; alternatively, analysis of and dissatisfaction with present	Puts criticality to work for goals beyond its own ends, criticality becomes a mode that can inspire and offer hope.

	injustices may suggest healthier ways of being.)	
Identifying normative content of one’s vision and other alternatives and their degree of flexibility	Learners can identify fundamental beliefs about the “normative ideals” or core values that animate various visions of change.	Imbues the idea and practice of imagination with ethical and moral content.
Focusing thinking on different domains of life	Learners are able to conceptualize particular domains of human life, social, economic, political, ecologic. May occur on different scales within a particular area of focus (e.g., may be “school” or “education” or “education policy,” “my community’s response to violence,” or “the Prison Industrial Complex” or “war.”	Enables clarity about the target of desired change, the kind of power which characterizes a particular domain, and the relationship among different domains of human life. Provides focus for change efforts.
Conceptualizing the social world at different geographic scales	Learners are able to move from local to global, “seeing things large” versus “seeing things small” and conceptualize relationships among different scales.	Enables people to think about the relationship of individual, local, and broader scale actions so that strategic choices can be made about how to best pursue change considering one’s aims.
Deliberating about alternative possibilities	Learners have tools and capacities required for democratic deliberation about elements of their own desires and in relation to the desires of others.	Contributes to a fundamental aim of social justice education – democratic deliberation about how we are to live and with which values at the core.
Narrating a story to describe changes sought	Learners are able to tell a story about themselves and the world that reflects their desires for transformation. Involves having language adequate for articulating alternative vision and being able to articulate one’s vision to others.	Articulating stories, narratives, visions of desired transformation enables one to clearly identify ones own core values and normative ideals and share those with others for democratic deliberation.
Conceptualizing time scale as a dimension of visions of change	Learners can identify the time scale(s) of their own vision(s) (e.g., short term versus long term visionary thinking), conceptualize relationship of vision to present-day action, see relationship of vision to short and long term histories.	Helps clarify the posture (e.g., level of urgency in action) and resources needed for desired change.
Acting based on vision	Learners are able to press vision into the service of action for change.	Enables one to pursue changes one has imagined alone or in collaboration with others

### Envisioning Social Change

I originally chose the language of “vision” to describe the forward-oriented imagination my study will center because the etymology of the term imagination itself suggests visuality and because optical

metaphors permeate literature about ideas that most concern me. But even among scholars for whom the language of vision is important (e.g., Giroux, 2003; Greene, 1995b; McInerney, 2007; North, 2009; Shapiro, 2009), a narrow language of vision by itself is inadequate conceptually and therefore pedagogically. Some discussions about radical imagination take up the question of *how one conceives* of what one is imagining. Beyond the idea of vision, these may range from a “language of possibility,” “narratives of imagination,” or “narratives of hope and possibility” (Hytten, 2010) to “stor[ies] for our personal lives and world” that we can desire (North, 2009, p. 151), an “alternative worldview” (Van Heertum, 2006, p. 48), dreams of an alternative world (Duncombe, 2007; Freire and Freire, 2007; Generett and Hicks, 2004; Kelley, 2002), or a “‘daydream’ projected into the future – the psychic representation of *that ‘which is not yet’*” (Halpin, 2001, p. 399, emphasis in original). In this sense, calling forward or inventing alternatives may go beyond the development of visual maps or mental pictures of a future, desired world, but also include accompanying language, stories, beliefs, dreams, psychic representations, and, in fact, entire worldviews to accompany and undergird alternative visions of justice.

### **Engage the Senses**

Some scholars highlight the power of shattering the “false Cartesian logic of a separation between mind and body” (Van Heertum, 2006, p. 49) by enlisting the full range of one’s bodily senses in the project of imagining a healthier world (e.g., Brown and Gillespie, 1999; Caracciolo, 2008). Many essays in Clover and Stalker’s (2007) edited volume on the arts and social justice in adult education argue that the body’s many senses may play critical parts in both learning processes and outcomes, in a manner unique to each medium. For instance, for Albergato-Muterspaw and Fenwick (2007), the physiological dynamics involved in singing “of merging one’s breathing with the rhythms and arc of a musical phrase, of virtually taking the tune simultaneously into one’s lungs and ears” as well as the impact music may have on cardiovascular rate and on the skin (which authors point out is humans’ largest sensory organ) allows for

“an experience that weds spirit, body, emotion and imagination” and especially when done as a collective experience can help to “provoke radical visions of an alternate world” (p. 161).

### **Engaging Affect/Emotion**

Some discussions examine the capacity to critically reflect upon, view, and wield emotion or affect as a means of imaginative sense making about the social world and as a method of engagement that goes beyond rationality and reason. Shapiro and Purple’s (2009) *Education and Hope in Troubled Times* reflects a theme articulated widely (e.g., Generett and Hicks, 2004; Giroux, 2003; Halpin, 2003a, 2003b; Hutchinson, 1996; McInerney, 2007; Van Heertum, 2006) that *hope* can help young people and adults alike to cope with and respond to the “immense dangers and extraordinary suffering” we face today as a result of endless wars, the ravages of consumer culture, and environmental degradation which threatens life on planet Earth. In a current context in which the hegemony of economic and political structures associated with neoliberalism “seeps into our psyches” and threatens to colonize every aspect of our lives (e.g., Coté, Day, de Peuter, 2007a, 2007b; North, 2008, 2009), an education that seriously engages our deepest individual and social *desires* and *longings* may be especially important way to “awaken a sense that more than freedom and satisfaction on the cheap are available” (Van Heertum, 2006, p. 48). Other emotions and their affective dimensions such as *anger* (Horton, Kohl, and Kohl, 1998), *anxiety* (Lewis, 2006), *indignation* (Duncan-Andrade, 2009), *love* (Greene, 1995), and *empathy* (Bigelow and Christensen, 1994) offer different types of resources to help focus and pursue radical dreams of change on the ground.

### **Adopting a Critical Posture**

Imagination may also involve the adoption of a critical stance and the capacity for “oppositional thought” (Moylan, 1986, p. 10) wherein an analysis of social ills is brought to bear on the process of imagination itself. The versions of radical imagination with which I am most concerned have emerged as a strategy for thinking and creating change precisely because they can engage directly with present injustices and problems in what scholars and educators believe are unique and constructive ways (Freire, 1997; Giroux,

1995; Lewis, 2006; Peters and Freeman-Moir, 2006; Streck, 2008; Van Heertum, 2006, 2008; Webb, 2009). According to Fischman and McLaren (2000), in Paulo Freire's theory "utopia and critical consciousness are mutually inclusive and dialectically reanimating" and "together they synergize new knowledge and new cultural configurations and possibilities for human transformation" (p. 169). In these frameworks, instead of merely being oppositional, criticality (developing an analysis of social ills such as oppression, neoliberalism, colonialism, violence, etc.) goes to work for goals beyond its own ends and becomes a mode and posture that can inspire, offer hope, and provide important resources for concrete visioning.

### **Constructing a Normative Ideal**

If imagination is not just *against* injustice – if it is *for* something else – then it involves some degree and kind of normative content, the construction of a "normative ideal" (Van Heertum, 2006, p. 50) with concomitant "principles, beliefs, and values" (McInerney, 2007, p. 264). This aspect of radical imagination involves an awareness of *which* values, *which* notions of "the good life" (Levitas, 2007) are expressed in one's vision and *to what degree* they are clearly defined or left flexible. Within social justice education scholarship about imagination, themes such as freedom, democracy, community, egalitarianism, peace, and ecology are frequently expressed (and as frequently contested, as is the term "social justice" itself). Webb (2009) notes that there is disagreement about how clearly delineated alternative visions held and advocated by educators should be. A similar question exists with regard to the type of imagination educators seek to nurture in others. Do educators advocate "holistic visions imbued with prescriptive content" (Webb, 2009, p. 756) or the more flexible, dynamic, kind of vision advocated by scholars like Giroux (2003) or Coté, Day, and de Peuter (2007a, 2007b) who may emphasize what Webb views as *process* devoid of prescriptive content? Blueprints or compass bearings?

### **Focusing on Particular Domains**

Some scholars direct attention to the issue of how imagination can aid us in our ability to *focus* so that some aspects of shared human life can actually come into sharp view while others fade into the background (at least temporarily). Some scholars emphasize visions focused on a robust *political* sphere (e.g., Fischman and McLaren, 2000; Giroux, 2003; Hytten, 2010); others advocate a focus on *economic* relationships, for instance, as alternatives to capitalism (Albert, 2003, 2006; Aronowitz, 2006; Miller, 2004; Wright, 2010); still others like Greene (1995b), Hung (2010), and Ginwright (2010) emphasize envisioning desirable *social* relations in one's immediate neighborhood or community. Some scholars emphasize envisioning alternatives specifically within education, focusing on schooling (McInerney, 2007; Shapiro and Purpel, 2009), curricular and instruction practices (Cartwright and Noone, 2006), policy (Halpin, 2003a, 2003b), pedagogical possibilities (Generett and Hicks, 2004; Giroux, 2003; Hytten, 2010; North, 2009; Webb, 2009), or modes of relating within educational settings (Coté, Day, and de Peuter, 2007a, 2007b). Options for conceptualizing different domains of the shared social world are nearly endless and will depend, among other things, on one's theory of social change and the purposes which bring educators and learners together. The emphasis here is on one's ability to *hold a particular gaze* long enough for generative insights to emerge or to be invented.

### **Engaging Different Scales**

Imagination also involves an awareness that visions of change are characterized by *scale*. Green (1995b) has distinguished between "seeing things large" (up close, in all their specificity and texture) versus "seeing things small" (from a distance, focused on systems, institutions, structures), which resonates with North's (2008) distinction between micro- and macro-level emphases in literature about the meaning of social justice. Hutchinson (1996) uses the metaphors of "worms eye view" and "bird's eye view" (p. 50) to distinguish between compartmentalized and interconnected ways of learning about and conceiving of the world. Hung's (2010) dissertation utilized the metaphor of dance floor and balcony to describe a capacity to vision at different scales: the first involves a viewpoint wherein "you see the action of the

space unfolding before your eyes, as you are just as much a part of it, swaying with your partner to the music” (p. 79); the second, represents a view from the balcony, where it is possible to view the action from above. Webb’s (2009) advocacy that a “totalizing, holistic utopian blueprint” (p. 749) and Levitas (2007) “imaginary reconstitution of society” (2007), both attempt a focus on “the whole” of social life certainly contrast with Greene’s (1995b) emphasis on visioning at the very local level of neighborhoods or schools. Although each example above is dualistic there are many scales at which to imagine the social world – at issue here is the ability to engage visioning at a scale appropriate to one’s educational or social change goals.

### **Engaging Past, Present, and Future**

Scale can also be conceived *temporally*. Visions of change operating at the scale advocated by Brand and his colleagues (1999) who are conceiving and creating a public art installation intended to last ten thousand years and foster long-range thinking might stretch centuries or even millennia. Conversely, Coté, Day, and de Peuter’s (2007a) utopian imaginings aim for fundamental economic-political-social change but emphasize “an ethos of experimentation that is oriented toward carving out spaces for resistance and reconstruction *in the here and now*” (p. 317, emphasis mine). Others still (Shor, 2010; Adams 2010) suggest visions of social change may self-consciously operate as part of a historical legacy that stretches not only forward into the future, but backward into the past to link with activists and social movements who have come before. This dimension of imagination involves an awareness of how one’s vision is historically situated in a stream stretching from past to future and on what temporal scale it is operating, as well as an ability to select a scale appropriate to one’s beliefs about how meaningful social change takes place.

### **Deliberating About Alternative Visions**

This aspect of imagination highlights the importance of being able to engage in democratic deliberation within particular communities in the process of visioning – and ultimately creating – change (Giroux,

1995; Hytten, 2010; McInerney, 2007; North, 2009). An ability to engage in a dialogical process by which people begin with their own individual visions and desires, but through dialogue look through “more and more particularities, to discover in others’ questions and visions more and more ways of transcending one-dimensional grasping” in order to generate mutual understanding and empathy, and perhaps to allow for “the gradual coming to being of a norm-governed common world” (Greene, 1995b, p. 69). For Levitas (2007) the two-fold archaeological (surfacing implicit assumptions about “the good life”) and architectural (conjuring alternative social systems) method of holistic utopian thinking involved in the “imaginary reconstitution of society” “enables the content of different ‘utopian’ visions to be brought within the sphere of democratic debate, in a manner that anti-utopian utopianism blocks” (p. 299-300). This dimension involves the articulation of an individual or collective vision, a capacity to express it to others in whatever mode one chooses, to surface and hold up for comparison alternative notions of the “good life,” and to reflect on and perhaps revise or refashion one’s vision on the basis of democratic dialogue.

### **Acting Based on Vision**

Some note that imagined or desired change can be pressed into the service of action for change alone or in collaboration with others (Hung, 2010). Despite charges of escapism, for many scholars, visions can animate, fuel, spur and provide other resources for the pursuit of change on the ground. Some believe vision and action sit in dialectical, symbiotic relation to one another (Generett and Hicks, 2004; McInerney, 2007; Van Heertum, 2006). Van Heertum (2006) puts it this way: “If we allow an affirmative vision of an alternative reality to move toward rather than one based solely on the eradication of negative elements, it can embolden people to act. For individuals are arguably more apt to struggle for a positive vision than one founded solely on negation” (p. 49). Generett and Hicks’ (2004) concept of “audacious hope in action” argues that visionary social imagination must go beyond an ability to “simply envision possibilities that are presently elusive but must include a theory of action, of taking steps to bring that vision to embodiment” (p. 192). For them, “hope and action are inextricably dependent on each other. For

action to be taken, one must have a hopeful view. And the reverse is also true: For one to be hopeful, action must be taken” (p. 199).

In chapter 4 I take up a focused conversation again about radical imagination, this time rearticulating the ideas and literatures I have noted above in terms of the perspectives of my research partners, a move that yielded a new framework for understanding radical imagination that I hope might be useful in helping radical educators reflect on which elements we emphasize, which we neglect, and to what effects.

### **Pedagogies for Radical Imagination: Scholarly Perspectives**

The previous discussion suggests some of the reasons that scholars believe that justice-focused imagination may offer possibilities for individual and group transformation that can help further the work of transformative social change. Further, the texts I examined assert that nurturing justice-focused imagination should be an aim of justice-focused education. Their viewpoints beg the question, then, how do educators seek to foster the imaginative modes of seeing the world in new ways, envisioning alternative arrangements, and acting with others to pursue change noted above? How do educators seek to “convoke” radical imagination, as Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) have put it?

This section of the paper describes two broad pedagogical approaches described by scholars as strategies social justice educators engage to “provoke” (Hung, 2010) radical dreams of social change and highlight the important role context can play in fostering radical imagination. Below, first I turn to a discussion about how engagement with *arts-based approaches* in which engagement with the many visual, literary, and performing arts can further the cultivation of radical imagination; next, I examine *action-based approaches*, pedagogies that experiment with and seek to embody desired changes in the here and now. While overlap among the variety of approaches and more specific strategies described below certainly exists in practice, the separation is made here for analytical purposes so that their specific contributions can be highlighted. Like the section above, my discussion here is meant primarily to illustrate the lenses I utilized as I embarked on the study. My discussion of strategies to provoke radical

imagination in chapter 5 illustrates the ways my research partners' perspectives altered and expanded this initial framework.

### **Arts-based Approaches**

My examination of literature about radical imagination reveals that many scholars believe art-based pedagogies may be the most ripe strategies for fostering a forward looking imagination for justice and the kinds of associated capacities I described above. Spehler and Slattery (1999) argue that “vision, imagination, and a passion for justice are in short supply” (p. 1) today and echo Holloway and Krensky’s (2001) view that the “free space” opened up by engagement with the arts “is a possible world that breaks down social barriers and allows young people to name themselves, envision alternative realities, and engage in remaking their worlds (p. 358). Caracciolo (2008) suggests “the path toward deepening our humanity runs through a world enlivened by artistic experiences” (p. 15). Greene (2000) writes, “one of the primary ways of activating the imaginative capacity is through encounters with the performing arts, the visual arts, and the art of literature” (p. 277) and that through such encounters we are “not only lurched out of the familiar and the taken-for-granted, but we may also discover new avenues for action. We may experience a sudden sense of new possibilities and thus new beginnings” (Greene, 1995a, p. 379). Artist and educator Beverly Naidus (2005) believes that among its many purposes, socially engaged art aims toward a litany of outcomes:

to provoke thought, to wake up those who are in denial, to create dialogue between groups in conflict, to make invisible groups more visible, to empower, to heal, to educate, to reveal hidden histories, to celebrate a community’s strengths, to document, to speak when everyone is scared, to enlighten, to transform, and to speak to truth (p. 179-180).

Although scholars often write of “the arts” as a coherent, singular approach to educating for social justice and imagination, what we often simply call “the arts” are actually a varied and diverse set of practices and approaches. Quinn (2009) describes art in this broad way: it is “the name we give our common drive to note and create rhythm, harmony, and balance; it is how we express our experience of the mysterious and difficult to understand; it is the shapes, sounds, and movements we use to expose

feelings, preserve the ephemeral, and suggest solutions” (p. 223). The chapters in Clover and Stalker’s (2007) book about the arts and social justice in adult education range in focus including discussions of quilting and other fabric arts, crafts, storytelling, literature, poetry, music, drama/theater, graffiti, and the playful art of clowning. Each of the forms noted above, and the many varieties within them, offers different pedagogical resources depending on its characteristics and the ways in which it is engaged. The following paragraphs illuminate some of the specific opportunities arts-based pedagogies offer to “step outside the dominant discourse and rationality and both deconstruct society and offer alternative dreams” (Van Heertum, 2006, p. 49) or to provoke “radical and creative visions or an alternative world – as if things could be otherwise – a helpful goal much required in these neo-liberal times” (Clover and Stalker, 2007. p. 2).

### ***Language and Literary Arts***

Kinsella (2007) views the literary arts as a powerful heuristic that can enable learning for social justice among adults in a variety of ways, arguing that “our encounter with the literary world shapes our ways of seeing, our meanings, our consciousness and our selves, just as readily as our encounter with the ‘real’ world can shape these dimensions” (p. 53). Many scholars agree that language arts are especially powerful media for bringing forth new visions of what might be (Greene, 1995a, 1995b, 1997, 2000; Kinsella, 2007; Moylan, 1986; Nussbaum, 1991; Weems, 2003; Wolk, 2009). Kinsella (2007) writes that rather than “a traditional focus on scientific, technical, empirical, and measurable information, literature has the potential to draw attention to what occurs in the feeling structure, mind, and imagination, and sensibility of living social beings” (p. 39). Two examples will help illustrate the ways scholars imagine literary arts as especially potent media for the cultivation of visionary social imagination.

Nussbaum (1991) describes the *novel* as a “triumph over other ways of imagining the world” (p. 880) which provides readers with vantage points “more adequate as an explanation of the totality of human behavior as we experience it” than other forms (p. 898). In Greene’s view (1997), the novel “suggests the endless complexity and the incompleteness of all explorations. It enables us to see and feel, as seldom

before, the textures of lives...things that cannot be captured by lists, tables, administrative reports, even personal stories” (p. 394). Greene and Nussbaum both see the novel as particularly ripe medium for cultivating empathy. By getting “readers involved with the characters, caring about their projects, their hopes and fears, participating in their attempts to unravel the mysteries and perplexities of their lives” (Nussbaum, 1991, p. 891) the novel “enables us to cross divides, to make connections between ourselves and others, and to look through other eyes” (Greene, 1997, p. 391). In this way, novels may enable understanding across vast social, political, cultural difference. The “generous construal” of the world and its inhabitants nourished by novels enhances our ability to “consider our fellow citizens, our fellow human beings, with the wonder and the generosity that this imagination promotes” (Nussbaum, 1991, p. 907), potentially resulting in an expansion of empathetic viewpoint that some scholars almost practically equate with imagination.

If novels foster a sense of connectivity powerful for imagining change, *critical utopian fiction* fosters an estrangement equally useful for radical imagination. In a historical moment characterized by the “enclosing of the present by transnational capital” (Moylan, 1987, p.36) we are told at every turn “there is no alternative” (McInerney, 2007). Moylan (1986) and Weiner (2007) suggest that critical utopian science fiction can enable the criticality and opposition essential to the pursuit of social justice in a time when “a combination of cynicism and feelings of powerlessness generated and supported by structures hostile to human agency has placed a vice grip around our social and political imaginations” (Weiner, 2007, p. 72). In such moments, “estranged genres that critically apprehend that present and hold open the possibility of a different future [are] all the more important in the continuing project of opposition and emancipation” (Moylan, 1986, p. 36). The ability of critical science fiction to “reconfigure our imaginative capacities so that the improbable *feels* possible” and “to imagine beyond the limits of official imaginations, to break the bonds that connect our imaginations to that which has been determined a priori as possible” (Weiner, 2007, p. 72, emphasis in original) is of crucial importance. Critical utopias “stimulate in its readers a desire for a better life” (p. 35), but reject fixity and the idea that there are closed answers about what that could or should look like, instead exemplifying and encouraging a “permanently open process of

envisioning what is not yet” (p. 213). Wolk (2009) has argued that teaching using dystopias offers unique opportunities to develop the “habits of mind” (p. 668) needed in social imagination. Drawing on reflections based in her teaching of two courses, Haddad (2005) argued that teaching through the categories of utopia and dystopia “ generates political insights, energizes students, deepens awareness, and cultivates good writing skills” because of the “active and imaginative engagement with fundamental questions that are often simply dismissed or actively ignored” these approaches entail (p. 399).

### ***Performing Arts***

The performing arts, methods such as drama and theater, dance, and music, offer yet another set of possibilities for fostering radical imagination.

Drama and theater techniques allow for *embodied* imaginative exploration that include but go beyond the idea that imagination is only about cognition. As strategies for fostering imagination, they have many benefits. Caracciolo (2008) believes visualization techniques can “enliven our thinking” (p. 14), strengthening a capability for mental imagining and that can serve the development of a “fiery imaginative” (p. 9) that surpasses “passive dreaming or fantasy” (p. 9). Interactive dramatic techniques which allow for the exploration of dynamics of oppression and liberation, for instance, via kinesthetic, visual (Downey, 2005), playful, embodied (LaGrande, 1996), and nonverbal (Brown and Gillespie, 1999) methods, on the other hand, undermine the pervasive assumption of the mind/body split (Caracciolo, 2009; LaGrande, 1996; Van Heertum, 2006) and foreground the embodiment of knowledge which has obvious implications for educators interested in fostering *action in the world*. These techniques can allow for a richer understanding social dynamics by “sensitizing [participants] to the effect of such linguistic subtleties as voice tone, gestures, and proxemics (the distance we stand from one another)” (Brown and Gillespie, 1999, p. 39). Furthermore, they can help put one in touch with one’s own experiences and desires in manners that offer benefits unavailable within other analytic techniques. These strategies externalize imagination, creating a potential public space for the collective creation and modification of alternative visions via deliberation and debate that are at the heart of democratic pedagogies (Brown and

Gillespie, 1999). Theater as praxis can allow us to perceive “public life as an imaginative realm” opening up for collective exploration “what kind of vision, what kind of world do we want to imagine, do we want to create” (LaGrande, 1996, p. 214).

Albergato-Muterspaw and Fenwick (2007) focus on song, arguing that “music engages listeners through the unique medium of tune, harmony and rhythm, stirring people deep at levels which some how lie beyond visual and poetic imagination” (p. 161). They describe a social justice pedagogy they call “co-equal cognitive integration style” that involves using the text of music, for instance, song lyrics and the qualities, like melody and tempo, to foster democratic, critical dialogue about social issues expressed in music, a method also suggested by Sweet (2009) in his advocacy of a social justice imagination. They also describe a pedagogy they name the “affective style” by which music is used to stimulate a mood or explore its impact on affect, which can then be analyzed by participants in a learning community. They are most concerned with pedagogies that involve singing among participants in learning communities, an approach they call “social integration,” which involves the use of music to create desirable communities. Especially when done as a collective experience, these aspects of song and music allow a group to directly face conditions of inequity and injustice, to “provoke radical visions of an alternate world” (p. 161), and actually bring desired alternatives social relations like inclusion, equality, and solidarity into practice in the here and now.

Harlap’s (2006) study of 48 organizations focused on social change included a handful of dance-focused organizations and a group of others that included dance as part of a broader repertoire of arts-based pedagogies. As the director of one organization put it, dance can “counteract a consumerist society that ‘divides experiences down to commodities’ and ‘leaves people dispossessed from their community, from their sense of self and self-worth, and with little room to explore alternative ways of being’” (p. 121) by allowing “people to go into that liminal space where they can be who they are and not who they are at the same time, so they can practice new identities” (p. 197). Like the theater and drama techniques described above, dance allows for an exploration of “the kinesthetic qualities of empathy [and] intersubjectivity” (p. 72) and for a reintegration where the many functions of dance “aesthetic, healing,

spiritual, social” (p. 116) can be woven into one practice. In the words of one of her study’s participants, the experiential and theoretical engagement with dance can allow communities that foster “thinking ahead: the wonderful qualities, the best qualities of feminism, of aesthetics, of ethics and communitarian valuing” (p. 73).

Maxine Greene (2000) has also written about the potential of dance for “provoking those willing to pay heed to resist ‘insularity,’ to conceive of things as if they might be otherwise” (p. 278). When one begins to think about how dance allows for nearly endless play with time, tempo, rhythm, and movement in space when many bodies are involved, “the possibilities become enormous” (p. 278). Dance, like other performing arts such as theater and music, involves a sensory experience which can “incorporate the body more fully into learning, allowing the students to explore the world and their own dreams of change in more immanent ways” (Van Heertum, 2006, p. 49).

### ***Visual Art***

Green (1995a, 2000) believes there is power in encouraging aesthetic appreciation in which learners are invited to deeply attend to the images that confront us; the arts, she argues, can allow for the development of this kind of attention. Once focused attention is achieved, she describes some of the benefits of visual arts for fostering social imagination. “To see sketch after sketch of women holding dead babies, as Picasso has forced us to do, is to become aware of a tragic deficiency in the fabric of life” (1995a, p. 379). And she argues that if we are wise enough to choose to engage such representations, “we are likely to strain toward conceptions of a better order of things,” to “summon up images of smiling mothers and lovely children, metaphors for what *ought* to be” (1995a, p. 379). She also explains that encounters with visual arts can enable an understanding that “phenomena of the visible world are themselves always fluid” and further that they allow one to “see new possibilities in experience and to attend to the world around with eyes wide open, refusing the fixed and unchangeable” (2000, p. 277).

If we choose, visual art offers us the chance to “enter a landscape or a room or an open street” which offer possibilities for awakening visions of change not only for a local environment, but on a global scale.

Greene (2000) explains that participatory encounters with visual arts offer metaphors for seeing the *particular* in new ways (Greene, 1997), but each particular may also suggest a whole new, imagined *totality* (or at least suggest its potential). “Just as one perceives things only against the background of the world, so the objects represented by art appear against the background of the universe,” in this way “the creative act aims at a total renewal of the world. Each painting, each book, is a recovery of the totality of being” (Sartre quoted in Greene, 1995a, p. 380). Changes suggested by imagined particulars, that is, can open us to imagining changes in the whole.

Weems (2003) explains meaningful engagement with a particular art form, like visual arts, does not need to be restricted to aesthetic appreciation or the cultivation of an ability to express oneself within that genre, advocating instead for a pedagogy of mixed artistic modalities for appreciation and expression (e.g., children may develop a dance that describes their experience of viewing a picture which thereby enhances not only their skill for appreciation but their ability to create themselves).

### **Action-based Approaches**

Harlap (2006) has argued, “*creating new visions and opening new imaginations for what the world could be* is a process of visioning the future that may be exclusive to the arts” (p. 196, emphasis in original). In light of this claim and the literatures I reference above which likewise suggest the arts may be particularly suitable for fostering radical imagination, pedagogies that are *not* art-based beg our attention. My next focus is scholarship which examines pedagogies that assume that today’s urgent social, political, economic, and ecological crises can best be addressed by linking visionary imagination with concrete individual and collective action for change in the here and now.

One example of this line of argument can be found in a collection of essays edited by Coté, Day, and de Peuter’s (2007b) book *Utopian Pedagogy*. Grounded in educational traditions like adult popular education, critical pedagogy, and radical pedagogies informed by feminism, antiracism, and postcolonialism and placing themselves within two streams of political theory and practice – autonomist Marxism and anarchism – the book advocates a pedagogical “ethos of experimentation that is oriented

toward carving out spaces of resistance and reconstruction in the here and now” (2007a, p. 317). The editors’ own scholarship (2007a, 2007b), like the chapters written by others that appear in their book, documents pedagogies and educational experiments which aim to “produce circumstances, spaces, and subjectivities that, within and against the present, strive toward anti-authoritarian, autonomous, and radically democratic modes of organizing intellectuality and learning” (2007a, p. 329).

There are two pedagogical elements in Coté, Day, and de Peuter’s volume I wish to surface here. The first aspect involves the specific, embodied actions of educators that might create possibilities for *experimenting with new educational relationships* as an important aspect of pedagogies of radical imagination. The second aspect understands pedagogies of radical imagination *as* and *within the context of* building alternative institutions, projects, infrastructure for meeting human needs and desires.

### ***Inventing New Educational Relationships***

One situation in which radical imagination can be fostered is when educators and learners partner to “experiment with the coordinates of the future” (Coté, Day, and de Peuter, 2007a, p. 328) by creating relational shifts in the present. In part, this practice emphasizes the importance of viewing pedagogy as lived and embodied, a theme explored above especially in relation to the performing arts; but it happens via other pedagogical behaviors and relations as well. This practice assumes that we develop both *ideas* and *longings* for change by engaging in radical and concrete experimentation with new social, political, economic and educational relationships in the here and now.

Van Heertum (2006) has written about the pedagogical implications of this view:

Critical teachers and researchers must embody the changes they are advocating, showing students an alternative through their actions together with their words. This requires more than critique, activism and alluding to the Great Refusal; it also must include a positive dream that can inspire others to follow embracing their creativity and beliefs (p. 50).

He argues, for instance, that in order to “fortify a new sensibility more in line with a just, equitable and humane society” educators should strive to embody “a pedagogy that escapes the patriarchal, androcentric and aggressive system of reason and attempts to embrace a sensibility more commonly affiliated with

femininity” which “would involve a movement toward empathy, sensitivity, peace, caring and non-exploitative practices ” (p. 49). The idea is that educators must live their most deeply cherished values in the here and now, rather than advocating them at some future point only.

In describing what this kind of pedagogy might look like, Van Heertum (2006) holds Herbert Marcuse, whose pedagogy is the subject of his writing, up with Gandhi, Marx and Martin Luther King, as a pedagogue who “lived the change” he pursued, particularly highlighting the pedagogical significance of his “hopeful embrace of all forms of resistance and his unflappable faith in the power of the people to overcome the domination and oppression that surrounded them” (p. 50). Coté, Day, and de Peuter (2007a), on the other hand, invented a conceptual persona to describe one form utopian pedagogy might take. “*Academicus affinitatus*” embodies an intellectual and pedagogical style that

prefers open experimentation to rule-based procedures, choose politics of the act over a politics of demand, pursues inventions rather than reforms, respects heteronomous systems of difference rather than universalizing, hegemonic formations, and is committed to the task of minimizing the operation of power as domination in every situation (p. 325).

Although such pedagogies of embodied action can take many shapes, the underlying idea is one in which an educators’ actions teach by example and, by creating an invitation for people within learning communities to relate differently, they embody articulations of what socially just, democratic, feminist, or antiracist practice, for instance, might look like even in the context of institutional structures, policies, discourses, and systems that may not reflect these values.

While little of the empirical literature about social justice education specifically examines how the embodied political actions of educators can be understood as part of a pedagogy of radical imagination, empirical studies like North’s (2009) *Teaching for Social Justice*, de los Reyes and Gozemba (2002) *Pockets of Hope*, Michie’s (2005) *See You When We Get There* are examples of comparative empirical studies that investigate the both the strategies involved in embodied social justice pedagogies and the ideas and assumptions that underlie them which informed my study. Furthermore, the portraits of radical adult educators illustrated in comparative case studies (e.g., Preskill and Brookfield, 2009) or via

individual first person narratives (e.g., Ransby, 2003; Brown, 1990; Horton, Kohl, and Kohl, 1998) are similarly illustrative.

### ***Prefigurative Interventions as Pedagogies of Radical Imagination***

Coté, Day, and de Peuter (2007a, 2007b) also highlight that education never occurs in a vacuum and that context matters. They emphasize the value of creating alternative *circumstances* and *spaces* in which the kinds of experimental educational, social, economic, political relationships described above can be explored. Of most value, they believe, are infrastructures that “exceed the name of resistance and take on the quality of a prototypical, but necessarily partial, alternative” (2007a, p. 325). In general, their approach shares Purpel’s (2009) assumption, shared by many others (e.g., Fine, Weis, Centrie, and Roberts 2000; Sutton et al., 2006), that educational scholarship benefits when it casts the net widely to include an examination of the many spaces – formal and informal, traditional and alternative – in which powerful teaching and learning occurs in our lives. Here I would like to briefly describe how radical imagination might be fostered in the context of work to build educational alternatives outside K-12 or university contexts, the construction of radical activist projects, and within intentional communities.

One approach involves the creation of alternative spaces or institutions that are specifically education-focused because such settings may provide a greater degree of flexibility and freedom for experimentation with educational practices, ideas, strategies for change than opportunities afforded within traditional teaching and learning settings. For instance, Coté, Day, and de Peuter’s (2007b) volume includes chapters about an anarchist free school (Antliff, 2007) and “Critical U,” a community based free school which did not charge money and which was intended as a dialogical learning space that might serve as an alternative to hegemony (a project involving Coté, Day and de Peuter themselves, who authored the chapter about it). Other examples of scholars focusing on the value of educational alternative-building include Apple and Beane’s (2007) *Democratic Schools* which documents institution-wide efforts to create spaces where deep commitments to democratic structures, processes, practices, and relationships can come alive and studies of institutions like the Highlander Research and Education Center (Ebert, Burford, Brian, 2003; Horton,

Kohl, and Kohl, 1998), which for nearly 90 years has provided those involved an alternative to traditional models of teaching and learning by centering the extraordinary and transformative power of knowledge-sharing among ordinary people. Haworth's (2012) edited collection of essays about anarchist pedagogies includes discussions of a variety of projects that seek to create spaces within, against, and beyond existing public education infrastructure, as does the excellent blog Class War University.

The School for Designing a Society (Scott, 2011) in Urbana, Illinois, is a uniquely focused example of an alternative educational institution focused squarely on helping its participants imagine alternative ways to live. In the past decade in the city where I live, there have been various free schools, freeschools, and free university projects, radical lending libraries and infoshops, ongoing study groups and other educational institutions and projects that run the gamut from formal to informal and in which radical pedagogies emphasizing imagination take place. While studies of such educational projects tend to conceptualize the institution itself as the unit of analysis, my own focus in this dissertation seeks to understand *an educator's intention* to create a new institution or to participate in an existing alternative *as an integral part* of a broader pedagogy for fostering radical imagination and seeks to understand the interconnected pedagogical ideas that lead an educator to pursue teaching and learning work outside traditional school settings.

A second permutation emphasizes pedagogical activity occurring within radical community and activist projects themselves. As I noted above in my discussion of education for social justice, pedagogical activities in such settings are practiced by people who may or may not consider themselves "teachers" or "educators," but whose work is nonetheless pedagogical. Pedagogy within such activist community projects may also afford opportunities to experiment with alternative ways of meeting human wants and needs, ways of making decisions and resolving conflicts, relating to each other culturally and socially. Writing about the need for spaces that not only foster "revolutionary hope" and "radical imaginations" among African American youth, but which create "space for young people to imagine a better way of life and support them to act on that vision" (Ginwright, 2010, p. 89), Ginwright argues that "small grassroots community organizations can experiment and implement new strategies under the radar

of school policies, governmental regulations that restrict the type of work that black youth need” (p. 89). Examples of empirical research about the educational nature of such spaces can be seen in Alleyne’s (2007) discussion of activist cultural politics in the UK, Sarda’s (2007) exploration of an open media lab in India that reflects an alternative space to build relationships across and tech skills and knowledge among diverse race, caste, and class groups, or the many examples of “public pedagogy” described within Sandlin, Schultz, and Burdick’s (2010) *Handbook of Public Pedagogy*. In another discussion, Sandlin (2007) has observed that activist groups often try to model or prefigure the kind of society they seek to create via the playful pedagogies involved in culture jamming. She writes, “culture jammers participate in the creation of culture and knowledge, enact politics, open transitional spaces, create community, and engage their whole selves—intellect, body, and emotions. Culture jamming as pedagogy is an active ‘doing’ rather than a passive ‘theorizing’” (p. 80). Additionally, although pedagogy itself is not their central focus, the kinds of activist projects described by Duncombe (2007) in his book *Dream* or Carlsson (2008) in his *Nowtopia* point to the types of alternative-building projects that Côté, Day, and de Peuter (2007a, 2007b) claim can be critical sites of teaching and learning in which to imagine and build visionary social imagination for radical change.

Marianne Mackelbergh’s (2011) ethnographic investigations of the prefigurative strategies utilized in the alterglobalization movement can be read through a pedagogical lens as she argues that “by literally trying out new political structures in large-scale, inter-cultural decision-making processes in matters ranging from global politics to daily life, movement actors are learning how to govern the world in a manner that fundamentally redesigns the way power operates” (p. 1). Carroll and Ratner’s (2001), Chatterton’s (2010), and Gouin’s (2009) examinations of social movement organizations and spaces in Canada, the UK, and the US respectively highlight activist’s collective experiments to create and nurture oppositional cultures and the many opportunities for cultivating a sense of radical possibility that may succeed or fail within them. Finally, although they do not speak in such terms, I see and Haiven and Khasnabish’s (2014) method of “convoking” the radical imagination via their prefigurative research practices as a pedagogical intervention that provokes radical imagination.

A third approach involves study of or within intentional communities. Like the community projects described above, “intentional communities are creating the change they wish to see in the world” (Lockyer, 2010, p. 2 of 4). Carspecken’s (2008) recent dissertation argued that the alternative model of values and practices of intentional communities reflect “embodied imagination” and “a vision made real” (p. 302), echoing Sargisson’s (2004) claim in her study of 40 New Zealand intentional communities that such projects can be seen as “social dreaming made manifest” (p. 322). By challenging deeply rooted assumptions about human relationships and human nature, such experimental communities can both “expand the range of lifestyle choices for people in the society beyond” the community and also “expand imaginative horizons, opening up new possibilities and directions *beyond* itself” (Carspecken, 2008, p. 303, emphasis in original). Scholarly interest in collective living – not as a panacea to social and ecological problems, but perhaps as an underappreciated approach to both learning and alternative culture and worldview building – seems to be increasing (Carspecken, 2008; Greenleaf, 2002; Kasper, 2008; Rivera, 2012; Sargisson, 2004 and 2012 each investigated intentional communities as sites in which pedagogies of embodied imagination could be considered to be present). Litfin’s (2013) *Ecovillages* describes fourteen large-scale intentional communities in different parts of the world as “hotbeds[s] of learning” (p. 18) and in light of the insights they provide for those interested in ecology, economy, community, and consciousness. As she puts it, resident “ecovillagers are like applied scientists, running collective experiments in every realm of life: building, farming, waste management, decision-making, communication, child-rearing, finance, ownership, aging and death” (p. 18) and foreshadowing what both more and larger-scale change might look like.

Joshua Lockyer’s (2010) teaching experiences suggested to him that while examining case studies of intentional communities in the abstract to understand the principles and practices that animate them might be valuable, inviting college students to visit intentional communities was much more powerful: “seeing and talking with groups of people engaged in deliberative endeavors to change their relationships with each other and with the surrounding environment provided a sense of positive possibilities” (p. 2 of 4). “Simply seeing that other people could do something was empowering” (p. 2 of 4). Large-scale

intentional communities like Findhorn in Scotland or Auroville in India have long served as laboratories of learning for ecological sustainability, nonviolence, cooperative economics, egalitarian relationships, Organizations like Living Routes visit these and other eco-villages around the world to foster learning about intentional community building and practice as personal and community-based methods of addressing pressing social problems and fostering skills and knowledge for restoring communities and the planet to greater health. In a different twist, Alexander and Johnson's (2013) chapter about an off-campus, residential program in the US Adirondacks describes the "ethos of immersion" (p. 6 of 17) and the potential involved in the intentional communities created among students in such program themselves of fostering such "*inhabitory practices*" as cooperation (p. 14 of 17). Intentional communities can also provide fertile ground for the critical analysis of the limitations and contradictions involved in such projects, for exploring the places where practices may not seamlessly align with expressed values and in some cases where the two may violently depart.

### **Critical Departure**

Taken together, these theoretical, practical, and empirical conversations make a compelling case that radical imagination involves a complex set of ideas which can be – and are – fostered pedagogically using an equally complex array of strategies. They also suggest that radical imagination has something powerful to offer the pursuit of justice on the ground. My discussions in chapter 4 and chapter 5 build on the conceptual foundations that have emerged in my reading of these literatures. In those chapters, I bring my research partners' ideas into conversation with these literatures to propose modified frameworks through which to understand the nature of radical imagination and pedagogies that may help generate its various dimensions and capacities.

My review also illuminates several areas where my own passions and curiosities dovetail with gaps in the literature that dissertation study sought to address. First, while repeated calls for an emboldened radical imagination among teachers and students are frequent within social justice education scholarship, they are typically fleeting. Literatures I have described above draw on a variety of fields and disciplines

that have some stake in questions of pedagogy, but academic fields that theorize and describe education for social justice itself do not seem to center questions about what conceptions of imagination might actually further the systemic change goals and aims articulated within various ESJ discourses to the degree that it might. Gaps in the scholarship call for a more in-depth elaboration of what specific kinds of imagination radical educators hope to provoke among those with whom they work and may help educators further discern between those whose agendas are very similar to their own and those whose goals may, in fact, be contradictory.

Second, there appears to be vastly less literature about the importance of imagination as it relates to learning among older youth and adults than that which is focused on children (in which references to creativity and imagination are many, especially in educational literature on the arts). Although both types of literature have value and offer theoretical resources for my study, my project examines radical imagination primarily as it is nurtured within learning communities comprised of older youth and adults. It asks why conscious attention to cultivating radical imagination over a lifetime is important, rather than conceiving imagination as a process or capacity to be nurtured only during childhood that will serve one into the future.

Third, a focus on older youth and adult teaching and learning allows for attention to be directed toward a multiplicity of learning contexts in which political pedagogies take place, from post-secondary institutions to activist campaigns, community organizations to autonomous universities, workplaces to freeschools, intentional communities to street demonstrations, and an array of other contexts, settings, and spaces. These are important sites for theorizing teaching and learning that are often neglected with a focus on education as schooling children.

Fourth, as demonstrated in the discussion above, although a substantial literature exists which focuses on arts-based pedagogies associated with fostering visions for social change, far less scholarly attention seems to be given to other broad approaches or to the specific pedagogical strategies employed as part of pedagogies of radical imagination. One goal of this study is to look across pedagogical approaches utilized by radical educators in order to understand the basic assumptions about teaching, learning, and

social change that underlie them, to explore what more particular strategies educators might use to nurture the imagination relevant to the pursuit of justice and what role educators themselves may play in associated learning processes, and to consider the unique promises and limitations of various strategies for generating radical imagination.

Fifth, much of the literature that does touch on efforts to theorize or promote radical imagination as an aspect or aim of radical pedagogy is either theoretical in nature or takes the form of practitioner-authored first person narrative. While both of these types of scholarship offer invaluable insights, there are some limitations associated with them. When theoretical and conceptual work is emphasized in scholarly literature about radical imagination, the ways educators themselves understand their efforts and the challenges they face within it are often absent. While practitioner-authored accounts can help fill this gap, they often neglect a more critical (self) assessment of the potential limitations and pedagogical tensions in pedagogies that advance imagination for social justice. With the rise of interest in “social justice” in the field, there is a large and quickly growing body of empirical scholarship that examines the philosophies and teaching strategies of social justice educators often through individual, cross, comparative, or collective case study investigations. The merging of theoretical lenses and knowledges of the scholars who conduct them with the reflective, grounded knowledges of the practitioners with whom they partner often push forward both conceptual knowledge in the field and yield knowledge about practical strategies of direct relevance for teachers involved in the studies and those who read them. My study builds on my awareness of these strengths and seeks to emulate them in the context of a specific focus on social justice and imagination.

Sixth and finally, while the field of social justice education appears to be grappling with some of the challenges of that work for learners and for educators, there appears to be a pervasive assumption among those who do view imagination as significant in the pursuit of justice that processes that aim to nurture imagination will necessarily be inspirational and further tangible action for change. My own experience suggests otherwise. In my view, while imagination does offer some potent resources for those committed to transformative change, it may also carry with it its own set of challenges that need attention. Although

there are a few exceptions, at the outset of the study, I had identified very little literature that spoke to the challenges, tensions, contradictions, and struggles faced by educators working to promote radical imagination pedagogically, which is the reason this topic does not get further attention in this chapter. In chapter 6, I point to resonance with some pedagogical literature that I began to draw on during the course of my sense making and which helped me conceptualize my research partners reflections about struggles they face in their work – of which there are many.

With the literatures and my comments above offered as a springboard, I turn now to a discussion of how I went about the research.

# Chapter Three

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## Inquire

*This is philosophical educational research; it is not a study of anyone's perspectives but rather a way of bringing together a group of people with different perspectives to arrive at new frameworks, both theoretical and practical.*

Morwenna Griffiths, "Discourses of Social Justice in Schools"

This project utilized a qualitative methodology grounded in several critical and praxis-oriented paradigms, such as educational research for social justice (Griffiths, 1998; He and Fillion, 2008), militant research (Bookchin et al., 2013), movement-relevant theory (Bevington and Dixon, 2005), several participatory methodologies (Kemmis, 2006; Hall, 1984; Maguire, 1987; Park, 1999), and decolonizing methodology (Smith, 1999), in pursuit of both greater understanding of the complexities involved in the practice of social justice education and an elaboration of frameworks about imaginative pedagogies that might be practically useful to individuals, communities, and movements working toward justice. The project attempts to both extend and refine existing ideas about education for social justice by exploring perspectives about the relationships among imagination, pedagogy, and the pursuit of social justice among educators who see themselves as radicals and examining linkages between these perspectives and extant theory. Its goal is to elaborate frameworks that might provide practicing educators with, at a minimum, insights, questions, or other reflective tools that might enable them to look in new ways at their own pedagogy or, on the more ambitious end, more solid theoretical foundations for practice. In a substantial review of literature about the field of education for social justice, in order to better conceptualize such a wide body of literature, Hytten and Bettez (2011) distinguished among five "genres" in which social justice education has been examined, explored, and described: (1) writings focused on philosophical or conceptual aspects of social justice education, (2) frameworks and models for practice

(frameworks, models, conditions, skills, competencies) that describe particular elements of social justice pedagogies or education, (3) ethnographic or narrative writings that aim to describe the nature of injustice in schools and outside them and reflections by educators who attempt to teach for social justice, (4) writings from theoretical positions associated with specific leftists or radical movements within academia, and (5) writings that specifically focus on the demands of social justice education within a democracy. As a project aiming to produce conceptual clarification of the idea radical imagination and new frameworks for praxis, this project can be understood primarily as a contribution to the first two genres, although readers may notice resonance with the other genres as well. Griffiths' (1998b, p. 308) description of her approach to "philosophical educational research" noted in the chapter's epigraph resonates strongly with this project.

In this chapter, I describe the way I approached the inquiry and the reasoning for my choices. In the pages that follow, I describe the study's design, including its introducing its questions, my research partners, and my approach to data production and analysis. I also include a reflection on the writing process and elaborate a set of guiding commitments I strove to enact as I moved through the project's different phases.

### **Questions**

The overarching goal of this project is to generate knowledge that can support the development of stronger, more intentional practices among educators and more effective social justice movements. With my curiosity about the significance of radical imagination for the work of education for social justice as both launch point and anchor for my inquiry, I settled on the following three questions to help focus my exploration:

1. What notions of imagination are at play in the pursuit of justice among radical educators today? Why are these notions of radical imagination considered promising for those seeking social justice in our current historical moment?
2. What range of pedagogical strategies do radical educators utilize to provoke and practice imagination in different kinds of learning contexts and communities? And why?
3. What struggles do educators face in their efforts to nurture radical imagination pedagogically? How do they respond to these challenges?

In the remainder of the chapter, I describe how I set out to explore these questions.

### **Research Partners**

In my university teaching and my experiences as an organizer, I have been fortunate to find what de los Reyes and Gozemba (2006) call “pockets of hope” and what Myles Horton has called “islands of decency” (Horton, Kohl, and Kohl, 1998). While no pedagogical space is free of the harms that exist within the broader contexts in which they are situated and, indeed, as Coté, Day, and de Peuter (2007a) have written, “the struggle against domination in *all* its myriad forms must be relentless” (p. 333, emphasis in original), for the past twenty years, as a teacher in various kinds of learning environments, I am pleased to have found spaces in which mutualistic and respectful collaboration with the “student” participants in these spaces is valued and even, by some, expected. As I noted in chapter 1 and as a result, I have been able to explore the significance of imagination in learning with younger children with whom I have worked and to theorize and experiment with its possibilities for social change with undergraduate colleagues. Outside these more formal teaching environments, my engagement in activist projects, especially over the past 15 years, has given me ample opportunity to collaborate with other activists and organizers, exploring together our ideas about effective strategies for pursuing justice, including the use of intentional pedagogical strategies within, for instance, intentional communities, social movement workshops, study groups, and street actions.

In developing this inquiry, it was my belief that although scholars of various radical education traditions gesture toward the importance of imagination as a desirable, or even necessary, element in the pursuit of social change, rarely do they engage in *extended* discussions about the nature of the kinds of imagination they advocate (or those they don’t), what pedagogical forms commitments to imagination might take, and what struggles educators may face in their efforts to cultivate imagination in various types of learning contexts. I knew from my own practice and experience, though, that there must be much to explore along these lines and that educators would certainly have a lot to contribute to my own thinking

about imaginative pedagogy. At the outset of the study, I realized that I craved the opportunity to reflect with other educators about their perspectives on the radical pedagogy – to learn about how they see their work within social movements, to learn about their specific approaches, and to hear about the struggles they face in this difficult work. This project is part of my own effort to amplify the insights of radical educators about the significance of pedagogies of imagination in a way that can strengthen both local praxis and our social justice movements.

The effectiveness of social movements in bringing about the changes they seek depends, at least in part, on individuals, communities, and whole movements developing subjectivities and skills that are different than those that exist today. One assumption animating this study is that educators who are committed to transformative change and who work to put their commitments into practice have unique knowledge bases and skill sets that can help theorize what some of these capacities and subjectivities might entail and how we might go about collaboratively nurturing them. Furthermore, as I noted in chapter 2, although many of these activist educators believe “structures hostile to human agency have placed a vice grip around our social and political imaginations” (Weiner, 2007, p. 72), people who spoke with me remind us and those with whom they work that oppressive economic, social, and political structures are human creations that, while appearing intractable, *can* be named, transformed, challenged, and sometimes replaced with more just alternatives through collective human action on the part of committed individuals and collectivities. It was these kinds of courageous, audacious, inspired convictions that drew me into conversation with them.

### **Invitation process**

After obtaining approval from the University of Washington’s IRB, with the help and feedback of friends who had recently completed their own dissertation work, I created information sheet a participation call-out to publicize my project and invite participation. I worried about how to communicate how busy I know activist educators are, share my sense of the limitations of scholarly research as a form of political action, and frame my own political involvement in a way that would engender at least enough trust in my

motivations for people to want to contact me. A few weeks later I began circulating information about the study through a variety of radical educator networks in which I participate or with which I am familiar. For instance, I sent study information through various local channels, such as my university's Educators for Social Justice group, another email list that connects Seattle-area radical educators who periodically gather to offer support and share stories, a listserv which hosts discussions among anarchists in the Pacific Northwest, and a list that was created to network intentional communities in the Seattle-area. I also reached out nationally, sending the call-out to a network of justice-focused educators via the Education for Liberation network's listserv. Because I included a request that the call out be circulated "far and wide," either to individuals who might be interested or by forwarding to groups of people those receiving the note might think appropriate, the range of channels through which the invitation circulated remains unclear to me. However, the evidence in emails I received often showed that the email had been forwarded through a variety of channels before a potential participant contacted me directly. It is clear that movement-involved, well-networked friends played an important role, spreading the word further than I could have on my own.

Ultimately, I was fortunate in that my request for participation generated a lot of responses from a range of educators near and far working in fields as varied as geography, drama, and math and in pedagogical settings ranging from intentional communities to college campuses, from nonprofit arts organizations to freeschools. I received initial responses from close to one hundred potential participants sharing their interest and curiosity in the project, often cheering me on. Although there were many more people that I exchanged emails with and felt excited to talk with, by the time financial constraints and upcoming travel dictated that I stop the data gathering process, I had engaged in 24 research conversations with a group of dedicated, thoughtful radicals.

### **Criteria for Participation**

From the information sheet I shared with potential participants, here are the criteria my research partners and I used to determine whether their participation in the study made sense:

1. Have experience helping others develop visions of desired change in formal or informal learning contexts;
2. Consider themselves ‘social justice educators’ or consider ‘social justice’ as a main organizing concept in their educational work;
3. Self-identify as ‘radical’ or understand social problems that concern them to be irresolvable within current social, political, economic systems (I’m most curious about movements and educators who seek to undo all forms of domination and oppression; global justice, anti-capitalist, anti-racist/racial justice, feminist, queer liberationist, anarchist, anti-authoritarian, anti-imperialist, anti-war/peace, and environmental justice are just a few of the movements educators who participate in the study may identify with);
4. Are based in the US or Canada;
5. Have an interest in talking about their work!

### Overview of Participants

The table below gives an overall picture of the kinds of data my research partners and I together created and that I was working with as I began the work of analyzing the ideas we explored, constructing interpretations, and writing. In addition to the information in the table below, I should note that nine interviews were conducted in person, nine via Skype, and six over the telephone. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed in their entirety, a process I will describe further below.

**Figure 2. Overview of Data Produced, by Research Partner**

Pseudonym & Interview Number	Interview Date	Length of time (hr: min)	No. of interviews	Transcribed pages (single space)	Additional Data Sources Provided by my Research Partners
Anna	7/26/11	:59	1	14	
Benjamin	8/02/11	1:18	1	20	
Carmen	8/04/11	:51	1	14	Resume
Davis	8/09/11	1:10	1	19	Syllabus
Erin	8/11/11	:41	1	13	Organization websites
Francine	8/11/11	1:31	1	22	
Gregory	8/13/11	1:58	1		
Hannah	8/18/11	1:18	1	21	
Ivy	8/19/11	1:58	1	30	
Jack	8/24/11	:53	1	12	Biographical interview
Kevin	8/25/11	1:34	1	22	
Lou	9/2/11	1:04	1	15	Syllabi
Martin	9/6/11	1:41	1	29	Syllabi, curriculum materials
Nadine	9/7/11	1:04	1	20	Syllabi, follow up emails about interview topics
Odessa	9/8/11, 9/23/11	1:30, 1:02, 1:03, :07	2	40	Syllabi, organization website, curricular resources
Patrick	9/9/11	:36, :01, :	1	13	

		16			
Quincy	9/15/11	1:26	1	16	Syllabus
Rita	9/15/11, 9/21/11	1:17, :50	2	28	Syllabi
Sarah	9/16/11	:01, :18, : 48	1	15	
Tom	9/19/11	1:17	1	20	
Uma	9/20/11	:58	1	16	
Vince	9/21/11	1:37	1	26	Syllabi, curriculum materials
Wanda	9/22/11	:49	1	14	
Xavier	9/22/11	1:28	1	24	

Although I have a strong intellectual and political curiosity about how educators' biographies or positionalities shape our commitments and practices, it was not my main purpose in this inquiry to examine these issues. Because of this, I did not initially ask for in-depth demographic information (nor did our research conversations necessarily center on these topics). While some of my research partners did share some of this information in the course of our conversations, as I began writing, I found myself perusing interviews again, recognizing how uneven was my ability to summarize salient characteristics of the research group as a whole and providing snapshots of individual educators in order to give readers a fuller picture of the educators whose ideas are the focus of this project. In order to provide an overview of the group as a whole, I realized more information would be useful. I sent my research partners an email updating them on my progress and requesting further information (text of the email, which also provides additional details about how I understand my own identity, can be found in Appendix B). I was extremely grateful that only two weeks later, I had received emails back from 18 of the 24 people I spoke with. I was even more delighted when my request sparked deepened questions about my choice of categories, why the information would be useful considering the goals of the project, and how it would be used.

In my note to educators I indicated that I hoped to include brief biographical descriptions of each participant, but decided that publishing these descriptions would compromise my efforts to maintain confidentiality. I provide more information about the process of developing these biographical descriptions below because although this step did not result in discrete descriptions that appear in the

dissertation, this process was an important step in helping me further appreciate the community of educators with whom I had spoken and it informed both my sense-making and writing in tangible ways.

As an alternative to including individual biographical descriptions in studies such as this one, some researchers include tables that provide an overview of characteristics that may give readers a better sense of their participants, displaying information about such identity markers as race, gender, age, teaching setting, and so on. Here, I provide an overview of some elements of the group's characteristics. My discussion will illuminate why I have chosen not to attempt to synopsise demographic information in a table. This information is based on the 18 responses I received. When possible, I have combined this with other information available in interviews or based on my knowledge of participants who did not respond.

### **My Relationship with Participants**

I had previous relationships with ten of the twenty-four people who participated in the research, most of whom I consider friends and part of my organizing community. Several of educators have taken part in ongoing or one-off conversations among the broad community of radical educators in our region. I have known several through organizing in the anti-authoritarian or anarchist community over the past decade. Some have visited my courses on utopias or radical pedagogies to share their practices with students I work with in the university. Several I know through connection with my university. I share a commitment to and experience with intentional community living with several of the participants.

A handful of participants were directly referred to the project by common friends. Although I did not know the remaining group of nine before they joined the process, I would generally characterize our conversations as having a tone of mutual respect, interest, and curiosity. In the several years between the initial research conversation and the conclusion of my writing, I have been in ongoing communication with several among this group to share resources and insights or to offer support for various projects with which they are involved.

## **Location**

At the time of our conversations, almost all of my research partners were based in metropolitan hub cities, with representation from New York, DC, Atlanta, Chicago, Minneapolis, San Francisco, Vancouver, British Columbia, and Seattle. A handful of smaller urban areas, with populations under 100,000, are represented in the project, as well. But noting the location of participants at the time of our conversation doesn't necessarily provide a clear picture of the contexts that shape their pedagogical thinking because most of my research partners spoke with me about involvement in social movements and pedagogical work that took them to a variety of locations over their lives, sometimes moves that involved shifts from urban to suburban or rural settings and back again or to locations in regions in various places around the world. As one example of what this can look like, I conducted my conversation with Kevin while he was in Atlanta. However, he also spoke with me about his involvement in a mobile learning program which took him and his collaborators by bus across the US to study experiential pedagogy, and during the several years since I interviewed him for the study, we have corresponded about his travels throughout Europe, to Africa, to various locations in the US, and India, all in relation to his work with learning in intentional communities.

## **Practice Contexts**

It is unsurprising to me that almost two-thirds of my research partners have at least some teaching experience in colleges or universities. Of these, nine had PhDs, three were enrolled in PhD programs at the time we spoke, and four had master's degrees. In addition to what seemed like genuine curiosity and interest about the topics on which the project focuses, many of these participants acknowledged how difficult graduate school can be and expressed that they felt happy to support me in taking this big step in my own process. The fields in which they studied and in which they teach include disciplines and fields like sociology, political science, geography, English, anthropology, ethnic studies, and math, as well as applied fields like social work and teacher education. Several spoke of teaching in interdisciplinary

programs emphasizing study of the environment or arts, for instance. Four participants spoke about experiences teaching in K-12 public or private schools.

It was of particular interest to me that, whether our conversations centered on their experiences in traditional school settings or not, all of my research partners also described significant teaching or facilitation experiences in a variety of other community and movement contexts that shaped their thinking about the relationships among imagination, pedagogy, and social justice. The constellation of informal educational contexts they spoke about is broad, ranging from popular education organizations to free schools or free skools (see Meza-Wilson, 2013, for this distinction), labor organizing to autonomous universities, temporary autonomous zones to long-term intentional communities, community media projects to youth arts organizations, community centers to study groups, the pedagogical work of parenting to many forms of informal mentoring, and more.

### **Political Perspectives**

As my elaboration of criteria for participation in the study above shows, two criteria for participation in the project narrowed the scope of participants considerably. First, I wanted to speak with people for whom “social justice” was a meaningful and animating force in their efforts. Second, I wanted to speak with people who considered themselves to be “radical” in their approach to change.

Considering the study’s explicit language of *radicalism*, it is unsurprising to me that several people simply responded “radical” to my question about political identity, while another responded “revolutionary.” A handful of others responded with general references to being on the left (some said “radical left” or “far left”). Tom explained his politics as leftist and anti-capitalist, specifying that a commitment to progressive reforms “that can improve human and more-than-human lives in the present while setting movements up for deeper gains in the future.” He told me he is committed to “forging a broad multi-tendency left,” noting that there “are many different niches in the ecology of movements.” A number of these niches were reflected in the group with whom I spoke. Eight of the eighteen people who responded to my email query noted that they either identify as anarchists or count anarchism among the

political traditions on which they draw (for instance, “anarchist-friendly” or “I come closest to anarchism”), and several others who did not respond to the email survey mentioned an affinity with anarchism in our conversation; several others used language of autonomism, anti-authoritarianism, or responded with the term “Zapatista.” Quincy’s comments show just how complex even one organizer’s political viewpoint can be. His political identity meets at the “intersections of decolonialist, abolitionist, anarchist, feminist, autonomist Marxist, queer liberationist, and environmentalist” politics. Although most of my research partners did not specify this broad range of affinities, most did note their connection with multiple political traditions and social movements. These references included work and movements focused on access to housing, immigration justice, labor struggle, youth liberation, queer liberation, anti-racism and racial justice, feminist struggle, climate change, decolonization, and more.

### **Race and Ethnicity**

I did not intentionally take steps to ensure I would be speaking with a racially diverse mix of educators, which resulted in a limitation of the study that I largely anticipated. Of the eighteen respondents to my email survey, four identify as people of color (one Indian person identifying as “Brown, person of color,” one Central American identifying as “Latina,” and one Mexican-Indian, Mexican, American, and Euro-American noting that she is “biracial”), the remainder identified as white or Caucasian, noting heritage from a variety of European ethnic groups (e.g., “Eurotrash mishmash” or “mostly Polish stock”). One identified with the phrases “Eastern European Jewish and Siberian Native (Euro-Asian), Western Siberia.”

But as Odessa commented, race is socially constructed, noting that it is “not biologically real, yet socially real.” For instance, here is what Rita said about her racial identity: “Other, because while I pass as white in some contexts, I’m more typically seen as Latina and indigenous in public situations.”

Another research partner likewise painted a complex racial picture, noting her “biologically mixed ancestry, Eastern European Jewish and Siberian native, perhaps Tartar too.” But the ways people read her racially depend on place: “In Europe, many people have labeled me definitely from Spain,” yet in “in the eastern part of North America many people have often identified me by sight as Latina, especially

Latino/a people” while “in the Western part of North America many people would characterize me as ‘white’ or ‘Jewish’ (whatever that might mean).” For Odessa, who also observed that she is “viewed and categorized differently based on where I am in the country or who I’m with,” this social constructedness is a reality that she finds “incredibly frustrating.”

### **Age**

My research partners ranged from their late 20s to 70. About half were on the younger end of this spectrum, between 25 and 35; another quarter were spread along the 36-55 age range; the remaining quarter were over 55 at the time of our conversation. Although I am disappointed about the exclusion of younger voices, I was especially pleased to hear from those who had extensive social movement experience (most of those at the older end of the spectrum) speak about their perception of continuities and changes between initial involvement in the 1960s or 70s through their involvement today.

### **Class**

In her email response to me, Nadine wrote about her parents’ job situations, financial assistance she offers her underemployed parents and sister (who faces a lot of student debt), and the ways both the current economic and political moment can shape and shift how people understand and talk about their class experience. She wrote, “you can tell here that I think more about class issues than other categories you have listed here.” But she wasn’t alone. The most detailed responses to my email request came in relation to my question about class.

In my email request, I asked that people say something about their “class background and/or current class,” which encourages comments about shifts and changes in a way that my framing for other categories does not (although some participants did speak about the fluidity of other aspects of their identities). Ten of the people who responded to the email survey told me about shifts in their class experience, with most, but not all, experiencing upward mobility after growing up “really poor,” “working poor,” or “lower middle class.” For some, the language used speaks to their political

perspectives. Carmen used Marxist terminology of “Petite bourgeois/professional technical/upper.” And some spoke of the complexity of thinking about where they fit in a class structure: one person mentioned feeling “mixed and confused” about growing up in a working class family but now teaching in a university; another mentioned being “mixed and ambivalent” between capitalist and working class after having grown up with middle class professional parents, having obtained a “capitalist class college education” and, at the time of our conversation working as an academic graduate student worker, but “soon to be contingent, unemployed faculty.”

### **Dis/Ability**

Just a handful of responses indicated that people experience disabilities or impairment that they felt important to share with me. Several mentioned asthma, one mentioned visual impairment, another “mild and intermittent Multiple Chemical Sensitivities,” another a wandering eye. One respondent did tell me that she has just recently beginning to come to grips with the ways her physical health has, in combination with other past experiences, had a profound impact on her “worldview, research, and activism.”

### **Gender and Sex**

My research partners were roughly half and half men and/or male identified and half woman and/or female identified. No one identified explicitly as transgender, although only one person specified a cis-gender identity. Some people’s responses reflected in obvious ways their sense of the limitation of trying to speak to gender or sex identity in a one word or one phrase way. “Woman/fluid... bearded lady?? Crap these are tough one word questions!” commented one participant. Another wrote “male... frequently read as ‘gay’ which I assume means effeminate.” Yet another told me about her desire never to be limited by gendered stereotypes, noting the range of physical activities she has always enjoyed participating in. Her response about the question of her sex was simply, “Yes.”

One participant noted feeling uncomfortable with the question about sex, telling me that it just “raises the question, why?” “If it’s important, I was born with a penis and was male socialized/privileged,” this

participant wrote. Our email exchanged encouraged me to think deeply about how and why in research contexts we sometimes ask for information about identity that we understand to be complex, fluid, constructed, and thoroughly political in a way that might be read as “check-the-box” or give a one word answer.

### **Sexuality**

Twelve of the 18 who responded to my email questionnaire identified as either straight or heterosexual, although several responded with phrases such as “straightish” or “heterosexual, mostly.” Five identified as queer or bisexual. One indicated the complexity and fluidity of sexuality, sharing the opening comment “Oh god, these keep getting harder!” and concluding with “I don’t know.”

### **Citizenship**

Sixteen of the eighteen who responded noted in some way their US citizenship. Two respondents are Canadian and at least one of the participants who did not respond is also Canadian.

### **Religion**

I was surprised by the range of religious affiliations indicated in the survey. Seven indicated atheism or used language like “secular,” “none,” or N/A, although Francine, for instance, noted that she is against all forms of evangelism, including atheistic forms. And several seemed to share Quincy’s appreciation “of the importance of spirituality and transcendent experiences as bases for community and movement building.” One noted her concern with “following rules made by males” and another noted “I am disgusted and horrified by the hate, intolerance, and self righteous beliefs and acts done in the name of god and religion. I am spiritual though.” Others spoke of being raised or currently identifying with such religious traditions as Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. One of my research partners noted her affinity with “earth based mindfulness, planting seeds and other rituals, such as

dancing.” One simply wrote “Sartre,” which I chuckle about every time I glance at my participant spreadsheet.

### **Languages Spoken**

I asked about languages spoken, although only a few of my research partners spoke about teaching experiences in which languages other than English were essential parts of their work. All speak English; a handful indicated fluency in other languages such as Spanish, French, and Hindi; still others told me they have some proficiency or at least experience with languages including Danish, Hebrew, Italian, Punjabi, Arabic, Ukrainian, and Tamil.

In the context of a study about the pedagogical perspectives of radical educators, I believe the information above can be useful in some ways. In one way, it indicates how thoughtful and critical many in the group are about the complexity of the phenomena we often call “identity” – an important observation to make before diving further into their words and ideas about social justice education. Furthermore, there are a range of other ways of understanding this group of educators, such as what educational and pedagogical traditions they resonate with and what struggles they face in their work as educators. I’ll address these more in chapters 4, 5, and 6 below.

### **Data Production**

For the purpose of understanding the pedagogical perspectives of my research partners and constructing frameworks that link their views with pertinent literature, I relied primarily on one data production strategy: interviewing. However, I will also note several additional types of materials I drew on in developing the discussions that appear in chapters 4, 5, and 6.

### **Research Dialogues**

I initially intended the research dialogues to proceed in three phases: first, an interview phase for brief (30 minute) conversations that would take place by phone for those out of the Seattle area; second, a phase for

more extended conversations (from one to several hours) with local educators; and a third phase of more involved conversations which would involve groups of educators. Because of financial constraints, it was necessary that I complete all data production before the end of September 2011 so as I began data production, I needed to revisit this strategy.

Once I began corresponding with potential participants and setting up an interview calendar, it became clear that I would need to shift my approach in a couple of ways. First, asking local educators to wait a month or two to talk with me during what was to be the second phase of the data production did not make sense. As I regularly told the educators I spoke with, activists and educators are some of the busiest folks I know. Put activism and education together and the task of scheduling becomes a formidable one. To accommodate these busy lives, I decided that my priority should be to simply move people through the screening and interview process as quickly as we were able to negotiate the steps. This resulted in a pattern of interviewing that had me conducting conversations in person, by phone, and by Skype throughout the summer. In addition, after speaking with my local research partners about whether they would prefer to engage in one shorter conversation (during the first phase) and another longer one (during the second phase) in which we would probe more deeply into the topics explored in the first, it became obvious that doing only one longer interview would be far preferable for almost all. By the time I reached the end of my data production time, I had not yet conducted the focus groups, but decided that the perspectives my partners had shared in the individual conversations spoke directly to all of my research questions so that analysis in light of each question would be possible. I made the decision to stop generating further data and instead use my writing process to grapple with the question of significance of the assertions I make in the study for the field of education for social justice.

A description of a few other slight modifications of my plan are in order. While I began with two distinct interview guides at the start of the research conversations, it became clear that one guide would serve me if I modified the depth to which I pursued responses depending on the length of time specific research partners told me they could and would be interested to talk. After sending participants the consent form by email and reviewing it together, asking for any concerns, I provided an overview of what

the research conversation would entail. Whether longer or shorter, in each interview I aimed to explore five broad areas with my participants. The first section on background and current work focused on my research partners' experiences in social movements and education and their goals as social change agents and educators. The second section revolved around my research partners' understandings of what imagination is and what its significance might be for the pursuit of social justice. The third set of questions asked participants to tell me about the approaches they use to foster radical imagination and the reasoning on which they base their pedagogical choices. The fourth part of our conversations dove into questions about what is difficult about the work of fostering radical imagination. And the final set of questions revolved around what specific things activists, educators, and scholars can do to strengthen radical left movements today and how my research partners would like to see me use the information we produced as a result of our conversation. My elaborated interview guide can be found in Appendix C. With my semi-structured interview approach, the order of the questions sometimes varied. Other times, my research partners and I spent a lot of time on one section so that other sections were moved through hastily or skipped altogether because of time constraints. In none of my conversations did we engage all of the questions.

I negotiated choices about timing with my research participants at the start of our conversations. Most interviews lasted between 50 minutes and two hours, with only one notable exception, my conversation with Odessa, which was longer. In general, the shorter conversations tended to happen by phone or Skype and longer ones tended to take place in person, although this is not true across the board. With all research participants, I offered and shared a range of my own teaching materials related to the topics we discussed in the research conversations and I asked what else I might offer as a show of appreciation for the gifts of time, knowledge, and insight they shared with me.

One important difference between in person interviews and those that took place by phone or Skype is worth noting. Because I viewed this inquiry process, in part, as a way to develop new relationships with other radical educators and to strengthen existing relationships, the value of reciprocity felt especially important to me. In line with this value, with the exception of one conversation, all in-person interviews

took place in my home, where I cooked lunch or dinner to share with participants and spent some relaxed time chatting before jumping into our recorded conversation.

Although every interview methods guidebook and anyone teaching methods to new researchers will tell researchers to always have two recording devices working during interviews, in my experience people rarely take this advice. In my case, there were several instances when, in the middle of the interview process, my digital recorder malfunctioned, resulting in a loss of some parts of our conversation. I was particularly horrified to realize that my recorder had stopped working during several parts of my conversation with Sarah because of her consistent decades long experience as an organizer and activist, and because she was someone whose perspective I was eager to hear. Having learned my lesson, I went out and bought what I hoped would be a more reliable recorder the next day and Sarah graciously helped fill in some of the blanks when I emailed her the interview transcript with its gaps.

### **Follow Up and Additional Data Sources**

Between the summer of 2011 when I conducted research conversations and the completion of the dissertation in fall 2014 I have maintained communication with my research partners in several ways. Periodic group emails have allowed me to provide my research partners with updates about my progress and the evolving timeline of the project. I also emailed several times when social movement activities felt like they were shifting, for instance, when the U.S. and Canadian Occupy movements were gaining momentum.

I emailed individually to follow-up in several ways. First, once I transcribed each interview, I emailed a copy to the participant and provided them the opportunity to make edits, revise, or add additional information in any way they saw fit (a process I describe further below). I also engaged in follow up email exchanges with some of my research partners to collect additional sources of information about their pedagogical beliefs and strategies. For instance, I received syllabi, resumes, curricular materials such as descriptions of specific activities, a copy of an interview with one participant, recommended websites for organizations we spoke about, publications written by my research partners, or publications they

recommended as especially illustrative of an idea or practice that was important in our conversation. A number of my research partners are the authors of conceptual or research material related to the topics in this study, and although I have sometimes utilized these in order to flesh out the concepts and practices which are central to the study, I have kept them separate from my discussion of the ideas they shared in our research conversations in order to keep their identities as project participants private. Although these sources helped me gain a more nuanced perspective about the ideas, practices, or struggles they describe, and I have drawn on some of these sources in my discussion because they are directly pertinent to the topics I explore below, I did not utilize these kinds of published sources to make claims about their particular beliefs or ideas. In my writing, this felt slightly odd, but seemed necessary.

### **Analysis**

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) tell us that qualitative research is “endlessly creative” (p. 29) and describe its accompanying interpretive practices as both “artful and political” (p. 30). In a similar vein, Heckert (2005) has written that instead of making claims of absolute validity and truth, his descriptions of mixed sexual relationships constitute “a contribution to ongoing discussions” about the topics he explored. His writing, then, was “a gift of fiction that coexists within the network of fictions that produce our understandings of reality” (p. 111).

This study utilized the techniques associated with several analytic traditions: grounded theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Strauss and Corbin, 1998), collective case study (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995 and 1998), and philosophical educational research (Griffiths, 1998a). Although I will describe the analytic processes on which I drew below, detailing these processes as through they were a linear series of clean steps and stages would be disingenuous. Qualitative research is messy, with the tasks of data production, analysis, writing, and reading and drawing on relevant literature often overlapping and occurring in a reiterative fashion. The description below will provide some sense of the strategies on which I drew to interpret the ideas my research partners and I explored in our conversations and how these inform my responses to this project’s questions. However, it should be noted that what I attempt to do in Chapters 4,

5, and 6 is, like in Levine-Ratsky's (1997) study of how teacher candidates negotiate social difference, "to sustain a series of core arguments filled out with empirical details, rather than imply a 'discovery' of a problem through a logical sequence of research activity" (p. 112). I attempt to persuade by providing enough evidence to readers that the frameworks I am proposing in response to the study's main questions reasonably follow from the sources on which I draw. In describing the kind of argument I hope to make, I am reminded of Hutchinson's (1999) scholarship on education and dignity in which she describes her method in this way:

The method I employ in order to generate my normative claims is one of laying out the best evidence for my claim. The evidence is drawn from various sources, including reasoned argument, broad conceptual analysis, case examples from schooling, stories from literature, and interpretation of the meaning of examples given. In addition, I draw upon the analyses of others as part of building support for my normative claims (p. 11).

Drawing on this jurisprudential model involves utilizing multiple sources of evidence involving various strategies. The following pages describe a few of the strategies I used – transcription and data organization, qualitative coding strategies, mind mapping, constructing biographical descriptions, and utilizing a dissertation journal – although I will reiterate that these did not occur in a linear way in the order they appear below, but often in an overlapping and reiterative fashion.

### **Transcription**

I transcribed each research dialogue in full and as close to verbatim as possible, by which I mean I did my best to write down all the words my research partners and I spoke during our conversations. Although I am persuaded that the techniques involved in discourse analysis, both the less politicized and more critical approaches (Fairclough, 2001; Van Dijk, 2001), can yield fruitful understandings, and I see a variety of important ways researchers are putting poststructural insights to work in grappling with the meanings (e.g., Park, 2008; Sandretto, 2004 and 2007) and practices of social justice education (e.g., Parkes, Gore, and Elsworth, 2010), because of my focus on the *what* of my research partners' ideas rather than the *how* of their descriptions, I decided my transcriptions would focus on achieving accuracy in capturing and transcribing the words my research partners used. In his study of White anti-racist activists, Mark Warren

(2010) describes this as a distinction between the “telling” – the structure of people’s narrative accounts – and the “told” – the content of stories one tells about one’s life. For this project, my interest was especially on the told.

My transcriptions are translations aimed at depicting the meanings I understood my research partners to be attempting to convey. For instance, because people do not speak in sentences or paragraphs, I made choices about punctuation that I thought would most clearly convey the ideas I believed my research partners were sharing with me. When it seemed like it would be important in interpretations (my own or readers’), I did indicate particular emotional qualities such as “[laughter]” or use exclamation points to indicate what I perceived as excitement, enthusiasm, or frustration. Major steps in transcription included the first round of writing down all the words spoken by participants and then a “cleanup round” of editing in which I removed redundancies, eliminated extraneous words and phrases including “like” or “um” or “you know” when it did not seem to affect the meaning of the text. Periodically, I revisited recordings to double check when I had questions about a particular passage. I included the following text at the top of the transcription I sent back to each participant, which helps illustrate my choices:

*Cleaned up: Removed \*um, ah, uh, like, you know, I mean\* unless they I thought they helped communicate what I understood as the intent of the segment; removed false starts when I thought they might confuse more than clarify.*

All participants were emailed a copy of our conversation with an invitation to make any changes or deletions they might want or to add further information to clarify the issues we discussed.

Most of my research partners replied, many offering me thanks for the copy and chance to have input. It was unsurprising to me that many noted that they were unlikely to offer additional information due to busy schedules. Several did fill in areas or phrases that were inaudible as I transcribed or correct errors they noticed. One offered extensive and very helpful additional information about her view of particular topics we discussed in the margins of the document. It was heartening and interesting to email back and forth with people about their insecurity or discomfort about how they felt to see their words transcribed in this way. Several noted that they felt inarticulate or were surprised at how many filler comments they made (even given that part of the transcription process was to minimize these). I enjoyed the chance to

reassure people that my own perspective is that writing down our words involves a significant translation of the way our conversation actually occurred, with all the facial expressions, body language, changes in voice pitch, pauses, slowdowns or increases in conversation pace being absent. Although I elected not to include markers of these conversation features in my transcription, they are important parts of conversational events that help listeners (like me) make meaning. I did share with my research partners that I perceived each and every person I spoke to be smart and articulate about their ideas and work. I also clarified that my purpose in gathering their words in a transcribed way was certainly to be as accurate as possible, but also to focus on the ideas and my understanding of their meaning and significance given my focus on imagination, pedagogy, and the pursuit of justice, not to make them look unintelligent or depict them as inarticulate. Except on special occasions, most of us do not speak in eloquent paragraphs and thankfully we don't usually need to (although as we will see in chapters 4, 5, and 6, a couple of my research partners actually do seem to!).

I created a code for each interviewee made up first of a three-digit number that indicated the interview order, followed by a series of numbers indicating the date of the interview (month, day, year separated by periods), the city in which my research partner was located at the time of the interview, and their first and last names' initials. Using myself as an example, if I were the 25<sup>th</sup> interviewee in the study and were interviewed just before I departed for France at the end of September in 2011, my code might be "025.9.30.11.Seattle.TM." For most of the writing period, I utilized the three-digit number to refer to particular people's ideas and words. I assigned pseudonyms during the final writing stages.

As I began to amass the set of transcriptions that would provide the study's primary data, I placed each in one of two three-ring binders, organized in chronological order of the date of the interview. These became my primary data books and were the place first and some subsequent rounds of coding took place.

### **Coding Processes**

As in Park's (2008) study of teachers' perceptions of social justice, a primary way I worked with the project's data involved coding the transcribed interview analytically by answering my research question. I

used differently colored highlighters to identify passages in my data books that spoke directly to my analytic questions. Although I knew I wanted to begin with a focus on one of the questions that eventually formed part of the basis for my discussion in chapter 4, the process I will describe here roughly encapsulates the process I used for subsequent analysis that resulted in Chapters 5 and 6, too. My analytic process in chapter 4 involved coding to answer the questions “What notions of imagination are at play in the pursuit of justice among radical educators today? Why are these notions of radical imagination considered promising for those seeking social justice in the current context?” For these questions, I chose first to analyze only passages generated by questions in section two of my interview protocol because this was the section in which I asked the most direct questions about my research partners ideas about radical imagination and its significance. So during my first round of coding, I did a line-by-line search through this section for each interview with the first of the two questions in mind. Once I had highlighted all segments I believed were relevant to the question, I began to search for segments in which my research partners spoke about *why* these types of imagination are considered promising in social struggle and work for change.

Like Hung (2010), I utilized the grounded theory technique of “open coding,” condensing longer segments into a word or phrase, sometimes utilizing what grounded theorists call “en vivo” codes, which are codes generated by words or phrases used by interviewees themselves, and sometimes utilizing terms from literature which frames the study. I noted these codes in the margins of transcripts in my data books.

### **Mind Mapping**

Given the availability of increasingly complex qualitative data analysis software and the digitization of practically everything it may seem quaint, but like Heckert (2005) and Curry-Stevens (2007), I found that working with data in a three dimensional tactile format which allowed me to physically move around cards or pieces of paper best suited my own kinesthetic and conceptual sense-making preferences.

Heckert described both his office wall and pigeon-holes (cubbies similar to workroom mailboxes) as data analysis tools. I, too, used my office walls and floor (and all of the various floors of friends and family

members' houses where I stayed while I was writing). Once I had coded the section of all 24 interviews most relevant to the question on which my analysis was focused at the time, I created a document comprised of the list of codes I generated, printing them out in a large enough font that I could easily cut them out and begin playing with them on the floor. This allowed me to explore the different ways ideas hung together and to consider the possible significance of different organizing schemes, a technique Curry-Stevens (2007) described as a "lateral documentation process illuminating the relative importance of the concepts and the linkages between the themes" (p. 34). One friend who came to check on my progress regularly laughed when she peeked in my office. Seeing hundreds of small pieces of paper arranged in piles and rows on the floor as the categories developed, she worried that a big gust of wind might blow in, destroying the emerging framework and necessitating that I redo the whole long process.

During this part of my analysis, I began writing the names of emerging categories on 3x5 cards, using these as headers under which to place the codes I was developing. Like Hung (2010), in this stage I was "operating from the specific to a more abstract level of encapsulation" (p. 45) by sorting the specific bullet points into more abstract categories that captured in broader terms the kinds of imagination my research partners believe can further the pursuit of justice. At the time, these 3x5 headers included such terms as "stories," "dreams" "visions/aims," "maps." I also began pulling out and mind-mapping books, articles, other framing source and secondary data to get a sense of the materials that would form the basis for my discussion of these emerging categories.

The interplay among the 3x5 category cards, books, articles, and bullet-point codes also took shape in my dissertation journal where I was constantly creating diagrams and mind maps, generating metaphors, drawing pictures, and generally engaging in various playful modes of exploration to construct a story about what sense I was making of the data my research partners and I had produced.

### **Additional Coding**

Once I had developed an initial conceptual framework, I returned to my data books to conduct a line-by-line analysis of the sections of the interview I had not coded during my initial round of coding. For

instance, in my analysis for chapter 4, this meant working my way through the first, second, third, and fifth sections of each interview. These initial frameworks provided me codes I could use as I read; however, I was also on the hunt for additional perspectives not yet reflected in my conceptual framework, including insights that challenged or contradicted the frameworks that I was beginning to develop.

### **Constructing Biographical Descriptions**

As part of my analytic process, I created 400-500 word biographical descriptions for each participant that provided an overview snapshot of his, her, or their ideas about their political and pedagogical background, their sense of what kinds of imagination are most needed today and why, and the kinds of strategies they use to help others cultivate imaginative capacities. The process helped me keep hold of my sense that there is a whole person with a unique life trajectory connected with each of the interview fragments I was slicing and dicing each day. This was particularly useful given that it was often difficult for me to respect the reality that although I borrow some tools from case study research methods, this project does not share the case study research aim of creating a deeply contextualized picture of each of my research partners' imaginative ideas and practices. In constructing these biographical descriptions, I included quotes that I found especially poignant or which seemed to capture a significant aspect of their pedagogical beliefs. I will include Hannah's here as an example of how I approached this task:

Hannah's emphasis on vision highlights the importance of learning to see how hierarchical power is created and maintained. "So I am a big one on education, we have to start with seeing it. Once we can see it [injustice], when our vision gets more critical and complex and deeper, then so do our responses. So, whatever map I have, whatever framework I'm using to make sense of the social relations and dynamics that are going on around me, are gonna drive my action in that." Coming of age in the 60s and 70s, she tells me she was too young to have friends in the Vietnam War, but "old enough to be paying attention" to the turbulence associated with that political moment. She does not identify as an organizer ("an organizer more like in the community where you're actually putting on events and maybe organizing people"), but sees her anti-racism focused consciousness-raising work as strongly "activist." Like several others I spoke with, she tells me her pedagogical approach emerged more from her experience with education in different kinds of settings, rather than formal study. "I've just gone to a million trainings," she told me, and collected powerful approaches along the way. Her experience leading anti-racism trainings also had a profound impact on her. "I'd never in my life had my racial paradigm challenged, but I was workin' with people of color who were radical and they fucking challenged the living shit out of me. And my whole world blew up." Her commitment to helping others cultivate vision and

imagination emphasizes the critical importance of being able to see how power functions in order to challenge and change it. Like others who work in the field of whiteness studies and anti-racism, Hannah's quote here illustrates her skepticism that people who are members of dominant groups in hierarchical societies will be able to identify anything like a liberatory vision of change. In order to create desired change, she told me, "I almost said you have to be able to see it, to manifest it, but I stopped because I don't know that you have to be able to see it. I don't know. I'm not sure there is any space that's free of inequality and oppression. And so if we wait until we can see it, we're gonna have trouble. That's what I tell my students, 'you're gonna make a mess, I mean, no one is outside of this. We haven't solved it yet, there's no free space.' So, maybe just that idea that you have to be able to see it, I think you have to be able to want it, and have to have some basic understandings of maybe some principles, but I don't know that we know what it looks like. Do you?" She utilizes methods of critical discourse analysis commonly utilized in her field and underscored the importance of empirical evidence in helping people understand the pervasiveness and persistence of inequality: "you can't argue with it. It's empirical. And that matters, right? That does wake people up".

### **The Dissertation Journal**

Although I initially experimented with keeping an electronic dissertation journal made up of logistical notes and notes of a more intentional theoretical nature (such as theoretical memos that are significant in grounded theory research) I found that from the first drafts of my proposal all the way through to the completion of the dissertation, a bound dissertation journal was the best place for me to record notes of many kinds. I feel lucky to have discovered that, at the start of the project, I had an empty journal hand bound by a bookbinder at a bindery on the Olympic Peninsula, just across the Sound from where I live in Seattle. We all have tools that work best for us – special pens, desks that are just right, a perfect quiet spot in the library. I found my first journal to be such a valuable tool that every time I filled one, I went out and bought another, seeking out a pattern and color for the cover that I believed would best suit my needs and help inspire me. For instance, I needed my second journal just as I was beginning in earnest to write chapter 4 – Imagine. I remembered Ruth Levitas's (2007) conceptual tools of "looking for the blue" and "looking for the green" in relation to the pursuit of utopian ideas and change strategies and found the perfect blue-green cover to help channel my thinking.

The journal served as a catch-all for logistical notes, theoretical notes, my emerging analysis, doodles and diagrams that helped me better play with the relationships among key ideas, section and chapter outlines, and my own ideas, phrases, and text that I wanted to include in my writing. For those periods

when I was in the throes of writing, especially during several month stints when I spent almost all of my time writing, I often spent my first and last hour of my workday sitting quietly with my journal mapping out the work day to come or strategizing about how to divvy up future writing tasks. This analog process was enormously helpful for me, in somewhat the same way as warm up and cool down exercises are for athletes. Because my handwriting is illegible otherwise, I was compelled to write slowly and intentionally, which I hope aided my strategic thinking.

### **Writing: A Personal Reflection**

When researchers write about their methodology in qualitative studies, often the commitments that animate research are fleeting or entirely implicit. Some of the most explicit discussions about the ways values shape our inquiry are couched in the language of “research ethics.” However, within critical traditions it is more common for researchers to lift them up as important influences on how we move through our research processes. In her book about educational research for social justice, Griffiths (1998a) explains that it is critical for researchers to acknowledge and articulate as fully as possible “allegiance to beliefs, values, and traditions” (p. 95) including those rooted in our commitment to social justice. In line with this commitment, she enumerates ten principles that she believes should guide research for social justice and which provide foundations for her own inquiries.

Herr and Anderson (2005) have written that researchers’ methodological choices are often guided by their beliefs and values. Before closing this chapter, I would like to share a few further reflections that may help guide readers in considering the assertions I make in the chapters that follow. Different than the kinds of concrete methodological decisions I delineated in the sections above, the kinds of considerations I am speaking about here are sometimes described as *ethics*, research *principles* (Griffiths, 1998a), or broader collective or political *purposes* (Smith, 1999) for which research projects are undertaken. I think of my own research *commitments* as a group of “traveling companions” that remind me about the *posture* I hope to embody in my work as both an educator and a researcher. In line with the broader political stakes of this project as a whole, they are *intentions* that I continuously consulted as tools for reflection

and which I *aimed* to enact. Griffiths (1998a) has called us to recognize that “the context in which the research is done is at least as influential on the course of the research as anything an individual could decide about the processes of their research” (p. 144), a reality that she believes is neglected, to our detriment, in both accounts of research and methodological texts. Both Griffiths’ insights and Tuck’s (2009) discussion of “complex personhood” help to explain that, in part, because of the constraints of the social, political, and economic realities with which we live, all of us may enact seemingly contradictory values. Readers should understand that by no means do I believe I was always successful in putting these commitments into practice as deeply as I would like. Nevertheless, congruent with my focus in this dissertation, our desires and visions matter and for this reason I believe naming these guiding values is significant.

As I began the process of publicizing my project and inviting participation by interested people, I emailed out an information sheet providing an overview of the study, including its goals and purpose. It also detailed some of the ways my values permeate the project. Near the end of the several page document, I wrote:

#### **Research Values and Commitments**

I believe that university research grows out of and often reproduces a culture of individualism, self-promotion, and arrogance. While the requirements of academic research do shape this project in ways I find both limiting and troubling, I find affinity with critical, feminist, and participatory action researchers that emphasize collaboration, solidarity, accountability, reflexivity, humility, and an awareness that our bodies and perspectives are bound up in social, economic, and political hierarchies that shape how we experience and move through the world. I would be very happy to share about how I hope these values will animate the project, to hear your concerns, or to learn your perspective about research practices that you see as especially promising for your social movements and communities.

I am especially inspired by research that benefits the lives and efforts of participants in research in some meaningful way and by research that has as a central goal the pursuit of stronger, more effective social justice movements. I see my work as one thread in the diverse strands of research that seek these ends. While my goals for this study are fairly modest, I do strongly hope that the conversations engendered in the context of the project will be interesting and useful, that they help inform thinking and action in our teaching and activism, and that they unfold into deeper conversations in our communities and movements about why vision matters and how we can more effectively leverage our power, knowledge, and skill as educators in the pursuit of a better world (Myers Project Information Sheet, 2011).

In the following paragraphs I sketch out a bit more about what I mean.

## **Situatedness, Reflexivity, and Justice**

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) have explained that the biographies of researchers inform nearly every phase of qualitative research in important ways. Some of the most theoretically and practically rich discussions about the importance of considering and naming our own socio-political locations and relationship to our efforts as researchers takes place among feminist methodologists, who, like Griffiths (1998a), argue for the critical importance of investigating and elaborating our own position and interests with respect to the projects we undertake. My view on what Frazer (2009) calls “positioned subject research” has been profoundly shaped by my study of the philosophies of feminists of color. These public intellectuals and scholars over the past several decades have developed powerful frameworks for naming our situatedness in interconnected systems of power. Hill Collins’ (2000) “matrix of power” and Crenshaw’s (1991) theory of “intersectionality” are two examples of concepts that offer powerful vantage points for understanding and describing the complexities of social, political, and economic power. Although it has not been my main point of inquiry, I have woven through the study some attempts to understand our varied positions and stakes and consider how they shape the research. My “Afterwords” also speak to this issue.

Connie North (2007a) observations offer an important frame for both the way I understand myself in relation to the project and participants and my approach to interpreting the perspectives my research partners have shared with me. She has written about her own research on anti-oppressive education,

While I attempted to be scrupulously self-reflexive about the claims made herein, I openly acknowledge the inevitability of alternative accounts (Williams, 1993) and the power I had throughout the research process, as demonstrated by my ability to decide on the topic of research as well as how to conduct, write and present it (Wolf, 1996). I undoubtedly interpreted student responses to the leadership program through particular lenses that would not match the reading of a different researcher, or my own future readings (p. 80).

Griffiths (1998a) writes that it is an important demand of reflexivity that researchers strive to identify and acknowledge their allegiance to beliefs, values and traditions that shape our approach to research. She goes on to admonish that our “most dearly held knowledge and values may be based in these principles of research for social justice, but these too are revisable” (p. 97). A commitment to continually trying to

uncover what we think we know about the world and to revising what we believe to be true about the world we study is an absolutely essential stance to take for any researcher. To this I would add a willingness to shift our actions so that they align with new understandings and ways of perceiving the world around us.

Like many other critical researchers, I take issue with Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995) position when they state, "we have little sympathy with attempts to redefine that role to make the researcher into some sort of political activist" (p. 287). A whole range of assumptions shape our research processes: from what we deem worthy of study to every choice we make in designing our inquiries. These choices advocate that some kinds of knowledge be taken seriously, others not. All research is activist; all researchers are activists. Among research traditions that self-consciously accept the political stakes of research are the critical traditions Crotty (1998) has written about. One shared commitment held by criticalists, he asserts, is a commitment to research as a form of political praxis, "a search for knowledge, to be sure, but always emancipatory knowledge, knowledge in the context of action and the search for freedom" (P. 159). Other researchers and the traditions from which they emerge not only acknowledge the politics of their research, but seek the creation of knowledge and action through the research itself. Maguire's (1987) feminist participatory action research builds on and synthesizes several traditions of research that seek justice-focused transformative aims; Griffith's book (1998) and He and Fillion's (2008) collection of essays on "personal~passionate~participatory" inquiry are both examples of research under the umbrella "social justice research." Contributors to the *Militant Research Handbook* (Bookchin et al., 2013) gather in a "place where academia and activism meet in the search for new ways of acting that lead to new ways of thinking" (p. 4) and in order to work in and with the movements researchers are concerned with. Justice-focused research traditions today go under many names. This is an activist project which aims to help build a stronger theoretical case for centering the work of imagination in our work in classrooms, communities, and social movements and to produce tangible knowledge about how radical educators might go about doing social justice work more effectively in the many spaces in which we practice.

### **Collaboration, Accountability, and Solidarity**

I share the conviction of my research partners who spoke to me about their beliefs that we must more deeply respect the interdependency among all humans, life, and the planet. While I can certainly appreciate the value of long periods of quiet, even isolated, reflection and the insights it may generate, an entrenched and growing problem in our increasingly neoliberal world is individualism. I believe we can set up our research projects to counteract the kinds of individualism, competition, and arrogance produced and encouraged within neoliberal frameworks by pursuing cooperative, collaborative, mutually supportive relationships as a part of our research work. There exists a range of research traditions influenced by what Reason and Bradbury (2001) have called a “participatory worldview.” Among these, participatory research (Park, 1999; Hall, 1984), participatory action research (Kemmis, 2006), feminist participatory research (Maguire, 1987), community based participatory research, cooperative research (Reason, 2002) are all ways research communities approach bringing *collaboration* as a value into the heart of our research endeavors. As an individual dissertation study, this inquiry was designed by me, but my posture has been and will remain collaborative. This study, in part, grows out of ongoing engagement with several specific communities, and a large more diffuse, network of radical educators who may differ in political or theoretical orientations, but who share a commitment to strengthening our knowledge and practice as social justice educators and a similar curiosity about how social imagination can enrich our pedagogical and social justice efforts. For me, the goal of this project to develop knowledge that will help social justice educators be more effective in our pedagogical efforts is part of my spirit of collaboration.

Bogdan and Bicklen (1992) advise researchers to protect anonymity to avoid embarrassment or the creation of political risks, to seek cooperation overtly rather than lying or hiding our agendas as researchers, and to transparently negotiate agreements about research with our research partners. These principles, along with honesty in our attempts to answer the research questions upon which our studies are based and accuracy in reporting findings, seem to me to be the basis of an ethical starting place (even if

the actual practice of these principles may be more complex than first appears). Here I am referring to a more politicized sense of *accountability*, in particular, accountability to the commitments I make.

In describing the unique features of qualitative approaches to inquiry about the world we share, one approach scholars take is to outline the various roles we may take on as researchers. In discussing the myriad hats worn by those engaged in qualitative case study research, Stake (1995) has explained that the “role may include teachers, participant observer, interviewer, reader, storyteller, advocate, artist, counselor, evaluator, consultant, and others” (91). Juggling these multiple roles and making shifts in emphasis over time are tasks researchers must engage in. Whatever one’s approach to research, there are always multiple roles involved and the choices we make shed light on our commitments.

In reflecting on the role and responsibilities of university based social research in neoliberal times, Khasnabish and Haiven’s (2012) questions point to some of the kinds of questions I have grappled with in the context of this project:

What are the unique features of or own subject locations as university researchers that would allow us to make a *meaningful* and *unique* contribution both to social movements in our locality and to our academic community? Can we imagine and experiment with a strategy of social movement research that (a) strives for a recognition of the specificities of the social location, privilege, constraint, and power of researchers, (b) mobilizes or leverages this locationality to provide social movements with a space or a time that they cannot or do not provide for themselves, and (3) [*sic.*] continues to contribute to critical academic scholarly dialogue (p. 3, emphasis in original).

This conception of accountability asks that we account not only for our positionality, but use our positioning and power to further collective good in ways our positions afford. Stoecker (1999) has argued that researchers committed to the goals of participatory research need to go beyond the roles most academically based participatory researchers often adopt (initiator, consultant, and collaborator), instead adopting the more politically engaged roles of community animator, community organizer, popular educator, and participatory researcher. As I see it, Stoecker’s argument has a lot to offer Haiven and Khasnabish’s (2014) call for university researchers to use the “weird space of academic privilege” (p. 251) in ethical and effective ways. During 2004 and 2005, I was fortunate to be invited to participate as a junior researcher on a three-university team qualitative research project aimed at understanding and

describing different approaches to social justice-focused youth and community development. Although the project did not receive funding to take the envisioned subsequent step that would have deepened its initial participatory impulse, one of the project's central goals was to utilize our positions as university researchers act as allies to amplify the voices of young people, their mentors, and their parents, all of whom were working to promote justice in their communities, and to coalesce learnings from the project into specific recommendations for justice advocates, funders, researchers, and youth program participants themselves (Sutton, Kemp, Gutiérrez, and Saegert, 2006). My own sense of accountability in this project involves striving to express as fully as possible the commitments I am describing here throughout all phases of the project, and to work toward producing resources that can support the social movements of which my research partners are part.

My commitment to engage in *solidarity* work brings my general commitment to accountability down to earth and in relation to specific groups of people. My own teaching aims to support learners in thinking critically about their socio-political locations and to growing their capacities to fight for justice more effectively in their communities. But more specifically, in the case of this project, my primary goal is to identify the value of the ideas, practices, and struggles of practicing educators and create something that will not only provide a meaningful contribution to the educational and movement research community of which I am part, but which will be directly useful to them. Like others (Bevington and Dixon, 2005; Quigley 1998), I want my research to be relevant to my research partners – relevant given the work they do as individuals, relevant given the communities they are working to support, and relevant given the movements of which they consider themselves part.

University ethics processes typically require that researchers specify to Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) whether and how research participants will be compensated for their engagement in our projects. But what happens in the context of the relational encounters are often impossible to write in terms that make sense considering the purposes of IRBs. Will the research encounter be enjoyable because of the pleasure one may derive from sharing a meaningful story with an interested listener? What if a shared meal is involved? How about laughter? Heckert (2005) has written that what takes place in our research

processes might be understood as the creation of a “gift economy.” In this context, the development of theory based on the perspectives our research partners offer us can be viewed as “gifts,” but within the framing of “compensation” within IRB processes, these kinds of gifts are considered irrelevant. In the chapter 7 of the dissertation, I outline some of the kinds of resources my research partners suggested I create once I complete the dissertation and outline my ideas about how I might go about doing so in order to continue the cycle of gift giving in which this project has been situated.

### **Humility, Courage, and Tenacity**

Freire (1998) put it succinctly when he wrote, “Humility helps us understand the obvious truth: No one knows it all; no one is ignorant of everything. We all know something; we are all ignorant of something” (p. 39). *Humility*, he argues, aligns us with democracy and not elitism and requires “courage, self-confidence, self-respect, and respect for others.” At the start of most quarters when I am teaching, I have begun assigning a short essay from Freire’s *Teachers as Cultural Workers*. A slim essay, only six pages, it is called “Don’t let the fear of what is difficult paralyze you.” The essay provides a nice opening for at least initial discussions about what worries students bring into the classes with them about the experiences ahead. In the essay, Freire (1998) explains that because *courage* “comprises the conquering of my fears, it implies fear” (p. 41). Although I do know a handful of people who found that writing their dissertations was meaningful and (mostly) pain free, for many doctoral candidates, both the isolation of the process and the fact that the dissertation is basically a final exam in what may have been a long process, can be very difficult, even terrifying.

In the case of this research, throughout the project, I have tried to share my trepidation and concerns and my sense of the limits of my knowledge. I approached my research partners precisely because I believe they have knowledge, wisdom, and skills that can challenge and expand my own. I was drawn to construct a line of inquiry which would allow me to converse with educators whose views represent a range of political perspectives and contextual knowledge for the same reasons I am drawn to interdisciplinary study and teaching. Firstly, exploring phenomena from multiple vantage points –

borrowing a metaphor from Litfin (2013), looking through different windows into a small house – helps so clearly to illuminate the limitations inherent in any vantage point. Secondly, the more complex views of the world that emerge from a multifaceted exploration can allow for more nuanced and strategic actions within it.

In the context of how intellectually, physically, politically, socially, and personally challenging a major writing project like a dissertation can be, the need to continually reaffirm a commitment to humility takes on additional significance. There is something to Freire’s (1998) notion that courage is not something we can find outside ourselves. And yet, his own essay argues that we recognize and actively draw on the many “auxiliary tools” available to us. In his case, he was speaking of the value of dictionaries and encyclopedias in making sense of texts that might feel intimidating. In my case, while some of the methodological texts I mention above were certainly critical auxiliary tools, it was ultimately my community that helped bolster my courage to undertake the final stages of this writing process. Friends provided tangible support like money, help finding a subletter so I could take a break from community living, help finding quiet spaces to write in borrowed homes or “dissertation rooms,” a fancy hand-me-down computer, and frequent verbal cheering sessions either given directly or through-the-grapevine, and – perhaps most important – encouragement to take the emotional space and time I needed to write with a promise that my friends would still be there when I returned to community life and activism. These were all votes of confidence in my ability to bring this process to a close – and they were humbling stances of solidarity that helped that to happen.

Even those I did not know before this process offered help. An email from a friend to a parents’ email listserve yielded an offer to trade the use of a car for two and a half months for the generous gift of a massage offered by my recently graduated massage therapist partner. As well, during the writing of this dissertation, I amassed a small but precious library of biographies, memoirs, and reflective essays written by writers such as Ursula LeGuin (2004), Stephen King (2000), Anne Lamott (1995), Annie Dillard (1989), Rick Bragg, Carolyn See (2002), Howard Becker (1986), and a host of others whose reflections

about creating a “literary life” provided tangible ideas about writing habits and practices that helped sustain me.

Griffiths (1998) writes, all research programs take place “on the run” (p. 97), rather than in a vacuum in which we can conceive of and carry our most ideal research projects. If we strive to do “utopian” research (Heckert, 2005, quoting Deleuze and Guattari) we might be best served by Eduardo Galeano’s idea of utopia as an always receding horizon, “good for the walking.” I have seen completing this degree in this light. Graduate students, like other researchers, often balance commitments to teaching or other paid work, family commitments, organizing and activism, maintaining friendships, caring for our physical and emotional health, and so on. In my case, a commitment to stay grounded in my activist and organizing community (because I feel that my academic work does not make sense outside that context and because my community is a critical support network) has meant that my trajectory through graduate school has been a long and sometimes circuitous one. In addition, the death of my mom the first year of my PhD program and the coupling of living with chronic illnesses and inconsistent access to necessary healthcare have created moments when I have been unable to maintain the busy life I have when I am balancing all of the commitments I might wish to balance consistently. Because of my participatory worldview, when the chips are down and a choice has to be made, I have always chosen to scale back on the parts of life that seem most centrally about me as an individual – such as finishing the writing required to complete my Ph.D.

As is true for many people who consider themselves extraverts, for me, the process of engaging in research conversations was energizing and exciting. The flip side of this reality is that the process of isolating myself in order to complete the writing was extremely difficult. A friend recently repeated the often-noted reality that the dissertation process is a marathon, not a sprint. I snapped back, “I didn’t fucking take up running for a reason!” Once my interviews were complete, the process of beginning transcriptions through final drafts of the dissertation took about three years. During this time, my analytic and writing work ebbed and flowed with my teaching schedule, health crises and upswings, and other significant life events. Although dissertations rarely seem to include direct discussions about the fears

doctoral students face as we conceptualize our projects and then carry them through to completion as significant contextual elements that shape our research, like the risks faced by new faculty members that Pamela Richards (1984) writes about in Becker's collection of essays on writing for social scientists, the processes involved in dissertation writing involve significant risk-taking that can be quite frightening. Sharing writing-in-progress can be terrifying, particularly with committee members who will ultimately decide whether we have successfully leaped over the final hurdles involved in PhD processes. We may face "imposter syndrome," questioning how in the world we ever reached this stage in the game in the first place. We may worry that we will let down the people who offered us the gift of their time and perspectives. Most recently graduated PhDs I have spoken with can talk in tangible ways about the fears that stalked them through the writing process and the kinds of coping strategies they utilized to get them through (some healthy habits, like a regular exercise schedule, others perhaps less so, like lots of drinking or pot smoking), although few include talk about these realities of writing in dissertations or academic publications.

As exception to this silence, Heckert (2005) wrote that the level of emotional challenge involved in his dissertation research left him feeling isolated and unable to seek out support from friends or colleagues about the challenges of discussing difficult topics in research contexts. His experience resulted in his need to seek counseling for his well-being, a brave move and helpful story to share considering that few dissertations seem to include this level of reflection about the process itself. Isolation in the individual writing process can make the enormity of the task ahead clear – like standing at the base of a mountain one plans to climb alone. I use this metaphor intentionally and specifically because it was nearly four years before I finished this process when I first emailed my advisors for this project from Zion National Park in Utah where I had just managed to make it to the top of Angels Landing, a hard hike for me, with, anyone who's made the hike knows, a glorious payoff at its end. Just like the hike, I knew I would have to take the dissertation process slow and steady, that the conditions would be unfavorable, that I probably wouldn't have enough water, and might feel like I wanted to give up. But I knew I wouldn't. Although there are many aspects of myself that I want to continue to grow, strengthen, and

change, *tenacity* is one of my strongest characteristics and it was ultimately my persistence that got me to the top of Angels Landing, as it was persistence that got me to the completion of this process.

As I completed some of the final chapters for the dissertation, I read the conclusion to Becky Thompson's (2001) study of white anti-racist activists, *A Promise and a Way of Life*. In the final paragraphs of the book, Thompson writes about the importance of acknowledging the loneliness and isolation that writing requires with a poignancy I have rarely seen:

Even though I have met some extraordinary people along the way, all of whom made writing the book possible and some of whom have changed my life, the actual writing required a hibernation and isolation that, particularly toward the end, made me feel like I was dying (p. 374).

As Thompson put it, her academic career required that she "trade in my body parts. Anything below the neck was traded in" (p. 374). In completing the book, she affirms that she's ready to have those body parts back. Although I am decidedly not a religious person, upon reading this passage I could not help but mutter "Amen."

## Chapter Four

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### Imagine

*Dreams are powerful. They are repositories of our desire. They animate the entertainment industry and drive consumption. They can blind people to reality and provide cover for political horror. But they can also inspire us to imagine that things could be radically different than they are today, and then believe we can progress toward that imaginary world.*

Stephen Duncombe, *Dream*

*She's on the horizon...I go two steps, she moves two steps away. I walk ten steps and the horizon runs ten steps ahead. No matter how much I walk, I'll never reach her. What good is utopia? That's what: it's good for walking.*

Eduardo Galeano, quoted in Duncombe, *Dream*

As I have noted, over the past several years, on the other side of the continent and on a on a timeline roughly paralleling my own, Alex Khasnabish and Max Haiven have built on their individual research and social movement involvement (e.g., Haiven, 2007; 2014; Khasnabish, 2005, 2008, 2014) to give considerable focused attention to the meaning, practice, and significance of radical imagination for today's radical left social movements. Focusing on the question, "What is the radical imagination?" they invited submissions for a special edition of the online journal *Affinities* in order to examine various ways of conceptualizing an idea they consider "slippery and difficult to pin down" (Haiven and Khasnabish, 2011, p. iii). The resulting collection of essays frames radical imagination in wildly divergent ways, some of which will be discussed below. Through their collaborative "radical imagination project," they utilized a strategy they call "convocation" to engage in a kind of solidarity research through social movement participants in Halifax, Nova Scotia could explore their life journeys into radical politics as well as their visions of change (Khasnabish and Haiven, 2012). A recent book fleshes out the project's many lessons (Haiven and Khasnabish, 2014). Their work is animated by their contention that the ways we, as activists, *conceptualize* imagination and the *possibilities* we associate with it can have profound effects on the

choices we make in our on-the-ground work, but in spite of this significance, social movements neglect the important work of theorizing imagination (Haiven and Khasnabish, 2010). This chapter responds to this observation by exploring radical imagination in light of my first set of research questions: What notions of imagination are at play in the pursuit of justice among radical educators today? Why are these notions of radical imagination considered promising for those seeking social justice in our current historical moment?

My primary goal in writing this chapter was to produce a conceptual framework to aid in our thinking about radical imagination and its component parts; in constructing the framework that describes the relationship of different types and modes of radical imagination to each other, I center the perspectives of my research partners, but I also draw on relevant theoretical and practice literature described in chapter 2 (synopsized as Figure 1) to support my discussion and expand on or interpret the comments made by my research partners. Additionally, because much of my own teaching and activism has been focused on imagination, there are times when I utilize my own reflections as resources for elaborating on ideas in this discussion.

My aim in the chapter is to build on existing conversations about radical imagination in ways that deepen our sense of its significance in the work of radical change, expand our understanding of its complexity, and foreshadow some of the difficulties educators must navigate in their work, which I take up further in chapter 6. I hope to multiply the points of connection between theories of imagination emerging both inside and outside the field of education. The framework I present below identifies nine imaginative modes discussed by my research partners and elaborates the unique role each can play in struggles for radical change.

### **Radical Imagination: Theorizations of My Research Partners**

Khasnabish and Haiven (2012) have noted “we do not ‘have’ radical imagination, no matter how dearly we wish for revolution or how unpopular our ideas might be” and instead have affirmed that “the radical imagination is something we *do* and something we *do together*” (p. 4). Hung’s (2010) research with youth

activists illustrated a similarly active conception of geographical imagination, that is, as a phenomena *enacted* by young people in the course of their social justice organizing efforts. My research partners' reflections further substantiate a view of imagination as an active process. In light of this concurrence, I have chosen to highlight the dynamic aspect of radical imagination by describing it a constellation of nine modes through which it may be expressed. I situate each of the nine modes within one of three broader types of activity – “perception,” “vision,” and “action” – as illustrated in Table 2 below. “Perception” emphasizes modes in which radical imagination allows people to perceive existing circumstances and their relation to them in ways that contribute to the pursuit of justice; “vision” focuses on modes in which radical imagination allows people to become and stay open to the many possibilities for radical social change by tapping into their dreams and desires for a better world; and “action” consists of modes of imagining which directly link the work of strategizing for change with materialized or embodied collective action.

A main assertion I make in this study is that rather than being a discrete element or goal of justice-focused education, radical educators can, do, and should conceptualize imagination as a *process* involving a range of modes helpful in the pursuit of justice and similar to the kinds of pedagogical goals many social justice educators say they are pursuing. It is important to note that the framework I describe below is not a comprehensive examination of ideas about “perception,” “vision,” and “action” as explicated in literature on either social justice education or imagination, or as described by my research partners, but illustrates and describes a *range of specific ways we can think of imagination as implicated in these aspects of our efforts*. The following table displays nine modes of radical imagination and provides an overview of each mode. The perspectives of my research partners, confirmed also by ideas expressed in literature on which I draw, indicate that these elements are not as discrete as they appear in the table. I have wrestled them apart partly for analytical convenience, but also because I believe doing so might be politically and pedagogically useful. Furthermore, in constructing this framework, I played with a variety of ways of organizing these modes and found various combinations useful in different ways. My desire in

the chapter is to provide enough evidence and description that readers can draw their own conclusions about the relationships among the modes they believe may be salient and useful for the field.

**Figure 3. Reconstructed Conceptual Framework for Radical Imagination**

<b>Imagination as...</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Elaborated Description</b>
Perception	Humanizing	Seeing oneself as worthy of self-respect and dignity, as agentic, as capable of committing to the difficult, ongoing growth demanded in struggles for justice.
	Connecting	Viewing the world in relational and ecological terms, embracing worldviews involving ‘we’ thinking, holism, and inter-connectedness.
	Critiquing	Apprehending the world around us using frameworks, maps, and lenses that shed light on harmful power relations.
Vision	Identifying Alternatives	Identifying a range of historical and contemporary ways of understanding and organizing human life (structures, systems, relationships, institutions, processes, worldviews, etc.); developing and articulating ideas about other possible alternatives.
	Envisioning	Developing a felt sense of the future; identifying desires for change; creating shared visions for possible change.
	Hoping	Resisting despair, cynicism, nihilism; building inspiration, motivation, and faith that change is possible.
Action	Organizing	Building visionary organizations and movements guided by clear principles, aims, and goals; strategizing for short and long term change.
	Playing	Being creative and playful; celebrating; building movement dexterity.
	Prefiguring	Modeling desired change on different scales; establishing prefigurative counter-institutions; creating new cultures in the here and now.

### **Perception**

The idea of imagination that appears in popular discourse frequently evokes a process of distancing – escaping reality by creatively conjuring ideas about how things could be different. But in her reflections about radical imagination, Rebick (2010) has proposed quite a different view, writing “radical imagination is not about letting our imagination run free, it’s about rooting our imagination fully in reality” (p. 63). Comments shared by many of my research partners resonate with Rebick’s view and highlight the work of radical imagination in perceiving, understanding, and describing the world we share in new ways.

Interestingly, it is in this section, in which my research partners reflect directly on the critical importance of developing what they see as more accurate understandings of the world we share, that their reflections are perhaps the most evocative and metaphorical. For instance, we will hear about imagination as dreams to plot a future, as maps to chart a course, as X-ray glasses capable of perceiving Mission Impossible beams, as a process of burning away one's skin to reveal a new self, and as unveiling that leaves one standing, Matrix-style, in Baudrillard's "desert of the real."

The three modes below are each processes of perceiving the self, the world, and life within it in new ways. In a way, they each ask different questions. *Humanizing* asks the question "Who am I?" and involves the ongoing and difficult work of developing a politicized, and loving, subjectivity within the context of entrenched hierarchies. *Connecting* shifts from "I" to "we" and inquires about how we might imagine the world as an interconnected whole and what kinds of ethical obligations arise in the context of harmful human and ecological relationships. *Critiquing*, then, asks about some of the most pressing problems we face today and seeks to understand their sources. It denotes a process of imagining the roots of human suffering and ecological problems as emerging, in part, from asymmetrical power relations.

### **Humanizing**

Throughout this dissertation, among the reflections of my research partners and in the literatures I draw on, runs a critique of what Keating (2009) has referred to as a "self-enclosed" individual. Whether located in the foundations of Western Modernity (Keating, 2009), "legislated by global capitalism" (Sabonmatsu quoted in Lilley, 2011), or originating in colonialist worldviews, in Keating's view, the collective myth that there exist selves which are entirely self-sufficient and self-directed is "one of the most damaging stories in US culture" (p. 211). Although many of my research partners agree with Keating that creating and maintaining a vision of the world as comprised of self-enclosed individuals has been a major project of both neoliberalism and capitalism (and as a result has become a significant source of today's social and ecological crises, as well as a formidable barrier to building effective movements for needed change), there remains an appreciation for the value of understanding and describing how specific persons see

themselves in relation to others and what kinds of self-understandings or worldviews might be capable of creating justice-oriented change. For this reason, many of my research partners share an abiding concern for “the importance of personal agency, integrity, relational autonomy, and self-respect” (Keating, 2009, p. 211), as well as a belief that it is possible and necessary to utilize frames for understanding both individuals and collectivities and that these frames need not necessarily be at fundamental odds.

Each of the views I will explore below stresses that individual people may understand the world and themselves in ways that close off or in ways that open possibilities for becoming committed to the ongoing work of creating promising change – including the ongoing work of disassembling their own subjectivities and reconstituting themselves in new forms (Parkes, Gore, Elsworth, 2010, p. 178). This section describes a mode of radical imagination which allows one to imagine a self and a personal life trajectory in new ways. In this mode, radical imagination helps cultivate an agentic self who can do several things: tap into the power of their dreams, envision a self worthy of dignity and capable of powerful action against oppression, and find fulfillment in the never-ending and often painful work of undermining hierarchies.

### ***A Dreaming Self***

Several of my research partners’ reflections highlight the imaginative work of tapping into one’s deepest desires as a mode of radical imagination that can enable one to find satisfaction, fulfillment, and vocation which may begin at the individual level, but opens the possibility for considering how these capacities might be collectively mobilized in powerful ways. The ability to perceive and access one’s motivation, dreams, and the courage needed to act on those dreams is central to all of Wanda’s efforts and resonated with reflections shared by Rita and Kevin. Wanda contrasted more conscious aspects of subjectivity with a notion of the “dreaming self” as an “un-nameable subjectivity” at the heart of being able to make choices that are “authentic” to us. I asked her to tell me about the kinds of dreams she hopes to foster:

You have a nameable subjectivity and then you have this unnamable, which is the dreaming. But that dreaming, where it interacts with your political self, that's the dream that I'm talking about when I'm working. Doesn't mean necessarily what kinda dreams they have for social change, but

it's more like themselves as a political entity, they have to make decisions about themselves as an economic entity, as a person in a family, those kinds of things. So what are those dreams? What would be the most satisfying, what is the thing that motivates them in that particular aspect of their lives? So economically, how do they want to participate in the economics around them?

She continued, explaining

I think that people have an is-ness, a who-they-are, but that that takes time and work to access that, because mostly we take that in externally. But the dream comes from inside of you, and inside's not the right word, inside's a problematic word, but the dream comes from who you are. And so, I wanna work with people, I wanna see them be able to access who am I, and that's that dreaming self and from there be able to say, okay, what resonates with me? What feels good to me in terms of what I'm moving toward in my life? Can I make a choice to move towards this thing that I am, you know? And to attract it to me? That's hard to articulate and I don't think I said it exactly like I mean it, but it's something like there's a real self that you are and that's hard to access, it's kinda slippery, and that art really helps us to access that.

As I reflected on Wanda's ideas, I was reminded of Tewa theorist and educator Greg Cajete's (2000) notions of "finding one's face" and "finding one's heart" where finding one's face involves "finding out who you are, where you come from, and your unique character" and finding one's heart entails identifying "that passionate sense of self that motivates you and moves you along in life" (p. 183). The "dreaming self" that Wanda seeks to nurture aims to allow people to engage important life choices outside what might be considered more "rational." As she puts it, "until you have that opportunity to access it, you're gonna use your rational mind to make economic choices or family choices or social choices." For Wanda, the dreaming self can help one act in ways that provide grounding stability:

dreams allow someone to do what's authentic to them. And I think that has a lot of sustainability in it. Especially when things get hard or when things need to change, if someone's moving from their dreaming, that's the right person to have in that position, that's how you feel that you're in the right place at the right time.

Rita echoed this idea, noting the importance of people developing personal visions in which one's work is fulfilling and allows one to find meaning by asking "what would it be like if everyone got to choose to do what they're gifted at?" And, although Kevin's perspective here may resemble the more "rational" thinking process from which Wanda distinguishes the dreaming self, in the context of our conversation I believe the perspective he offers here is quite similar and highlights the ways cultivating personal vision can help individuals and groups most fruitfully leverage limited energies in the work of social change, a move that has obvious political significance.

I would say first is to be able to see individually a vision for oneself. What is it that you want to do in this world? How do we each vision ourselves as being change agents, positive change agents in the world and what is each of our roles. So that's one step. And so that is basically just figuring out what am I best at, what are my skills, practical skills in the world that I can do, or what is it that I want to learn so that I can do what I envision in the world? So it's imagining what I want and then doing that, whether that be as educators or as farmers or economists that are working to create micro-lending projects. So all of these, whatever the specific role is, figure that out.

Again, for Cajete (2000), finding one's foundation, then, is a base on which human development and an expression of "heart" and "face" can occur: "that foundation is your vocation, the work that you do, whether it be as a artist, lawyer, or teacher...It is finding that special kind of work that most fully allows you to express your true self – 'Your heart and your face'" (p. 183). Here we can see a notion of groundedness that has some clear implications for those working in social movements, particularly in light of a current culture of reactive politics which calls for deeply visionary movements, an issue I will take up further below. Moving from dreaming or from one's foundation can allow people to stay rooted in the values and commitments we hold most dear. It's a part of integrity, a notion of wholeness that some describe in spiritual terms (hooks, 2003), although most of my research partners did not speak in explicitly spiritual terms.

For Wanda, the dreaming self may be most potent in its relational mode, in community:

What would it take to ignite someone to move toward their dreams? And also to be able to communicate those dreams, take the risk to be able to communicate them with each other and then build together. I'm always really interested in what happens when people's authentic selves come into encounter with each other.

Although the notion of an "authentic self" has been criticized as essentialist and on other grounds, for these educators it nevertheless provides a useful frame or heuristic with which to work toward new ways of perceiving oneself and ones' desires.

### ***Dignity, Healing, and Agency***

The reflections above do not highlight some of the complex ways one's situatedness in hierarchical power relations can impact how one perceives oneself and the world, although most of my research partners, including Wanda, Rita, and Kevin, reflected a belief that positionality is an important consideration in

their work as educators. While my research partners' social analyses and political understandings differ, most spoke in terms that suggest that they understand the world as comprised of multiple, overlapping, mutually constituting political, economic, and social hierarchies that can sometimes make it difficult to talk in simple binary terms of "privilege" or "oppression." Still, consistent with Curry-Steven's (2007) research with social movement-based adult educators, many of my research partners found it easy to name work they have done within communities they see as bearing the brunt of oppressive structures or discourses. We can particularly see in Anna's, Uma's, Ivy's, and Rita's reflections the way a politicized subjectivity can combine the healing function of building a sense of self who is worthy of dignity alongside a sense of self who is capable of working with others to transform or eradicate dehumanizing conditions to open a range of political possibilities absent without them.

Patricia Hill Collins has written about oppression as a form of "anti-humanism" (Collins, 2000, p. 42), a process that undermines human solidarity and tries to distance some people(s) from the human community, diminishing or interfering with the development of a sense of self-worth. Albert Memmi (2000), whose theories informed Paulo Freire's, wrote that the intent of the "dominance-subjection" relationship involved in racism and "heterophobias" (other forms of oppression) is to "torment other people through an attempt to reduce them to nothing, and to harass people to the point of destroying them" through "a process of constant humiliation" (p. 57). Describing the internalization of supremacist ideologies and practices, Memmi has written: "the interiorization of racist denigration is not the least criminal aspect of it; it is the ingestion of a poison that eats away from the inside, and whose end is the victim's wholehearted adoption of the imposed image" (p. 56). In this way, oppression can be dehumanizing.

Both Anna and Uma explained to me that in the context of oppressive schools, communities, and societies, they deeply desire for the young people with whom they work to see themselves as capable of imagining themselves as worthy of dignity and capable of shaping their surroundings. As Uma put it, "the underlying, bottom goal of everything" involves ensuring that young people "feel they're important as youth," "have agency," and "understand that they can make wise decisions and also help create a world

that they wanna live in.” For both, personal experiences as targets of oppression and the material conditions produced in a world structured by supremacist ideologies interfere with these goals. In the face of dehumanization and trauma that can result from racist ideologies or the material and psychological harms of poverty, then, imagining oneself as fully human can be a profound place from which to begin to nurture a sense of personal dignity which says, as Hutchinson (1999) has put it, “I am a person of value and deserve the rights accorded to any human being” (p. 58).

In his important collaborative work to develop the idea and practice of “social justice youth development” (Cammarota, 2011; Ginwright and Cammarota, 2002; Ginwright and James, 2002), Shawn Ginwright (2010) has written that radical “healing occurs when we reconcile painful experiences resulting from oppression through testimony and naming what may seem to be personal misfortune as systemic oppression” (p. 85). In this vein, the organization in which Ivy works with youth encourages self-exploration as a means of reimagining one’s story as one of survivorship, rather than victimhood. “Part of the work we do is how to own that [history of surviving traumatic events] and name that and live that in a way that steps you towards power.” For Rita, also, reimagining and retelling one’s story in relation to oppressive structures is a critical part of the healing and personal transformation that she sees as essential to making grassroots organizing effective. In her view, telling new stories about our lives is among the most powerful ways to help people “understand their oppression in very personal ways, so that they will be grounded in the practice of changing what they’re experiencing.” Rita works to “dance around this edge of the work being healing and not bringing a therapeutic model into the classroom.”

For Hutchinson (1999), developing a sense of self worthy of dignity involves two distinct capacities: the ability to name “that which dominates and marginalizes,” as in the case of naming the structural causes of one’s own and one’s community’s suffering, and the ability to name “that which sustains and nurtures dignity” (p. 101). So the flip side of this endeavor moves beyond reimagining one’s story in the context of larger forces and collective experience by naming the systemic causes of suffering and toward opening “imaginative breathing space” (Scott quoted in Hutchinson, 1999, p. 102) which can disrupt taken for granted hierarchies and open humanizing possibilities. Just as experiencing oppression is

relational, Hutchinson believes that developing a sense of dignity is primarily a relational process. “The acknowledgement of personal dignity necessarily occurs within a web of social relations” (p. 58). Dignity is afforded and affirmed in community. For Ginwright (2010), too, dignity is affirmed in community, but the kind of radical healing he promotes goes beyond imagining and telling one’s story to in order to build young people’s capacity for collective action in the places they live their lives. “By integrating issues of power history, self-identity and the possibility of collective agency, radical healing rebuilds communities that foster hope and political possibilities for young people (p. 86). Ginwright resonates with Freire’s conception of humanization as a process of integrating dialogical and critical reflection and action in order to transform dehumanizing conditions. Empowerment in this frame includes nurturing a sense of an individual self worthy of dignity and respect, but goes beyond this liberal notion to involve an image of oneself as capable of working with others to dismantle or fundamentally transform those systems and structures, policies and practices that reinscribe hierarchies and create experiences of collective suffering. From this type of social justice perspective, imagining a self who is capable of creating change and taking collective action to pursue change can be seen as mutually informing processes.

### ***‘Burning Away the Self’***

Still keeping in mind the complexities of intersecting identities and overlapping hierarchies, my research partners also suggested that people who experience hierarchies from relatively privileged positions – people with more access to social, political, and economic power or wealth – face different kinds of challenges in developing a politicized subjectivity capable of envisioning and working for collective liberatory change over the long haul than those described above. Here, radical imagination can help enable them to perceive dehumanization amid ostensible privilege and help cultivate a sense of self capable of committing to the difficult and oftentimes painful work of undermining harmful institutionalized power relations and working to divest from or reducing individual enactments of these systemic power relations (Applebaum, 2004; Curry-Stevens, 2007; Griffin and Ouellett, 2007; Hytten and Warren, 2003).

For Freire, the dehumanization of those whose actions consciously or unconsciously seek to diminish others' humanity distorts them, too. In Memmi's (2000) view, "like all aggression, racism deforms the face and the conduct of the racist himself" (p 151). He writes that although "the corrosive suffering of the victim is wholly incommensurate with and overshadows the psychic deformation of the victimizer, one nevertheless does not transform oneself into an executioner without great cost" (p. 56). I heard echoes of this view in both Hannah's and Xavier's reflections.

On one hand, the incommensurability of the harms done by privilege and oppression in are evident in Hannah's observations about her work with preservice educators on whiteness and institutionalized racism. She told me "a lot of people that do what I do really focus on what whites lose. And that does not speak to me at all." She puts her own goals bluntly when she states, "I want us [white people] to fucking admit that it feels good to feel superior. From the time I could open my eyes, I have been told I am superior and I want us to stop lying about it." Still, the idea that there are costs incurred within relationships of domination by those who are considered privileged seems to have some significance in her view. Hannah described the loss that comes from divisions created by hierarchical worldviews and the alienation and segregation they create, even for those who ostensibly benefit most from those hierarchies:

We are separated and we are not taught to feel loss...so that's my punch line when I'm talking about whiteness is that we can grow up in this segregation and have never been given the message by anybody who cares for us that we've lost. You know, I can live my whole life without any relations with people of color, my parents didn't think that was [negative], in fact, that's a good thing. When that shit changes, we're there, right?

In her own view, a world in which "authentic cross positionality relationships" are expected is a radical departure from the world she sees around her. Undermining the ideologies that that normalize segregation and teach people not to feel its negative impacts – even on those considered privileged – may be an important step along the way.

In thinking about Hannah's and Xavier's reflections on teaching with privileged students, I often found myself reflecting about my own student colleagues, the pain I see in their course work or emails to me, the pain evident in tearful office hours visits. As Xavier put it, the development of new ways of

understanding oneself in our world requires a metaphorical burning away of skin in order to reveal another. As painful as it may be, “it’s necessary to go through that fire,” he explained.

I don't know if that sounds too negative, but the old self has to be burned away, aspects of the old self have to be burned away. It's the only way of it and hopefully there's something there, there's not nothing. There's almost, if that skin is burned off, maybe there's a new skin that can go out in the world and go on. But to me, that's honestly in every setting that's what it's about.

As both Hannah and Xavier explained, and as a variety of theorists argue, paralyzing pain and shame in learning to see one’s complicity are not the only options available to those learning to see themselves and the world in new ways. Although some caution that the collateral effects of profound discomfort in learning processes can diminish positive potentiality and may at times be unethical (Zembylas and McGlynn, 2012) Duncan-Andrade (2009) has remarked that “pain may pave the path to justice” (6 of 12), a view shared by many others. For instance, O’Sullivan asserts that outrage at oppression should be nurtured and cultivated as “an intelligent and rational response to a situation where our highest values are being violated” (p. 274). As Cornell West has put it, feelings like rage may be considered an “appropriate response to an absurd situation” (West quoted in Duncan Andrade, 2009, p 6 of 12). Hannah, too, shared that she has felt hope when, at times, her students express outrage about how oblivious people with unearned power may be to the advantages that profoundly shape their lives. She described to me a quarter long process in which students began a course by reflecting on the role of race in shaping their lives, noting that an overwhelming majority of the mostly white group of students indicated their belief that race has not shaped their lives in any significant way. During an end-of-quarter exercise, after focusing on race, racism, and whiteness for the course’s duration, she read out loud these initial reflections. As we talked, she laughed out loud as she recalled a student’s incredulity about the group’s initial perceptions, blurting out “What a bunch of bullshit!” The shift in perspective signaled by this observation made her hopeful.

In the best cases, the recognition of the negative impact of hierarchical relations on both those who are dominated *and* on dominators not only produces affective engagement, but also unsettles in the sense that it generates movement among both groups. I find Toni Morrison’s (1994) distinction between being

“touched” and being “moved” in response to learning to more deeply understand the impacts of oppression to be useful here – a move from “passive empathy” toward an active sense of responsibility to take action to reduce injustice (Zembylas and McGlynn, 2012). Xavier spoke about wanting to see people “become addicted to” political work in a way that resonated with Hannah’s desire that the white students she works with become deeply invested in the difficult and often painful work of learning how whiteness and racism functions and seeking more liberatory pathways, for this work to become an integral part of how they understand themselves in the world:

I want 'em to be motivated, I want them to find it deeply fulfilling and stimulating, as I do, and to be motivated to continue that work so that it does become more and more and more who they are.

While some students have told her that she has “ruined their lives” by creating a situation in which they can no longer maintain their obliviousness to the suffering of others, there are a few students who she believes understand the shifts in how they see themselves, their students, their schools, and society as profoundly positive and who approach her for help to better understand the troubling dynamics they face in their own classrooms when they become teachers. And despite the difficulties of choosing to see oneself and living in opposition to dominant and normalized hierarchical structures that may ultimately mean risking the safety and comfort of privilege, for Hannah acknowledging the loss that comes with hierarchy also creates the possibility to develop relationships with people that might never happen otherwise. Her optimistic take? “For the ones that I reach, I do believe they can’t really go back.”

### **Connecting**

For Keating (2009), our “dreams and visions shape the worlds we inhabit, though we rarely (if ever!) recognize their creative power” (p. 218). The notion of “we’ thinking” that I noted above and that she advocates posits a radical interrelationship between the material and immaterial dimensions of life and can be understood as a holistic worldview. Keating stands with others (Hutchinson, 1996; Smith, 2000) who view reality as ecologically, economically, linguistically, socially, and spiritually interdependent.

In its connecting mode, radical imagination enables a conception of the world as comprised of inextricably interconnected, interdependent, and interrelated fields, but it also creates a sense of ethical obligation foster health in these relationships and to ameliorate harm when it is present. We can see these kinds of ethical obligations in Alfred's (2010) remarks below in his essay about radical imagination in *Affinities*. He asks:

Would it be possible for people cultured in the North American mainstream to reimagine themselves in relation to the land and others and start to see this place as a real, sacred homeland, instead of an encountered commodity destined to be used and abused to satisfy impulses and desires implanted in their heads by European imperial texts? (Alfred, 2010, p. 5).

In Alfred's framing, the work of radical imagination doesn't require much creativity, instead it is "simply Euroamericans deciding to leave the old visions of conquest and privileges of empire behind and focusing on their responsibilities as human beings today" (p. 7). However as some of my research partners highlight, the project of reimagining oneself in relation to the land and to others in more respectful, responsible ways is quite far from simple: it's about developing new worldviews. The perspectives I highlight below emphasize the imaginative work of conceiving of the world in relational and ecological terms.

### ***Human Connectedness and Solidarity***

One aspect of a relational mode of engaging with the world emphasizes the interconnectedness of all human life. Shifting from a dominant narrative of self-enclosed individualism described above to "we" thinking is significant for Keating (2009) because it allows for a conception of self in which individual and communal identities are mutually inclusive. As she writes, "we do have boundaries, but these boundaries are porous, allowing exchange with our external environment" (p. 216), including other people. Helping those with whom she works better perceive these connections is key to her agenda. For Keating, imagining holistic human connectedness requires and fosters empathy and solidarity, important capacities for those seeking change.

A number of my research partners indicated that for them it is nonsensical to imagine either individual humans as “self-enclosed” subjects or to imagine collectivities of humans as discrete from a larger human community. Ivy’s and Patrick’s reflections emphasized the ethical demands of this awareness. My interview with Ivy highlighted a need for relationships that enable young people to be “capable of being in healthy loving community, capable of making deep loving connection.” Within the youth arts organization Ivy spoke about working with, valuing, claiming, and sharing one’s personal story can serve as a vehicle for personal empowerment, but also can create generative soil in which to nurture a loving sense of connectedness. The kind of loving connectedness of which Ivy spoke not only emphasized meaningful connections and empathic understanding, but also highlighted a sense of responsibility capable of responding to the understanding that in even our most treasured communities relationships are impacted by broader social hierarchies. While criticizing commercialized “Hallmark” versions of love, Ivy nevertheless spoke about the powerful potential of building a sense of loving connectedness across difference. Ivy was excited by the connections being created among the youth with whom they work, where

youth from different racial backgrounds and different privilege backgrounds are interacting and are calling each other brother and sister and are building strong relationships within this community that has this consciousness.

Ivy spoke about feeling excited to see young people taking on this consciousness more and more and hoping to do more of this work with young folks. While Ivy noted the positive potential of what Hannah called “cross-positionality relationships,” Ivy also observed how unbalanced the growth that can occur in these relationships may be, noting, specifically the kind of one-sided relationships in which people from dominating groups acknowledge the benefits gained from interacting with people considered to be “different”:

So I had this board member who stood up at a fundraiser and said “[organization name] was the first place that I met a Black person and a homeless person and a queer person,’ and got some applause and sat down and I was like ‘ugh, fuck.’ And coming from a similar community where there were very few people of color I understand the power of that for him.”

An ethical loving connectedness for Ivy certainly requires decentering white people and other privileged groups as the primary focus of anti-oppressive educational work. But it also requires going beyond simply connecting across difference to build relationships of solidarity and allyship in the context of hierarchical power relations. For many, solidarity at its heart is about empathy and an ability to “enter into the situation with whom one is in solidarity” (Freire, 1997, p. 31). But for Ivy, solidarity sometimes, perhaps counter-intuitively, requires creating space and separation. Ivy told me, it especially important in their organization, which works with diverse populations – “and when I say diverse, I mean really privilege-diverse, a wide range of spectrum” – that young people are “not only learning from difference but learning how to be allies in difference.” This might mean developing a capacity for honestly and directly perceiving and then dealing with feelings like shame that can be arise among white youth in the context of grappling with power imbalances of systemic racism, but doing so in a way that does not create additional burdens for the young people of color doing this work, as well.

Patrick also wants young people to better appreciate the nature of our connected human world and the kinds of power relationships embedded in it. He described his efforts to help the high school students he works with take a “bird’s eye view” (Hutchinson, 1996) in the wake of the disastrous 2010 oil spill in which an oil well owned and operated by British Petroleum (BP) dumped an estimated 200 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico, devastating both the regional eco-system and the human social and economic livelihood of the region:

I’m trying to make them develop that awareness that we do exist in the systems and that we have cause and effect relationships with people that we might never meet, but that our, that every element of the way that we live here is connected to people all over the world. So that, those systems do exist, that during the Gulf oil spill, these students were talking about how, who do we think might be responsible? Who’s to blame? Who’s culpable for this? Many of them thought that the hole in the ground was responsible. And when we talked about who owns the hole in the ground? Oh, it’s the government, because if it’s anything larger than them or the store in their local community, it’s the government. So just understanding of what the actual shape of the world looks like. And being able to imagine who the stakeholders really are in any given issue, as broad a web as we possibly can, and what their interests and needs are.

Within connected worldviews, harm in these kinds of social, economic, and political disasters does not stop at those most impacted “because self and other are irrevocably, utterly, *intimately* interrelated, what

affects you – no matter how distant, how separate, how different (from me) you seem to be – affects me as well” (Keating, 2009, p. 217, emphasis in original). As Patrick put it, “every element of the way we live here is connected to people all over the world” and it is part of his work to help young people develop new ways to imagine these relationships.

Among these viewpoints, increased facility at perception is not enough. The understanding of social, political, and economic hierarchies coupled with an awareness of interdependence calls for a kind of ethical commitment, a responsibility of members of dominant groups to act as allies in solidarity with those most negatively impacted by oppression. It’s a view of interconnectedness in which all people and their stories are valued, but which also appreciates that our positionality within hierarchies means that the imaginative work of empathic understanding is more complex than simple mutual sharing across difference. Sometimes the work of connecting across difference or striving for empathy can actually reinforce hierarchies. This notion of interdependence sees humans as inextricably connected in a web of life, but it is a web of life fraught with power imbalances that create an ethical imperative to ameliorate the impacts of harmful hierarchies.

### ***Ecological Interconnectedness***

For Hutchinson (1996), “eco-relational ways of thinking” involve seeing the world as an “interconnected, interdependent field” (p. 50) which enables foresight needed to solve complex human problems. For Lai (2010), radical imagination can help to wake people from the myth of destructive binaries, including destructive mind/body, culture/nature, and human/earth splits. Although there are many important divergences both within and across these traditions, Indigenous philosophies that emphasize wholeness (Schroff, 2011; Smith, 2000) are joined by fields like social ecology, ecofeminism, interdisciplinary fields like integral studies, and many others, assume that understanding and changing a particular aspect of our world necessitates perceiving its situatedness in a larger ecological context. Among my research partners, there are important differences in conceptions of the relationships among the social and ecological worlds, but there is widespread general agreement about the importance of fostering ways of perceiving the world

around us that in some ways reflect what Vandana Shiva (2003) refers to as Earth democracy, which she described as a new worldview in which “responsibility” is “the core of our relationships with each other and other species” (p. 3 of 5).

For Kevin addressing the ecological crises humans and the planet face requires applying our imagination in practical, problem solving ways. Reflecting on how we might reform our communities in line with the goals of creating environmental and social justice, as well as communities in which “happy, healthy” lifestyles can be maintained, Kevin told me it largely comes down to the need to localize, “just figuring out how we can have our communities be localized and maintain their individual uniqueness while continuing to be able to exist.” In this framework, localization means maintaining uniqueness, creating possibilities to meet happiness and health needs by relating with the land and place in new ways, and shrinking a community’s consumptive footprint. For Kevin, communities need “to exist within the ecosystem it's centered in in a way that is functional and sustainable.” Kevin continued, explaining his take on the role of imagination in addressing human-ecological problems:

So, if you live in the desert you need to find systems that are gonna provide water and catch, save water for that ecosystem. And that probably means that you can't have a city like Phoenix in the middle of Arizona because it's just too many people for that place, or at least they haven't managed the number of people in a way that is at all sustainable. And that's an example, that's a desert ecosystem, but we have, you know, New York City right now is actually doing some really interesting things, but it's not, it's this gigantic city and it's reaching far outside of it's, it has a gigantic footprint in order to support the millions of people that live there. Look at a city like Havana Cuba, which has been forced to, you know, Cuba in general was forced to find ways to do this when it was cut off through all the embargoes and now 90% of Havana's food is grown within the city. So that's a kind of way we need to apply our imaginations practically to say we can do these things, we just have to figure out how.

Kevin is describing a world in which communities bear an obligation to both imagine the impact of their culture and consumption on others and imagine – and create – ways of living together that are functional and sustainable within their local ecosystems. He reflected on the power of imagination in this work:

Human imagination has incredible potential and it's just figuring out a way to harness it and use it, I don't like the word harness, that's kind of controlling, but to utilize it in a way that is going to allow us to survive.

Kevin and several of my other interview partners, like Ivy, Patrick, and Xavier also spoke about the need to imagine struggles for social and environmental justice in mutually inclusive terms. From these vantage points, human and ecological problems cannot be unlinked. Kevin described his view:

I mean if people are unable to survive and live lives that are fulfilling and have their basic needs met, including things like being able to be happy and have joyful existence within communities of people – I view those as basic needs as well as food, water, shelter, clothing – if people aren't able to have those things, they will continue to relate to the planet in a way that is destructive at the same time. So the environmental movement doesn't pay attention sometimes to the fact that there are basic needs in the world that all people need to have met equally. At the same time, without having an ecological worldview to social justice, it doesn't account for [the fact that] the world that we exist in needs to be healthy in order to support us. We're living on a planet that is alive. And so, if we damage it then we can't have a healthy existence. And so, both are basically required. And they go very much hand in hand, I see, because oppressive society basically seeks to abuse – that's personifying it but – in general, society has oppressed both the voices of those, of the under privileged in terms of humans, but also the earth as well. So I view it as something where the philosophy can be one of freedom for both people and the planet.

Comments by many of my research partners echo a growing popular awareness, and awareness within many justice-focused movements, that social, political, economic, and ecological problems are related and, in fact, are mutually reinforcing. Although perceived competition for scarce resources continues to manifest in the form of political contestation (such as current conflicts among those fighting to address the social, political, and economic causes of climate change, for instance by seeking to decrease fossil fuel extraction and use, and others arguing that difficult economic times call for employment before anything else), as the activist-insects on the Beehive's *True Cost of Coal* graphic put it, there will be “No Jobs on a Dead Planet.” Although some were surprised to see “teamsters and turtles” (labor and environmental activists) marching together during the 1999 anti-WTO protests in Seattle, as one demonstrator put it “of course we belong together. The same people who exploit natural resources exploit human resources” (Freidberg and Rowley, 2000). John Sanbonmatsu has explained his view of the need to go beyond fragmented movements:

What I'm saying is that if the Sierra Club really wants to change the way that nature is being systematically dismantled around the world, then it needs to adopt an anticapitalist view of things. If people in the women's rights movement really want to create a feminist world, they will have to take seriously the oppression of animals and the way that our destruction and torture of animals is related to the domination of women historically and ideologically – and so forth (Lilley, 2011, p. 234).

It is crucial that I note that important and sometimes heated debates emerge from different theorizations of the relationships among humans and human phenomena, other species, land, the earth, the universe, and the cosmos and that on further probing there would undoubtedly be important distinctions in the theorizations of my research partners, it is also true that the importance of imagining connections among issues – what Gardner (2005) has called “linking activism” – is a general commitment I believe to be shared by many of my research partners. And, the generation and/or reinforcement of ways of imagining the world in which human and ecological solidarity are at their heart was a specific subject of extended reflection by several of my research partners.

### **Critiquing**

A naked woman leans over a fence. A man buys a magazine and stares at her picture. The destinies of these two are linked. The man has paid the woman to take off her clothes, to lean over the fence. The photograph contains its history—the moment the woman unbuttoned her shirt, how she felt, what the photographer said. The price of the magazine is a code that describes the relationships between all these people—the woman, the man, the publisher, the photographer—who commanded, who obeyed. The cup of coffee contains the history of the peasants who picked the beans, how some of them fainted in the heat of the sun, some were beaten, some were kicked.

For two days I could see the fetishism of commodities everywhere around me. It was a strange feeling. Then on the third day I lost it, it was gone, I couldn't see it anymore (para. 37).

I still remember the first time I read Wallace Shawn's (1991) small book, *The Fever*. In the story, after receiving an anonymous gift of Marx's *Capital* on his doorstep and ultimately diving into its thick text, the story's narrator struggled to understand Marx's concept of “commodity fetishism.” I was taken by Shawn's description of learning to “see” economic relations all around. One of the unifying assumptions held by those on the radical left is the existence of injustices and suffering results from what Crotty (1998) refers to as “dominative relationships” (p. 158). Within the Marxist framework explored by Shawn in *The Fever* the focus may be on the domination entailed in exploitative class relations. But other critical traditions shed light on other kinds of dominative power. For critical theorists, one of the primary tasks of inquiry is to “call current ideology into question, and initiate action, in the cause of social justice” (Crotty, 1998, p. 157). Critical inquiry, then, “keeps the spotlight on power relationships within society so as to

expose the forces of hegemony and injustice” (Crotty, 1998, p. 157), although these may vary and analyses may emphasize the workings of different axes of power or even different understandings of how power functions. On a general note, then, for me, Shawn’s narrator highlights the imaginative function of critical analysis and reverberates with Hannah’s reflections, shared above, about her students who are training to be teachers learning to perceive power relations all around them that they never imagined existed before. It also highlights the imaginative work of critical analysis that I will focus on here.

One view almost all of my research partners shared with me in our conversations is that the “commonsensical” frameworks often used to make sense of the world and guide action obscure the kinds of awareness that radical educators seek to promote – an analysis of how power functions that will allow people to take new forms of action. Many of my research partners shared some version of a view that these “commonsense” frameworks are not benign and that they have in fact been cultivated purposefully. As Hannah put it, “the powers that be” are deeply invested in keeping us “in a fog.” Tom described processes of ideological “veiling.” Patrick worried about “indoctrination” and “complete corporate control...over the minds of our youth.” Lou talked about hegemony: “there are any number of forces that are arrayed to make them see those kinds of relations [race, gender, power, globalization] and those kinds of questions in the world according to hegemonic ways.” As a result, they share a commitment to both explore the ways commonsense ways of viewing the world are constructed, but also to support those with whom they work in perceiving and constructing understandings of the world in ways that will more adequately illuminate harmful power dynamics that undergird the injustices that concern them. Tom and Hannah spoke at length their views on this topic and it is their comments I will highlight here.

Tom described the imaginative process of constructing knowledge about power imbalances as a kind of “unveiling” and he used the metaphors of the Matrix trilogy as a way to help make his point:

And in really almost cheesy classic terms, and you know, I have sort of post-structural tendencies, so this is gonna seem like maybe a joke, but there's *truth!* You know, what's *really* going on? Welcome to the desert of the real, vis-à-vis the Matrix, or whatever. What's *actually* happening here, you know? There's so much veiling that happens ideologically and elsewhere and having experienced my vision being obstructed by ideology, architecture, all kinds of different things, suddenly I'm very interested in unveiling because I have a desire to see what's going on.

He described the idea of unveiling as “almost like a conversion experience, in a certain respect,” which can have consequences that ripple out:

where you're seeing the same things that you've seen your whole life, but suddenly you're seeing them differently, which made you realize that there's been something else going on the whole time [all] along and then suddenly that sparks this, holy shit, what else am I missing?

Here, Tom echoes Freire and Shor's (1987) goal, to “illuminate reality,” to understand moments of society, to “reveal it, unveil it, see its reasons for being like it is” (p.13). For Tom, not only can developing a capacity to see power dynamics around us with fresh eyes allow us to see what's “really going on,” it can also generate its own momentum, catalyzing a deepened curiosity about other harmful dynamics, yet unseen, which may need attention.

For Hannah, being able to perceive harmful dynamics, or the sources of unfreedom, is step one. “You have to be able to see something that needs to happen,” she told me. In other words, people need to be able to identify problems before wanting to address them. Hannah articulated a belief widely held among my research partners and critical education theorists about the importance of clearly seeing the problems one seeks to change:

Once we can see it [injustice], when our vision gets more critical and complex and deeper, then so do our responses. So, whatever map I have, whatever framework I'm using to make sense of the social relations and dynamics that are going on around me, are gonna drive my action in that.

Her comments speak to the idea articulated by several others that the frameworks we utilize for understanding how power functions shape what we're able to see in very important ways. Thus, an ability to engage various critical traditions, a capacity Lou emphasized, will enable the kind of complex, deep understanding these pedagogues advocate. Hannah told me about the importance of the idea of salience in developing an ability to perceive power relations that are in constant flux:

We have to get everybody at the table. That's the first thing. You have to get more voices at the table and you have to be able to think, what is more or less salient right, in this moment? So now we're all at the table and that doesn't mean anyone acts as a positionality, cancels out any other one. But I see it, almost kind of in my head, as some [dynamics] become more or less salient in any moment. So we're sitting there and we're talking about racism and it's really salient and then I begin to share ‘oh my husband, blah blah blah,’ and in that moment, heterosexism becomes very salient, and the way that I took that for granted, right? These things, they're always, so how do we both track them and then also keep some sense of what is my position and how do I best act from

that position? Because of course what I can do or how I can be effective varies based on my position within that construct. This is actually how I see these things.

Adams (2010) explains that among the principles of Social Justice Education (SJE) is that “*SJE pedagogies acknowledge and seek to transform the many ways in which identity-based social position and power, privilege, and disadvantage, shape participant interactions in the classroom and everyday contexts*” (p. 76, italics in original). Hannah’s description highlights the shifting salience of the many dynamics that may be present in a particular situation and resonates with “intersectional” (Crenshaw, 1991) understandings of identity especially as theorized by feminists of color. Within the sort of intersectional framework described by Hannah we can see that a critical practice of acknowledging and working to transform dynamics that shape experience involves at least four distinct tasks: seeing the salience of particular oppressive dynamics in a given moment, tracking them as they shift, noting one’s own relationships to these shifting dynamics, and identifying how one might act on one commitments most effectively considering this shifting terrain. A tall order, which Hannah highlights using different film-inspired metaphor:

And so, now we're all at the table, how do we kind of, there's that Mission Impossible, have you ever seen it? He wants to steal the diamonds, it looks like they're just sitting there on the table, but then he puts on his x-ray glasses and you see all the red beams. And I kind of just see it as, you get those glasses and now I can see all of these beams that we need to navigate.

In other words, we need critical lenses, and a facility in utilizing them in different moments and comparatively, which will allow us to see the “matrices of domination” (Collins, 2000) in which our work takes place. For Hannah, the consequences of not having adequate lenses can cause social movement participants to ignore the ways their ostensible fights for a better world may actually contribute to exclusion, marginalization, and a reconcentration of power and material resources in the hands of those who already have more than their fair share.

For example, the environmental movement in a lot of ways is, I see it as a white men's movement, ‘I want the land so that I can consume it and ride my bike and not see anybody else.’ And, that really bothers me. So, that would be a vision that would just turn everything, it seems, upside [down]. And this is hard. We'd all be makin' messes and struggling, but it would call upon us to be humble and have to try to figure out.

As in the past, many social movements today are grappling with movement-based exclusions which result from the challenges associated with seeing all struggles for liberation as bound together, thus taking all forms of domination and exclusion seriously. Hannah's observation "we'd all be makin' messes and struggling" underscores the difficulty of developing and sustaining the level and kind of awareness she describes. Having the kind of x-ray glasses she talked about could be an indispensable tool in the difficult work of actually transforming the kinds of abusive or exclusionary power relations that all of my research partners are concerned to change.

Despite describing herself as being in a "super cynical place" at the time of our conversation, Hannah was also clear about the tangible implications of learning to imagine human relationships, her position within them, and the options for action available to her in deeper and more complex ways. Speaking changes she has seen in her own relationships, she told me:

I really sincerely believe that I do less damage than I used to do to people of color...It probably helps that I say *less* damage, that doesn't mean that I don't run micro-aggressions and all kinds of things, but I do less and that matters. That means quality of life changes.

The excerpts above highlight the importance of developing critical lenses to understand the dynamics we face, in various spheres of life and at different scales. Within liberation frameworks, local or micro expressions of power are seen as resulting from broader social, political, and economic sources such as collective stories or ideologies and systems and structures that both maintain and are maintained by them. But seeing these connections requires imagining the range of dynamics at work in these more personal experiences – being able to see from a "bird's eye view," as Hutchinson (1996) has put it. Analyzing how power works and how hierarchies are maintained – in micro-contexts and at other scales – provides opportunities and new pathways of social action.

Adopting a critical race theory, feminist, or anarchist framework will each allow one to perceive differently because these various critical traditions offer different frames for describing how power functions. A Marxian analysis utilizing the concept of "class exploitation" or "commodity fetishism" will illuminate different social and economic relations than the ideas "intersectionality" (Crenshaw, 1991) or a "matrix of domination" (Collins, 2000) advanced by feminists of color in which class relations are among

other relations of dominance and oppression which need attention. An engagement with Peggy McIntosh's (1988) idea of class "privilege" as an "invisible knapsack of unearned assets" may be useful for anti-capitalists, but it suggests different understandings of power than an anarchist analytic which sees the state, capitalism, and all forms of social oppression as hierarchical, mutually reinforcing, and damaging to humans and the rest of the natural world. Utilizing a structuralist perspective versus a poststructuralist perspective to name and examine power in the world around us will yield different understandings of the problems humans face. In his book *Normal Life*, which focuses on expressions of critical trans politics today, Dean Spade (2011) has argued that he prefers to utilize the frame of "subjection" to that of "oppression," writing

I use "subjection" because it indicates that power relations impact how we know ourselves as subjects through these systems of meaning and control – the ways we understand our own bodies, the things we believe about ourselves and our relationships with other people and with institutions, and the ways we imagine change and transformation. I use "subjection" rather than "oppression" because "oppression" brings to mind the notion that one set of people are dominating another set of people, that one set of people "have power" and another set are denied it (p. 25).

It was evident across my research conversations that a range of varying frameworks were at work in our conversations and that each of my research partners' perspectives about power were more complex than I can capture in section or the dissertation as a whole. It is not my point to resolve these tensions here, but instead to point out that no matter what conception of power one holds, developing the kinds of critical skills of perception advanced by my research partners always involves imaginative acts.

### **Vision**

My first memories of the power of vision as a practical tool to shape the future stretch back three decades, at least. In my mind's eye, I see my twelve year old self sequestered away in a practice room at a gymnastics meet, laying relaxed on my back, eyes closed, visualizing myself going through a balance beam routine, sticking my side aerial and landing a difficult dismount perfectly. As Kelley (2002) has written, "call me utopian, but I inherited my mother's belief that the map to a new world is in the imagination, in what we see in our third eyes rather than in the desolation that surrounds us." Even this

individualistic and decidedly non-politicized example of visioning shares an affinity with Kelley's view and the similar idea that Karen Litfin (2013) put so simply, that "saying yes is a greater source of power than saying no" (p. 16). In the years since those pre-competition balance beam visioning sessions, I have joined Kelley, Litfin, and the many individuals, groups, and movements developing a practice of visioning which has become increasingly both politicized and collective, intentionally aimed at identifying the kinds of "viable futures" Adrienne Maree Brown (2014) believes are so necessary for collective healing today.

In this section, we'll move from a discussion of radical imagination as a process of re-perceiving, re-thinking, and re-describing the existing world to a focus on radical imagination as a process by which people can identify possibilities for change and tap the emotional and affective resources to support that work. I have organized this discussion into three parts: *Identifying alternatives* describes the capacity to identify alternatives to current social, political, or economic arrangements in history or today and to invent ideas about how the world could be different (regardless of whether these alternatives are preferable or not); *envisioning* emphasizes a mode of imagination through which more desirable visions of change are identified; and *hoping* shows the ways in which imagination can help hold open space for imagined change even when shifts seem unlikely or unimaginable.

### **Identifying Alternatives**

In his reflections about where the field of critical pedagogy stands today, Weiner (2007) has observed that we are living during a time when "structures hostile to human agency have placed a vice grip around our imaginations" (p. 72). He argues for the cultivation of a "critical imaginary" in which people learn to rewrite the categories of the real and "imagine beyond the possible" (p. 69) "so that the improbable *feels* possible" (p. 72, emphasis in original). He advocates a view of imagination in which it is

manifested in the act of seeing what is not yet there, speculating how it might come about, rewriting what has come before, and breaking through 'the real'; it is thinking the improbable as possible, just as it is feeling, seeing, hearing, sensing, and doing that which is not supposed to be felt, saw, heard, sensed, and done (p. 58).

For Weiner the cognitive, affective, and emotional experience of imagining possibility helps “offer real people in real situations real tools by which they (we) can make their (our) lives more free” (p. 66). For Levitas (2007), the “Imaginary Reconstitution of Society” allows holistic conversation and democratic debate about the visions and core values that underlie all political perspectives, whether existing or imagined. Radical imagination in this mode identifies possibilities that do not currently exist by creating alternative ideas about how humans might relate to one another socially, politically, and economically.

Wanda told me she has spent a lot of time thinking about imagination in relation to individual growth and social movements, both as part of her work in a graduate program and within her arts education work with young people and adults. For Wanda, trying to describe imagination is a “huge question” that she’s been grappling with for the past few years and for which she doesn’t have a “pat answer.” Still, she offered this helpful description:

I think imagination is the function that, a facility we use to create, to generate meaningful innovation. So it's like a cognitive thing that we do, it's not dreaming. And we use the different parts, the different knowledge, the different information that we have and in the recombining of all that knowledge to create new things, new meanings, that's imagination. So, being able to imagine a different world is that function. But also being able to think about what I'm gonna eat today, that's also imagination. The function that reaches out in the world, uses what it already has, and then meets the world in a creative, meaningful way, that's imagination to me.

In his dissertation about the resonance of Zapatismo, Khasnabish (2005) affirms the importance of imagining possibility, writing “it is perhaps axiomatic to note that if one cannot imagine alternatives it becomes impossible to move toward them” (p. 231). Many of my research partners seemed to agree, offering perspectives that imply an almost commonsense agreement that identifying alternatives is an essential ingredient in creating change. Ivy told me “I come from the assumption that if you can’t envision it, you can’t build it.” Francine said, “I think if people can't imagine alternatives, they can't create alternatives. And so I think all of us need to imagine alternatives in order to create them.” Odessa echoed, “people need to envision different possibilities for them even to happen, you can’t have something happen without the idea that it’s possible,” adding that creating “relationships and other types of economies, other types of ways of living and interacting with, other ways of living...it takes stepping out of what you know.” “What else is possible?” is the key question in Patrick’s theater work with young

people. Amid this shared sentiment, these statements tell us little about the more specific relationships my research partners believe exist between the capacity to imagine alternatives and the ability to create positive transformative change. What assumptions about the specifics of change processes underlie the idea that identifying alternatives is important in creating change?

For Vince, creating change depends first and foremost on our ability to imagine the difference between what is and what might be:

Well, I'm gonna give you a slightly academic answer, I guess. So Bourdieu has this concept of heretic subversion. And really the idea is that we can't change things to be different until we can imagine what that difference is. And so really this gets back to this idea of vision being crucially important, that if we can't imagine something different, then we're cursed to go through the perpetuation, rearticulation, reinscription process without ever changing things. And the world is constantly changing, right? That's not something that actually happens, but there's moments of significant social change that involved, well McAdam talked about this process of cognitive liberation, right, particularly with the Civil Rights Movement in his case where there came a point at which participants in the movement recognized that they were capable of changing things, that they first recognized that things could be different and then felt empowered enough to be able to make that change. And often, that's about looking around at each other and saying, hey, we're actually a bunch of people and, oh, we did something that made an impact yesterday, we can do something else tomorrow. So, vision and seeing something different is kind of square one in that respect.

Creating change is not like playing a game of chess, where movement happens only when clearly identifiable human players shift pieces. Human and other systems are sufficiently complex that it remains impossible to predict with certainty how or when change will take place, a reality that may sometimes feel as irksome to activists trying to create change as it is to social scientists trying to explain it. Tom talked about this reality as the “fundamental contingency of the world,” noting that “things change regardless of what we do.” Still, for both Tom and Vince, identifying possibilities is a critical element in trying to “dictate that change in ways that we would like.”

Quincy spoke about imagination in a different way, explaining that there are particular “imaginaries” that shape how we interact with the world and which constrain possibilities for more liberatory kinds of actions. Creating change requires developing alternative maps that can guide our way toward new courses of action:

I think the way people normally interact in the world is mediated by certain imaginaries, like the market and the state and the rational individual and all sorts of stereotype dichotomies, like male

and female, like upper class and lower class and black and white and dropouts and graduates. I think there's certain ways of imagining the world that are subscribed to by most people and that kind of give them guidelines or maps for interacting with the world. And so, I, as someone who wants to interact with the world in different ways, I want to circulate alternative imaginaries.

For Ivy, identifying alternatives by “valuing the edges” – politically or culturally – helps constitute a wider field of political possibilities which can make ideas or practices that may have been viewed as threatening seem more acceptable by comparison.

I think in a lot of different ways, so I think a lot of Right wing, the way in which the Right wing has pushed the center of this country to a very conservative place by naming all of these grossly horrible things and on a similar level I've heard people say things around, especially in the civil rights Black power context of the fact that there were people naming what seemed like so extreme notions of Black power and arming yourself and dah dah dah, made Martin Luther King and some of that movement look like, oh yeah, okay let's take that. So I think part of it is moving the needle from what seems normal and that's both in terms of what we name and what we talk about and what we practice. And part of that's also valuing the edges. So valuing folks who, whether it's dress in ways that are very not mainstream or some of the more extreme political actions.

In this view, valuing the edges “just pushes the boundaries of what seems possible.”

For both Ivy and Tom, placing one's efforts and one's movement in a stream of political action that stretches into imagined past or future can also help contextualize today's efforts, offering a kind of perspective that can be both usefully humbling and which may also encourage more bold thinking. Here is how Ivy put it:

And part of it is just pushing what we are willing to imagine is possible. I have this idea that what we as left wing radicals in this era or in Seattle think is possible will be humorous in 100 years. You know? I think people will look at us and probably be able to contextualize where we were, but also be like, god you guys were limited. And I think we think of that as people who, you know, worked 100 years ago. So part of it is constantly pushing, constantly re-imagining, really questioning what's possible. You know?

For Tom, historical work can help “get people out of seeing their world as *the* world, to particularize experience for people is important, so that they realize there's all kinds of different ways that things can be.”

Possibilities that emerge from both historicizing and imagining futures help ward off a sense that the present is inevitable. Whether “seven generations” thinking that intentionally takes into account both recent ancestors and the next few generations to come or the millennial scale thinking advocated by the architects of the “10,000 year clock,” a participatory art installation and pedagogical tool being

constructed in a Texas mountain, imaginings that stretch from deep past to distant future, can help challenge the sense of immediacy encouraged by capitalism. Thinking in terms of what Brian Eno interestingly called a “long now” (Brand, 1999) can also play a part of creating a sense of responsibility the impacts of today’s human communities.

For Erin, imagining alternative possibilities can provide “release” in the context of a socio-historical moment in which many people find themselves in perpetual survival mode, but they can also provide directional guidance for action. But as Justin Paulson (2010) notes, when crises open, “social movements need to be able to fill those spaces on short notice and to do so they need to already have imagined at least the possibility that alternatives may yet exist” (p. 36). Erin puts a similar idea this way:

I think the current forces and the certain need for people to be in survival mode are certainly fighting those [imagination and vision]. So if folks can be invited to have some imagination I think it's huge. I think it can be a release for folks, although I'm not quite sure how much opportunity people have to do that. So on one level, the lack of freedom, the lack of imagination, the lack to be creative, the lack to not sort of like just figure out how you're gonna fit yourself into that perfect slot that society wants us to fit in, I think the lack of that on some level can also be pretty explosive and can maybe push people in a different direction. But they still have to have some ability to even think about that there is another direction possible in order to go there.

A mode of imagination which, as Levitas (2007) puts it, “embodies the refusal to accept that living beyond the present is delusional, the refusal to take at face value current judgments of the good, or claims that there is no alternative” (p. 294) may be profoundly threatening to those who would prefer things remain as they are. And according to some of my research partners, like Xavier, that’s precisely why it is so necessary today:

Not only are other worlds possible, other worlds exist and they're here and now and all around us. And [my students are] always saying, how come I never heard of this? And I will say, well, I think there's an unconscious quote conspiracy to make sure most of you don't know that other worlds are not only possible, but existing because we might start doing that shit ourselves here and now and that is really scary to the people who run the world.

## **Envisioning**

For Maxine Greene (1995b), the “social imagination” is a “capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, and in our schools” (p. 5). It reflects a “mode of utopian thinking” (p. 5) which she, like others, argues can be a powerful tool for

enabling action in pursuit of a socially just world (Generett and Hicks, 2004; Van Heertum, 2006). Theorists who join Greene (1995b) in advocating the cultivation of “thinking that refuses mere compliance, that looks down roads not yet taken to the shapes of a more fulfilling social order, to more vibrant ways of being in the world” (p. 5) emphasize the need for different kinds of visions. For instance, Stout (2011) believes collective visioning provides opportunities for building social movements and a sense of community empowerment absent within approaches that are primarily oppositional, but argues that such visions are guided by a “realistic” bent. Webb (2009), on the other hand, has argued that despite the dangers people associate with it, a holistic normative blueprint is necessary for guiding needed social change. Although there important differences exist in the kinds of vision advocated by theorists and practitioners, within the frameworks on which I draw in my discussion in this section, there is a shared assumption that engaging in and sustaining change work requires more than knowing that alternatives exist (my focus in the previous section). To motivate action, imagined alternatives must be more desirable – longed for, wanted, idealized, or believed to be more pleasurable – than other options. In this mode, radical imagination can help people link imagined possibilities with longing for change to identify and articulate their own individual and collective visions of better circumstances. My research partners articulated a variety of beliefs about envisioning as a mode of radical imagination that can foster radical change.

In the following quote, Wanda differentiates vision from dreaming and imagination:

And vision is again, I think, something different, although they're all three [vision, imagination, and dreaming], I think, kind of connected. But I think that vision is a felt sense, I think it's kind of like a misnamed thing, a felt sense of the future. It's kind of a felt sense of orientation. Where are you going?

Despite the widespread sense that vision matters, and is fundamentally tied to the idea of desire, my research partners articulated different understandings of vision and talked about its significance in different ways.

Wanda, Uma, Patrick, Kevin, and Ivy shared reflections that highlight the practical significance of vision as a motivational force that can have tangible impacts. For Wanda, visions are a kind of goal.

Unlike imagined alternatives, which can be filled with any values, vision links to our sense of rightness, goodness, and desirability:

And then vision is, like I say, it orients the imagination. It takes that function that we have and connects it to our ethics and our morals and our spirituality and the traditions of our ancestors and allows us to envision the future. So taking that imagination, first of all taking the dreaming of what we are and this imagination of what we can be or what we can do and then orienting it towards a goal.

For Uma, the fact that young people have very little say in the conditions in which they live can create a sense of inevitability, describing school in particular, she notes that young people can feel the impact of the constraints around them: “you must follow this rule, you have to take this class, you have to study this curriculum to get to the next level.” To counter this, she believes they need to “start to imagine things that they could have power over in the future.” Patrick told me, “without being able to dream a little of something different, then any kind of motivation to action can't really be possible.” For Jack, counter-hegemonic visions can enable action: “I think a vision of a healthy world, a peaceful healthy world is something that can perhaps motivate people in their everyday lives to have a kind of alternative conception of how they could be living.” And, Kevin and Ivy both emphasized that, in their view, settings goals and intentions can shape reality in important ways. As Kevin put it:

It's not just a belief, the power of intention is a proven, scientifically-tested aspect of reality.

And Ivy remarked:

And I've also read that they've done studies and having a goal, whether or not you achieve it or not, makes you more productive. So I think that there's just something incredibly empowering about visioning and about taking the time to value yourself enough and value what you want and need enough to really create a vision, to create a picture of what the world could be.

For some, visions of desired change can serve as tangible goals that encourage and guide action. As Anna put it, “how do you know where you're gonna go if you haven't thought about it or planned it at least a little bit. We all need to know what we're working towards.”

Some of my research partners highlighted the critical importance of visioning processes being collective endeavors, rather than individual processes. Rita and Jack's comments framed this commitment in light of the idea of resonance. To them, visions which resonate with deeper individual and collective

desires about how people want to live are more promising than those which do not. For Jack, currently circulating discourses narrow the range of visions which seem available. As he explained, new visions can captivate and gain stakeholders in powerful ways *if* they resonate as preferable alternatives in the context of people's day-to-day existence:

Well, I think the thing is that one of the most difficult challenges for creating social change is that people, the system that we're in, it contains its own self-reproducing premises. If we think about just the economic aspects, not just economic, but economically, we're all caught up in this treadmill of production, where we're producing things, we're consuming things, capital is accumulating, economic growth is being generated and we hear these, pick up on these discourses all the time that are circulating in terms of what is considered to be normal and appropriate and the kind of vision of the future within the world, the bubble that we're living it. This kind of future of endless growth, it's a future that, as I say, is not really sustainable. It's a dead end. But we need to be able to provide an alternative to that hegemonic vision. And it needs to be an alternative that people can actually recognize as preferable in various ways, not just preferable in a sense of, well this is our only survival strategy, but preferable in terms of recognizing that their own lives can be enriched, they can be living richer lives... And then, I think, as I say the tricky part is a lot of alternative visions are posed so abstractly that it's hard for people to connect to the quotidian world that they're in and how does this actually connect up with an alternative future?

Rita also talked about resonance in relation to an art installation she created. In her view, a felt sense of connection with a project can create a situation in which people will begin to devote their time and energies to manifesting or maintaining it in the world. She explained that in the context of fragmented lives in which people feel many demands on their time at any moment, people need to see themselves as stakeholders in the vision somehow. As she put it, "you need to have a vision that captivates a group in some way so that they will make it either manifest or make it sustainable in some way. Khasnabish's (2005, 2008) research about the international resonance of Zapatismo among US and Canadian organizers – an approach which places imagination, creativity, and possibility at the center of revolutionary struggle – captures some of the ways resonance can occur at the scale of movements. Such resonance can mean that desires that may have spent long periods smoldering seem to suddenly ignite, spurring action for change.

Some of my research partners were adamant about the importance of visions being generated in collective and deeply democratic ways. For Anna, anti-oppressive visions require incorporating a multiplicity of viewpoints "because having one solid vision, individual vision, means that there isn't often

room for other people in that vision.” In her view, “in order to have a true anti-oppressive vision, you have to incorporate all these other people’s ideas.” Some critiqued authoritarian visions of both the left and the Right. Odessa’s comments below call up a critical perspective about visioning which associates it with the dangers of totalitarianism and fascism. In her view, shared vision can mitigate some of the potential danger associated with personal vision:

I try to say it cannot be your personal vision. Right? I mean, I guess there are some people who have pushed their own personal vision and have been successful, but we don't wanna go there, right? Like Hitler or something, you know, had this vision, but that for sustainability and social justice it needs to be a shared vision.

For Quincy, the “bankruptcy” of traditional leftist approaches can partly be understood as stemming from anti-democratic approaches to social change. A deeper practice of democracy calls for the practice of sharing power in the work of collectively visioning a better world:

I think another reason imagination is especially important now or kind of democratizing of people's involvement in imagining alternatives is important is that I think all of the traditional leftist approaches to organizing have proven themselves to be pretty futile or bankrupt. Like traditional business unions and political parties and NGOs and bureaucratic nonprofits and I think one of the biggest problems with all those institutions is that they allow the kind of division of labor within them between the leaders who get to design the visions for the movement and those who follow the visions. So I think breaking out of that division of labor and enabling everybody who's involved in the movement to be part of constructing the visions for what the world should look like is pretty crucial.

According to Lou, being vigilant about the sometimes insidious ways authoritarianism can show up even in anti-authoritarian left movements requires intentionally visioning in ways that are evolving, organic, and collaborative:

I mean that's a challenging question because I think that the left has, there's a history of having kind of a rigid, orthodox left, whatever, have a rigid sense of how the world should work or what justice would look like and that's also the critique of traditional left. But those strategies or those impulses, the old left is not so distant from our heart sometimes. This was something that came up when I was in Mexico in 2005 during the election with regard to the Zapatistas, what was it? They had a new campaign, but again the idea was that is it enough to simply say 'we're not like the old left, we're not like Stalin or Mao or whatever'? But those authoritarian principles or impulses can often show up as one is invested so heavily in a project. The reason I'm bringing that up is visions of course are essential to get anywhere, but they run the risk of becoming dogmatic. I don't know, I think that would be the main cautionary thing or important historical point of reference, to say that dogmas are also visions, right? And that how do we ensure that a vision is evolving, organic, collaborative, you know, as opposed to just something that's imposed..

For some, identifying and articulating desired changes are not enough. Instead, you have to really *want* change in order to work for it. In other words, the feeling is as important as the vision itself. But my research partners have different ideas about how specific this desire needs to be. For Francine, there is some value in articulating concrete visions. As Francine put it, going forward requires that we “talk about what we really want and talk about what that might concretely mean.” But Hannah has a different perspective, stemming from her belief that our visions are obscured by a variety of oppressive discourses and worldviews from which even imagined escape is impossible. She questions whether we need to be able to see the changes we want in order to pursue better, healthier relationships. Instead, a desire for change and set of guiding principles may lead the way:

Well, I was just thinking, whether you have to be able, I almost said you have to be able to see it, to manifest it, but I stopped because I don't know that you have to be able to see it. I don't know. I'm not sure there is any space that's free of inequality and oppression. And so if we wait until we can see it, we're gonna have trouble. That's what I tell my students, ‘you're gonna make a mess, I mean, no one is outside of this. We haven't solved it yet, there's no free space.’ So, maybe just that idea that you have to be able to see it, I think you have to be able to want it, and have to have some basic understandings of maybe some principles, but I don't know that we know what it looks like.

## **Hoping**

For some, hope is grounded in an ability to put the kind of “instrumental” visions I described above to use. Halpin (2003b) advocates a notion of “aimed hope” that “has a better specific state of affairs in mind” (p. 397). Like Stout’s (2011) emphasis on “realistic” vision, hope for Halpin functions best when it does not diverge sharply from what is considered realizable in light of current arrangements. For others, however, “radical,” rather than “realistic,” visions are necessary. For Dixon (2012), for instance, energy and action can be derived within strategies based “not on what seems ‘possible,’ or even necessarily ‘winnable’” (p. 46), but on visions which actually reflect the world people would rather live in, regardless of how “realistic” these goals are considered to be. This can be seen, for instance, in the efforts of prison abolitionists who call for the complete elimination of the prison system, as well as the social, economic, and political infrastructure that supports it. Radical imagination in its hopeful mode encourages trust that change work matters even when there is scant or no evidence to support that belief. It can nurture

alternatives to despair, political depression, cynicism, and nihilism – what some call the “doom and gloom” (Johnson, 2005) aspects of education for social justice – by seeking resources that will motivate, energize, and inspire. It can help channel outrage and indignation into work to create more desirable arrangements.

For some, narratives of doom and gloom are justified on the basis that they reflect actually existing problems that must be addressed. They ward off a Pollyanna-ism which, in a different way than political despair, can also thwart action for change. The worry here is that “keeping on the sunny side” can actually result in complacency. But writers like Howard Zinn (1994) and Rebecca Solnit (2004) argue in a compelling way that neither the historical record nor our current situation is entirely negative. Individual leftists and our movements need to learn to better take stock of changes that have been produced through collective action. As Solnit (2004) has put it, we need to learn better to “count our victories.” She advocates building movements that don’t just respond to the evils of the present but which call forth the future possibilities. She argues that we need a “revolution of hope” (Solnit, 2004).

Public intellectuals like Zinn and Solnit have been among those who believe that “in spite of all the evidence of terrible things happening everywhere,” small acts multiplied by millions can and do transform the world (Zinn, 1994, p. 208). Creating a more accurate historical record that includes stories that have been obscured or ignored can buoy hope by allowing and encouraging us to imagine changes we might bring about through similar acts of reform, rebellion, or autonomy.

Although in the reflections below we will see reverberations of the ideas I addressed in sections above, a specific discourse of hope (and its related themes) that seemed to point to something a bit different than the other modes I have addressed above ran through many of my research conversations. The reflections I share in this section reference ideas like belief, faith, and various forms of affect that provide motivation and inspiration for change work that is often difficult and may feel quite unrewarding.

For some, like Vince, hope is necessary to counter the “doom and gloom” often prevalent even in justice movements:

And that's part of the vision thing, too, is like trying to help provide something other than the doom and the gloom, so that people can get excited and get that spark that Emma Goldman talked about is so important in revolution, that we have to get people to have fun, right? We have to be able to see something that we can do about stuff.

For others, like Erin, it is directly linked to purpose and motivation, a belief that things can be better.

I would translate that to just hope. Without vision and imagination, then what is there, right? We need hope. And without hope there's no drive, there's no movement, there's no purpose. So I think being able to imagine something differently is a thing that'll drive people to push forward, 'cause if people become hopeless then what do we got? Nothing.

Tom talked about the significance of contextualizing current circumstances by looking to history for examples of times when different social, economic, or political arrangements existed. From his perspective, this can help expand vision and enlarge one's sense that change work can have an effect:

I guess this just comes back to what I already said around demonstrating to people that things can be different and that's very motivating. It has been for me around, it does not have to be this way. Because if you believe it does, what's the point of acting? It's pointless. And so that's the primary value of vision in terms of encouraging action, it's possible, it's not fruitless. Political action is not fruitless. We can create a different [world]. Another world is possible is the tagline. And that feels very politically important because if you actually don't think that then you're not gonna do anything about it. Whereas if you really do and you have particular visions of what that might be, something you're working towards.

Xavier told me he thinks that people need to believe things can be better in order to work for change:

I think one has to believe that there's some utility, not futility, to what one's doing. One has to believe that other worlds are possible. One has to feel that something can be different, that something can change for the better. And I think that's what that imaginative visioning function can give to us.

For Benjamin, an element of faith is important, but similarly argued for a specific kind of faith grounded in a trust that one's actions will actually have positive consequences:

So, I guess the easy answer is to say that people need something to believe in if they're ever gonna be, if they're ever gonna take a step. I mean, in the union movement everyone's always like, you can't expect people to just make a leap of faith, right? I mean I think faith is actually very important. I do. And I think you have to have some faith, but I think you also have some faith that what you're doing will cause something better and some idea of what that better thing is. So, on the one hand having this vision of a better possibility is important.

But for Solnit (2004), hope can also spring from not knowing what the future will bring, when the desire for change burns bright, but the future remains unknown:

Hope is not about what we expect. It is an embrace of the essential unknowability of the world, of the breaks with the present, the surprises. Or perhaps studying the record more carefully leads us

to expect miracles – not when and where we expect them, but to expect to be astonished, to expect that we don't know. And this is grounds to act (136).

For Zinn (1994), it is the endless succession of surprises, “zig-zag” moves in the direction of a more decent society there is reason to be hopeful. “Hope is believing in spite of the evidence, then watching the evidence change” (Wallis, quoted in Loeb, 2004, p. 5). Radical imagination, in this mode, understands that it is impossible to know what changes are possible. In light of this awareness, it can hold open space in an unknown future so that it can be filled with unimaginable possibilities. In a similar vein, as I noted above, Tom referred to the “fundamental contingency” of the world, the idea that things change regardless of what we do. Others agreed, claiming that the world constantly changes in ways we can't fully account for. Both Odessa and Kevin talked of trying to explicitly unsettle the dichotomy of “realistic” visions versus “unrealistic” ones. As Kevin explained: “How do we know what is possible? We don't really ever know what is possible in the future, we can only dream it, and then attempt to meet that.”

In a context in which dystopian fantasies are far more prevalent than hopeful visions and deep despair and cynicism are common, Rita talked about hope as the need to be open to the possibility that miracles will occur:

In my eco-art class, I get all these environmental studies students who just laugh when I talk about reconstructive visions, they go, what do you mean? We're all gonna die, can't you see what's going on? And I'm like, how do you live with that? We have to have miracles in the world and miracles occur because people have vision, so that's why this moment really requires it.

For Odessa, the relationship between hope, possibility, and action is a little more complicated. On one hand, she explained her alarm about a situation in which the dominant conversations about climate change do not adequately express the reality of the ecological damages that are likely to take place unless major social, political, and economic changes occur. Like others, she talked about worrying that the planet may be at a “tipping point” beyond which destruction of planetary life systems will be inevitable. “I read the conservative science on climate change that scares the shit out of me, I start crying.” And she told me she is aghast that neoliberal consumer activism is promoted as a way to deal with the egregious human and environmental destruction caused by capitalism.

On the other hand, her perspective is complicated by a variety of other thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. I share this extended reflection below because it so beautifully captures the kinds of ambiguities and contradictions many radical educators feel as we struggle to make sense of a complex world, name our sense of prospects for change, and identify our place in both. And it illustrates the complicated nature of hope:

...of course everybody writes about now is the time we're at the tipping point and all of this and of course inequality's growing and you have, but at the same time if you look at all of what people have written through history, it's always this, we're at this crux of collapse and catastrophe. And I was watching this documentary on the middle ages, again, just for some perspective, and I'm thinking, you know, things are a lot better now than they were. At least in terms of how it's, you know the Middle Ages or the Dark Ages or whatever, just bands of people were just going through and wiping out, killing randomly, and that's happening in certain parts of the world, but I think, I was reading about this is actually the most peaceful time in human history. Scary enough. So, you know, I'm a bit of a relativist. Don't get me wrong, I have many moments where I'm like, oh my god, we have to change things right now. I know, the science on climate change says we have to, we're at the tipping point, we need to stop using fossil fuels right now. And so I talk to my students about that importance and I talk to my students about kind of this neoliberal push, surge, that's kind of happening, it's been a process of social change. Now we've gone from thinking that we're a society to thinking that we're a bunch of individuals, individual consumers, no less, and that's where our power is, as an individual consumer. We can change the world by buying this green product. And I'm like, that wouldn't have gone over 30, 40 years ago. That just wouldn't have, and now we think that's okay. So I think that there are definitely things that are happening in this time that make this time the time that we need to work on, that are important. But then I think about human history and I'm like, I have these relativist moments. And I'm like, maybe it'll all work out, I don't know! [Laughter] And a lot of times my students get totally, totally depressed and they're like, how can you look so happy? And I'm like, you know, I mean I really believe we need to work for change and I will always work for change, but at the same time at some point that sun's gonna go supernova and we're all gonna be gone! [Laughter]. You know, we can do what we can do with the lives that we have now and make them meaningful, but in the end, that's all we can do.

In many ways, the hope these educators articulate resonates with what Generett and Hicks (2004), drawing on Cornell West, call audacious hope, “the ability to take action when there is little evidence that doing so will produce a positive outcome” (p. 192).

### **Action**

Imagination conjures change. First we dream it, then we speak it, then we struggle and build it (Reinsborough, 2003).

When I speak with the student participants in classes I teach at the University of Washington, I am always excited to explore with them their ideas about the relationship between dreaming of change and working with others to manifest these dreams in the material world. Reinsborough's view, pithily stated above, describes a very linear process that does not quite jibe with the sequence of these processes in my own life. For instance, in explaining my own commitment to living collectively, sharing power and making decisions in deeply democratic ways, and sharing resources across vastly different access to wealth, I point not first to my dreams of living these values, but instead I point directly to small scale experimentation in these practices that I grew up with as a direct source of inspiration. It's a bit chicken and egg – certainly action can unfold from ideas, but the reverse is also true.

What is true in this section is that the three modes of action described below help illustrate that radical imagination can move beyond the world of ideas, awareness, thinking, dreaming, and visioning and be embodied in action and that individual and collective action in line with one's deeply held beliefs and desires can be profoundly important, sometimes in ways we may not even be able to anticipate. Like Generett and Hicks' (2004) ideas about audacious action, these conceptions of imagination are “framed to not simply envision possibilities that are presently elusive but must include a theory of action, of taking steps to bring that vision to embodiment” (p. 192). *Organizing* describes a few methods of considering change processes and developing organizing strategies in line with ideas about how change happens; *playing* focuses on activist nimble-ness and creative dexterity as a form of imagination; and *prefiguring* theorizes prefigurative politics and strategies as an embodied collective form of radical imagination.

### **Organizing**

Struggles to dismantle capitalism, social injustice, or the kinds of ecological degradation humans face today require short term tactical planning, long-range strategizing, and movement building. In its organizing mode, the radical imagination is pressed into the service of radical change by shaping collective action in tangible ways. Here, radical imagination involves an ability to speculate about the results that might unfold from different courses of action might have in order to thoughtfully assess which

steps may be most promising considering an organization's or movement's goals and aims. Readers are likely to notice resonance among my research partners' reflections here and their views shared in other sections above. What distinguishes this category from others before is the emphasis on directly linking the visioning modes of radical imagination with other kinds of collective action in the world.

"Capitalism is really killing us, you know. It sucks. It's there," Carmen told me. Like others, she also observes that we are in a historical moment in which people around the world are recognizing and acting on this awareness in greater and greater numbers. She shared a view articulated by several of my other research partners when she observed that it's time for our movements to examine whether they can "go from being a defensive movement, fighting back to hold on to what people feel like they are losing versus being a visionary, forward looking movement that says we can really provide for all of people's needs because there's an abundance and we can only do that if we get rid of the market." When I asked her to tell me more about the significance of imagination for political action, she described vision as the "subjective" side of the struggle and explained that, coupled with a clear view of the root causes of today's problems, it is a key to building the movements we need today:

This is really an imagination, at least as I, well for me as I understand it, it's really the subjective side, it's the subjective and political side of the struggle. There are the conditions which are really negative and adversely affecting us and the only way we can really bring about a resolution to the problem of poverty or homelessness or race or sexual or you know national oppression is to really, I believe change society is that to have a vision. You have to not only know what you don't like and what is wrong, but also two things. You need to know why those problems exist, root causes, and the energy, the thing that keeps you going that long term goal is really reorganizing, recreating society that is in line of with the vision of the community, society, world that we wanna live in. So without vision people can not move forward. They can fight back. They can try to hold on to things that they are losing, where they fight really defensive battles it seems to me. But a transformative struggle is, you've got to envision something that doesn't exactly exist. That's hard.

A variety of radical left movements today frame their efforts primarily in relation to what they are fighting against. *Anti*-oppression, *anti*-authoritarian, *non*-violence movements are understood largely in relation to the problems they seek to disrupt or transform – oppression, authoritarianism, and violence. The positive content is often not as explicit as what movements seek to dismantle. Anna notes that this

can result in criticism leveled at movements from their opponents that can diminish hope. Still, she thinks there is some merit to this critique and that there is value in identifying collective direction:

And I feel like that there's constantly this criticism of different social movements of 'well, all you do is complain about... But you know, how do you think it's going to be different?' And while I think that's a combative question and that it's supposed to demoralize and diminish people's hope, I think it is a reasonable one... And it's a hard question. We don't always have the exact answers. 'Well this government doesn't work, but I see that this would work and this would work this way, this would be this system' We don't have all of those things planned out and I think that that's okay as long as we have a vision of how we could see the world where there's equity in different things.

Others agree, noting that they feel troubled by an emphasis on critique at the expense of clarity about what is being sought. Referring to nonviolence movements, Sarah told me, "I don't like the non- word there, the description of something as not something else," noting that she aims to use language that describes what a more desirable alternative would entail.

Ivy believes that "seeing the world as fucked up is really easy," which challenges left radicals to try "to see the world as potentially good," balancing the work of critique with the constructive work of building visions and alternatives.

And then also envisioning the world leads toward strategies for changing it. So the way in which you want to see the world end up really points to how you want to movement-build. You know, is movement building based on living in community and I think there's a lot of folks who practice that in various ways. Is it based in sort of a religious context? Is it about people living individually but coming together? In what ways does art play into movement building? I think your visions for a better world, a utopian world, really dictates some of those questions.

For Rita, balancing critique with developing "reconstructive visions" (Heller, 1999) can help counter the despair associated with looking at what's happening in our world, which, in turn, can build more sustainable movements:

I don't think that we can galvanize social movements unless we have vision and imagination. It's not enough for people to just sit together and complain about what's wrong. It gets despairing and depressing after a while and people burn out. But I do think people get lifted up by visioning. It feeds them.

Some of my research partners, like Nadine and Martin, spoke more specifically about the role of radical imagination within specific movement organizations, noting that visions of desired change framed

as aims and goals can help organizations move beyond survival and routine and suggest a mechanism with which to gauge the effectiveness of our work.

I think largely it's to have, and I hate to sound instrumental, but that end goal piece. And I know that this was a lot of the conversations that we had in [organization name] kind of informally, 'what does that look like? What's the ideal that we're striving for? If we know that the organization is working well, what does that mean, once we get to that stage?' And I think what we got most frustrated with when we were organizing was that it became sort of survival and routine.

Framed as ideals, visions of desired change can also provide strategic direction. I asked Nadine to tell me about the hesitancy I thought I heard in her comment, "I hate to sound instrumental, but...." Nadine's response reflects the complexity of blending an "organic" process of dreaming with what may feel like a more linear, pragmatic work of identifying what a group is seeking:

I mean I guess just that we have to have a goal and we have to reach that goal and we have to take these certain steps to that goal and that seems counter to what a vision or imagination is, that it should be this more organic process, even getting into that imagination state. I think that was where we also struggled as [name of the freeschool project she participated in]. Some of us, like myself, we're much more linear, pragmatic, and that was our role in the group for sure and other folks were much more loose and wanting to explore more things and so that was kind of our bind, too, and why we never really came to a meeting where we tried a visioning process because we couldn't really even decide how to do it or why we were doing it or what the outcome of this visioning meeting would be. And so I'm hesitant to say you do a vision because it's one of the goals you should have as an organization, because I think that's counter to why you need the vision in the first place. It's not just a goal, but we still need to have these bigger ideas so that we can start to think about how we want to get there or what is the ideal.

For Martin, also, creating new ways of relating and meeting human needs which actually reflect the values held by movements demands "serious" attention.

I think revolutionary political action is about visioning a new future, is about envisioning a new way to do things, a new way to provide education, envisioning a new way to provide material needs, health, housing, food, envisioning a new way for people to communicate, envisioning a new way for people to reduce the amount of violence and coercion. When I explain to people what is anarchism, I have a big anarchist tattoo on my arm and I work in the service industry, people ask me all the time what it is. I say 'anarchism is a political framework that attempts to reduce the amount of violence and coercion, what we do is that we try to make systems of human organization that aren't so coercive. So people volunteer and people work in a nonviolent way.' And I think that's it, that's what's important is to figure out ways to do what we're doing in a more egalitarian, less coercive way and that requires imagining because they don't exist right now.

As Miller (2004) puts it, "[t]he biggest obstacle to social change in the United States may be our imaginations" (p. 11). By his reckoning, "most people have concrete experiences of the dysfunctional and

violent nature of the dominant economy” (p. 11) but lack experiences that would actually allow them to envision more desirable possibilities Martin thinks are required today.

Still, those who are committed to doing the important work of envisioning new ways of meeting needs and desires need to be clear that there are many options available. The politics of rejection evident in the anti-capitalist imaginary articulate a clear “no,” but tell us little about what alternatives might entail. Solidarity economy (Miller, 2004), participatory economics (Albert, 2003), municipalized economy (Biehl, 1998), community economy (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2009), and cooperative economy (Alperovitz, 2012) are just a few of the alternatives to capitalism being proposed by anti-capitalists. And while these approaches may share some common ground, they are also animated by different assumptions and values. In light of these differences, for Martin, it is important that movements get clear about what, precisely, they want.

So, again, if we're talking about setting up projects, let's start from what we want. Do we want cheap healthcare? Do we want free healthcare? Do we want affordable healthcare? From the visioning level, start with that. Do we want childcare that is accessible? Childcare that is affordable? Childcare that's intentional? Do we want all of this? To not just go from what we can do with our resources, but to actually start the visioning process.

The consequences of not naming specific goals means that movements and their organizations will be reduced to taking whatever comes our way:

And I feel like I've been involved in projects where we do that first [identify goals] and I've been in projects where we just kind of roll over that. And I'll go back to [an organizer's conference he described to me] as an example, where we definitely had time 'cause we would spend two weeks being like 'what do we want the theme of this conference to be? Who do we want to come? Do we want Noam Chomsky? What are our aims?' We can aim as high as we want, but if we don't take the time to develop those aims then we end up getting whatever comes our way

There are examples of groups and movements prioritizing this work in the context of urgent and persistent organizing campaigns. In line with Khasnabish's (2005, 2008) observations about both the strong resonance of Zapatismo among US and Canadian activists and organizers and the Zapatista's emphasis on imagination, quite a few of my research partners mentioned their approach as inspirational and effective. Martin told me,

And I think that you see, groups that do that well, for instance, the Zapatistas, I think that's a really good example of a movement which has taken a lot of care in imagining what they want

prior to carrying it out. And also there's of course smaller, more domestic examples, but that's a great example of a group that has made a vision and then, like, 'okay, this is our vision, how do we get there?' as opposed to kind of the perverted reverse of that process which is, 'we have 20 people and 1,000 dollars, what can we do with this?' not 'what do we want to do?' and then figuring out what you need. Does that make sense?

In addition to offering direct and clear solutions to the kinds of problems faced by poor and working people, those most negatively impacted by existing and expanding inequities, for Benjamin, envisioning change in ways that allow people to take creative imaginative action can be successful in a way that predictability is not:

you know, the American labor movement was turned around in the late 80s and early 90s when essentially it was at a massive low point and it was turned around by low wage immigrants who everyone said were unorganizable, would never do anything because the boss has so much power over them and they have no history of organizing. But Justice for Janitors blew the thing off the roof because they actually thought of new ways of doing things. So it wasn't like going to the boss's house and try to knock out some cards, try to get on a petition, have a little action. They took over the whole fucking city. It really was an imaginative campaign in a very real sense of what the word means. They had to rethink the entire way of doing things

Without an imaginative aspect, movements can replicate strategies that might have made sense in one context, but do not in others. Reflecting on the alterglobalization movement of the late 90s, Benjamin remembers "we had this incredibly imaginative moment in '98, '99 that we just replicated in all these circumstances that were completely, they didn't make any sense." Imagination can offer an antidote:

the imagination comes in where you have to sort of deal with what's in front of you, I guess, and find creative ways [to deal with] obstacles...It's like, I guess maybe, you know the expression if life gives you lemons, make lemonade? Well maybe not. You know, I guess maybe make something else.

## **Playing**

The playful and creative mode of radical imagination enables flexibility and dexterity in our actions and a sense of joy and humor in the context difficult work. Beyond nurturing fun and friendship, a playful approach provides movements with a heightened capacity to respond to political repression and maintain a commitment to non-violence even in the face of what is often violent state repression. Also, without it, as Benjamin observed above, groups may get locked into employing old methods of change which may be ineffective given vastly changed contexts or because they may be easily anticipated by those in power.

A playful approach is what allows people to take life's lemons and, instead of making lemonade, make chocolate mousse.

Shepard's (2012) study, *Play, Creativity, and Social Movements*, explored the idea of play as a form of social critique and creative intervention with a long history and many current manifestations. Play in the form of tactical pranks goes back "at least as far as the Trojan Horse" (Boyd and Mitchell, 2012, p. 1). Today's radical clowning has direct links to jesters of years past, the wise fool who is both absurd and has a point (Shepard, 2012), as well as links to the idea of "Trickster" present in many indigenous traditions (Archibald, 2008). While Shepard, and others like Kelley (2002), Duncombe (2007), and Boyd and Mitchell (2012) note that the presence of creative interventions in social movements are anything but new, describing additional roots in Dadaism, Surrealism, and Situationism, they also note that over the past few decades, activists have produced a flourish of new approaches which required new terms: "flash mobs, virtual sit-ins, denial-of-service attacks, media pranks, distributed actions, viral campaigns, subvertisements, culture jamming, etc." (Boyd and Mitchell, 2012, p. 3). For Shepard (2012), play is a noun and a verb, an action, a process, and a spirit. Despite its long history, it's also as "a new philosophy of political engagement" (p. 23). Play holds a variety of promises for social movements: creating community and bringing in new members, supporting group development, sustaining organizing efforts, connecting hearts and minds, validating different modes of working in the world, providing a coping mechanism and set of resources for those struggling with oppression, and supporting holistic movement strategies. Because of its ability to meet affective and emotional needs, disrupt monotony, and interrupt the flow of business, and challenge social mores, play can be an important resource in challenging capitalism. And, as Shepard puts it, a mix of "play and protests, songs and colorful signs" utilized in movements underscores that "fighting authority can be a joyous endeavor" (Shepard, 2012, p. 18).

A number of my research partners mentioned or spoke at more length about the importance of creativity and play in movements, but the need for creativity in movement building and strategizing was a thread that ran throughout my conversation with Sarah. More than the kinds of visioning some of my research partners described above, Sarah told me she believes that playful, creative action can have

immediate, positive payoffs, leaving people feeling powerful, inspired, and, in turn, able to generate still more creativity. For Sarah, imagination made manifest in the form of clowning (Peacock, 2009), ethical spectacles (Duncombe, 2007), or other creative interventions (Boyd and Mitchell, 2012) can have powerful impacts on both participants and observers, a topic I'll return to in more depth in the next chapter.

For Sarah, play isn't just about fun and celebration. In a framework of nonviolence and nonviolent struggle, she explained her belief that cooperating with "the system" is what allows for its perpetuation. People's power, on the other hand, rests in our cooperation with each other and our ability to withdraw our power from the system. As she sees it, creativity, imagination, vision, and humor are involved in the ability "to think about how do we not do what they expect us to do? To think outside the box." Creativity allows organizers to avoid replicating tactics and strategies mindlessly, a concern raised by Benjamin which I noted above. It enables what I think of as a kind of organizing dexterity, an ability "to do the unexpected."

I actually myself like to frame nonviolent struggle, nonviolent direct action as endless creativity. I don't like the 'non' word there, the description of something as not something else. And so when I try to put it in a positive way, I call it endless creativity or boundless creativity because that's what makes it possible for us to achieve change, social change, and confront really heavy stuff, heavy oppression, without resorting to the use of arms ourselves is that creativity. Because we do what they don't expect us to do. We come up with a creative, a different creative response and we need the creativity to keep coming up with always new things, always different things, to keep them off balance.

In Sarah's view, this idea of keeping oppressors "off balance" has practical tactical appeal:

the military doesn't really know what to do with that kind of creativity, the military and the police don't know what to do with it, don't know how to respond to a clown as opposed to a demonstrator. It could be a clown who's demonstrating, but because it's a clown, how do you respond to this?

Barbara Ehrenreich (quoted in Shepard, 2012), has echoed this sentiment when she explains that people "must find, in their movement, the immediate joy of solidarity, if only because, in the face of overwhelming state or corporate power, solidarity is the sole source of strength" (p. 2). In this context, humor and pleasure can help disarm systems of power (Shepard, 2011, p. 3).

In addition to creating confusion that may be difficult for police or military to respond to, clowning as practiced by groups like the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army can benefit movements both by impacting those inside them and those outside. As Shepard (2012) notes, clowning disrupts the demonization of radical social movements that often occurs in corporate media by allowing movement participants to present their efforts in ways that can be perceived as non-threatening by those outside them. It can create pleasurable reference points for people observing activist efforts, which, in turn, can allow people who might otherwise turn away from ideas, actions, or people they do not understand to pay attention. And, as doctor and clown Patch Adams put it, “the most revolutionary act you can commit in today's society is to be publicly happy.” For decades, clowning has been a key practice in Adams’ efforts to revolutionize healthcare, infusing fun and play in the mutually necessary work of healing individuals, communities, the world, and the healthcare system itself. For those inside movements, the play of clowning can allow people to shed “activist armor” and instead “rediscover their spontaneity and their emotions” (Shepard, 2012, p. 249). Further, some believe that trading in an angry mode for a playful one may allow participants to sustain their efforts over the long haul.

Sarah described another form creative interventions can take:

...in Germany during the G8 protests where a whole bunch of people just took off all their clothes and marched completely naked and so it was the naked bloc as opposed to the black bloc. And, you know, again just kind of taking the repressive forces, the military, off guard that way, like, oh my god what do we do with a whole bunch of naked people coming at me?

In addition to taking those in power off guard and finding new creative wellsprings among activists, through its own seeming absurdity, this kind of creative action has the power to highlight the absurd violence of the state. In a similar vein, Mitchell and Boyd (2012) described 2011 protests in Belarus in which people would gather in public spaces and merely clap their hands in unison. “The result,” they explain, “was the bewildering sight of secret police brutally arresting people for the simple act of clapping their hands – a powerful challenge to the legitimacy of an increasingly irrational regime” (p. 46).

Even those advocating a politics of play often recognize its limits in the context of a world in which many do not have access to the basic necessities of life. While creative interventions can have enormous

affective and ideological impacts for people inside and outside movements for change, they rarely are able to create “life rafts” (Shepard, 2012) of material support for those who need them most. Sarah spoke about this near the end of our conversation when she talked about the importance of moving away from “expressive” political action toward an “instrumental” mode:

Expressive actions being ones that say, I believe such-and-such, you know? I don't like Republicans or I'm against the war or something like that, as a way of expressing ourselves. As opposed to instrumental ones being about, I'm gonna stop the war and enough of this vigiling or whatever I'm doing to say how much I hate the war, I'm gonna stop it.

In this light, if organizers are serious about creating alternatives to capitalism expressing our ideas and creating celebratory spaces needs to be joined by the difficult work of creating tangible means of meeting basic material needs. As some of my research partners told me, radical imagination can be helpful in this work, too.

### **Prefiguring**

The prefigurative mode of radical imagination allows us to bring our deepest dreams of change into the present through embodied and collective experimentation today. For Dixon (2012), prefigurative politics “name[s] activist efforts to manifest and build, to the greatest extent possible, the world they would like to see through their means of fighting in this one” (p. 43-44). According to Boyd (2012), prefiguration as creative strategy “put[s] forward a fragment of something visionary, desirable, and just beyond the realm of the possible” (p. 83) in order to “offer a compelling glimpse of a possible, and better, future” (p. 82). It allows people to build relationships, projects, and counter-institutions that reflect deeply held values, rather than waiting for a far off future revolutionary moment or process of change to occur.

Prefigurative approaches can be individual or collective. They can reflect the popular idea that individuals should “be the change they wish to see in the world,” or, as in the context of this chapter, the idea can take on a collective nature – as collective visions materialized. Prefiguration can be small, medium, or large scale. For instance, it can refer to the creation of a single intentional community, to the kinds of ecovillages described in Litfin’s (2013) book that describes her research about fourteen

ecovillages around the world, or to the development of a large scale, networked community of communities, as in the Global Ecovillage Network. Prefigurative projects can arise spontaneously and be short term – they can be “temporary autonomous zones” (Bey, 2003), a pop-song-length flashmob in a corporate chain store – or they can be planned, durable, and institutionalized, as in the network of counter-institutions created by members of Movement for a New Society described in Andrew Cornell’s (2011) *Oppose and Propose*. They can take shape in any domain of human life as people seek to prefigure new ways of meeting human needs and desires for education, food systems, housing, social spaces, decision-making structures, conflict resolution strategies, and so on.

At its heart, prefiguration is a “materializing” way to talk about imagination and possibility that some of my research participants think is necessary. Here is what Quincy had to say:

There's a book by Stevphen Shukaitis called *Imaginal Machines*, I think that's a pretty cool way of thinking about visions 'cause it's a kind of more materializing way of talking about imagination. I think maybe one problem with talking about imagination or vision is that it could potentially reinforce a view of the world that's split into like idealistic realm of representations that's separate from material realm of represented things....so I like the phrase imaginal machines because it kind of brings down images and visions into the material world as machines that people can subscribe to and that follow very material pathways through speech and media.

Not all of the approaches described here are inspired by the kind of Deleuzian framework described in Shukaitis’s (2009) *Imaginal Machines*, but the effort to join the ideal and the material is precisely what is at work in prefigurative politics.

Prefiguration can model the kinds of non-hierarchical relations many of my research partners believe are necessary today. As Carmen explained,

The other thing is that we do have to model. I mean we talked a lot about this in [a political education organization she described working with]. In the movement and in the work we do we want to be as - my comrades would kill me - we want to be as horizontal as we can. I mean we want to not reproduce the oppressions and the hierarchies of the existing society

Her comment “my comrades would kill me” reflects a tension among radicals on the left between Marxist-inspired left organizing, typically hierarchical and centralized, out of which Carmen’s politics at least partly emerged, and the decentralization and horizontal commitments of anti-authoritarian traditions which Carmen also finds some promise.

Modeling change assumes that engaging in new ways of relating with others create understandings which are qualitatively different than those grasped through intellectual work alone. As Tom put it, “what's best is not only to be able to envision something, but to actually experience a different world.” As Duncombe (2007) describes, one of the challenges of prefiguration as a social change strategy is that the “islands of decency” (Horton, Kohl, and Kohl, 1998) people are trying to create exist in a sea that is hostile to them:

It is no mystery why prefigurative politics are a failure. The same people who imagine this new world of democratic cooperation live the rest of their lives in a world of individualistic competition. They are not prefiguring a new world as much as acting out the old one in a hopeful new setting (Duncombe, 2007, p. 172)

But this seemingly pessimistic view of prefigurative approaches is tempered by another more hopeful one. Duncombe also adds that the experience of doing something new and different “is a transformative experience in itself” (p. 172), helping participants identify pitfalls and opportunities within nonhierarchical organizing, opening space for new dreams to arise, and giving at least a glimpse of what a radically reorganized society might look and feel like. And even short stints of prefiguration can be powerful. One of the concluding scenes in the film *This is What Democracy Looks Like* (Big Noise Films, 2000) captures a WTO protestor breathlessly exclaiming “I will absolutely never be the same again. I’ve never seen this before. I’ve never seen people stand up like this before, and I’m going to take this home and this is going to keep me going for a long time because it’s really opened my eyes to some amazing possibilities.” For many who participated in the week-long protests that successfully shut down the World Trade Organization’s meetings in Seattle in November 1999, the ideas of democracy embodied in the streets, the convergence spaces, and independent media being produced over the course of those five days was one short moment that reflected an extended process of organizing, planning, and collective decision making that had taken place for months or years before and would stretch out well into the future beyond that week.

For Anna prefiguration within the no borders movement along the southern border of the US with Mexico created a space for joint vision-building and inter-group cooperation which allowed her an inspiring glimpse of what a world without state-imposed borders might look and feel like:

And it was really inspiring that we could all agree on the same vision and have different tactics of how we wanted that to happen. And I think the No Borders camp was, even though there were a lot of things that were problematic about it was really amazing because we took over this space that was where the border wall ended in California and San Diego and Mexicali and Calexico and there were anarchists from Mexico on one side and then there were anarchists from the US on the other side and then also undocumented peoples and immigrant populations and catholic workers and like No More Deaths and all these people. And then we all met and had a camp for three days. And for a while we were able to be at the place where the wall wasn't separating us anymore, but then the border patrol did push us so that we were both on the other side of the walls again because the border patrol also spent the night with us for four days.

Most, but not all, of my research partners shared with me their belief that reform-based approaches are inadequate to achieve the root-level changes they believe are necessary to create more equitable, healthy social world. In light of this belief, many see prefiguration as an alternative approach that can create a piece of the world they want without waiting for some future time. As Mackelbergh (2011) has put it, prefiguration removes the “temporal distinction between the struggle in the present and a goal in the future; instead the struggle and the goal, the real and the ideal, become one in the present” (p. 4). In this way, it provides an alternative to reform-based approaches to change. Here is how Vince talked about the importance of prefiguring desired change:

To some extent, the thing that's most important for me, anyway, is being able to imagine small-scale counter-institutions as viable, as something that is reasonable and something that is all around us. And so I guess that's the thing that I tend to go back to is whatever the context is, I think to myself, how are people organizing around this who are the stakeholders here and how are they making decisions? How are they structuring themselves? Because that right there is an opportunity for creating democratic liberatory organizing structures, whatever the example might be, whether it's at the P-Patch or whatever the example is. I guess that's the thing that I think about is being able to imagine not just butting our heads against the brick wall of reform, it's starting to create those prefigurative counter-institutional structures that provide the resources that we need to then take the next step that we can then build on.

In *Oppose and Propose*, Andrew Cornell (2011) describes the decentralized network Movement for a New Society (MNS) which established a variety of alternative and counter-institutional projects in cities around the United States. Among other foundational ideas, these projects were rooted in the twin beliefs that these institutions could serve the pedagogical function of validating the values that undergird such

projects while *also* meeting basic needs in grassroots, non-hierarchical ways. During the course of its members' efforts in the 1970s and 1980s, members of MNS built projects to meet basic needs like housing, education, communication, food, and neighborhood safety. In West Philadelphia, some of the infrastructure created in the 1970s and 1980s remains today. But a part of MNS's philosophy also included the idea that prefiguration must also be linked with a movement-building approach aimed at engaging people who do not already identify with radical justice movements otherwise they run the risk of functioning as "clubhouses for self-selecting radicals" that can be perceived as "irrelevant of off-putting to people whom organizers would like to become more politically active" (p. 162). In Xavier's view, in order for such prefigurative projects to effectively do this work to draw in a wider community than the small subcultures that often create them, they need to be functional, joyful, and perhaps above all else, welcoming to people who may not currently see them as relevant in their own lives.

Not only is prefiguration about creating institutions which allow people to meet human needs and desires in ways that are consistent with their deeply held values, it can create profound cultural change and paradigm shifts in assumptions about what a meaningful life entails. For some of my research partners, creating new cultures can combat isolation and alienation, by building solidarity and validating hard work:

And a lot of creating new worlds is about creating new cultures, because we can't exist as individuals entirely alone. And it is, I think a lot of the sort of burnout effect comes from the feeling of I'm all alone trying to do this stuff. It's really hard, we always fail. And so the kind of being part of a culture that somehow validates that struggle, somehow makes it feel as though there are some rewards from doing this stuff. I think that that's really crucial..

Countercultural spaces like cooperatives, communes, or housing collectives are often criticized for encouraging a "drop-out" lifestyle approach to change which many see as ineffective in impacting larger systems and only available to those with protective race or class privilege. But at their best they provide relational "islands of decency" (Horton, Kohl, and Kohl, 1998) that as Ivy told me can be viewed in broader collective "cultural" rather than individual "lifestyle" terms. As Ivy described, discrete projects, such as housing collectives, need not function as discrete entities – they can be part of broader movements

that link the building of prefigurative institutions with broader cultural change, providing people with many opportunities to meet needs and desires in different ways:

so you don't have to live in a collective to be part of the culture, but that you could build a culture around resource-sharing and in fact there's a lot of work already being done around that, that there could be a real culture around experimenting and attempting to live small pockets of a utopian world within a capitalist system, and I think there's already a lot of models for that. And I think that those things could actually be really intertwined, an identity that includes open source software, burning man bike culture, anarchist collective living, Marxist, you know, the word's not coming to me, but you know, movement-building I think would be really powerful.

Such spaces can help buoy people in the context of a difficult world, actually bolstering possibilities for people to be involved in political, social, and economic change efforts in sustainable ways over the long haul, rather than seeking escape.

For Ethan Miller (2004), “our movements will not succeed until they begin to include within their scope the construction of *lived alternatives* that meet our basic needs and allow us to experience new possibilities” (p. 11, emphasis in original). But for him, as for Ivy, isolated projects themselves are not enough. Linking up these small-scale experiments – the “small pockets of a utopian world” Ivy mentions – in order to create larger scale, broad movements is essential. And it is precisely what those involved in the solidarity economy are trying to do:

The process of coming together to make creative, concrete connections between initiatives is at the core of a solidarity economy strategy. By linking together previously-isolated and disconnected efforts, we can begin to construct the skeleton of a new economy within the body of the old (Miller, 2004, p. 9).

Earlier in this chapter, I described the sense of urgency that shapes Xavier’s teaching and efforts at change. This same urgency drives his call for prefigurative experimentation:

So that's why we have more reason, I would say, now than ever to be conducting experiments to be trying to figure out what to do otherwise. We're gonna be forced. Call me a survivalist, but I truly believe that maybe within my lifetime, certainly within the lifetime of my children, those of us who know how to live off the land and perhaps have established ourselves on the land, because that takes a while, you don't just show up and, hey, I'm ready to go now, where's the wheat? Where's the fruit trees? Well, they take ten years, you know. Those are the people who'll survive, those are the people who'll get through

For Davis, getting started now is also important, but as he observed “it's kind of like the academic problem of when you're doing research, that instead of actually writing, you end up just wanting to keep

reading more and more and more. Just keep reading more” In his view, “a lot of activists have seen enough to start rooting themselves in, and so the idea is to start that process as soon as possible.” As he put it to one of his students: “man the most important decision that you have to make right now is just find a place, find a place that you wanna live for a long time and go there...go there and start thinking and working and start making mistakes so we can keep building something.” Getting started right now, beginning the process to “create the new world in the shell of the old,” as the popular adage goes, is what prefiguration is all about.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I utilized the ideas of perception, vision, and action to organize and describe nine distinct but related ways my research partners talked about radical imagination and its significance for social justice movements. It might be useful to consider Hutchinson’s (1996, p. 46) metaphor of “compass bearings” to understand these modes as a range of “resources for open-ended journeys of active hope” which can “encourage discussion in both formal and nonformal educational sectors of possible, probable, and preferable futures” (pp. 47-48). I also highlighted a range of reasons radical educators believe imagination is central to the pursuit of justice, a topic to which I return in chapter 7.

The next chapter concerns how my research partners seek to nurture these distinct imaginative modes in the different kinds of learning communities in which they work.

# Chapter Five

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## Provoke

*How do we produce a vision that enables us to see beyond our immediate ordeals? How do we transcend bitterness and cynicism, and embrace love, hope, and an all-encompassing dream of freedom, especially in these rough times?*

Robin Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*

As a young child, during bedtime trips to “Marshmallowland,” guided by my mom’s words I climbed imaginatively out my bedroom window and aboard a large pillow, traveling up and up, above my house and neighborhood, looking down on my elementary school a mile from our house and nearby cities, eventually landing in a Willy Wonka-esque city made of my favorite treats before making the reverse journey back home, dozy and ready for sleep. (No wonder I grew up with a mean sweet tooth!) My mom also encouraged play with the idea of lucid dreaming, inviting my sister and I to imagine intervening in our nightmares by turning around to face an antagonist to ask directly “What do you want? Why are you here?” Since I had a lot of scary dreams as a kid, I remember excitedly reporting times I felt I had been successful using the strategy during the night. As I mentioned in the last chapter, envisioning was also typical during gymnastics meets, allowing me to both soothe my nerves in the heat of competition and to remember strategies for landing difficult moves that I had drilled over and again during practice sessions.

As I got older, these kinds of creative imaginings were supplemented with more explicitly political and strategic uses of vision and imagination. Although “strategic planning” came to be familiar language in workplaces and political organizations, opportunities to really engage in it seemed few and far between and typically were not deeply collective processes. Rarely did these processes seem to be rooted in or even articulated with the broader desires for social, political, or economic change that seemed to be shared in these settings. I remember a social work class I took during my master’s program in the late 1990s in which the major assignment for the quarter was to write a “manifesto,” individually or in groups,

to guide our work as social change agents, whatever our specific “helping” field of practice. (It should be noted that this course was taught by a professor who told us that he had originally entered the field of social work on the “misunderstanding” that the field was actually named “socialist work.” He always said this with a glimmer in his eye and I was never quite sure how serious he was.) I found myself thrilled about the process of writing a personal manifesto, feeling quite sure that my years of studying political theory, engaging in various types of activism, and having many heated political discussions, I had sharpened my politics in a way that was sufficient to the task at hand. I was surprised, unsettled, and humbled by how difficult I found the process. This experience was pivotal, a stark moment during which I recognized that I desired many more opportunities to do this kind of imaginative work, work that would both invite and push me to deliberately imagine and articulate links between my desires for a better world and my own actions to bring it about. During the intervening years between that social work class and now I have hungrily sought out situations supportive of infusing my activism and teaching with imaginative and visionary work and I have been lucky to find many spaces to collaborate with friends, colleagues, comrades, students, community members, and others in the pedagogical work I do as a classroom teacher, as an organizer, and as a member of numerous intentional communities.

Although Odessa was able to share with me many concrete strategies she has used to nurture radical imagination in her students, in describing specific activities she has used she told me “I don't have any kind of critical thinking or deeper thinking than, okay, I just must include that.” Continuing, she told me, “I wish I had more of a skill set and more intentionality behind what I do.” Although I have been lucky to find many spaces where others have been willing to experiment with me and share their own practices for cultivating radical imagination along the way, until relatively recently, like Odessa, my use of these strategies was largely experimental, ad hoc, and far less theoretically grounded than other aspects of my pedagogy. Part of my reasoning for undertaking this dissertation was to broaden my repertoire of pedagogical strategies and to deepen my understanding of what these strategies have to offer our social justice pedagogy and our transformative social movements.

My discussion in this chapter takes up my second set of research questions, asking: What range of pedagogical strategies do radical educators utilize to provoke and practice imagination in different kinds of learning contexts and communities? And why? My goal in the chapter was to probe Harlap's (2006) contention that "*creating new visions and opening new imaginations for what the world could be* is a process of visioning the future that may be exclusive to the arts" (p. 196, emphasis in original). Knowing that my own early and more recent pedagogical forays aimed at radical imagination have certainly included "artistic" experimentation, but also included plenty of other approaches, I wanted to examine more systematically what range of approaches could be fruitful in this work and what different promises varying provocations might offer.

Readers will notice the title of the chapter is "provoke," a term I have borrowed from Hung's (2010) discussion of geographical imagination. Although we will see below that the assumptions about teaching and learning that my research partners hold vary quite a lot, I have chosen this heuristic as a chapter title because it implies that the conditions within which radical imagination might develop and be practiced can be intentionally cultivated, perhaps through pedagogical actions. Although this chapter narrows the dissertation's focus by emphasizing the kinds of pedagogical steps educators may take in this work, the range of actions particular educators might take in their efforts to create such conditions remains quite broad. For instance, in his investigation of social justice education in the field of Outdoor Education Studies, Frazer (2009) distinguished between and among "instructional" actions (such as utilizing democratic and participatory approaches or project-based instruction), "dispositional" actions (such as modeling or "seed planting") and "curricular" actions (such as covering diversity and social justice theory or programming for direct action and praxis). In this chapter, I have not made similar distinctions, instead opting for a more open discussion utilizing the language of pedagogical "strategies" that allows me to give at least a little attention to each of these kinds of actions. Despite this open container, like Hung's examination of geographical imagination among youth activists, the discussion below is organized primarily around the kinds of "activities" my research partners believe may effectively foster the kinds of radical imagination identified in chapter 4 (a limitation I revisit in Chapter 7). Throughout the chapter, I

have tried to both demonstrate the range specific strategies my research partners utilize, but also to place these specific approaches into the context of my research partners' broader philosophies of education, offering enough detail so that readers might be able to picture the distinct contexts in which my research partners' efforts take place. That the dual goals of the chapter were to identify a broad range of imaginative strategies radical educators use and to probe in more depth the reasons they find these strategies promising created a challenge I am not satisfied I have resolved well.

Nevertheless, in the chapter that follows, I describe five main strategies my research partners told me they utilize to promote, provoke, nurture, or otherwise call radical imagination into being within different kinds of learning communities and try to speak to the question of why they believe these strategies may be promising. The chapter is organized into discussions of the following approaches, each of which is comprised of more specific strategies that I describe below:

1. *narrative strategies* that tell new stories about ourselves, our interconnections, and change processes
2. real or imagined *travel* to places close to home or far away
3. *composition* via definition building, guided visioning, or design projects
4. *experimentation* with the arts or creative interventions
5. the *experience* of creating prefigurative relationships, projects, or movements

Within each of the sub-sections for these approaches, I have tried to provide evidence of the different strategies my research partners use followed by a more in depth discussion that highlights some of the divergent thinking about teaching and learning held by my research partners.

### **Narrate**

In his book *The Truth About Stories*, writer, scholar, and humorist, Thomas King (2003) begins each of the book's chapters with a story about the earth and how it floats on the back of a turtle, explaining that in every telling, while the story may vary in details, sequence of events, voice of the storyteller, or dialogue with the audience, the gist of the story remains consistent. With each chapter, the book builds a case that

the stories we tell have a profound influence on us, individually and collectively, and the world we share. As I wrote in the introductory chapter, King states, “Once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world” (p. 10). According to King, this reality can have liberatory or stifling effects. The critical importance of story in processes of meaning-making and the relationship of meaning-making to creating a more just and equitable world is the subject of the following section.

In this section, I describe three main approaches to story I saw in our conversations: telling new personal stories relation to power; telling new stories that reflect an interconnected and “ecological self”; and, telling new stories about how transformative change occurs. Each of these practices aims to foster capacities related to different modes of radical imagination described in chapter 4 which I will touch on in my descriptions below.

### **Narrating Lives**

Shepard (2012) has written that meaning construction is a social movement’s primary function and that story can provide a potent vehicle for that process. Through “stories people come to grips with their lives and struggles, connecting personal challenges with larger contests over meaning” (Shepard, 2012, p. 15). Among social justice educators, “personal” storytelling, especially creating and telling stories about the events that have shaped one’s life, has had an important role for a variety of reasons. For instance, Vivian Paley’s (1990, 1992, 1997, 2001) extensive writing has described in rich detail story-based pedagogies that nurture connection across difference and engender more just ways of relating among children in grade school all the way down to “the youngest storytellers,” two year olds. Hutchinson (1999) has emphatically argued that young people be encouraged to tell what she calls “core stories” – “stories that reveal the self and the meaning that one attaches to life experience” (p. 75) – because of the possibilities they offer for nurturing and sustaining dignity, essential in the search for justice. The curriculum of the “Storyline” approach described by Romano (1999) invites kids to invent people and events that may help them better understand issues like homelessness and their impacts on particular people.

As an institution that has put story at the center of its approach for over 80 years, the Highlander Research and Education Center has played a pivotal role as a hub for social justice movement teaching, learning, and pedagogy (Ebert, Burford, and Brian, 2003; Horton, Kohl, and Kohl, 1998; Thayer-Bacon, 2004). Generations of activists, organizers, and people who wouldn't identify in those ways have gathered at the school to describe their experiences with abusive power in order to create more robust shared understandings of the nature of the oppression and exploitation and to generate organizing strategies to bring about self-determination and equity. Highlander played a key role as a training center for labor movement organizers during the 30s and 40s, for freedom fighters during the Civil Rights Movement, and it continues to play an important educational role in today's movements. Over its existence, it has served as a hub not only for organizers and organizations in the US South that it was primarily created to serve, it has drawn activists from all over the US and the world together to experiment with and generate popular education theory and practice.

As a school, Highlander has been “one stop in the continuum of defining and trying to solve important problems,” problems too big for individuals to solve alone – a place to “think and plan and share knowledge” (Horton, Kohl, and Kohl, 1998, p. 148), often through storytelling that occurred during less structured social times and during more structured workshops. The popular education approach practiced at Highlander has emphasized practices that invite and teach people to deeply value the knowledge they have accumulated and built based on the lives they have lived, even if they might not know it.

Several of my research partners talked with me about their use of popular education-style personal storytelling strategies as a way to generate collective knowledge about systemic problems and, as a result, open new possibilities for action for change. Ivy, Erin, Carmen and Rita all talked about their use of story, each in slightly different ways.

Erin, an organizer, therapist, and university-based educator who trains pre-service social workers described story work as a way to hit her students “at home” and create a sense of relevance. In this approach, tapping into personal story can help her social work students understand their own connection

to the systemic issues their future clients will likely struggle with, a move that might foster empathy and understanding, and potentially a sense of solidarity and recognition that transforming the systems that negatively impact their clients may have positive impacts on their own lives:

Like, who in the classroom doesn't have health insurance for their child? Or who's made decision about their education based on providing health insurance for their child? Who's grandmother can't pay for her medications? And try to get to those personal stories to then get them to sort of like, well let's look at systemically how, like to get them to understand this is a systemic issue and then take it out from there.

For Carmen, a co-founder of a popular education organization and a university sociology professor, surfacing personal stories in classrooms and community popular education workshop settings is a useful process for collectively pursuing the historical materialist analysis she hopes to cultivate. Making space for people to share and listen to “ah-hah moments” related to their own political awareness allows groups to develop a “broader tapestry of the variety and depth and breadth of...oppression and exploitation and unhappiness with the way the world is.”

For Ivy, telling stories about the trauma people have survived in the context of residential youth arts camps can be a step in the processes of healing. Ivy believes this kind of storytelling can be empowering for the teller and, like Carmen, agrees it may also generate new understandings for listeners. But for Ivy, for storytelling to be meaningful within a social justice-based praxis, it must be done with an awareness of how participants are situated in relation to structures of privilege and oppression and invite active engagement and risk-taking among all participants. Ivy described to me a “heart circle ritual...where people get to step into the circle and name the truth in their heart as it relates to stepping into more power,” which often involves naming trauma, and some of its complications in the context of learning communities made up of people with different experiences of trauma and access to privilege. As Ivy put it, trauma naming is not enough: “if it's just the saddest story competition, that's dumb.” Although there are certainly things that need naming, as Ivy said, “I'm interested in how do we push everyone. How do the privileged kids also have those experiences, so that those who are less privileged get to benefit from that?”

Rita told me that from a young age she has eschewed dogma and both her political and pedagogical influences reflect an eclecticism that suggests that she finds value in multiple traditions, intellectual

frameworks, and practices. Although she spoke with me about pedagogical practice in community venues, like salon-style discussions and museums, as well as movement schools, she also talked with me about teaching in an interdisciplinary arts program in which she and her students utilize multiple artistic approaches to make sense of the world in which we live, articulate their understandings, and envision possible alternatives to current economic, social and political arrangements. Her coursework engages students in exploring such societally and personally significant themes as body image and its societal influences, war, globalization, and the multiple ecological crises we face on the planet today. For Rita, storytelling can play a pivotal role in long-term, grassroots organizing and in liberatory learning by helping people closely examine their experiences of oppression, connecting us across similar experiences and differences, and mobilizing individual and collective action.

In Rita's view, the kind of widespread learning needed to build effective movements for change demands "armies of people doing what's called community cultural animation" in a variety of venues, not only traditional schools or academic contexts. She spoke of the value of drawing inspiration from alternative schools, such as Institute for Social Ecology and Goddard College, and groups like the Beehive Collective, whose political education work takes place in universities, at street demonstrations, in community and movement organizations' spaces, and everywhere in between. She also spoke of expanding story-based learning to a range of less formal and more familiar, inviting contexts, venues like neighborhood community centers and people's kitchens where pressing problems can be explored with neighbors and community members. Telling me "we need to have more salons" in people's homes, around kitchen tables, she explained "some people won't go to a cafe, they won't think that's an appropriate place for them to go, or to a gallery. They'll feel the exclusiveness of the venue."

Rita's comments highlighted the importance of examining the resonance of individual stories with those told by others, also shared by Carmen. Her reflections also speak to the value of story as a way to touch people in ways that will be memorable over the long haul, leaving them, as Odessa put it, "hooked" and "invested." Rita explained:

Well, I think the goal is to do grassroots organizing and to find ways that people can understand their oppression in very personal ways, so that they will be grounded in the practice of changing what they're experiencing. So that's what brings me to pedagogy as a practice, and particularly art practice, because they get an opportunity to tell their story. And when they tell their story and hear the stories of others and see how they percolate with each other, then it embodies what they're learning in a way that will be with them for the rest of their lives. They can't let go of it at that point. And so it's that kind of grassroots organizing that needs to happen right now.

Preskill and Brookfield (2009) also argue that stories can provide powerful resources for analyzing experience. When shared in a group context that begins with space and patience before moving to a more critical approach, people can gain confidence in the idea that they have important knowledge about the problems that shape their lives. Noting shared themes and differences across stories told, exploring what is left out of stories, and linking individual stories with larger structures and systems can allow people to depersonalize the problems they face and instead see them as public problems. Ultimately, critical analysis of conditions can be brought together with explorations about what a more desirable state of affairs might look like. But like others in recent years, Preskill and Brookfield (2009) also problematize the idea of “learning from experience,” writing

First, we are wary of any approach that views experience as a unified, monological phenomenon capable of teaching us only one set of lessons. Experience is ambiguous, multifaceted, and open to contradictory readings and interpretations. Events are what happen to us. Experiences are what we construct out of those events. Experience is not a river in which we swim like a fish unaware of its surroundings; it is rather a constructed phenomenon created when we ascribe meaning to events (p. 105).

Social Justice Educator Lee Anne Bell has also problematized some of the ways “experience” may invoked:

We talk about concrete experience, but I do not know what this means. To me experience “exists” through interpretation. It is produced through the meanings given it. Interpretations of lived experiences are always contextual and specific. Experiences are contingent; interpretations can change....Perhaps remembering an experience recomposes it so that its meaning changes (quoted in Adams, 1997, p. 33).

Although in this section I have highlighted comments by my research partners which resonate with the assumption that telling one’s story can open previously unavailable understandings or courses of action, I do not wish to suggest that the educators whose voices I have highlighted here do not also share Preskill and Brookfield’s or Bell’s concerns that our constructed interpretations also need interrogation. In some

cases, my research partners' comments revealed a concern with critical investigation of these narrated stories; while in other cases they did not, I do not assume or wish to suggest that this means that they do not believe in the importance of subsequent critical investigation.

Some of my other research partners offered a different view of story, highlighting the critical importance of directly confronting the relationship of power and privilege to the stories we tell. Like the perspectives I described above, several of my partners believe stories can play an important role in charting new courses for radical action taking, but in some different ways than in the methods described above. For instance, recall from the last chapter Hannah and Xavier's reflections about their students' investments in privilege. Some pedagogical viewpoints emphasize that members of dominant groups are taught to internalize superiority and defend privilege in part through their investment and participation in dominant cultural storytelling. In this view, the telling of personal narratives can function to reinscribe existing abusive cultural power. As Preskill and Brookfield (2009) explain, some stories can be restricting, justifying bigotry and reinforcing abusive power relations, stories such as those that claim "that lighter skinned people are more intelligent than darker skinned people, that power should be kept close to one's chest, or that women are too emotional to think rationally" (p. 105). Keating (2009), for instance, has written about working with students who have been "seduced by stories of rugged self-enclosed individualism," through which they have come to perceive themselves through "hyper-individualism's solipsistic lens." This, she believes, makes them "callous and judgmental" (p. 213). It is a central part of Hannah's agenda to help students identify how these kinds of stories shape their understandings of the world.

Hannah and several of my other research partners suggest that while our stories do matter, we also need to cultivate skills for understanding how our own interpretations and narration of our lives are shaped by the ways in which we are situated in systemic power relations. From this perspective, storytelling can also be a key ingredient in opening a sense of possibility for change, but in ways that emphasize examining one's resistances, seeing gaps in one's thinking or perception, or identifying discourses that shape viewpoints in previously unexamined ways. This is a different way of working with

storytelling than the methods noted above and seems particularly significant among educators working to construct what Curry-Stevens (2007) has called a “pedagogy for the privileged” or what Swalwell (2011) refers to as a social justice pedagogy with “the elite.” For instance, Xavier told me that with one group of undergraduate students, it became nearly a term-long project for students to explore their own “wall,” asking

What is it that keeps me inside myself relatively inside the dominant order? Why is it that even though I took this class because I wanted to do and be certain things that now when I start exploring...I reach this limit? And what is the nature of my own set of limits?

As Arnold and his colleagues have written, “a central purpose of social change education is to build resisters” (Arnold et. al, 1991, p. 132). However, this sense of resistance is directed toward dismantling a harmful status quo, to damaging social relations, etc. It is a complex, and essential, task to complicate the idea that resistance is always positive or always serves the ends we seek. Resistance can arise from critical thinking and the desire to challenge and change harmful relationships, but it can also arise from, among other things, fears associated with losing one’s power. In this context, story can become a tool for investigating one’s own resistances to discover how the investments in privilege we have been systematically taught can actually sabotage commitments we wish to make to pursuing a healthier world for all.

For Hannah, the critical examination of our ways of making sense of the world – including the stories we tell about our own lives – is an essential part of the struggle for social justice and a critical part of her work with preservice teachers. Politically and pedagogically, anti-racist consciousness-raising is at the top of her agenda. Remarking “I love tellin’ you about this,” she told me her own process of “radicalization” took place as a result of working closely with people of color facilitating mandatory trainings with white people about race. Describing her job working in interracial teams doing mandatory diversity trainings for the welfare department as a rare opportunity, she told me “I mean, as a white person my job every day is to try to talk to other white people about race, that’s not the normal job.” In these collaborations, she told me, “like a fish being take out of water, I was seeing through a new lens.” As she put it, “I’d never in my

life had my racial paradigm challenged, but I was workin' with people of color who were radical and they fucking challenged the living shit out of me. And my whole world blew up.”

Describing her beliefs about the prospects for social change, she told me she feels an affinity with the legal scholar and critical race theorist Derrick Bell, author of books like *And We are Not Saved* (1989) and *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* (1992), “who basically says racism will not end, and from that perspective challenge it. It's the false hope that causes people to settle for small things, like affirmative action, right?” Like Erin, Carmen, Ivy, and Rita, whose use of storytelling pedagogies I described above, Hannah wants people to be able to “really get that bottom-line, society is hierarchically arranged by social groups and they're given more or less value and that profoundly shapes our experiences and our perspectives” and “to be able to see social systems and their relationship to them so that they can challenge inequity.” But she also emphasized an element of this work that others did not speak to as directly. “I want us [white people] to fucking admit that it feels good to feel superior. From the time I could open my eyes, I have been told I am superior and I want us to stop lying about it.”

In helping people come to grips with these realities, she told me she believes empirical evidence can be powerfully persuasive, giving examples like Michelle Alexander's (2010) *The New Jim Crow* and Picca and Fegan's (2007) *Two-Faced Racism*, showing films like *Race: The Power of an Illusion* (Adelman, 2003). As she puts it, “you can't argue with it. It's empirical. And that matters, right? That does wake people up.” She also engages her students in participatory exercises to learn to distinguish among the kinds of descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative assessments they engage in regularly in order to “get through to the fact that we're not objective and we're seeing through filters.”

It is in this broader context that she also uses story. Rather than unproblematically valorizing student “experience,” she told me about several ways she uses story as a method of exploring how we are situated in structures of oppression and power in ways that shape how we narrate our lives. She described one of her favorite activities, which she calls “Frame of Reference,” in each student takes a few minutes to “just share some of the things that have shaped the way they see the world.” She models, demonstrating how students might approach their sharing. “I always go first to set, I talk about being raised poor, having my

mother die when I was a child of leukemia, and the way that was silenced and then how that's impacted my life's work. And then something positive, too, like having a Ph.D.” And, she said, “it's so powerful. Even though it's simple.” She told me that although students who participate in the activity “share pretty deeply,” which can help cultivate a community in which open dialogue will be more likely, the activity can also illustrate ways in which students with whom she works are oblivious to their place in structures of privilege or oppression. For instance, “if they don't have a disability, then of course there's cluelessness that how our bodies shape how the way we see the world, right?” Although her work emphasizes whiteness and anti-racism, she wants students to see their situatedness in multiple, overlapping hierarchies and that our placement in these hierarchies shapes how we see the world and how we explain our place in it. She wants students to be able to access and use new explanatory frameworks to understand their own situatedness – to put on the “X-ray glasses” (described in the last chapter ) which will enable them to see dynamics of privilege and oppression that are largely invisible without them.

In the following excerpt from our conversation, we can see how her goals inform the ways she opens and closes some of her courses:

One of my very favorites is the very first class before I even say anything, 'cause I don't want to influence them, I give them a piece of paper and it's printed on the top, basically, how has race shaped your life? How racially diverse was your environment growing up and how has your life been shaped by race? And I hand it around and I ask them to share an anonymous reflection. And I tell 'em, it's actually a couple layers, 'cause your name's not on this and we're actually gonna read this set in a different class. And [read a set from] another class in here. But we'll return to these at the end. And they write 'em and I collect them. And then I hold it up and say, I'm gonna make some predictions. Almost all of you grew up in all white neighborhoods, went to all white schools, were taught to see everybody the same. Race hasn't impacted your life in any way. If you grew up around people of color, you grew up in urban poverty, you no longer are around people of color. And some of you could not write more than three sentences and had no interest in writing more than three sentences on this question, right? And of course it pisses 'em, 'cause it's totally true.

Anonymity provided in the process may open space for students to share in a less risky way than if their names were attached. In addition to modeling the kinds of awareness she hopes students will be able to develop over the course of their work together, her choice to begin by directly naming the ways in which people “do whiteness” – partly, the stories whites tell about ourselves to maintain cultural, political, economic, and social power – may help establish an understanding from the start that the processes the

group will be collectively engaging in are likely to include discomfort, with Hannah providing structure and support for exploration, but also pushing them out to their growing edges. After this initial part of the activity, she puts these descriptions away for the duration of the term. Finally, she pulls these student explanations out again at a course's end:

...then the last week, I read these out loud and then they analyze them. And I say so tell me what it means to be white, how do we do it? And they can. Those are the moments when I feel some hope, because they can do it pretty much. It's so frickin' loud. I always love the student, when, after she listened to them all go around, she just blurted out ' what a bunch of bullshit!' 'Cause they were all saying it means nothing. But they're saying this in an all white classroom. This is mind blowing to me. Right? So that's a powerful exercise.

Although her efforts emphasize the development of capacities to be able to see, name, and explain how structures of domination are reproduced – an agenda which deemphasizes individual narratives – there is still a place that something resembling “personal story” can be utilized in pedagogically meaningful ways.

As a result of concerns they share with Preskill and Brookfield (2009), Applebaum (2004) and Hytten and Warren (2003) argue that it is essential that work to undermine abusive power take as a central goal the work of identifying the discourses we draw on which reproduce these dynamics. But here, rather than an approach which stresses the ways mutual storytelling can help create more complex, robust, or “accurate” individual and collective narratives, in this approach, the focus is on examining how those with privilege tell stories about their lives that reflect the kinds of “resistance” that collude “to secure dominance of the center,” stories that represent a “deflecting or distancing [of] oneself from a productive interaction with systems of racial privilege” (Hytten and Warren, 2003, p. 88). In their discussion of the demands of decolonization, these kinds of discursive moves have been theorized by Tuck and Yang (2012) as “settler moves to innocence.” For Hytten and Warren (2003), and for Hannah's students, possibility “lies in the hope that by identifying the structure of discourses of whiteness, they/we might be able to construct critical rereadings of these constructions in ways that work to disrupt the foundations upon which cultural power rests” (p. 87).

## **Theorizing Human and Ecological Connectedness**

As I wrote about in chapter 4, one of the concerns shared by many of my research partners is that today's dominant economic systems and the paradigms that support them – capitalism and neoliberalism – encourage a highly individualistic sense of self. Beyond being an ontologically troubling view of the world for many of my research partners (because they see it as simply inaccurate), the view of self-enclosed individualism encouraged by neoliberalism and capitalism is ethically problematic. It's one that precludes people from seeing and acting in ways that reflect an understanding that our actions necessarily impact other people, species, and the planet as a whole. Carmen put it bluntly, "capitalism really is killing us." And, as some of my research partners view it, it is killing us partly through its perpetuation of a hyper-individualist story that says social problems can be solved in piecemeal ways, as Jack worried, or through consumer activism, as Odessa shared. In light of this situation, as I noted in chapter 4, several of my research partners see the goal of deepening an appreciation for interconnectedness as critical work in the fight for both social justice and ecological health. Several of my research partners spoke to me about ways storytelling can play a useful role in nurturing this connected sense of self which, in turn, can open possibilities for imagining change by utilizing different understandings of interrelationality.

For instance, we saw in chapter 4, Patrick's discussion of the 2010 Gulf oil spill that he sought to help his students "understand what the actual shape of the world looks like" and "develop that awareness that we do exist in the systems and that we have cause and effect relationships with people that we might never meet, but that our, that every element of the way that we live here is connected to people all over the world." His participatory theater work in part reflects his view that storytelling, which he described as one of "our first instincts and one of our most basic rights," is an essential tool in understanding our situatedness in the world. Xavier highlighted the importance of not only understanding the broader web of planetary life and its stakeholders, but also "making those connections to our own lives," "bringing ourselves into it," and always "returning to how does this figure upon us given how we're situated."

In the course of the research conversations, Kevin spoke at perhaps the greatest length and with the most specificity about how he works to foster stories of interconnection within the eco-village based

learning communities in which he has taught. In the programs he has facilitated, students learn about sustainability using multiple lenses, examining it in light of its significance for communities, ecological systems, health and spirituality, and in relation to social justice. Kevin talked about drawing on a variety of pedagogical strategies to invoke a sense of human, inter-species, and ecological connectedness.

Although a number of the many activities Kevin described to me involve the development or exploration of stories as explanatory frameworks that might help foster his big picture goal to “quickly shift people's worldviews and ways of looking” so they can see the world in new ways, Kevin also told me about more explicit kinds of storytelling. He described exploring “the universe story” with students, including a process involving an activity called the “The Cosmic Walk” in which participants are invited to consider the origins and evolving nature of the universe by engaging with a participatory timeline that combines information about changes in the universe over its 13.7 million year lifetime. He described the set up and process:

it's almost like a ritual space, there's a spiral string going out from the center and I have a lot of cards that say different dates on them, ranging back to the age of the big bang, which is like 13.7 years ago. And so students will walk this path and I have a series of readings that I do that suggest a different perspective of viewing the universe as almost an evolving being, it doesn't have to be this living being, but at least not just in scientific terms, but combining the science with a new form of spirituality almost.

In his view, interactive storytelling which places today's communities in a timeline stretching millions of years into the past can help create a new sense of perspective.

And so, in reading this story and creating this new story, there's an element of visualization that needs to happen because it's not something that they can see, you know you can't go back to the big bang or the formation of stars or the planet. But you can visualize it. And so creating stories for people, I think storytelling is a very effective way of doing that.

Kevin's efforts and ideas resemble the approaches and activities described in Seed, Macy, Flemming, and Naess's (1988) small book *Thinking Like a Mountain* and highlight pedagogical approaches that encourage the use of ritual not only to foster an ecological or cosmic subjectivity, but point the way toward action. As Seed et al. (1988) put it “with the authority of more than four billion years of our planet's evolution behind us, then we are filled with new determination, courage and perseverance, less

limited by self-doubt, narrow self interest, and discouragement” (p. 15). Brand and his colleagues (Brand, 1999) on the other hand highlight the ways millennial-scale thinking can stretch into the future, too. Describing a rationale and proposal for a 10,000 year clock, an interactive educational/art installation aimed at fostering long term thinking and generational responsibility currently being built in a mountain in Texas, they explain that the clock will tick once a year and, when prompted by visitors, play melodies programmed not to repeat for 10,000 years. The project’s creators argue that the questions and curiosity engendered by the project may be its most significant aspect:

If you have a Clock ticking for 10,000 years what kinds of generational-scale questions and projects will it suggest? If a Clock can keep going for ten millennia, shouldn’t we make sure our civilization does as well? If the Clock keeps going after we are personally long dead, why not attempt other projects that require future generations to finish? The larger question is, as virologist Jonas Salk once asked, “Are we being good ancestors?” (<http://longnow.org/clock/>)

### **Explaining Change**

Yet another way my research partners utilized story in their efforts to invoke various modes of radical imagination revolved around stories about how transformative change happens. In this view, multiplying the courses of action that are seen as viable for individuals or groups can happen as a result of learning the pathways walked by other people.

Even though all of my research partners shared the belief that structural changes require action among large groups of people, such as large-scale social movements, some also shared the belief that it is also indispensable for people to understand that individual action actually does matter. Writers like Howard Zinn and collections like Paul Loeb’s (2004) *The Impossible Will Take a Little While* have used first-person narrative about small-scale, often dispersed, actions as a way to illustrate that individual actions can have tangible impacts on big-picture change. The pedagogical assumption at work here is that learning about the ways individuals have approached their own lives can be both inspirational and provide concrete ideas about ways others might take action.

Uma told me she sees sharing “stories of success” through “story shares” as a promising way to help young people expand their sense of how they might take effective action in the world:

We also do story shares, where every student has to bring in a story of success. And they share with each other. We've had two or three so far, and one girl talked about Valentino, I can't remember his name, he's one of the lost boys of Sudan, and he partnered with Dave Eggers who did his oral testimony and all the money went to building this school in Sudan, in southern Sudan. So we talked about that and how, you know, it was this partnership between a western American middle class white man and this Sudanese refugee and what that partnership looked like and how it was equitable and what good both of them did. And so, looking at tiny examples of individuals, as well, versus just saying you have privilege, you have to go out to the protest on Saturday and fight against the capitalist system. They don't wanna hear that.

In the context of these conversations, Uma told me she is intentional about expanding students' understandings that activism can take many forms and that they can be active agents within broader change processes.

And we went through these discussions and I always tried to bring it back to, okay, well what can you do? What can you as an individual do in your everyday life that will help or bring about a more equitable system? And trying to make it back to these personal choices that, okay, understand that these exist and then just point that out to them. Even understanding that you have privilege is already a big step, a step that a lot of adults won't even take. Once you've taken that step, what's the next step that you can take? And just bringing it back to the individual. And also encouraging them, telling them all the time that, look, we can't change the world, but we can be active agents in it.

For Uma, sharing action stories can help her students see alternatives to protest and open up multiple potential pathways for positive action resembled Ivy's commitment to the idea that "naming stories of people doing good work is really powerful and naming it in ways that shows, that offers a path."

Pedagogical approaches that introduce people to possibilities for both individual and collective action provide avenues for people to "politicize their lives" even when sustained involvement in collective action may not feel possible (Curry-Stevens, 2003).

Some of my research partners told me about sharing their own stories of involvement with activism, organizing, or solidarity work. Tom told me that while he believes collective systemic and political action are crucial, "one of the values of individual change, lifestyle change, is that it can make you more comfortable asking other people to change because you've made some of those steps yourself, you know?"

In line with this assumption, Xavier told me about sharing with his students ways he attempts to use his settler privilege to work in solidarity with First Nations people:

And I speak from my own experience, as well. So I will say, when I was involved in going to stand on the line with the Mohawks and knowing that there's 35 warriors there with automatic

weapons and that there's the Canadian army and police and [inaudible phrase] and everybody up there with their sniper rifles trained on my temple, I was really scared. I was really scared when all of a sudden we're sittin' around a fire and this guy drives up in a pickup truck and says, they're fuckin' comin'! They're fuckin' comin'! I almost crapped my pants. You know? I thought, whoa, that's not supposed to happen. Not while I'm here.

After describing the kinds of stories he shares with his students, Xavier told me, “I think what I’m trying to do there pedagogically is take this stuff out of the distance and bring it in closer,” inspiring students to understand “this is something you can do.” This kind of pedagogical approach helps demystify activism. Sharing the fear that can come along with risk-taking in organizing and solidarity work can help normalize similar feelings that those new to activism may experience. In this way, sharing one’s story can become one among many “mediating artifacts,” tool that might assist others in their own processes of deconstructing existing practices and forms of knowledge in order to become other than who they are (Parkes, Gore, Elsworth, 2010, p. 178). It is important to note that among all of my research partners, including Uma, Ivy, Tom, and Xavier, there is an assumption that the kinds of transformative change they believe are necessary will not take place without the concerted efforts of large groups of people. So while these individual actions matter, they are not the whole story.

Some of my research partners, like Tom, Carmen, and Benjamin directly highlighted the importance of not only learning about individual narratives and actions, but emphasize the criticality of learning about social movements and the social change processes to which they contribute and in which they are historically situated. Solnit’s (2004) writing encourages us to learn to “count our victories” partly by learning the stories of collectivities who have come before and fought for justice. In his popular book *Freedom Dreams*, Robin Kelley (2002) focuses on Black struggles for freedom, emphasizing not only the ways Black people’s involvement in socialist, feminist, Surrealist, and other movements pushed these movements in more radical strategic directions, but also highlights the critical role of imagination and vision which animated these movements. For Tom, too, social movement history can help us understand which kinds of strategies worked well and which were less successful.

For Carmen, historical study as a strategy can help us narrate stories of societal or global scale processes that depict different ways change can occur:

So, understanding that change is a part of life and can be slow and gradual, which is a lot of what people experience over their lifetime, or it can be very quick very rapid, what we call qualitative. And we're beginning to enter that period, right? I mean, things are just falling off the cliff. Society is just falling apart. So, history lets us understand change in its different forms.

As Carmen noted, change isn't always rapid and for those seeking the transformation of social, political, or economic structures, stepping back to examine the longer arc of change processes is essential. When I asked Benjamin to tell me about his perspective about why imagination and vision matter for those seeking change, he told me a story. Consider his description of a "battle of the story" which takes place over decades:

you know Hayek, the economist? Yeah. He's the grandfather or the father, depending how you look at it, of neoliberal economics and somewhere he said sometime, you know, the socialists in Europe and some part of America were able to capture the imagination of the people and convinced them that there was something better. Right? Convinced them there was something better than what we had before. And, that was a prime component of their success, and he was very clear about their success. He made sure, no bones about it. And he was like, that's what we have to do. The conservatives, which they were then, the conservatives have to capture the imaginations of people and convince them that we have something better to offer that's better than socialism, better than social democracy. And then they did it. They did. Alright? They did. And if you look at the transformation of America, the conservatives or Reaganomics did not come out of the 80s, it began in the 30s. And those people worked for decades tirelessly trying to convince people through all kinds of think tanks and small, wildly marginalized institutions that the free market was the right, was the answer, had all of the answers. And eventually they won the argument.

For Benjamin, and for others I spoke with, while political and economic change work is certainly about material struggle, its discursive elements mean that it also entails a struggle to persuade or convince people that some alternatives are better than others. In part, it's about winning an argument. *SmartMeme* project organizers For Patrick Reinsborough and Doyle Canning (2010) the argumentative component of movements needs more serious attention from radicals. Benjamin's comments below illustrate the enormous accomplishment achieved by supporters of neoliberalism in "winning the argument" and suggests a level of patience (or perhaps stubborn determination) in the context of "the battle of the story" (Reinsborough and Canning, 2010) that may need more cultivation on the left. When I asked Benjamin for his take on what prevents people from being able to imagine alternatives, he explained:

Sometimes I've thought that it's a lack of knowledge of our history, left history, that there was once a movement with a utopian impulse that actually really did, because you know the communist purge, not only wiped out the communists, but they really wiped out the memory of

the communist, the history of the communists, and the history of the socialist movement which is pretty impressive actually. If we're able to successfully wipe out the memory of the neoliberal movement in the next four decades it will be as equal a feat.

In this case, not only do we need to understand historical processes on a longer time-frame, but we need to understand that a pedagogy of storytelling itself can take place over generations, and sometimes in restrictive ways. Although the story Benjamin recounts about the ascendance of neoliberalism is not the kind of change any of my research partners would seek, it does reflect the kind of intentional and patient culture-level pedagogical process some believe will be necessary to create the kinds of widespread shifts needed to counter the problems we face collectively today.

### **Travel**

Quoting Derek Walcott, Maxine Greene wrote “to have loved one horizon is insularity,” it “blindfolds vision, it narrows experience” (Greene, 2000, p. 268). The approaches described in this section have in common their intention to expand imaginative capacities by involving participants in real or imaginative voyages. Although some of the approaches described in this section, like international education or ethnographic analysis, have also been criticized on the basis that they can reinforce existing hierarchies, my research partners believe that when situated within broader pedagogical frameworks focused on transformative change toward greater equality, justice, and ecological well-being these approaches can play an important role in fostering modes of radical imagination that are difficult to develop by other means. Within these frameworks, travel can enhance one's ability to examine privilege and challenge stereotypes about others, learn to see the power structures that shape human experience, and learn to think at different scales, connecting local to regional and global scales. In addition, the real and imagined travel advocated by my research partners spring from an assumption shared by Odessa that “I feel like we're really limited by our own experiences and knowledge...that our imagination is curtailed by that.”

Throughout this chapter I will describe a range of ways travel is engaged and viewed by my research partners as a valuable pedagogical method to expand imagination. Above in my discussion of narrative strategies, I described Kevin's approach to study abroad, which includes many activities aimed at helping

people develop an understanding of human and ecological interconnection. Below, in the fifth section in the chapter, I'll describe how travel can involve people in prefigurative relationships, projects, and movements. But my focus in this section is narrower. Here, I focus on travel that creates experiences that resemble what Trilokekar and Kukar (2011) refer to as “disorienting experiences” and what Che, Spearman, and Manizade (2009) refer to as “constructive disequilibrium.” Travel in this frame offers a kind of critical distancing, an opportunity to imagine both the places traveled and home in new ways. Within this section, although each of the pedagogical approaches I describe can be understood as a form of travel, the emphasis here is on travel which *unsettles*, travel which helps shake loose assumptions about who we and others are and how social change can, does, and should take place so that other possibilities may be noticed, examined, and appraised.

Among my research partners, there were a variety of pedagogical strategies that emphasized physical or imagined travel as a method of provoking radical imagination. Some of my research partners utilize the experiential approaches of study abroad, field trips, or service learning to engage people in hands-on learning that both takes them out of familiar day to day contexts and introduces them to new ways of organizing human life and activity. Others invited comparison via the study of historical or contemporary cases, for instance, through guest visits, written documents, or films. Still others invite what Hutchinson (1996) calls “voyages of active hope” (p. 46) via imagined travel through the experience of reading and making sense of science fiction or utopian literatures.

### **Traveling Physically**

Whether voyaging close to home or halfway around the world, physical travel provides opportunities for new perspective-taking that can help de-center one's perspective. From field trips in one's own community to international travel via study abroad programs, my research partners described a range of approaches they take.

### *Analyzing Everyday Spaces*

A number of my research partners emphasized the importance of travel as a way to de-center perspectives that have been normalized and to allow people to develop new senses of possibility. For some, travel as close to home as a field trip around one's school, as Odessa explained, or other everyday spaces can be empowering by allowing people to both see and engage in the places they regularly inhabit in new ways. For instance, Tom talked about the power of examining everyday contexts in his own life, using an example of pedagogy from his own childhood years. His description also here illustrates an approach to examining the contexts one routinely inhabits, but in a more overtly politicized way:

I remember having this one experience as a kid that is akin to that experience in that philosophy class [which he had described earlier in our conversation], which is going into a bank with my mom, who, her political trajectory within the Canadian context is sort of small-l liberal, but she had very clear feminist politics. And I remember going into a bank with her and her asking me, so, who's working at the front of the bank? And looked and oh, it's all women! She's like, who's working at the back of the bank? And I looked, oh, it's all men. And I'd been to the bank with her many times, but I never noticed that something was going on that was unseen by me, and yet had consequence.

Traveling through familiar contexts in new ways or with new purposes can be a powerful way to see the places we call home in new ways. The Situationist strategy of *derive* – French for “drift” – involves unplanned walking through a landscape in order to analyze and interpret it in new ways. Hung (2010) described a pedagogy of walking that she and her youth partners engaged in order to examine processes like gentrification Harlem and New York City in a new and embodied way. Walking through a familiar context together at a slower pace than normal gave members of the group opportunities to expand their “critical lens” (p. 152) and gain new perspectives on places close to home in part by asking questions about resources, power, and change and placing themselves and placing familiar terrain within a different or larger context.

Both Uma and Erin told me about taking their students to shelters in cities where they teach in order to unsettle assumptions. Here is Uma telling me about a field trip and volunteer experience with young adults who had created a year-long participatory action research project focused on homelessness that she

sees is an effective way to help both break stereotypes and encourage reflection about privilege.

Describing a trip to a shelter housed in a downtown church:

We went there and worked in their soup kitchen. We went two or three times throughout the year. And just being there and talking with the people who worked at [name of the church] and seeing the people that came in for lunch everyday also started to break down stereotypes, because the people weren't crazy, the people weren't on drugs. One of the students said, not all homeless people smell bad. And they also started to realize that a lot of the people who came in for lunch were people who looked just like they did and it broke down a lot of those stereotypes. And so as far as an envisioning, I don't think they went as far as to envision what it would look like without homelessness, but they definitely started to understand that homelessness isn't this tiny little box of people who are either crazy or on drugs. And starting to understand that process and realize that, wow, I do live in a really expensive place and I'm lucky to have a home and I'm lucky that my parents can afford to provide this for me. I think they started to realize and understand their privilege.

Erin takes her social work students to a shelter “that’s a little different” than others in the urban area where she lives because it takes anybody and is open 24 hours a day. This trip allows her to introduce her college students to the kinds of problems they will explore both in their coursework and in their eventual practice as social workers. It also offers a new viewpoint from which to understand their own city, “they kinda have this third world vision of what's happening in poverty here in our city.”

We can see in these pedagogies of travel that my research partners aim, in part, to shift consciousness and expand awareness, by dislodging assumptions about places near and far. In particular, the approaches above encourage theoretical, analytical, intellectual perspective shifts by involving participants in the physical perspective shifts that result from spatial movement.

### ***Participating in Radical Projects***

My research partners also described to me travel-based strategies that aim to shift assumptions about how organizing for change can, should, and does happen. Odessa and Erin both use field trips to radical organizations to shift their students’ assumptions about social change work. As I described above, Erin takes her students to a shelter in order to understand “what’s happening in poverty here in our city” as a starting place, but it’s not the end. After this initial experience, she tells me, she begins to introduce students to other kinds of radical projects, such as organizations that focus on fighting foreclosures in her

city or creating grassroots independent media, introducing them to other kinds of radical projects “to begin to sort of give them ideas of other things that are possible.” Odessa also talked with me about the benefits of physically visiting new places, telling me “experiential learning is really important...something hands on.” For instance, in her work with college students on sustainable practices, she asks students to choose a project to visit where they can talk directly with people involved. In her view, “I think that's pretty powerful. You know, you learn a lot just by visiting and being someplace.” Collective knowledge is generated when students return to the classroom, reporting back about their field visits and documenting them by mapping them with online mapping tools. “I think that's the positive part,” she told me, “seeing what's happening on the ground, the diversity of things that are going on and the diversity of places.”

Still others spoke of longer-term involvement in radical projects via internships or service learning in order to experience alternative projects from the perspective of a participant. Xavier expects his students to “get involved outside of our classroom in some actually existing social movement” or to address “some actually existing social issue.” Vince talked at length about his efforts to partner with local organizations to create opportunities for his students to participate in community work in ways that will both allow them to grow and which will contribute something positive to the communities with whom they work. He talked about the value of students seeing firsthand ways that communities are seeking alternatives to “butting our heads against the brick wall of reform” by trying to create parallel infrastructure as a method of creating change. He told me about the value of involving students in projects that may be quite radical, but not appear so from the outside, explaining, “I think there are really interesting issue movements or activist organizations that get at some of these big ideas, but very indirectly.” When students become involved in these kinds of projects the learning may be more subtle and more effective as a result:

They may never have experienced something like a direct democracy in terms of decision-making, they may never have thought about, in a very real substantive way, the kinds of stereotypes or class-based biases or preconceptions that people have until they're part of a group that can, in their collectiveness, anyway, articulate those relationships. And so those are the kinds of things that I think are also really exciting. I mean I just think that's a really interesting example, where people can participate in something that is very anarchistic in many ways, very communitarian, but not ever use those words or know that language. And so those are the examples that in some

ways excite me the most because I think that they can reach people in ways that kind of the people who are already activists, you can't reach people who are not already activists in the same ways.

Residential education programs are another way my research partners engage in pedagogies of travel to support new kinds of perspective taking and new views of social change. For Ivy, for instance, residential arts camps that aim to connect young people with the natural world can be deeply moving. There's something about "being in a beautiful natural setting just shakes people up, some people it's just like awe-inspiring and [for] a lot of people it's terrifying."

While residential education programs may be most familiar in the form of camps, some of my research partners talked about residential education in relation to adults, as well. A number of my research partners talked about feeling inspired by Highlander, which, since 1932 has involved adults in weekend-long or longer popular education workshops in rural Tennessee. Several of my research partners told me about their involvement as students or faculty with the Institute for Social Ecology which for decades offered residential summer programs that drew students not only from around the US, but from around the world for theoretical and applied study of social ecology. Tom talked about a field school with which he's been involved, referring to it as "kind of like a little boot camp for activists" unsettling assumptions that classroom learning is best and echoing the assumption of many experiential educators that "the more proximity you have to what you're learning about, the better you're gonna learn."

This approach offers a powerful response to the concerns raised by Cermack and his colleagues (2011) in their study of student responses to international service trips. Their findings suggest that if study abroad trips focused on service do not explicitly build awareness of agency and social justice, they may inadvertently (or, of course, more intentionally) reinforce stereotypical views of activism (as extremist, for instance) and simultaneously leave participants without adequate ways to explain how social justice focused change can and has been collectively pursued. Davis's approach seems to resonate with the view that if international programs are going to support participants taking effective collective action at home they must combine activist skill and knowledge building with their other emphases.

Field trips, service learning, and activist-focused residential education each offer different promises for unsettling assumptions about how change can, should, and does work. In different ways, each of these approaches seek to accomplish what Lou told me was one of his goals with students: to “interrupt their sense of how the world works in terms of social change, so interrupting their faith in the electoral system or interrupting their faith in nonprofits.”

### ***Travelling Internationally***

Study abroad often begins with an idea that firsthand experience outside one’s day-to-day environment can also be a powerful way to become aware of and critically assess one’s assumptions and worldview and develop new interpretive lenses for analyzing the world around us and our place in it. Manley (2002) argued that while there is a sizeable literature on international education, little of it focuses on pedagogy, making it difficult to assess the political orientation and pedagogical intentions of study abroad programs or place my research partners’ international education efforts in a larger context. It is undoubtedly the case that study abroad programs are framed by wildly different intentions that can vary depending on the field or program in which they are situated and the political commitments of the faculty and staff who lead them. In an excellent critical essay outlining a number of ethical and pedagogical issues he believes critical international educators must grapple with Epprecht (2004) has written that although there is a presumption that “experiential learning may appear self-evidently superior to classroom learning...it too can impart lessons that betray key principles of development and environmental ethics” (p. 704). This concern notwithstanding, he also notes that “the shock of immersion in a foreign culture disorients the students faith in her/his own embedded assumptions about right and wrong. Such a culture shock ideally forces her/him to reconstruct a truly global perspective” (p. 692). Che, Spearman, and Manizade (2009) articulate a similar assumption when they write “personal transformation becomes more possible when we encounter and experience that which we have not encountered before” (p. 104). They highlight the “constructive disequilibrium” that can result from struggle, dissonance, and strife of studying in what they refer to as “less familiar destinations.” In introducing a recent *Handbook of Practice and Research in*

*Study Abroad*, Lewin (2009) has argued that among at least some advocates of study abroad, there exists shared movement “toward developing critical individuals who are capable of analyzing power structures, building global community, or tangibly helping improve the lives of people around the world” (p. xv). And although there are many concerns social justice advocates can and do level at international education, Lewin also argues that study abroad “does not have to come at the cost of increasing consumerism or colonialism” (p. xv).

The kinds of justice-focused critical awareness radical educators may hope to promote don’t come only through field experience, but require intention before, during, and after an international experience to ensure that educators and participants are continually questioning the impact of the many ethical and pedagogical choices we make. Two of my research partners spoke about this work and its significance at length in our conversations. Although he expressed that he does feel conflicted about encouraging US students to travel around the world to study sustainability, Kevin talked about the impact of studying abroad in transforming his own worldview:

But I think it's really important for people to see other parts of the world, especially Americans, to experience other places and what life is like in other places because there's no way to imagine that. I think it's a very important step, especially for people that are living lives that are privileged in some way to see what it's like to not have those privileges, to see other people that live lives like that. And so it is a privilege in order for them to come there, as well as for me, but I think as long as they're taking it back and really shifting, I mean for me, I was a student in this program 12 years ago, 13 years ago, and the reason I'm a teacher for it now is because it changed my worldview and I wanted to be able to offer that to other people.

This approach is similar to Uma and Erin’s above, that seeing firsthand living conditions in other places can shine a bright light on one’s own privilege. Trilokekar and Kukar’s (2011) discussion of the experiences of pre-service teacher candidates’ travel experiences highlights the critical importance of pedagogies which assume diversity in student populations and demand practices that invite students to reflect on their own positionality vis-à-vis race, gender, class, age, and other aspects of identity. Cultivating new “frames of reference” which might allow educators, the population with whom they work, to pursue work effectively within diverse learning communities and pursue a “just and equitable society” (p. 1141) requires starting from the assumption that study abroad participants are not homogeneously

situated in US or global hierarchies. An ethical and effective process of supporting students to make sense of their “disorienting” experiences necessitates this awareness and pedagogical strategies that reflect it.

Davis also told me that his experiences studying abroad as a student was transformative and resulted in his desire to lead programs himself. He explained that although he “did volunteer work in college that made some pretty powerful observations come to light with regards to [the question] how can inequality that's this serious be accidental,” it wasn't until he studied abroad that he “began to really understand the economic aspects of poverty and inequality.” Not until he studied abroad “did I see communities that were a whole ‘nother kind of poverty,” not only poverty at a different scale, but he also saw communities “that were organized and were fighting against neoliberalism and I think as a student that was very new to me.” Seeing indigenous communities fighting against development projects and free trade agreements that were socially, economically, and environmentally detrimental

brought a lot of the things home to a much larger analysis of what was going on socioeconomically and in world politics and world markets. So I felt like that tied a lot of things together with regards to racism, feminism, a lot of the things I had experienced on a college campus, it was a whole 'nother way of looking at things when you get outside so dramatically and are forced to look North in a very different way.

In Davis's case we can see the promise of international education in expanding an analysis of globalized power relationships and our place in them. As he put it, “getting up outside your borders really makes you account for your ideas and your place in a way that you don't have to” at home.

### **Travelling Imaginatively**

While the approaches I described above involve participants in physical travel, travel can also take place imaginatively. Several strategies my research partners told me about included taking a comparative perspective either by looking to historical or current examples that show ways people have already created alternative ways to relate or meet human needs or by looking to utopian or visionary science fiction.

### ***Historicizing and Comparing***

Drawing on the insights of experiential education theory, the perspectives I shared above emphasize bringing participants into direct contact with people seeking change outside normalized (and less radical) reform-based frameworks or nonprofit work. Another method of unsettling ideas about what kinds of change might be possible and how to bring them about involves exposing people to examples of times or places where alternative arrangements or methods of pursuing change have existed or do currently exist. Involving people in historical or contemporary case study and examining theoretical models of altered arrangements are two methods some of my research partners see as promising.

In the section about narrative strategies, I shared excerpts in which some of my research partners described the importance of historical study because it can allow for the development of new explanatory frameworks and stories about the ways social change occurs. Some of my research partners talked about other kinds of value they associate with historical study. For Quincy, historical study can help complicate historical accounts which have erased more radical expressions of freedom struggle, for instance, Malcolm X and the Black Panthers as integral to the Civil Rights Movement. For Xavier, learning alternative histories can lead to alternative ways of being in the present. And, as Carmen put it, “If you can make people understand that the world we live in has not always been here, then they can begin to think possibly we can move through it and beyond it.”

Contextualizing, de-normalizing, or what Tom called “particularizing” the present is a key element of his view of the importance of historical study for opening up radical imagination of alternative possibilities. He talked me about his work with university students in the Canadian environmental studies program in which he was teaching at the time of our conversation. In this pedagogical context, historical study is an important element in his efforts to help students understand that present arrangements are “not a given.”

And part of that is not only helping students imagine a different present and future, but also looking historically at different ways things have been organized at different times, in different places, which suggests again, oh look, capitalism is actually only 250 years old, it's not a given. And so that kind of historicizing work I see as extremely important to loosening people's vision, loosening the grip of a very weighty present and realizing that things can be different. And I think just offering people back, I've found that can be a very profound realization, that it does not have

to be this way. And visionary work includes sort of historical perspective, but also sort of future consideration.

He told me a bit about how this agenda looks in an introductory environmental studies course organized around food:

And so, just giving folks a sense of some of the colonial history here in British Columbia and then the crucial role food has played in that. But also accounting for different indigenous land use practices and just really nailing home that there have been different food systems that have provided for people at different times and, again, reiterating this point that things don't have to be the way that they are now. Different ways that people have organized things in the past that worked quite well. So if we're using sustainability as our goal, we need to be careful of simple romanticization, but there are a number of societies in history that are still alive that have accomplished some the goals. In terms of living in relative alignment with living with biophysical systems, a number of indigenous societies still do that and have in the past and having students realize that is sort of liberating, oh us humans are not inherently destructive of landscapes. You know, there's cultures that have learned important lessons and that we can learn from as well. And so that kind of historical, but also just comparative work is extremely important. So if you get people out of seeing their world as *the* world, to particularize experience for people is important, so that they realize there's all kinds of different ways that things can be.

In the quote above, we can see that comparative study of contemporary alternatives can serve a similar purpose. For instance, some of my research partners include either case studies or movement-based writings or films in their teaching. As Lou told me, introducing students to a framework of protest, reform, and autonomy as different social movement strategies can help “interrupt their sense of how the world works in terms of social change, so interrupting their faith in the electoral system or interrupting their faith in nonprofits.” Jack told me he explores examples of on-the-ground approaches take within social movements in order to help open possibilities:

Again, I try to get them in that course to reflect on not just what's happening in the here and now, but what do they see as possible openings toward alternative futures. It's a kind of open-ended envisioning in that sense in that it's not like oh here is eco-socialism, let's look at that, it's more what's going on on the ground in these social movements? What could we take from that in terms of prefiguring a different world?

Vince offered an example of this in his teaching:

Well definitely trying to provide case studies of different ways of doing things. People like that. So I'll show Naomi Klein's *The Take* and then have a discussion, what would happen if this is what people started to do in Detroit? What would that be like? So let's imagine that. Let's say all of the things about how it would never work and then let's say some things about, well what if we did this? What would have to happen in order for it to work? And so, what I try to do is bring examples into the classroom and help walk through the process of trying to implement those examples in different contexts

Vince's comment about "all the things that would never work" underscores the importance of unearthing the assumptions people hold about what kinds of change are possible before moving on to introduce and imaginatively experiment with new frameworks.

For Odessa learning about particular projects undertaken by others near and far can offer powerful learning opportunities. She told me the readings and cases she gives her students are "pretty provocative in terms of thinking about kind of turning things upside down for them and trying to think about what's possible." She explained more about why this kind of perspective shift matters:

But I think part of that, too, is exposing them to what other possibilities might be. Like saying, well here's a completely different way of thinking about it. Here's another group of people somewhere else on the planet who are doing something completely different, why is it the way? Do we have to do what we're doing? And I think that that's really important in terms of thinking about being able to imagine different things. Because I feel like we're really limited by our own experiences and knowledge, in terms of, for the most part, imagination, that our imagination is curtailed by that. So I think bringing in other possibilities kind of starts more ideas flowing about, well what can we do?

In exploring cases, her goal is not for students to uncritically accept examples of alternatives as necessarily positive. She takes it as a sign of success when students push back and continue to think critically about all the examples they study, even those that might seem inspiring from a justice-centered perspective. She gave an example about a discussion about land trusts and private property in which a student was able to critically appraise a proposed framework in a sophisticated way, noting a connection that Odessa said she herself hadn't "hadn't quite made." In pointing this out, my intention is to highlight that few of my research partners' comments suggest that the perspective shifts they wish to invite do not involve uncritically stepping from one worldview or set of assumptions to another, but rather to gain an increased facility in being able to identify and critically assess the assumptions that are necessarily part of any worldview, perspective, or approach to change.

Rita gave another example, a time when a teacher exposed her to alternative models of what education could look like that had a profound impact on her:

And he wanted us to read all these books about education by Paul Goodman and Ivan Illich and, who was the other guy? George Leonard's *Education for Ecstasy* and *Summerhill* and it was a

bunch of stuff. And I was on fire reading this stuff going, wow, you could do it so differently! Isn't that amazing?

A number of my research partners also spoke about their efforts to introduce students to theoretical models that challenge dominant economic or political arrangements, models resemble the kind of “normative holistic blueprints” advocated by Webb (2009), who has asserted that concrete proposals which reflect the broadest aims of movements will provide more effective than vague principles. Along these lines, Jack told me he raises the “question of post-capitalism” by exploring eco-socialism, citing Derek Wall’s *Babylon and Beyond* as a useful book. As Benjamin put it, Albert’s (2003) participatory economics – ParEcon, as it is called - is “formulaic and whatever, there’s all kinds of criticisms, but it’s an attempt to map out” what an alternative could look like. He continued, “and you know Murray’s stuff was good on that that too,” describing social ecologist Murray Bookchin’s framework of libertarian municipalism (Biehl, 1998) as a concrete and useful attempt to map out what a deeply participatory political framework might look like. As theoretical models, these kinds of texts can provide a kind of imaginative journey that may create shifts in what is considered possible.

### ***Exploring Utopian or Science Fiction***

“I am certainly not the first or only person who forgot how to imagine,” organizer and facilitator Adrienne Maree Brown reflected (2014, p. 35) in the summer 2014 edition of *Yes! Magazine*. “My work has primarily been as a facilitator. I help others envision, plan, and create viable futures for humanity. I call my work ‘organizational healing’ as opposed to ‘strategic planning.’ It takes faith, time, and creativity to do this sort of change work. So this forgetfulness was a minor tragedy” (p. 35), Brown continued. Partly for this reason and inspired by the visionary fiction of Octavia Butler, Brown partnered with organizer and educator, Walidah Imarisha to imagine and collect social justice-focused visionary fiction from organizers and activists. A forthcoming volume called *Octavia’s Brood* pays tribute to the life and imaginative fiction of Octavia Butler and will allow the stories to be shared with others.

Utopian and science fiction can be vehicles through which people can “freely imagine what different conceptions of freedom might look like under various historical conditions” (Weiner, 2007, p. 65). As Carspecken (2008) has observed, science fiction has been influential among the kinds of communitarians on which her research focused because it asks “what if?” questions. “What if we were taken over by machines as in the *Terminator* and *Matrix* movies? What if we lived without laws, as in Ursula LeGuin’s *The Dispossessed*?” (p. 76).

Several of my research partners told me they have found personal inspiration and possibility through science fiction novels and some use them with their students. About Starhawk’s (1993) *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, which imagines a utopian northern California at war with surrounding areas, Kevin told me, “so powerful, so awesome. I love that book.” Sarah told me this utopian novels are useful “to get us thinking” noting that the better the novel is, the more effective its impact may be. She specifically highlighted LeGuin’s (1974) *The Dispossessed*, which imagines an anarchist society on a moon orbiting a planet resembling Earth, and offered the following reflections on Starhawk’s *Fifth Sacred Thing*:

That one is a great one because...it's realistic about nothing can be all perfect or all good or all beautiful. There's gonna be difficulties. I like that one in particular because it feels like utopian, but realistic utopian.

As she puts it, these novels “set us up for thinking about the future in a way that's got some creativity and some hope to it.” Rita agreed, telling me that although in her courses there is not time to read full novels, she has asked students to read short excerpts and keeps close to her heart authors who inspired her, like LeGuin, Starhawk, and Butler. Speaking about her own introduction to utopian fiction via Ernst Callenbach’s (1975) *Imagined Community*, set in a region which had previously been Washington, Oregon, and northern California, she tells me:

And yeah, starting with *Ecotopia*, when I first heard it on the radio on WBAI in 1976 and Margot Adler read it on the air and I got to tell her when she came to the Institute for Social Ecology in 1991, I said, you changed my life when you read *Ecotopia* on the air. It was the first time that I could imagine something different and I have believed in it ever since. It's not exactly the dream that I have, but I believe that dreaming it was really important.

Rita’s comments highlight that it may be less the content of the political vision that matters than the process of unsettling taken-for-granted assumptions about the way things have to be that can be

significant. Several of my research partners who shared their perspectives that they see science fiction or utopian fiction as pedagogically promising did so near the end of our interview, which made for truncated discussions about these kinds of texts and their promises. Like Haddad (2005), some of my research partners combine the reading of utopian or science fiction novels or the watching of films in these genres with an invitation that students create and articulate their own utopian vision. I'll take this practice up further in the next section.

### Compose

The School for Designing a Society (SDaS) was created, in part, based on the assumption that people need practice desiring and articulating their desires. During the time I was research and writing for this project, Scott's (2011) dissertation was the only scholarly writing I was able to find about the school's history and pedagogy. While placing SDaS within a constellation of liberatory education projects including Highlander, in Scott's view, what sets SDAS apart is its emphasis on producing people who can desire well:

Outside of the SDaS, the potential for a desire-oriented pedagogy and educational policy remains largely unexplored. I know of no education scholars with a stated agenda or developed curriculum for training more skillful *desirers*. Though it is unclear whether such educators would leave easily-recognizable traces of their work (Scott, 2011, p. 185).

This dissertation emerges from the belief that the kinds of work to nurture the capacity and skill to desire actually are actually taken up by many community activists and educators, although sometimes not as a central organizing project of the organizations or institutions in which they do their work. For instance, Levitas's (2007) proposal that people engage in an "imaginary reconstitution of society" is grounded in the idea that articulating alternatives to the status quo opens them for public scrutiny, comparison, and deliberation about desirable change. Bufe and Neutopia's (n.d.) zine, "Design Your Own Utopia" results from its authors' belief that "the clearer the vision, the better the chances of achieving it" and presents readers with lists of questions to generate thinking about what kinds of community and world might be more desirable than the one we presently share. Haddad (2005) described her utilization

of utopian and dystopian texts as a basis for subsequently inviting students to manifest their own more desirable visions in writing. Project South's "Critical Classroom" curriculum includes activities that ask participants to consider "We've won – what does society look like now?" As I noted above, Scott (2011) has observed that the School for Designing a Society utilizes a framework of composition to invite participants to experiment with various activities that aim to enable them to become more skillful desirers.

Here, I highlight ideas my research partners share about the strategies they use to invite learners to tap and articulate their desires for change, including defining terms, engaging in guided visioning processes, and inviting students to individually or collectively manifest their dreams in some physical way through various approaches to design.

### **Defining Terms**

In her small booklet "Playing Attention to Language," School for Designing a Society (SDaS) facilitator Susan Parenti (2005) writes that in U.S. society language has a reputation of "mere-ness," a reputation in which it is seen as a "*carrier* of thought and meaning" (p. 3). But, as she explains, a central element of work at the SDaS is changing the way we relate to language:

Language's reputation of "mereness" is one we'd like to change. We consider language a major dynamic in social affairs: it not only carries thoughts, it shapes them. Language has much more of an infective power than its vehicular reputation belies. Itself the traces left of past systems and paradigms, language will present those past coherences, not the fresh intent or idea of the speaker, unless the speaker is alert to the language. A speaker trying to bring up an idea will meet a resistance in the language itself. There'll be a gap between the speaker's intent and an old language. Unless a speaker is aware of this, she isn't "using language for her thoughts"; rather, language is using her: The language we speak, speaks *us* (p. 3, emphasis in original).

In his dissertation about the school's history, Scott (2011) points out one of the assumptions that drives this focus on language: "when one attempts to say something new, one's language comes up against the tendencies of the system that it came from, irrespective of the tendencies of the speaker" (p. 65). From this perspective, similar to narrative strategies shared above which focus on how our stories can reinscribe hierarchy, it becomes important to understand not what speakers are saying, but "what language is doing." Students at SDaS are encouraged to become "masters of their language" by formulating statements and

sentences that speak intended meanings and “make new things become possible” (p. 64). Parenti’s book includes a variety of exercises for readers to “play with” the theoretical lessons she offers. Among the methods of inviting students to master their language is a process of creating neologisms that combine two or several ideas into one new word to reflect ideas that cannot be communicated utilizing current language. Recently, a new SDaS program was organized around the neologism “re(x)sistance” which could be read and interpreted in terms of the ideas “re-existance” or “resistance.”

Several of my research partners utilize a process of defining terms that are significant in the context of their work together as a strategy to invite participants with whom they work to envision desired change. Several of my research participants told me that in their individual practice, or collective projects with other organizers, they spent time grappling with the meaning of terms like social justice or democracy. In her collaborations with others to create and create and grow the freeskool project she talked with me about, Nadine told me that among the questions pursued by the group was “well what do we mean by... ‘social justice education’?”

Uma told me she asks her students to look around for existing definitions of social justice that they then use to explore potential courses of action for change. Students bring a range of definitions that resonate with them and share these with each other. These definitions, then, serve as a springboard for exploring students’ senses of the prospects for and barriers to change:

And we talked about why they liked it. And the question was, okay, can social justice exist? In our society, can it exist? And we had these discussions and a lot of the students feel like no it can't exist with our economic system. Social justice will never exist with capitalism.

Here, the imaginative process involves translating definitions provided by others into ideas about what these definitions might entail in terms of shifts in human arrangements. In this context, Uma invites students to assess whether they believe the conceptions of social justice that resonate with them are possible considering the context in which it is pursued, which involves economic arrangements, among other things.

Odessa told me that a practice she often uses and would like to use more is inviting students to define for themselves, individually or in groups, key terms that, like “sustainability,” organize her

teaching. On one hand, the process of developing a collective definition of important terms serves other goals: one of Odessa's core pedagogical goals in all the courses she teaches is to increase students' familiarity and skill with consensus decision making. On the other hand, these definitions can then serve as a basis for both imagining ways to put these definitions into the world practically and for assessing the projects they propose in the context of her time with them.

### **Guided Visioning**

In her book *Collective Visioning* Linda Stout (2011) describes a visioning process she has used in both small groups and with hundreds of people that can be as short as several minutes long or take as long as several days. Inviting participants on an imaginative journey by time-machine 25 years into the future, she leads participants through a series of prompts, such as "imagine stepping out into your community free of any fear or anxiety over your own and your children's safety and security. What would that feel like? What are people doing?" or "imagine having all your needs met. Imagine everyone's needs are met – we have free quality education and healthcare, and we are working in a safe environment for fair wages. What would be different for you?" (p. 34). During longer versions of the activity, once the guided visioning portion of the exercise draws to a close, she invites participants to depict what they saw and felt visually, using these representations as a tool for talking about how to pursue whatever shared ground exists.

As I noted in chapter 4, there is a shared sense among many of my research partners that carving out intentional time and space to envision desirable change can play an important role in opening possibilities for transformative action and change and they told me about different methods for doing this work. For instance, Kevin told me about a practice of visualizing a day's previous activities as a way to reinforce learning. He also told me about his general sense that visualization, asking students to "look into their own mind," can be a generative tool for learning, regardless of the topic at hand:

I think, it triggers or starts initiating the imagination to come alive. Once they see that that's a possibility, that it's not just 'okay read this article and write this paper,' which has it's value, but

then accessing the other parts of the brain that are so poorly used typically in at least what I see in academic settings, that will just start the spark.

Among the specific techniques utilized by my research partners, some are as simple as asking a question. Anna, Uma, and Francine spoke about the value of making space for the participants they work with in learning settings to clarify their own needs in the learning environment. Francine might ask “what are your expectations about education? And what do you want from a teacher?” Uma might ask her students “what do you want to learn?” or “what is your ideal school?” Ivy described a simple process by which groups compose collective poems themes like “what does it mean to be queer? What's your vision of safety? What is your vision of liberation?”

Some talked about personal visions in more broad political terms. Anna told me about her use of guided visioning processes with the students with whom she works, students who “been told many times by different teachers that they are stupid and that they can’t do anything.” “So we had to work from a place of just envisioning them being successful. And we did a lot of just real exercises of close your eyes and imagine what success means to you. Close your eyes and imagine what being treated like a human being looks like.”

Martin’s and Tom’s reflections link the work of visioning with concrete strategizing for change. I explained in chapter 4 Martin’s perspective that social movements must grapple intentionally and concretely with what they want, offering the example of developing projects to meet basic needs and distinguishing, for instance, among a goal of “cheap” versus “free” versus “affordable” healthcare. This work involves a visioning process. Tom suggested, as well, the importance of saying, “let's take a moment here to imagine a different configuration.” In order to “try to concretize that imagination for people,” here’s one idea he shared:

Or, you could imagine, if you're outside, drawing a chalk circle around the group and saying, okay, in this space, there is no hierarchical state, capitalism is not here, patriarchy is not here, so in this space what do things look like?

As I described earlier in this chapter, Rita teaches in an interdisciplinary arts program in a university in a large urban setting. Although different classes bring her into contact with different populations, she

told me her partner “always tries to remind me that I’m teaching on the front line.” She explained that although the populations with whom she works vary from class to class, she is sometimes taken aback by the politics and polarities that can show up in her classes and the miseducation students have experienced, leaving them ill equipped to think critically or creatively without a lot of support. In the context of this political and experiential diversity, she sees envisioning personal and systemic possibility as an important part of her work. In the discussion about telling new stories above I noted that an important goal of Rita’s is to help students understand how they are situated within both power structures and a larger ecological context, to “speak to the truth of what they’re experiencing right now,” which is often quite painful.

But another part of her work is to support her students in envisioning alternative possibilities, other pathways for action, by making pieces that “develop a new vision for themselves.” When faced with students who share that they are stuck in boring jobs that they hate, in addition to making space to express these feelings, she makes another kind of invitation:

I’d like you to imagine what kind of job you’d rather have, where would you really find meaning in your life? So that that could be something you work towards. What would it be like if everyone got to choose to do what they’re gifted at? What does that look like?

In describing examples of pedagogies that utilize some process of guided visioning, she told me she might utilize participatory theater techniques (which I discuss at more length below), for example, in order to ask students to “try and imagine does the world look like if globalization as it’s configured right now doesn’t exist.” Or, she might invite students to move from exploring dreams they have at night to “take the dream into the daytime and let’s put some visions on the table. What kind of world do you wanna live in?”

Rita talked with me about the influence of Joanna Macy’s “despair and empowerment” work on her years ago. She told me she was first introduced to Macy’s work when she was invited to the Blue Mountain Center, a retreat center for writers and artists in the Adirondacks that provides residencies for social change focused arts and writers to work without the demands of normal daily life. As she explained, Ronald Reagan had been in office for several years when she was working on a “nuclear nightmare” art piece and having difficult time revamping it because, “we were all thinking that we were gonna die.” In

this context, Joanna Macy's "book literally fell off the shelf in the library and hit me." She told me that reading Macy's (1983) *Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age*, which includes "all these exercises for how to take people through despair and empowerment," allowed her to work through her struggle to complete the piece and to create her own visionary audience participatory workshop for a museum in New York. Describing the significance of learning about Macy's approach through workshops she attended and personal reading, she told me, "it really changed me."

She told me more about the approach and why it resonated so strongly with her:

...one of the things that she does is allows people to really feel their grief, really feel their despair, in a collective environment. And it's only through doing that that you can do the turning, because otherwise people don't feel it's real. But if they embody the pain that they're experiencing, like this group that you're speaking about, really talking about their grief, really talking about their despair in a way that brings forth tears and pounding of pillows and rage and screaming and whatever, then they can create enough spaciousness to bring in the vision.

As Rita explained, within despair and empowerment work, the idea of "unblocking" is key. Macy herself has written that it is essential that people's pain for the world is not only experienced in cognitive terms, but emotionally. It is the emotional experience and expression of pain, grief, and anger that result from witnessing suffering in our shared world that can allow creativity and collective power to be released (Seed, 1988). As we discussed the kinds of promises and limitations that can come from guided visioning exercises, Rita told me about one approach she learned in the context of despair and empowerment work that she feels excited by and why:

So one of the exercises was to imagine opening up a trunk of, you know, photos and mementos that you've had thirty years from now, and you're opening it up to show the newspaper headline and photograph to your grandchildren or to some young people, to show them the event that was part of the turning that allowed the world to become what it is now, and how you participated in that event. So what does that headline look like? What is that photograph? What is the event that occurred? And I just love that! Because it was so concrete and it wasn't so huge as imagining the whole everyday life of that moment, but it was like, oh yeah, yeah, we were able to close that nuclear power plant and that allowed for, and when I do my slideshows, I always show the Greenham Common camp and the art that was woven into the fences of this nuclear missile base in England and how many years it took of women persistently sleeping outside that fence and weaving art into the fence that was cut down every day. How much effort it took and now it's a park. Now, nuclear war has not been prevented, but it's a little piece of the picture.

### **Designing Your Own...**

Some pedagogical approaches described by my research partners asked that participants compose their visions in some tangible way. After a decade of social movement organizing and educational work, at the time of our conversation, Martin was teaching in a university with students who are “tracked to be a part of the state,” a university which he explained to me “factually, generates a lot of politicians on different levels, it generates a lot of lobbyists and bureaucrats and policy makers and think tank people.” Because many of his students will be “involved in developing policies against...non-state actors” who are often labeled as “terrorists” and whose perspectives they may never have to grapple with otherwise, his teaching require students to give attention to the complexities of political events, processes, and perspectives in a way they may never have experienced or have to again. He wants students to emerge from these experiences better informed, more curious, and capable of thinking in nuanced terms, and able to draw their own conclusions about complex political realities.

Martin described the process of non-graded journaling as a “forced opportunity” to articulate political perspectives within a “judgment-free space,” a process which he told me he sees as “a good way for students to explore their own politics.” He described exercises such as one in which students develop a taxonomy of a political group in order to “imagine nuance,” by, for instance, grappling with what might be differences between a campesino farmer and military commander involved with the FARC; or asking about a group like the Ku Klux Klan “is every single person the same?” and articulating their views.

In line with his goal of fostering creative, strategic thinking about issues his students have likely not grappled with before, one part of his approach is to “frontload” his courses with information and materials that, once read, experienced, examined, can serve as useful fodder for collective analysis and assessment. One of the sources of information he provides his students in the context of a course on political violence is a packet containing 30 or 40 communiqués written by different groups so that students can begin to develop an understanding of the positionality of non-state actors and begin to appreciate that acts of violence that are often labeled “terrorist” are carried out “not because they're sociopathic lunatics,” but for explicitly political motivations. For instance, he asks students to read a communiqué from a Palestinian nationalist group so they can explore the perspective of the group: “we're not doing this because we hate

Jews, we're doing this for the following explicit military reasons.” In line with his goal of helping students “imagine nuance,” he wants students to be able to see “depth and the positionality of these groups which are normally written off as violent, period.”

Part of this work may be as simple as asking a question students have never been asked before “Is there legitimacy to the Iraqi insurgency? Is it okay ethically, morally, politically, legally for an Iraqi to kill a US soldier?” or “what are their views on a bomb attack on an abortion clinic or the armed expropriation of a bank to donate money to buy revolutionary supplies?,” questions he described as ultimately “unanswerable.” He explained that in his view, it is okay for students to come to the same conclusion as the state after rigorous examination and reflection, “but at least have your own thought process.”

One way Martin invites students to imagine political complexity he believes they have been discouraged from seeing, and to begin thinking strategically about social change, which is one of his priorities, is by imagining and describing a fictional act of political violence. After introducing them to the communiqués described above, students have the opportunity to write their own communiqué based on an imagined act of political violence. The process of writing an unfamiliar rhetorical style “is kind of fun for them” but he also sees significance in the space opened up by envisioning and articulating their ideas about deep social problems and possible solutions. He told me more about the significance of the strategic thinking engendered in such exercises:

But again to envision a revolutionary way of fixing problems which, normally people are like 'well, that's unfixable,' that's one of the things that I think is really important. Not just policy decisions, not just voting in a certain candidate or voting in a certain policy, but really thinking about developing campaigns. So we talk a lot about the difference between tactics and strategy and the idea of identifying your problem and then developing a strategy based on that, not a strategy based on what's legal or illegal, but a strategy based on how best you conceive of obtaining your objectives.

My conversation with Odessa also revolved around several composition-style approaches to imagining change. She teaches at both a university located in a suburb 15 or so miles from a major urban area and another university located in the heart of the urban area itself. Like many others I spoke with, she told me she is influenced by Freire’s ideas, although she tells me she hasn’t read a lot of his writing. She

most readily identifies with democratic pedagogical traditions and in the years I have known her, she has consistently sought out new ways to engage learning communities in participatory strategies. She told me, “my class is really noisy and somewhat chaotic sometimes and people talk a lot” and that one of the positive types of feedback she often receives from visitors is their reflection to her that “wow, everybody's participating.” Like Martin, her experience outside the classroom seems to have an important influence on her pedagogy inside it. In her case, engagement with the intentional communities movement and her experience living in various intentional communities also reflects a desire that people participate actively in all aspects of their lives. Environmental sustainability and social justice are strong themes in her teaching and two threads run through all of her work: she wants students to come away with an increased understandings about social justice and a heightened appreciation about the value of consensus processes. In the context of this work, she described to me a variety of strategies she utilizes to invite students to design their vision of positive change, which range from in-class activities to quarter long projects.

In one course focused on common property, students engaged in two long-term group projects aimed at designing a student-run community garden for their campus. Over the course of the quarter, through regular class conversations facilitated by her or student facilitators, students were invited to apply the ideas from a range of frameworks, sets of principles, and other course materials she had introduced to their developing proposals. According to Odessa, “it allowed them to apply the information to a pseudo real-life situation and then it would also allow them to envision what it might be like.” And, she told me, “it worked out really well” and, in fact, students “applauded at the end of the class 'cause I think it was like, they loved it.”

In another approach she described, she invited students to envision possibility not in relation to their own design projects, but in relation to existing community projects. She told me about an activity in which students watched the film *The Garden* (Kennedy, 2008) about a community garden in South Central Los Angeles which she tells me she sees as “just super depressing” but which she likes “because it shows, there's just so much happening, right? And it really shows the complexity about all these issues.

What is community? Who is the community?” During the next session, she introduces students to the “wheel of participation” which differentiates among strategies for participatory planning which range from no participatory involvement at all to meaningful involvement at every level:

And it has these levels for community participation. The first level's just information, you're getting information. The next level is maybe input, like a town meeting. And then the next level is being involved in the process, the decision-making process and the next level is, final level is empowerment just like giving the power to different groups to do what they need to do.

After introducing students to the model, students form groups and are assigned a particular slice of the wheel with the task to apply the particular strategy to the process they had learned about at the South Central Farm in the film the session before: “what if the city of LA had adopted the pie that you were assigned. At any given point, you can insert this into any given point in the process, what would, how would things have been different?” Her observation of conversations that seemed “really powerful” to her – “they were talking about so much” – was tempered by an awareness that perhaps the process was more difficult than she anticipated, explaining “they could not grasp it and they kept asking, they were like, I don't understand, can you repeat what we're supposed to be doing. What is empowerment?” As a result, “at the end I was kind of bummed, because I was like this is not what I had envisioned. Right? And I was like, that didn't work.” But, she continued, “one student left and came back and was like ‘I really found that really powerful!’” which is a good reminder that often the effectiveness of such processes may not be immediately apparent.

Odessa also invites students to design changes they desire on smaller scales through regular class activities and mini-assignments. She gave me an example of a simple exercise in which she introduces students to the city planning process utilized in the city in which their college is located and explore what's missing from the plans. “And of course agriculture's missing, no gardens, no community gardens or anything.” Students are invited then to share ideas about how community or urban agriculture might be incorporated. “And that's always really simple and easy, because I give them a map and they just color it in, rooftop gardens and a community garden and whatever. Orchards and fruit trees and things like that.” Rita also described a similar green-mapping project seemed to open a flood of ideas and expressions

when she simply asked “what do you really want to see on this campus? What's missing?” In her case, collective enthusiasm was underscored when the group used its resulting product as a basis to participate in a campus renovation planning meeting. She told me “students felt, wow, I'm empowered! I can take this somewhere....there was this real sense of, gee, I'm doing something. We're doing something. This might have an impact.”

Odessa also described to me more challenging exercises. For instance, she described to me processes in which students are invited to consider the implications of an 85% - 100% reduction in fossil fuels. Working individually and then in groups, they used discussion and a range of creative methods to explore “what does our world look like without fossil fuels?” and “okay what are we gonna do?”

While common in fields like architecture or urban planning, design charrettes are less common in fields like anthropology or interdisciplinary social sciences or humanities. In Odessa's experience, inviting students to rapidly generate ideas together, and share them, as a way to synthesize and apply their learning can sometimes work out really well, and can sometimes be really difficult: “it depends on the student, it depends on the class, right?” Reactions to the process are mixed. “I've had classes where it's like, you want us to do what? They have a really hard time coming out of the bubble of they can be super creative. And then I've had students be uber-creative and so that's kind of interesting as well.” About one group of students, she told me, “they had a blast. They were like, everybody was smiling and they were all working and they were all talking...they really enjoyed that, I think.”

She described one process to me in which students chose the scale at which they wanted to work (at the city level, regional level, etc.) and then created designs, “thinking about community and transportation and energy and food and all of this stuff, you know?” But creative thinking can be a challenge when a collective willingness to suspend usual assumptions and when a collective spirit of openness to experimentation is not present.

But it's really hard for students to break out of, to say, okay can we envision something completely different? Is that okay? 'Cause I'm like, it's okay! You can do it. And they're like...oh should we just think about what's possible? And I'm like, what is possible? I don't know. You know? So can we envision a city without cars, yeah go for it! We can't have a city with cars forever, it's not gonna happen. It's just not possible. So that's not possible, so let's think about like,

turn around what's possible and what's not possible. And so students have, and so I tell them, there are no holds barred. And I get a few students who go with way extreme out there ideas which are cool, but then like, and then I get students who work within kind of like what would be the expected, what they think would be possible in our society right now, given our political climate. So I get that whole range, in terms of the charrettes.

Ivy's view that collaboration can be a wonderful wellspring for enhanced creativity, resonated with some of Odessa's reflections. As Ivy told me, visioning together can be exciting, validating, and contagious:

I think another big thing is the isolation, I think visioning is so important in community and so hard to do as an individual or in isolation.... I think in part 'cause it's hard to think it matters. Who cares? I think in part because, part of visioning is building on different ideas, different people's ideas, and I think a lot of people tend to get excited by putting out an idea and having people add to it and building together. I think playing Legos by yourself if no one's ever gonna see it is not that fun for most people. I think certain people it is, but my feeling is it's a rarity. Yeah. And so it's that same idea of people being able to see it, being able to witness it, being able to validate it as a real, and then being able to add to it.

Odessa's emphasis on collective process may also spring from the assumption that many people are most creative when they are building together. In her own words, her emphasis on collaboration underscores her belief that people need to learn "they have to work together to find answers that are good for the group."

### **Experiment**

At the center of the approaches I describe in this section is an ethos of experimentation, an invitation to try the new and unfamiliar, to engage in modes of learning that intentionally nudge people out of their comfort zone and habitual ways of thinking or doing in order to imagine new – always evolving – ends. As Wanda explained, playful and artistic experimentation can be powerful ways to foster the kinds of creative risk-taking that are at the heart of her work, "I've seen such amazing results when people just are able to safely, in quotations, confront the unknown," results such as being able to see and experience oneself as an agent in one's life.

In this section, I describe reflections my research partners shared about their use of artistic methods that may be familiar to readers, such as visual arts, music, and participatory theater, as well as playful pedagogies that may be less familiar, such as culture jamming and acrobatics.

### **Expressing Artistically**

A number of my research participants noted the power of various forms of artistic expression as an antidote to more “sterile” traditional modes of expressing ideas or desires that can “stifle imagination” and leave people feeling “bogged down.” Speaking about the power of the arts as tools for thinking differently, evocative phrases like “creatively and wildly,” “revelation and freedom,” and “magic” peppered our conversations, bringing in a decidedly different tone. As Ivy told me, “I’ve always had this vision of arts as reminding us of the way the world was, of pointing out the way the world is, and of helping us see the way the world could be, so I think it’s a fundamental part of what the arts are.” Many of my conversations with my research partners about their pedagogical use of the arts resonated with Ivy’s sentiment that art “connects with the experience that I’m having and the emotions that I have and the daily struggles that I have” in a way that is different than other modes. My research partners’ reflections here resonate with assertions made by scholars like Greene (1995b), Weems (2003), and Sweet (2010) which highlight the power of artistic processes such as drawing or visual art, creative writing, poetry, spoken word, hip hop, singing, or participatory theater to foster new ideas and ways of viewing the world, as well as new hopes, visions, and dreams.

Several of my research partners talked about the value of creating visual arts. Kevin contrasted “standard academic” techniques that in his view can stifle imagination with artistic ones that may open more creative, visionary space: “so we’ll ask them to draw or paint or color some aspect that would typically be written or requested as ‘okay write this paper.’” Uma described a student-determined class project on domestic violence, a topic that was very close to home for many of them, in which students each created a visual art piece dedicated to women who had been abused. Ivy told me about inviting youth to imagine and draw a tree as a metaphor for “what do you want?” – roots as metaphors for

resources, the trunk as obstacles, and fruit as what you are hoping to get. Nadine spoke about the potential value of visually depicting a group's vision as a way to both "break away from traditional modes" and also to make shared vision into "something that is more concrete."

In Wanda's view, the accessibility of the creative risks involved in drawing offer advantages, particularly in the early stages of working with a group.

The drawing work is great when I'm doing work in places where I'm out of context. So I travel a lot to do this kind of work and I often start with drawing because it's not as culturally loaded and it doesn't require as much frontloading from me. So it really allows people to come to the creative risk without having to agree with me first or without having necessarily to have language in common with [me].

She said she often uses automatic drawing, from the Surrealist tradition, "it's sorta like freestyling...drawing without thinking," and portraiture, as a way of "seeing, learning, gathering information about ourselves." Even though she knows that many people may feel fear around drawing and that it can "be a big push for them," she finds these strategies useful as ways to build "courage and a sense of your own power, your own ability to act under pressure. Your own ability to make something out of nothing."

Wanda spoke about the value of hip hop in similar terms. In freestyling, she told me, people can "experience that split second of knowing - not knowing-ness and expressing that. And there's so much fear for people around that and when they get into that zone, there's a lot of revelation of freedom in it." She told me that hip hop offers young people the opportunity also to let go of the fear they have around language and writing, "and just learn to express themselves in really these kind of tumbling, overflowing images," using language flexibly and sonically in a way that connects language to body. Her discussion of hip hop also highlighted the value of modes that have special significance for particular communities:

Well, hip hop is super useful when I'm working in the youth detention center, for instance, it has a lot of cache because it's been the voice of people who are voiceless and it's been a place for a lot of rage and projection and aggression to have a home and I find that super important that that exist. And then to do this kind of really positive work using that mode, it's kind of like a gate, a key in a lock. And so I find that just that piece, building on the history of that art form gives it a very unique tone. And when you do it with adults it can become this kind of joke and I find it really sort of becomes, the mode itself becomes disrespected, it kind of gets aped, in a way. But when I do it with young people who are marginalized, especially young people who are marginalized, they come to it with so much respect.

She also spoke to me about the power of singing, which, she explained some people experience as “one of the most terrifying things” because so many people have had their physical voice blocked or restricted. “I think so many people are trained to keep their sound to themselves, keep their voices down. Sit still, keep your voice down.” In this context, especially among adult women, “when that voice comes out, and it comes through the whole body, I see these really beautiful relationships come out of it.” She explained to me “because of what voices in harmony represent to almost everyone on this planet, just the fact of opening your voice and feeling it come into resonance with another person's voice, the intimacy of that and the magic of it, it's so powerful.” Wanda’s comments here highlight the power of singing together as a way to foster a strong and lasting sense of connectedness:

The combination of voices taking space together, it's almost like, I don't know if this is exactly what I mean, but it's almost like there's another being, the singing itself creates this self. And when I was talkin' earlier, like what's my dream? It's those levels of self, to access those different levels of self. And it's like, when 40 people are singing together, they become a self in a way that's very different than if they were in a play. Because you sort of cede your individuality to that self, just temporarily, to that song and that pattern and that underlying pattern. When it's working it's so beautiful and it's so unforgettable to people. And it does something amazing with the memory, too. People will leave a gathering and they keep that song, it reminds you of that moment of belonging and connectedness.

A handful of my research partners spoke with me about engaging in participatory theater work within different kinds of learning communities. Uma told me about a group of her students who created a play about how war can impact individual people and how their Catholic school community ought to view wars abroad. Ivy described a variety of participatory theater activities, including one in which participants at a youth arts camp wrote monologues that were then anonymously given to a college theater class to perform for the community. Nadine, Rita, Wanda, and Patrick also shared their enthusiasm about the particular benefits of theater work as a vehicle for building imaginative thinking.

Participatory theater is the heart of Patrick’s pedagogical work with young people. And, like most of the others who told me about their drama or theater work, Patrick explained, “you won't be surprised that I draw a lot of my inspiration and some of my techniques from Augusto Boal and the Theater of the Oppressed.” Patrick described to me working with theater in both grassroots organizing contexts outside

the United States (as both a visionary organizing vehicle and as a political strategy to subvert exclusionary, racist policies related to travel across borders) and with young people particularly in public schools in large cities. No matter the context, he told me “my mission is always to empower the participants in reclaiming their own story and being the ones to tell it.” Also, like others who use Boal’s (1979, 1992) techniques, he elaborated on the significance of the participatory theater work he does by telling me “I always imagine the one driving question that’s behind that entire body of work is, what else is possible?”

He explained that he uses the forums of imagination and improvisation to encourage students to explore both issues that may feel very close to home to them, but also issues that students may need to learn about either because of individual teachers’ curricula or state-mandated standards in areas like history, political theory, or literature.

Here Patrick describes the kind of process that can bridge classroom content with issues young people face in their daily lives:

And then we start with some really simple scenarios, where each of the students will have like an index card that just lets them know basically who they are, what activity they're doing, and what they need in this scenario, what they're trying to get. And they, maybe 5 or 6 of them volunteers...but their cards by definition are putting them in conflict. And we start with situations that are really easy for them to understand and access and we just let them try to kind of fight it out, know that we're looking for solutions, you have to get what you want, but think about solutions that will really work. So the first ones that always jump to mind are when I can't get the thing that I want is, well, I can shoot him, I can punch him, I can do this. And we freeze the action and talk about whether that would actually be the solution that would get you the thing that you want. If retribution or police become involved, did that really solve the problem for you? So a lot, just conflict mediation. And then when they reach an impasse, we freeze them and take suggestions on the audience for what other tactics they might try, these could be emotional tactics or they can be more like negotiating strategies or just new ideas for solution seeking and sometimes we actually take, if somebody really has an idea they feel strongly about, we'll let them come in and replace one of the actors or add in a new character, and try to add that into the mix. And then we reflect on what happened in that scene, where the power was, where the conflict was. And depending on the needs of the teacher and how it's connecting to our theme, then that's how we guide the reflection.

He described a process in which students begin with situations that may feel familiar, but then develop “muscles” that allow them to extend their imaginative reach:

And then we move up into increasingly complex and situations and scenarios, with characters that are a little further out of their experience, so that they're kind of stretching that muscle of imagination, too. Once they know what it's like to have this negotiation at their corner store, but what is it like to be a fisherman in Guatemala or what is it like to be in the war in 1942 or whatever it is.

For Ivy, theater can allow young people to name the constricting forces in their own lives and tap into more desirable ways of self-determining their own identities – working “from the hardship of the reality into what is your vision?” Ivy described a process through which participants were invited to embody their ideal visions gender:

how would you move if your shoulders were masculine? Just beginning to percolate some of the notions of masculinity versus femininity that we have. Trying to name that that's a binary. And then [we] got into a really cool conversation around who benefits and naming the sale of gender and the way in which gender is sold. And talked about what does it mean to be a perfect woman and what do you have to buy? And what does it mean to be a perfect man and what do you have to buy? And so looking at commercialization of it and then did, basically from the theater of the oppressed thing where, it started with what's your, what does your socialized gender look like? And then five steps to what's your ideal? What would be the perfect manifestation of your gender? So we had costumes. I love to use costumes. So everyone grabbed a costume and it was like, okay, so we had them make a pose with the costume of their socialized gender. And then it was like, we're gonna clap our hands five times and each time we clap our hands, you're gonna take one step towards your perfect manifestation of gender.

Like the others who spoke with me about their use of theater, Patrick explained that the participatory techniques he uses offer a variety of benefits not common to other modes of learning. Getting folks “into their body” in the ways he describes above – and which Ivy’s example illustrates so clearly – can be a valuable way to do several things. As Patrick explained, working with bodies also shares some characteristics with the physical travel I explored above in the sense that they can help people make a break with perhaps entrenched ways of working and instead “get people thinking non-habitually.” He also explained that embodying ideas makes them memorable in unique ways because “making them just real, they're in the first person, they're in the flesh right there. There's an emotional connection to it that they remember”

The embodiment involved in theater work also allows participants to make concrete to themselves processes they might otherwise find it difficult to imagine living through, “they're able to empathize with some of those issues because they felt in some way what that was like to live it for a little while,” as

Patrick told me. Wanda also explained that working with the body as a medium of exploration can be an incredibly powerful and effective way to “build bridges across difference.” As she told me: “Cause in the body we all have such similar experiences, and it's so accessible and so it breaks down a lot of barriers and it really lets us see what are our common struggles? And who are our common oppressors?”

### **Playing with Pedagogies**

My research partners also talked with me about experimentation with other kinds of creative methods. Ivy mentioned using acrobatics, for instance, “as a way of reexamining what our bodies are capable of and using that as a metaphor for what are we capable of.” Ivy also spoke about tapping “some of the revolutionary or radical histories of clowning” in order to “look at clowning as how does making everything a problem lead toward solutions?” In the last chapter, I explained that Sarah, in particular, stressed the critical importance of activists expanding their capacity for “boundless creativity,” a strategically important ability which, as she put it, can help keep oppressors “off balance.”

Both Tom and Rita explained that the observation of such playful pedagogies as the culture jamming of groups like the Yes Men (Nomai, 2008) can play a role in helping people become more critical about the institutions that shape their lives. Here is Tom explaining a satirical hoax he helped organize in the 90s:

And in terms of trajectory, I've always been interested in changing minds and in some respects what's called, I guess, social marketing in a sort of respect now *vis-à-vis* campaigns, you know? So just as an example, we did a benefit concert for a large telecommunications company as a joke back in the late 90s to make a mockery of the fact that they were raising rates while at the same time denying phone access to people who couldn't afford it. This billion dollar company, we'll hold them a benefit concert. So just finding creative ways of getting into the mainstream media, of getting the message out and trying to sort of shift opinion and to open people's eyes to what's going on.

While Tom's emphasis was on garnering media attention, Rita offered a more process-oriented perspective about the potentially transformative impacts of culture jamming events or processes. Earlier in our conversation she had stressed the importance of bringing political and ethical conversations into spaces where people actually live our lives, such as living rooms and kitchen tables. But she said

additional opportunities that “bring people out of their houses” (Rita, 019) and into public space may also speak to people by provoking new questions:

So it may be that people are still reticent, not just because of fear, but because they're just overwhelmed and busy and it may take something extraordinary to get them out. And the idea of just sitting around having a conversation about the neighborhood or about global warming or about emergency preparedness isn't enough for them to come. And so, it may be that you have to do something that's a real aesthetic journey for people, where they have to move to the next place, another plane of response, they can't be in their routine mind, they have to go, oh things are a little bit different in this moment. The trees are all blue! Why? Or, there are people who are sitting in the middle of the road wearing clown costumes. Why? Is it just annoying me right now or is there something else going on? You know?

In his book *Dream*, Stephen Duncombe (2007) has written about ethical spectacles as “a dream put on display” (p. 174). Some scholars, like Nomai (2008), who has written about the culture jams of groups such as the Yes Men or the project Adbusters as public pedagogies for enhancing critical consciousness of the public, and Paul Duncum (2011), who has written about bringing students out of classrooms to examine the political possibilities of public arts interventions, have described culture jamming in specifically pedagogical terms. In Duncum’s view, creative and playful public interventions can accomplish several pedagogical goals particularly well: first, as inherently visual methods, culture jamming is an embodied way of “answering back to power” (p. 360) theatrically and in public; second, such interventions “provide models for students to learn about how artists variously address issues of social justice despite the necessary negotiations, exploit the opportunities afforded, employ strategies of subversion, and compromise when they have no choice.” (p. 360); and third, culture jamming builds on the strengths of playful pedagogies as a means of addressing issues that are particularly controversial, avoiding some of the pitfalls of more conventional pedagogies by “leavening” such issues with the “pleasure of play” (p. 360).

### **Experience**

In her new book describing her journey to visit 14 ecovillages around the world, Karen Litfin (2013) described ecovillages as “living laboratories” that can be viewed as training centers for a new order (p. 130). Utilizing a framework she refers to as E2C2, the book’s main chapters describe the ways

ecovillages relate to four key dimensions of sustainability: ecology, economy, community, and consciousness. That learning is both an animating force and outcome of participating in ecovillages is a thread that runs through the whole book. She argues that the learning that takes place within them diverges sharply from what happens in classrooms, “rather than trying to pass exams in order to find a niche within the status quo, students are learning the skills necessary to create viable models of living” (p. 131). The pedagogical perspectives and approaches I highlight in this section emphasize the critical importance of the idea that our imaginations are constrained by what we have been exposed to and that the best way to expand individual and collective senses of possibility is to engage people in trying to build the changes they want here and now, rather than waiting until some future time.

Although these perspectives share common ground with other pedagogical strategies that are frequently referred to as “experiential,” the views I highlight here largely emphasize what I have described earlier as “prefigurative” approaches. Tom put his commitment to prefigurative experiential pedagogies this way:

And one of the battles of prefigurative politics or I like the temporary autonomous zone stuff of Hakim Bey in that it's, like what's best is not only to be able to envision something, but to actually experience a different world. That's the real role of education, it's hard to provide that in the classroom, that's where political education can be important. But in the meeting, in the protest, in the organization, you actually experience a different way of relating, that's inspiring. And that's very important. Because, again, thinking about something intellectually versus experiencing it are very different animals and still thinking about it intellectually is important, but if you can actually provide people with an experience of a different world somehow, that's pretty powerful.

In chapter 3, I described the significance of a prefigurative approach to social change from my research partners’ perspectives. Here I emphasize their perspectives about what working together to create the changes we seek in the here and now can offer as a teaching and learning strategy.

### **Social Relationships**

Some of my research partners highlighted the power of working to build social or educational relationships based on values like friendship, allyship, or mutuality.

In Quincy's view, being socialized in a hierarchical, segregated, exclusionary world constrains the kinds of relationships those seeking change can easily build. Social constructions of identity categories like gender and sexuality "get in the way of our forming meaningful, effective relationships with new people." For this reason, he argues that it is critical that "we should be self reflective on those limits and strategize for how we can overcome them in our everyday practices." Quincy told me more about what he sees as potentially effective strategies for action in light of the social constrictions he described:

I was talking about how the projects I'm involved in now kind of came out of that hunger strike, I feel like the friendships that I've formed or people involved in that formed with each other were kind of the basis, the fundamental basis, for continuing on those projects. So I think seeing how affective relationships between people has a really key [role to play], I think it's really important for activists to develop practices for sustaining those relationships and being self-critical about all the ways that those relationships can go wrong or ways that problems can occur based on gender and sexuality and race and class dynamics.

Ivy observed that facilitators can involve young people in specific practices that may nurture more politically effective allyship. The strategic employment of segregation through caucusing may create space for people struggling with similar experiences based on shared positioning in social hierarchies to have more open space to share feelings like shame or guilt without demanding that those positioned differently have to witness such processing. Ivy told me about making space for white youth to talk "about what it's like to be white and the shame of that" within a community" can be "really awesome." In this kind of space "the white facilitators acknowledge that we don't want the people of color to have to hold that burden, so we take it outside of the larger community and have that conversation," a commitment Ivy thinks can be very useful.

Xavier highlighted the way a willingness to meaningfully connect across perceived social differences can provide profound opportunities for critical-self reflection. In chapter 3, I described Xavier's perspective that a process of divesting from harmful hierarchical relationships means that "aspects of the old self have to be burned away...if that skin is burned off, maybe there's a new skin that can go out in the world and go on." Describing what that kind of process might entail, he told me "kind of what I want to do is, it's terrible to say, but kinda seduce people into the fire, as much fire as they can take at a given

time.” While he talked about his own efforts with students with whom he works, he also reflected on experiences in his own political development:

I grew up in this racist, sexist, homophobic environment primarily and I can name times, I can remember meeting my first feminist, she did a really good job in showing me how I was acting and why I was that way and so on and so forth and then sending me on my way. It amazing. I never forgot those lessons.

He told me these kinds of learning processes need not be one way, but can be one of mutual seduction and growth. He told me there is power in approaches that asks “what do we have that can change each other?” While he works to draw people toward experiences that may feel painful in the moment, but ultimately result in powerful growth, he told me he yearns for and seeks out such experiences, too, noting “I always want to learn, I get very bored and I always am learning, I’m always trying to learn. You know, people will bring me through various fires” as well.

Some of my research partners specifically spoke with me about their efforts to disrupt hierarchical adult-youth relationships, shifting in the direction of what they view as healthier intergenerational relationships. Anna told me that simple proximity between youth and adults can help young people understand that the demonization of young people so prevalent in the United States is not shared by all: “I feel like students have the impression that communities that they’re in don’t like them, which is true, but not all true.” She believes that, with intention, new and supportive relationships can be enacted, relationships that can foster a sense of connectedness many of the students she works with have not had the opportunity to develop. In her vision, she hopes “to have my students know that people in the community care about their education and want to be involved in it.” She told me a move in this direction can be as simple as having adults come to be present in classrooms, not even in a formal teaching capacity, “but just come to class and hear the students read their writing or help them read that day or just do anything, just so that they see these new people and don’t feel so isolated.”

For Ivy, bringing young people into contact with adults can provide young people with models of adulthood which can then be considered and explored as possible developmental or life pathways. As Ivy put it, “I think also this space for young people to just be around adults being adults is also incredible

learning...it's like the adults being adults and you just got to watch and kinda learn how to be an adult, or one vision of being an adult.” Ivy wondered aloud, “as radical community, how do we do that?”

Uma, too, highlighted how intergenerational interactions can profoundly shape young people’s understandings of the world we share:

Getting them out in the world. Right?...Just getting them out in the street and seeing what's going on. What sort of interactions can they have with adults who are not their teachers or their parents? Which is really important because they feel that they have, you know, their family friends, or there's also that, social structures and having conversations with adults, some kids are really good at it, and others aren't. And putting them in opportunities where they can have conversations with adults about issues that mean something, it changes a lot how they see the world.

Although my research partners did not speak directly to this issue, another set of possibilities created in such intergenerational interactions, of course, is that adults will have their points of view profoundly changed, as well.

Most of my research partners talked with me about ways they actively work to disrupt hierarchical educational relationships, relationships between people typically called “teachers” and “students,” regardless of the age of the people involved, for instance, by organizing together. As Kevin told me, “this process of unlearning this system of hierarchical educational approach is part of my intent.” Quincy spoke about his efforts along these lines in more traditional classroom spaces and in the context of a freeschool project he co-organized. Although he spoke at length about some of the challenges imposed by trying to take a more radical approach in the university teaching he does, Quincy told me that he has had some success breaking out of university imposed hierarchies using an approach shared by several of my research partners – organizing alongside people in the classes they teach or facilitate. Organizing with students can challenge the popular paradigm of the “politically neutral educator” who does not have relationships with students outside the classroom in ways that creates fertile ground for the developing a sense of shared struggle and collaborative relationships:

One part of it I really enjoyed was a couple of my activist friends took the class and so we got to kind of bring in some of our activist discussions into class and conversely talk about the themes of the class in our activism. And we actually did a kind of activist event, during the class we, or some of us, occupied a building on campus for a few days and so yeah that was pretty cool to break down the usual teacher-student barriers and be like collaborative activists together.

In a similar way, one of the freeschool courses he co-facilitated – a course that focused on “theorizing the university” by learning about critiques of university corporatization, about academic governance, and about academic union movements – provided space to create new kinds of relationships in spite of the kinds of barriers and divisions that typically constrain relationships among the kinds of folks who were involved.

And those were really cool classes because it was, the participants included professors and grad students and undergrads overcoming those usual segmentations of work on campus, so just thinking about how barriers can be overcome, because we weren't being graded and because the usual hierarchies were broken down because different people's knowledges from those different positions was deemed as valuable in equal ways, I think we were able to form more authentic...relationships with each other.

He explained that the relationships that were formed in “more radical classes” like this helped “helped us subscribe to anticapitalist, pro-labor perspectives [that] I think were contagious with our organizing and practice in a mutually beneficial way.” In this example, he highlighted how nurturing a cooperative ethic in all aspects of an educational institution can offer support for building collaborative educational relationships. He told me that organizers of the freeschool worked to create an infrastructure to support people who want to gather to engage in cooperative teaching and learning and illustrated the ways the language used within the project reflect the spirit those involved are hoping to nurture:

So in our role as organizers we don't see ourselves as educators or even as teachers. But then, I've also taken on the role of teacher in some of those classes, but even in that role, we use the words facilitator and participant instead of teacher and learner, to try to destabilize the usual hierarchy between like expert teachers and non-expert students. So we can kind of see everybody as bringing some knowledge and skills to the learning encounters that we're supporting. While also recognizing differences in the knowledge and skills that people bring. People who are designated as facilitators are usually bringing the knowledges and skills set the participants want to acquire. So recognizing those differences and creating supportive situations for mutual exchange and dialogue to occur.

Xavier echoed a similar sentiment in relation to his experience with a community education project that linked university-affiliated people with members of the university's surrounding community. In this case, the approach also centers a value of mutuality and cooperation and

was about the unsettling of the university expert persona, while acknowledging that, yeah, some of us study some of this stuff for years and years and we have some things to say about it, but the

way in which we say it and the position we can occupy when we do is as someone who is in this community and as someone who has something to contribute to something we all wanna do.

The example above highlights some of the ways my research partners hope intentional work to destabilize what might have been perceived as “normal” or rigid hierarchies can open new possibilities for deepening or creating other kinds of relationships in the future. From Quincy’s perspective, it is the affective dimension of different kinds of prefigurative relationships that can accomplish one of the ends he sees as vital to producing transformative change, but also very difficult to produce – desire.

I guess I think one of the big obstacles to radical movements now is the commodifying of the image or the lifestyle of the radical movement where people can just wear the clothes and listen to the music and make themselves visible within the scene and then feel like they have become part of the movement just by participating in that performance. And so, I think that's the kind of recuperation of the creative activities of the movement for a pretty normalizing lifestyle. So I think, maybe a lot more than the images, we need relationships that are the basis for forms of community or sociabilities or collectivities that are working together to create resistance projects or create alternatives while simultaneously subverting and resisting dominant things. And so, I think the actual affective relationships between people involved in those collectives are like the kind of wellspring of desires for changing the world and creating another world.

## **Practices**

My research partners also talked with me about the ways engaging in specific kinds of practices can allow communities to experience democracy, practices of meeting human needs, or practices for connecting in new ways.

“Popular education should give people experience in making decisions,” Myles Horton said (Horton, Kohl, and Kohl, 1998, p. 134); he also he also observed, while “many take it for granted that people can make decisions, the majority of us are not allowed to make decisions about most of the things that are important” (p. 134). Horton founded Highlander in part on two assumptions shared by many of my research partners: that a healthier, more just world requires that people have control over the decisions that impact our lives and that that the best way to learn to do democracy is to create and practice it. Several of my research partners highlighted the pedagogical significance of practicing democracy on a daily basis in a variety of spaces that people live their lives: homes, classrooms, communities, organizations, and social movements.

For Odessa, introducing her university students to consensus processes and practices is a core goal in all her courses both because she wants them to experience the power of horizontal decision-making, but also to encourage a sense of interdependence and understanding that they need others to think better about collective problems they face. She wants them to be exposed “to the idea that they don't have the answers and that no one has the answers and that they have to work together to find answers that are good for the group. That way they can learn from other people, you know?” Making decisions together can create important opportunities not only to become aware of gaps in one’s knowledge, but also to recognize the power held within groups. I asked her to tell me what is so powerful about making decisions democratically in groups:

Oh gosh, learning about other people's perspectives on things. You're learning about other people's knowledge. Gaining insight into yourself about the fact that you don't have all the answers, right? That other people have great ideas and so I think you're learning some self-awareness. And then you're just being able to cull information from a lot of people, like you have a problem and you have like 12, 25 different ways of looking at it and that's pretty powerful in terms of getting a larger pool of knowledge to get access to in terms of communities or even different organizational groups. I think that's pretty powerful, you're learning together, I think that's pretty powerful as well.

Part of Anna’s visioning work with her high school students involves asking them to envision the kind of classroom they believe will be supportive of their learning, “because it’s not my position as the teacher to create rules for you, it’s your position to create safer space for your education. So how are you going to do that?” She told me about a group of students who were initially skeptical of the idea that they could take responsibility for creating a classroom that could meet their needs, and who pushed back against a video she showed in which Howard Zinn talks about being an anarchist by echoing the popular notion ‘well if there’s just no rules then there’s chaos and we’ll never all agree’. But by working together to address common needs and challenges, she explained that students were able to expand their sense of what might be possible. Describing a process of collaborating to create a learning space that would meet students’ needs, she explained that she would have “non-negotiables,” giving the example of prohibiting racist or sexist language, that students would then buy in to, but students were responsible for going further. She described to me how one group collectively tackled one of the issues that seems to vex

classroom teachers most: cell phones. Although she told me lots of teachers take them away, “I was of the understanding that for my students their cell phone was one of the only real things that was theirs, that connected them to the world when they feel so isolated and alienated.” So students made their own rule: “it was their rule they would learn to be responsible for it. And so that was creating a different vision because then once they were able to be responsible, it wasn’t an issue anymore.” Collaborating like this on issues significant to young people themselves challenged their initial assumptions in a powerful way:

And with working, they figured out that they could all agree on so many different things and that the cell phone thing was just one of them and once they agreed and once they had control it wasn’t an issue anymore. Then they wanted to be engaged in the class and create this classroom where they were advocates for their own education. And that was really important to them.

Anna told me she hopes that students will carry such visioning processes with them in a way that might spur both desire and action for continued involvement in making decisions the broader schools, communities, cities, and other contexts in which they live their lives.

Myles Horton echoed Anna’s sentiments here when he said: “If you believe in democracy...you have to believe that people have the capacity within themselves to develop the ability to govern themselves” (Horton, Kohl, and Kohl, 1998, p. 131). Further, “Given genuine decision-making powers, people will not only learn rapidly to make socially useful decisions, but they will also assume responsibility for carrying out decisions based on their collective judgment” (p. 134). Along these lines, Ivy reflected about how incredible it can feel when young people to experience deep support and trust in youth organizations:

part of the educational practice or pedagogy of that organization was it needed to get done and so you figure it out. So there was very rarely times when it'd be like, do you know how to do something? It'd just be like, who wants to do this? Raise your hand and then you'd figure it out, often times with the adult staff support.

Vince talked about growing up in a small island community of about 100 people in which any issue or concern related to the community could be brought to the collective table, discussed, and decided upon in a modified consensus process at regular community meetings. Although the community meeting as a body did not have official political power in the way a city council might, it provided Vince with a

powerful example of participatory democracy, and particularly, consensus process, that shaped his political life in the years to come. “And then I went out into the world and learned more about democratic processes and the ways that people make decisions in our society,” he told me, “I started to kind of look back on that as kind of an interesting example of something similar to a New England style town meeting organizing structure where people can participate relatively evenly.”

These early experiences with deep forms of participatory democracy in action was undoubtedly part of what drew him to work with others to practice larger-scale coordination and horizontal decision-making in the global justice movement, such as the Direct Action Network’s spokescouncil model. In his experience, such practices demonstrate their pedagogical value in part because they provide participants a potentially inspiring and definitely tangible example of an alternative-in-action and cannot be easily dismissed: “it’s not a totally utopian dream to think, okay we can self-organize, because there’ve been examples throughout history and here I’m seeing an example right now that isn’t perfect, but it basically functions for the purposes that it’s there to serve.”

Creating ways to meet human needs outside neoliberalism and capitalism was a common thread among these interviews, but few of my research partners spoke at length or with specificity about specific prefigurative practices which might enhance the sense that people can self-organize to meet community needs. Ivy did speak about the value of beginning at a very local scale – within one’s own life – and modeling the way the world might be. In this strategy, it’s essential to examine whether the model could feasibly and ethically be scaled-up in the interest of “building a larger culture.” Ivy gave the example of communities creating cultures around resource sharing that can provide a basis for “experimenting and attempting to live small pockets of a utopian world within a capitalist system,” which Ivy noted is already happening in lots of places. Jenny Cameron (2007), however, has recommended a three-pronged approach that involves 1) identifying existing economic diversity, 2) recognizing economic interdependence, and 3) fostering further economic interdependence. Her work, like that of scholars like Gibson-Graham (2008) and Ethan Miller (2004, 2011), emphasizes that a diverse economy already exists and that we each participate in it in myriad ways. Our task, then, is to expand our participation in non-capitalist economic

activity while “collectively practicing ethical economic decision making to build community economies” (p. 15).

In the examples so far, I have shared perspectives that highlight the power of active participation in working to create new kinds of social, educational, and economic relationships in supporting people to develop new senses of possibility. Several of my research partners spoke specifically about the essential work of intentionally caring for oneself partly by engaging in connectedness practices. For instance, Kevin’s teaching work in ecovillages goes beyond “book learning or academic studying” to include “bodily experiencing” as a basis for cultivating new understandings and growth.

For example, we do yoga every day as a form of kind of body-mind connection, Body, Mind, Spirit, that’s one of the classes, and so having that as an experience, practicing meditation, just getting a feel for what are different ways of developing a personal spiritual practice or just a practice in general that is supportive of one’s personal health and well being.

Tom talked about mindfulness practices as strategies for developing both methods for short-term personal health and also healthier social movements. He told me that in his view, “existential problems” are at the root of our ecological and social problems, leading him to an interest in meditation. He explained this way:

For me, in my analysis, it’s a simplification, but a cultural anxiety or fear around death, mortality, change, leads to a lot of domineering behaviors and manifests in all kinds of ways and I really do think that a real deep rooted practice that can encourage people to realize that our fundamental existence is not as scary as we think and that we don’t need to war against it and build up our egos to make ourselves feel comfortable and okay in our bodies and the world.

He described a desire shared by many that “in this different environment ego would be manifesting differently and people would all be sane and generous and kind,” but also lamented that that’s certainly not always the case, possibly for the reasons that Duncombe (2007) has noted: the “same people who imagine this new world of democratic cooperation live the rest of their lives in a world of individualistic competition. They are not prefiguring a new world as much as acting out the old one in a hopeful new setting” (p. 172). Whether one accounts for the gaps between political desire and practice in existential or political terms, Tom argues that whether it happens in classrooms or movement spaces, intentionally increasing opportunities “to just sit with each other would be good”:

I do think movement building-wise, bringing sort of a mindfulness practice and meditation is really important in terms of short-term personal health, but actual long-term cultural change. I think a more meditative society would be a more socially just and ecologically sane world

### **Physical Spaces**

Some of my research partners spoke specifically about the value of creating physical spaces in which to experiment with and enact the kinds of relationships and practices I discussed above. As Poletta (1999) has written, such spaces go by a plethora of names: “free spaces,” “protected spaces,” “safe spaces,” “spatial preserves,” “havens,” “sequestered social sites,” “cultural laboratories,” “spheres of cultural autonomy,” “free social spaces,” among others (p. 1), but whatever terminology is utilized she explained that people are typically referring to “small-scale settings within a community or movement that are removed from the direct control of dominant groups, are voluntarily participated in, and generate the cultural challenge that precedes or accompanies political mobilization” (Poletta, 1999, p. 1). Amid this terminological diversity, some scholars have attempted to differentiate among different kinds of “freespaces.” Poletta, for instance, distinguished among “transmovement,” “indigenous,” and “prefigurative” structures and notes the different opportunities she sees within each structure for furthering the aims of social movements. From another angle, Cornell (2011) has distinguished between alternative institutions, which may be “either ignored or recuperated by the state and capital” (p. 165), and prefigurative counter-institutions, which he argues must “undermine, rather than solidify, social hierarchies among the people who staff and use them” (p. 161-162).

Although few of my research partners attempted to distinguish in clear ways among the many variations of spaces where, as Vince put it, “people who are not in the dominant, mainframe way of thinking about the world can get together, talk to each other, and build understandings and move forward instead of continually being sidelined and marginalized,” many spoke with me about their general sense that such spaces can serve important pedagogical purposes. In our conversation, Xavier spoke about the importance of prefigurative projects for many types of people. He also stressed the importance of making such projects appealing to folks who are not already part of activist communities or radical movements:

So, that's really, I would say of deep pedagogical importance to actually be working at the same time, not just on that critique of the dominant order, not just on the imagining the otherness, but on creating the spaces of the joyful otherness that look functional, that are functional, that a middle to upper middle class could look at and go, yeah, shit I could try that. I could get a go with that. That's not crazy. That's not crazy. When I walk in, there's not somebody all dressed in black abusing me and calling me a stupid bourgie fuck. That at least, maybe they will after three weeks, after they get to know me, but at least their first assumption is not, what are you doing here? You don't belong. I haven't seen you at all. To have actual semi-functional or relatively open and somewhat friendly spaces that can welcome people into other worlds has gotta be a crucial part of it, of breaking down the wall. .

My research partners spoke with me about the pedagogical value of prefigurative approaches to building housing and community projects, educational institutions, and social movements.

As I noted in chapter 2, a number of scholars have investigated how intentional communities can serve as living laboratories in which to expand a sense of possibility and collectively experiment with ideas in action. My research partners offered a range of similar perspectives.

Tamara: So what do you think it takes and looks like to keep a vision open, evolving, organic, and collaborative? What does that look like in practice?

Lou: Your work, how you do it. [Both Lou and I laugh.] You live in intentional communities and you hold meetings and, no honestly I'm not really joking, I think that that's what it takes. And that's just not the route that I took.

Lou was not the only among my research partners who spoke with me about intentional communities and a variety of “alternative households” as significant pedagogical spaces. In our conversation, Jack shared with me his sense of the importance of “building the movements and alternative cultures and subcultures that can sustain that vision not just as an abstract idea, but to really make it prefigurative.” In his view, even relatively minor experimentation with living one’s vision can be important. Taking the example of family configurations, he explained:

I think a lot of gay and lesbian politics is important in that way to challenge the hegemony of the patriarchal nuclear family, 'cause that is another one of the lynchpins that really harnesses people into the present day way of life that then becomes reified and people just can't see an alternative to it.

And, as Tom explained, although lifestyle changes are limited in their ability to produce the kinds of structural changes that he believes are necessary, there are tangible and important things that individual lifestyle changes can produce. For him, one of the values of “lifestyle change, is that it can make you

more comfortable asking other people to change because you've made some of those steps yourself, you know?"

For a number of my research partners, living in intentional communities holds a similarly unique kind of promise in opening up ideas about changed conditions. Anna also provided a perspective also shared by Odessa, Gregory, Ivy, Jack, Kevin, Rita, that living in intentional community can help break basic assumptions about gender and patriarchy, the nuclear family, and private property. Growing up as an only child was not only lonely for Anna, it encouraged her to internalize dominant assumptions about nuclear family and private home ownership. Collective living helped challenge a variety of her assumptions by introducing her to new interview processes, food sharing strategies, ways of sharing physical space, and practices of using houses as social spaces to host shows, among other practices, which she found inspiring "because we're taught to live so separately and to have our own property and to have our own families and to not engage with other people except for a very superficial neighborly engagement." She also explained that living collectively helped unsettle the commonly held assumption that sharing home with friends might make sense in college, but after college, as people "grow up" they should "grow out" of sharing a home with friends: "But to know that you can live in these communities for the rest of your life and other people seeing you live in these loving communities is really inspiring."

Above, I shared Odessa's view that practicing consensus can help people envision a range of ways of approaching decision-making. In her view, living in community provides members ample opportunities to begin to see the limitations of their own knowledge and the power of a shared approach to problem solving. Gregory, who lived for a time at one of the coops where Odessa had also lived, explained that the teaching that takes place in intentional communities can be concrete and direct, but it can also unfold in a more quiet way. He explained that his "vision about gender" was certainly shaped by his experience at a cooperative house at which he lived, a house "where I received a world-class education on issues of gender and patriarchy, sometimes not even particularly overtly, but it was just the atmosphere, so I picked up that a lot."

Some of my research partners talked about the value of engaging in intentional community living even short term. For instance, the 8-day art camps which Ivy described to me share some ground with the longer term communities described above in their emphasis on “creating alternative cultures and alternative spaces and alternative definitions of safety and comfort and family.” In these spaces, a commitment to healthy community building is not just talk, but is “really strongly walked.”

Kevin explained to me that he believes the ecovillages in which he has taught offer many advantages “as a campus compared to a traditional academic campus setting or college level education.” In simple terms, he told me, “even if they're not utopias, they're working models.” Inviting students to live and participate in such communities, even for a semester, entails a process that “moves toward the concept of pedagogy, but it's an experiential education, it's a way of learning by seeing what's happening and being part of it. Living in community is I think an education in and of itself.”

Anna described her experience at a three-day “no border” camp as another kind of short-term community that gave her a tangible way to put vision into action and feel its effects:

And I think the No Borders camp was, even though there were a lot of things that were problematic about it was really amazing because we took over this space that was where the border wall ended in California and San Diego and Mexicali and Calexico and there were anarchists from Mexico on one side and then there were anarchists from the US on the other side and then also undocumented peoples and immigrant populations and catholic workers and like No More Deaths and all these people. And then we all met and had a camp for three days. And for a while we were able to be at the place where the wall wasn't separating us anymore, but then the border patrol did push us so that we were both on the other side of the walls again because the border patrol also spent the night with us for four days.

She continued, explaining that even a short-term transformation of physical space can be significant:

I think that that was one of the closest things to seeing the way that it could be different. Because we just crossed the border back and forth and it's usually something that's so, separates you, and it's so violent and dangerous and just to be able to have that be different for even a few days was really inspiring. Yeah. So I think that that was a big one.

Rita, too, explained that her involvement with a short term “utopic community” not only was deeply inspiring in spite of its limitations, but also generated deep paradigm shifts.

I know that happened to me when I went to the Institute. I never had been in a utopic community before. I had a little taste of it with my feminist friends, that we created a new sense of the world, that we were shifting paradigms, and certainly that's stayed with me, it didn't disappear. But being in a multi-age, multi-classed group, it wasn't as multicultural as I would have liked, but still, we

were addressing that, and we were addressing what world we wanted to be in and it was the first time that I felt I was lifted out of my own despair.

Fed up with the limitations of traditional schooling (K-12 and college), many of my research partners spoke specifically about the need to create alternative educational projects and structures. As Benjamin put it, “I just think it’s like a no-brainer. You know, you don’t learn anything in school that we think people should know and you don’t even learn anything in college that people should know, really.” He continued,

...my people that I look to as far as people I think I would like to emulate in life, have all had something to do with popular education initiatives, starting charter school, starting freeschools, devising worker education programs, devising secular, faith based education programs. They’ve all done that. And at some point, they all realized that it matters and that it’s not happening.

But examples do exist. Among my research partners, although many do also work in what might be considered traditional learning contexts, like public schools or universities, many are also committed to or are actively experimenting with building alternative contexts in which teaching and learning can take place. Several spoke to me about specific examples of their experimentation with what Lou referred to as self-generated collective pedagogy in such formations as study groups, learning collectives, freeschools, popular education projects, and alternative universities.

For Quincy, one of the powers of the kind of freeschool project helped to found is its lack of coercion: “without having this external coercive force, what keeps people in the freeschool class is their own self-created motivations.” Along similar lines, Xavier described to me a community educational project he collaborated with others to found and that he reflected on very positively:

So it was this idea of people in a community identifying what to them could be worthwhile that they could possibly explore with the help of people from a university. We identified a bunch of these things that people were interested in and then those of us who were organizing it went out and found people who could speak to these things in a way that we thought might not be showing up and sheering everyone's head off with jargon. The better nights were always, there was this guy, [name], who's this anarchist slash Marxist historian and labor historian primarily and he's a very good banjo player. So he came in and he would say, you know, here's this movement back then and you know, la la la, they did this and that here in [city where the project was located] and here's a song that they would march around singing. And he'd play that song on his banjo. People love that, right? And just anything participatory, anything a little different from the pedantic monologue. Yeah, it [pedantic monologue] doesn't work these days, especially with youth. It's a waste of time.

Scaling up further, several of my research partners, like Carmen, Vince, and Ethan spoke about the value of prefiguration at the level of social movements. Here is Vince:

Yeah, I've definitely been very inspired by the World Social Forum process to some extent, as imperfect as it is. I think it's really great that people are finally, on a large scale, saying, well, what are the alternatives? We've been beating our heads against the wall for a long time, so how can we start to build alternative structures and talk to each other across the different issues we're involved in, kind of build those. That's definitely something that I appreciate. And not just in the World Social Forum structure, but other spaces that maybe might bring a similar approach. So, for instance, I was working on the Northwest Community Radio Network a few years ago, which was moderately successful in achieving some of its goals, but the goal basically there was to get community radio stations to talk to each other, share resources, and potentially build mutually beneficial resources together. Like sharing news programming and things like that. So that's another example of people getting together to try and talk about and construct spaces within which we can build alternatives.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I described five broad strategies my research partners engage to nurture the kinds of imaginative modes I presented in chapter 4. These include narrative strategies, travel, composition, artistic and creative experimentation, and prefigurative experiential learning. In the course of exploring my research partners' views and relevant literature on each of these pedagogical approaches, I also gave some attention to the common ground shared by these approaches and their unique contributions to the work of imaginative education for social justice.

In the next chapter, I move to a topic frequently left out in conversations about radical imagination – what is difficult about this work.

# Chapter Six

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## Struggle

*The belligerent white kid with the perpetual grin says another racist thing. “Indians are lazy alcoholics. I see them on the street corner all the time when I go home, so I think it’s good that they lost their land.” Trying to keep my cool, I analyze him from head to foot. He’s holding up the back wall, wearing a white hat with embroidered letters. The smile and thick glasses are his most prominent features on his perpetually red face. From a distance he looks like another happy frat boy with his grey Greek lettered sweatshirt and faded jeans. His lap dogs around him nod their heads in agreement and chime in that they agree. Others in the class gasp. One young blonde woman muttering under her breath, “You are so damned stupid.” Deep down, I want to take him outside and throttle him, even though this has been going on all semester, but I know he’s playing me. He’s being a clown. A racist ignorant clown, but he’s pushing, trying to get a rise. Instead, I remain silent (until I think it’s appropriate) and let others speak because I have a problem controlling my swearing and don’t want to get fired.*

María de Jesús Estrada. *A Radical Pedagogy*

It is late at night and I’m at a lake house borrowed from a friend’s family with a longtime activist comrade who’s also trying to finish her dissertation this year. Although graduate school has taken her to several other cities over the past 8 years and my own busy life at home has conspired to keep us from getting together in person as much as we’d both like, we both know we’ll be lifelong friends. Late in the evening, after too much wine leads to too much whiskey, we turn to discussing our dissertation and teaching lives. My friend says she finds both her dissertation topic and the teaching she’s done so depressing that she can’t imagine wanting to stay in academia. Some of her comments suggest that my dissertation topic is much more inspiring and my teaching context easier than hers. I lose it. Voices raise. Tears ensue. We’re up until 8:00 a.m. talking it all through.

When I read or hear the critique that social justice education or a focus on imagination is feel-good fluff or always and only inspiring, my own experiences come rushing to the fore to counter-argue. Some of my own teaching experiences over the past few years have included working with students overcome by guilt rooted in class- or race-based privilege, needing their pain recognized in order to stay in the work,

angry about being asked to reconsider their worldview or choices, resistant to thinking deeply about their values, distrustful of people they view as primarily concerned with academics. I have called and participated in countless informal meetings with stressed colleagues to process teaching difficulties, I have organized and been part of many long meetings to tease out difficult dynamics in class groups or teaching teams, and I have experienced the urgency of the weekly and quarterly time crunch. I have struggled to maintain healthy boundaries with students and other activist colleagues I want to help grow, knowing the most powerful learning relationships usually emerge outside classrooms, but also knowing that constantly feeling “on” for others depletes me and worsens my chronic health problems. I have struggled with the isolation that comes from trying to stay rooted in a very transient community and society: students change every quarter, sometimes I am lucky enough to work with a few students over several quarters, but more often than not, it’s a new group every three months. I have put in more than full time hours for half time pay and no job security because I believe the people with whom I work deserve quality education. Like Estrada’s (2006) reflection above, sometimes students – or educators who are my colleagues or my supervisors – say things that are so offensive I am left speechless because the only words I can conjure are a string of profanities that would certainly not be considered collegial and might get me fired. Almost all of these experiences take place in pedagogical contexts where the work of imagining the classrooms, communities, and world we want to live in has the central place on our agenda. None of this is unique to me.

Although a variety of recent studies illustrate in vivid detail the many challenges social justice focused educators may face in their work to nurture justice-focused learning (e.g., Argawal et al., 2010, Chubbuck and Zembylas, 2008; Picower, 2011), Philpott (2009) has noted that new teachers often lack the collegial spaces they need to “drop the veils of false competence” (p. 28) and share insecurities, uncertainties, struggles, and challenges in order to experiment with practices that might be transformative for their students and themselves. Her study of new educators’ understandings of social justice and efforts to put their ideals of justice into place revealed myriad constraints teachers may feel, including worries about job security, facing curriculum and job assignment constraints, and struggling to work effectively

with particular student populations. But it is not only new teachers who struggle in their work to enact social justice pedagogies. Bell, Washington, Weinstein, and Love's (2007) collaborative exploration about struggles social justice educators face in their attempts to introduce learners to new content, as well as new processes, indicates that even seasoned educators come up against tensions and contradictions in their efforts, such as feelings of ambivalence about one's competence in facilitating meaningful learning, a fear of losing control in the face of emotional intensity generated by justice-oriented work, and worries about the real institutional risks educators face in engaging students in unfamiliar, often challenging learning processes.

At the end of my conversation with both Tom and Erin, they each joked that our conversation was in some ways like therapy. Here are first Tom's comments, then Erin's:

No. No. I've really enjoyed the opportunity to, it's like a political therapy session. You can send me the bill.

So I don't know if that answers your question or if I just had a therapy session with you.

Although I am certainly aware that the conversations my research partners were generous enough to have with me benefitted me more than them, Erin's and Tom's reflections highlight the importance of having spaces to share, troubleshoot, and sometimes vent about how difficult social justice teaching can be – even teaching that includes attention to imagination that is supposed to be so “inspirational.”

As the title of the chapter suggests, my discussion here revolves around the idea that our work as radical educators is beset with challenges. My focus here is on the question of struggle. The chapter asks, What struggles did my research partners tell me they face in relation to their work to nurture the kinds of imaginative capacities described in chapter 4 using some of the specific strategies I discussed in chapter 5? What is difficult about the pedagogical work of nurturing radical imagination? And how do my research partners respond to these difficulties?

Below I present four main types of challenges my research partners spoke with me about: challenges posed by the current milieu of organizing, activism, and social movements, challenges related to working in specific kinds of pedagogical contexts, challenges of responding to the needs of different kinds of

learners, and the ways these challenges combine with an educator's biography and commitments to create reactions and responses which are difficult for educators themselves.

### **Challenges Posed by the Current Movement Milieu**

Although the idea that justice-focused educators should take an active role in structural change efforts themselves, not just promote activism among those with whom they work, is a theme in educational theory and research literature, there is very little attention on educators' *particular* movement commitments and involvement. Although some of the structural constraints all the educators in my study seem concerned with – neoliberalism, capitalism, fundamentalism, escalating differences in social and political power, the effects of past and current colonialism/neocolonialism, frightening ecological degradation – the pedagogical landscape may be quite different depending on the specific movement contexts in which one works. This reality does not get much attention in educational scholarship.

As I wrote about in chapter 3, my research partners described seeing themselves as part of a broad range of movements and they described affinities with a range of political tendencies that influence their practice as radical educators. In our conversation about political affinity, Tom told me there “are many different niches in the ecology of movements.” My research partners perspectives might represent a sample of the “broad multi-tendency left” he would like to see strengthened. All were critical of capitalism or explicitly anti-capitalist. Some identify with such revolutionary left tendencies as anarchism, anti-authoritarianism, or socialism; others mentioned more broad liberation or anti-oppression politics. Most of these educators could be considered part of an “anti-authoritarian current” Dixon (2012) has described. But Quincy's response to my query about political affinity helps illustrate the complexity of political identity in the context of overlapping movements that are often being shaped in new ways all the time. He told me his affinities meet at the “intersections of decolonialist, abolitionist, anarchist, feminist, autonomist Marxist, queer liberationist, and environmentalist” politics.

My research partners' efforts also take place within a range of social, political, and economic domains and such issue-driven movements focusing as housing justice, immigrant justice, labor struggle, youth or

queer liberation, anti-racism and racial justice, climate change, decolonization and more. These broad political affinities and movement affiliations are an important part of the broader context in which my research partners' pedagogical efforts take place. These contexts offer supports and openings for powerful teaching and learning, but, as my research partners' comments below will show, they are also the source of some of the pedagogical challenges they say they face. The three main areas of difficulty posed by the current milieu that my research partners spoke about include the nature of the crises humans face today; that today's crises call for collective action on a broad scale that they believe is currently lacking; and that the strategies current radical movements are employing are either not up to the task to create needed change or that effective strategic thinking is simply absent.

### **Enormity of Today's Political, Economic, and Social Problems**

The political milieu my research partners describe is one in which the educational and political tasks they see themselves as having taken on are enormous. We are living in a moment, many suggested, in which political, social, economic injustices and the threat of ecological devastation mean the stakes of our work as educators and activists are very high. Described this moment as "an incredibly devastating time," Lou put it bluntly by saying simply, "I mean, we're fucked." When I asked him to elaborate, he laughed, "Oh Tamara! Why do you want me to state obvious things?" and then cited ongoing wars, corporate theft, and a troubled economy as indicators of the devastation. Carmen was similarly direct, noting, "things are just falling off the cliff. Society is just falling apart." Here's how Vince put it:

We live at a particularly crazy point in time in which those mechanisms of inequality and lack of participation in decision making is leading to the real possibility that we might become extinct as a species. So that's definitely at the forefront of my mind in terms of that kind of utopian vision that I try and remember in the work that I'm doing.

One current in my conversation with Ivy, like the one with several of my other research partners, was a focus on ecological health and its flip side, the kinds of ecological devastation and climate disruption humans are creating through social, economic, and political practices. Ivy noted that our time may be limited:

Well, so I think global warming puts a certain time limit on our thinking. As I imagine other challenges actually do, but maybe we have taken less time to actually name what those times are, but there's a certain time limit where we have to change in this amount of time or we're a certain amount of screwed, this amount of time and we're a little bit more screwed, and you know, there's a point, where pretty quickly, where we're really screwed. So there's a need to begin to think about our work in terms of scalability, reaching thousands, reaching millions, reaching billions.

Uma, who spoke primarily about her work to support young people to develop a sense of agency and other capacities that will allow them to actively intervene to create a world they want to live in, described feeling concerned about the culture of anger that is emerging in these unsettling times. “I think that now that there's a lot more anger. Yeah, I feel like now that it's not dreaming, that there's anger, there's one side or the other.” She told me that even within the field of education, including the email list on which we met which centers around liberatory education, she notices that “people are angry. And they're angry on both sides.” She believes young people can feel this anger and that it “makes it hard for them to feel that they can dream, where they feel that they just have to defend.” In this context she tells me, “I feel like our fight is so basic right now.” “We're back to just fighting to have caring classrooms. Fighting to have kids have free time in the day where they can be kids.”

For the educators I spoke with, these kinds of challenges, and the many others they shared in the course of our conversations, are the objects of their change efforts, they are the broader aims toward which their teaching is directed. They are the kinds of problems which can only be impacted by large groups of people working in some concerted way – movement-level interventions. But as Davis put it, the fact that “we really do live in the belly of the beast” at a time Tom described as particularly “uncertain and unsettling” presents challenges to building the movements many of my research partners believe are essential right now. For instance, I noted above Tom’s commitment to an invigorated “broad multi-tendency left,” but my research partners articulated a whole range of ways they would like to see left movements strengthened, which would, in turn, create a better context in which their educational work could take place. Many of my research partners spoke about a gap in organizational infrastructure necessary for long-term, large-scale organizing and coordination of movements and suggested a need to take up questions of what kinds of institutions, political formations, leadership, and grassroots or

independent funding sources will allow left movements to be effective in creating the changes we seek.

They shared concerns about an absence of basic movement infrastructure (for instance, numbers of people involved, institutions, and funding) and about an absence of effective political strategies capable of creating changes sought. Benjamin, Davis, Carmen, and Tom spoke directly about these challenges and I highlight their comments here.

### **Inadequate Movement Infrastructure**

Davis's question here highlights the problem that occurs when we hope to cultivate a sense of agency and the capacities needed to build movements in the context where movements are not currently thriving: "if we see in the United States a lot of apathy and a situation where we don't have mass social movements like we used to, how do we begin to build that? And what kinds of experiences can we have and engender so that folks are motivated and have the tools to build long lasting mass social movements in the United States." Carmen also told me she believes the absence of mass movements poses a pedagogical problem.

In Carmen's view, a "huge piece is developing political independence from the parties of the ruling class."

In the wake of the latest budget fiasco in the city where she lives, there may be some more opportunity, but movements face a significant task:

So I think the vision, the clarity about capitalism can't be fixed, we gotta get rid of it, is a huge piece of the intellectual struggle. [...] So we have to begin to think about building a political force that will eventually be probably an electoral party at some point or a political party, and I think that's down the road, but I think the seeds are being planted now. On the political side to break away from thinking that Congress can do anything, state governments can do anything that's gonna resolve our problems. We've gotta make that break and that's an intellectual, it's a question of consciousness.

Benjamin's comments below highlight that effective movement organizations can fulfill a pedagogical function as spaces in which the kinds of intellectual work Carmen would like to see are materialized. He said, "you know Barbara Epstein probably? So her big thing is always the same, the left has no organization. So one thing I do think that the radical left should be considering is its approach to mass politics." Noting my involvement in the Institute for Social Ecology's now defunct summer political education program, he said, "if you're comin' out of the ISE, this is no stranger to you" but

I think a lot of us have drifted toward this position where the idea of a left party is not reprehensible or doesn't seem immoral anymore for some reason. You know, it may not be exactly what we're talking about, but some sort of formation that is a more mass formation that actually leaves some issues aside.

He told me he perceives the “incredible tendency toward pluralism and inclusivity” on the left as a problem. “We've worked out all kinds of interesting left perspectives and analysis of the current conjuncture and all these things.” Like Carmen, his comments highlight the crucial importance of developing collective intellectual and analytical capacities for understanding what is significant about the current political and economic moment, but, he told me, “we have no way...to begin to share those perspectives with large groups of people.”

Benjamin told me more than most others about the structure of the organizations he would like to see: “I'm a firm believer in the idea that organizations have leaders and that leaders are defined by their followers and that we need to be talking to people that have followers, that have a base.” While Benjamin's comments here raise questions about leadership, pedagogy, and the relationship between them that my research partners would certainly not all agree on, it's worth it to note how many of those with whom I spoke talked directly about the need either for large-scale base-building or for creating some sort of organizational container with which to effectively build collective power.

One crucial element of movement infrastructure that many of my research partners spoke about was movement institutions to counter hegemonic ideologies, promote radical ideas, build alternative knowledges, and strategize for change – in other words, radical institutions where developing skills and knowledge needed to pursue change are emphasized. As Tom ruminated on where the specific work to imagine alternative arrangements and experiment with them might happen, he told me he runs into his own “imaginative problems.”

Like, that's fine to have a workshop at the anarchist bookfair on imagining alternatives and have tools so people can experience that more viscerally, but out of that political subculture it's hard for me to imagine venues where that can happen. Like in the midst of a contract campaign, for instance, to be able to insert a critique of capitalism and imagine a completely different economic system, I think that would actually be useful, but finding the context where that can happen without having people lose track of the fact that actually it's really important that we get better healthcare, it's hard. There's a venue problem.”

Returning to Benjamin's perspective also reveals a venue problem. He described a situation in which he sees a political Right wing with "a lot of impressive think tanks, stuff like the Heritage foundation, Log Cabin, all those institutions which actually, I think, have a lot of grassroots support, churches, you know, god knows." In this situation, if the Right wing has an "interesting critique put forth, they have ways to promote it through organizations that have real resonance with people's lives," a situation that is very different than on the left because of the lack of broadly supported movement institutions: "I mean to some extent the left has no way to offer a critique that will gain hold in the social fabric of America outside the labor movement." It is in part because of this venue problem that and some of my research partners, including Benjamin, told me about their work with others to create intentional communities, freeschools or freeschools, popular education centers, and other movement spaces and institutions in which individual and collective movement capacities can be nurtured, an approach I discussed in chapter 5.

Carmen told me she believes that collective resourcing is one of the key questions our movements need to grapple with. "The foundations are not gonna fund the revolution. I mean you probably know that, right?" [Tamara, sarcastically: "Really?"] "Yeah, no shit. And so it is a matter of urgency and survival, of how we do that." Quincy spoke about his desire to move away from dependence on the university and its bureaucracy in favor of a move toward grassroots funding base for the freeschool project in which he was involved, "so communities here would feel more invested in it." Tom told me he wants to see the left have the financial resources capable of shaping public discourse and the political domain. These resources might enable public pedagogies that engage a broad audience:

I wish that we had the popular energy to expropriate wealth, really get access to wealth and redistribute it and have organizations that are well funded and well supported and then have a much bigger voice in the media, that the left had a TV station. The Tea Party had the Koch brothers. It's not like the global justice movement needs a Warren Buffet or billionaire benefactor. [Tamara: Sugardaddy?] Yeah, sugardaddy. But having access to that resource would be nice. So if they're not gonna give it, it would be nice to take it. But I don't know how to do that beyond robbery. So I don't know, but that's what I would like. I'd like to see serious redistribution of resources. Just recently, too, this Republican party primary debate was co-sponsored by the Tea Party Express and CNN. Can you imagine? This was obviously different because of ambivalences many on the left have towards the formal political structure, but can you imagine a global justice movement MSNBC sponsored debate between the democratic candidates? Holy shit, I crave that capacity.

Wanda sees the lack of adequate sustainable funding as a limitation, too. “So few people are ever getting any kind of core stability, so they can only do the work at their arm's length. To reach beyond that would burn everyone out.”

### **Ineffective Political Strategy**

An additional problem my research partners spoke about is the tendency of contemporary movements to mirror the patterns of social, economic, and political segregation and exclusion their participants find troubling in the broader society. For educators who believe that individual and collective modeling, or prefiguration, is a useful way to help people expand their sense of what kinds of political arrangements are possible, this is a problem. My research partners described activist communities that are exclusionary, in which major knowledge gaps remain, and which are plagued by strategic limitations related to cooptation by liberalism or neoliberalism.

I shared Carmen’s perspective above about her sense of the need for political independence from the ruling class. She believes the “political force” necessary to create the changes she seeks needs to represent “the interests of the oppressed and the exploited, the working class, in all our diversity. Gender diversity, sexual diversity, national diversity, racial diversity, I don’t see those as contradictory. The working class is multicultural and multigendered, it’s multinational for sure.” But as Davis put it, this isn’t happening in the ways it could or should:

I think that that's a struggle for a lot of leftist movements, how do you create movements that are relevant and attractive to people that are the most affected by social inequalities, economic and race and sex inequalities? And so I think a lot of time those environments aren't necessarily created.

Quincy and Anna shared concerns related to their own experiences. Quincy told me that “one of the problems with the freeskool [which he helped create] is that it's kind of embedded in mostly white, class privileged activist networks.” He spoke about a desire among those involved to “make the classes accessible for and put on themselves by people from more marginalized communities,” but also noted that one tension being worked on is the tension “between wanting to expand who's involved but also at the

same time trying to overcome the segregation of the city within the classes.” He told me about concrete efforts of those involved to create a more broadly inclusive project (for instance, by offering classes in Spanish) and to address segregation within classes (for instance, by offering bilingual classes).

Anna told me about her worry that activist communities often reproduce exactly the troubling dynamics they are ostensibly committed to fighting and gave several examples. She described her concerns about exclusions that can result from the use of political jargon:

I think what got in the way for us, because we all identified as anarchists, was being anarchists and having this language that doesn’t make sense to a lot of people outside of anarchists communities. And then going to graduate school and going to undergrad and having this language like oppression and patriarchy and genderqueer and you know it’s just like ‘ahhhh, what are you talking about?’

She told me she believes people need to simply learn “how not to talk like that...not having like low expectations or coming down to anyone else’s level, but realizing how to talk as a human being and how to say ‘people are racist’ instead of oppression dadadadada.” In reflecting on a freeschool project she helped found, the exclusion that this language gap created “was one of the stumbling blocks that we first encountered.” She also noted her concern about locating radical spaces that primarily draw and involve class-privileged, white activists within gentrifying communities.

For Benjamin, creating racially and economically inclusive organizations and movements requires recognizing the different stakes that different kinds of political actors have in social change work. He wants to see radicals get clear about the visions we seek because “poor and working people...have a lot to lose by just sort of going out and waiting for the struggle to sort of manifest the next direction, waiting for the next thing.” For him,

it’s good to talk about freedom and autonomy and liberty [...], but there’s no idea what those concepts mean or what, what to flesh out what a free society would look like. So if you actually want someone to believe in that, well who’s gonna follow you if you can’t give them some even small minute idea of what that means? Whereas the right talks about freedom and liberty and they have a very clear vision, it means you know like a nationalist, ethnic state, run by the free market.

On a basic level, both Anna and Benjamin told me they believe the radical left needs to get much clearer about its own shared analyses and goals. In order to highlight the lack of the more nuanced analyses she believes the radical left needs, Anna told me about some conversations she had recently been

having that illustrate the more complex analysis and interpretation she would like to see movements develop:

I've just started to have these more nuanced conversations with people about structures of power, 'cause they can very much sometimes be like 'well the cops are assholes, that's it.' You know, 'kill the pigs,' or whatever. And it becomes much more nuanced, 'well you know, police are people, there are people behind there. And, what does it actually mean to be a police officer? What does it actually mean to be a school teacher? What does it actually mean to be all these different positions in our society that is one that is inherently racist and violent? And the people who go into the police, they're created by that institution to be the way they are, so what does it mean to have to deconstruct all of those?'

Benjamin seemed alarmed about the gaps in knowledge that he sees among those on the left about what should be considered very basic issues.

And it's very simple because in my field it's painfully obvious that no one has any idea, outside of our small subgroup of labor sociologist people, what the fuck the labor movement, you know? They have no idea. Like in my interview for these different jobs I was shocked. I would say the stupidest things, I would mess up these inane sort of overly simplistic straw man kind of arguments, people would be like [clapping] Bravo! They had no idea what I'm talking about. And I actually think it's a pretty central problem. The labor question and workers' problems, I mean, I think they're actually central questions. It's not like they just don't know labor sociology, that's not the problem. It's not like they're not versed in that area. It's like they have no fucking clue what workers actually live like and struggle through in America or the rest of the world. And that's a big problem as a leftist.

Another strategic challenge my research partners mentioned is that ideas and practices that start off as radical positions are often coopted in the interest of furthering liberal, neoliberal, or conservative agendas. Some spoke of liberal cooptation or the negative impacts of liberalism on radicals' strategic thinking. Lou told me he sees a situation in which "diversity work or other kinds of work have also been so mainstreamed or so co-opted that even to interrupt the seemingly progressive tools, concepts, that have been developed, how to repoliticize them," is difficult.

A number of folks spoke to me about the either insidious or simple and direct ways liberalism impacts the students with whom we work or our movements. Vince worried that

people can easily think that they're doing something or feel that they're doing something through e-petitions or forwarding a plea about the Egypt uprising or something, but at the same time that's very much like a rearticulation of existing class stratification in terms of who has access to electronic communication tools and who has the skills and the sense that it's efficacious to use them.

Sarah told me that building the power we need requires uprooting the impacts of nonprofit approaches to change on radical left movements, a topic taken up and explored in various ways in the essay collection put together by members of the INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence collective (2007) For Sarah, part of interrupting these harms requires “getting away from the notion that we’re doing it [activism] for somebody else, which is very insidious result of the nonprofit industrial complex, how the nonprofit industrial complex way of thinking has infiltrated our way of thinking.”

Because of these dual problems of infiltration and cooptation, radicals tend to be wary of spending much time engaging with liberals or what they perceive as liberal approaches to change. But Benjamin thinks this may be a strategic error and spoke about the pedagogical context of a large yearly conference where leftists come together to share analyses and build collective strategic thinking:

So one thing we always grapple with is whether or not to invite liberals or those types at our conference to sort of have some dialogue with them. And enough people think that we shouldn’t that mostly we don’t. And I actually think it’s a mistake. I actually think that there should be a more, a deeper engagement on the left with the center-left, rather than the right, necessarily. I think a critique of green capitalism, I guess, in a very wide sort of ethical moral capitalism has a human face kind of stuff, that the center-left often promotes, that’s popular in management and business circles these days, needs a heavy dose of critique, I guess.

In a context rife with appropriation and commodification of radical ideas and practices, it is understandable that care would be taken to ensure that neither this kind of cooptation, nor unreasonable compromise, occurs; one strategy for managing these concerns is to maintain distance. But the flipside of this issue that some of my research participants spoke about is the problem of radical “purism.” Davis was candid and forthcoming about feeling vexed by the kinds of political purism that he sometimes sees in his students, and the elitism and arrogance it can imply. He wondered “how can US-educated, new social actors understand other movements without using their own ideologies of organizing to evaluate and compare?” He explained a bit more about this struggle, which, he told me, is one of the toughest he faces:

And I think that comes from a culture, in the United States, where the perceived possibility for radical action is reduced to purchasing the most fair/direct trade commodities possible. Basically reducing our politics to how can we shop most ethically. And we apply this sort of consumer-choice elitism frame to a mass movement. Like, ‘is this class-based mass movement as non-hierarchical, consensus-based, and feminist as I want it to be?’ It’s a theoretical arrogance and a

practical ignorance that I think is a pretty big challenge for students that we work with. And as an educator/facilitator, I try to constantly ameliorate the tension found there because I understand where the students are coming from, but I also feel like their assumptions need to be pushed and challenged.

Davis explained further that he's "fascinated by any educators' discussions on how to convince students to sink themselves into something and stop criticizing before listening and learning." Uma told me she worries about working in a context in which educators themselves may set unreasonably narrow expectations about what kinds of political work are valuable and effective. She told me, "I feel that there are people who have been in this position in the past [and it] has been a lot about this guilt. Or wanting them all to go out and be revolutionaries." "But," she told me, "that's not what it's about. It's about them understanding what position they have in this society and then finding ways that they can move through this that will encourage social change or a more equitable system in the future." And this commitment and action can take many forms.

In this context, some of my research partners noted that decisions about who to be in dialogue with, who to engage, what kinds of political diversity our justice movements can effectively contain can be complex, especially in the context of limited individual and collective energy. Wanda noted that although she believes "there's so many people doing such similar work or so many people with the same intention doing different work" the "segregation of movements" means people who actually share common visionary ground are often not in conversation or working solidarity with each other. "It would be so beautiful to begin to be able to coordinate movements," she told me. But there are barriers:

it's vital for there to be diversity of intention, but that diversity of intention can make it impossible to coordinate. So it would be like, what would it be like to be able to work without having the same intention? Parallel intentions, rather than the same intentions, I think would allow us to begin coordinating, for instance, food security movements and anti-racist movements. There's so many obvious connections.

But she told me that limits of capacity and funding mean people are making hard decisions about what work to do. "To reach beyond that would burn everyone out." But she also sees costs of not reaching out: "So then we end up working in these silos and then we end up taking on identities as if that was a reality and then we're separated from each other." For Sarah, power-base building requires this coordination and

an acknowledgement that purism has got to go. “The difficulty that, of course, everybody comes up against right when you try to do that is that it requires compromise. And it can no longer be pure with what you believe or the ways you're gonna behave. And so you're confronted with compromise almost immediately.”

The comments in this section aim to at least suggest that the difficulty or ease that we as educators experience in our pedagogical efforts is shaped by the much broader political milieus in which our work takes place. Above, my research partners’ comments offer a bird’s eye view of political, social, and economic realities that they view as quite hostile and movement infrastructure and strategies that they worry are inadequate to the tasks they must face. The next section narrows the field of vision somewhat, focusing on the ways educators’ more specific institutional and organizational settings present them with still different types of difficulties in their efforts to nurture radical imagination.

### **Challenges Posed by Educational Settings**

The broad contexts of a troubled world and movements that are trying to address contemporary crises can be considered important aspects of the contexts in which radical educators I spoke with do their pedagogical work. The more immediate contexts of particular educational projects, organizations, schools, and classrooms were also subjects of my research partners’ reflections about difficulties they face in their work to cultivate imagination pedagogically. It’s important to note that while this section focuses on context concerns at a more local level, these local contexts are shaped in both apparent and less obvious ways by the broader political and movement milieus which were the subject of some of the reflections above.

### **Institutional Constraints**

Institutional characteristics like policies imposed from above, as well as economic and time constraints, can leave educators feeling like they are working in “survival mode,” rather than doing the kinds of work they believe will actually be effective. The hierarchical nature of many schools is also at odds with many

of the values my research partners hold most dear and strive to express in their teaching. In this section, I discuss how my research partners talked about these challenges.

Several educators I spoke with described how bureaucratic power disconnected from on-the-ground work can lead to policies that severely restrict possibilities for justice-focused imaginative pedagogical work. Ivy told me, as “someone who holds fairly radical values and also works in the office” there is a “huge disconnect” between the board and the office staff of the organization and those who actually work directly with youth. Knowing when to address this disconnect can be a puzzle:

And it's a real challenge to know how much do you just take on the power of actually being at the programs and just doing your thing and how much do you engage the systems that lead to the programs and recognize the ways in which those systems dictate the kind of programs you can have and so really fight for more justice-oriented, more equity-oriented policies?

While Erin talked with me about her classroom work to help social work students both develop critical analyses of the causes of inequities and injustice and pursue justice, and she noted related concerns I will discuss below, she also told me about a different kind of pedagogical work she does as a therapist. She told me about a situation constrained by the need to work at a rapid pace, in a context myopically focused on paperwork: “I can only be so creative in that work because I’m busy completing paperwork, insurance referral forms, disability forms, treatment plans, suicide assessments,” a reality that interferes with the direct therapeutic work she believes will actually best serve her clients. She told me about a world in which people go to social work school and learn a wide variety of creative strategies for working with clients, “but you know we're not allowed to do it.” For instance, she told me, more creative, promising approaches like art therapy have no place. “Art therapy is like completely gone from inpatient units, day treatment programs, everything's about employability. People used to go and paint at a day treatment program, now they can't do that.” She gave another example:

The way things are, like right now, the way the insurance companies bill, and for students who are working, for people who are working in human service agencies, counties contract with a not for profit for, say, foster care and then the case worker has to provide x, y, and z service in order to get reimbursed by the county, right? So for me, I'm seeing people and then we're billing the insurance company so the insurance company has all these rules about what I can and cannot do within the session. And so I'm sure the county has all these rules about what they can and cannot do for the client. So I think not having all those rules, so I could meet somebody and say what would be therapeutic for this person who has a hard time leaving their home is for me to be able

to leave my five foot by six foot office and maybe walk around the university – 'cause I work at a hospital that's connected to a university – walk around the university campus with this person and expose them to other stimuli that would be similar to leaving their home, right? But I can't do that because then I'd be going off-site and we don't participate in off-site billing. So, I just have to talk with the person and urge them to do something outside of their home. But they're isolated and don't have any friends 'cause they haven't left their home in 15 years and then they come back the following week and haven't managed to do that. So, I mean that's not a very creative thing, right?

Some educators find themselves working in “survival mode,” focused on meeting the demands of teaching in a context of limited resources. For Nadine, standardization and dubious forms of accountability crowd out imaginative work that might make space for more shared direction and purpose:

And so I think, and this is the case in organizations or in the classroom, or whatever, we've lost our ability to do some of this imaginative work because everything is very organized and we have to fit requirements and they have to do x, y, and z and that there is an answer, you know. Again, where we get into that survival mode where you need to find the grant money or we need to do this. We were talking about this in our faculty meeting this morning, actually, the way that budget cuts have happened and those types of things is that there is more administrative work and other work and exploitive work that gets put on everybody in all of these situations, so why should we spend our time doing a visioning thing when we have to just figure out how we're gonna meet the demand of classes and advise all our students and get all this other stuff done? So I think at this moment it's a lot of different things in terms of how society has kind of been structured with this standardization and accountability as dominant themes as well as just the increase of work that's placed on individuals because of cuts and unemployment.

Odessa and Xavier spoke about how large class sizes, typically a much cheaper way for universities and their departments to offer courses than offering many smaller ones, create constraints on the work they would like to do. Odessa told me about working in a context in which her university ostensibly values experiential learning, but doesn't have transportation necessary to make it possible for faculty to arrange field-based learning given large class sizes. Xavier's sarcasm in the comments below illustrates the gap between an educator's desire for involving students in experiential, community-engaged pedagogy and what's possible given the some of the circumstances in which he has to teach:

Yeah, because I, for the first time in about ten years, am going to have to teach a first year course of 450 people in global development studies. A lot of them won't know where Africa is. These are the raw recruits. And so I've figured out at the higher levels how to relate to people in a seminar and so on and so forth. I'm really gonna be hard-pressed to do the kind of things that I want to do in this huge talking head setting. I can cut 25 people loose into the local activist community and on the campus and so on and say, hey, got some students to, quote, help you and people know me well enough to trust me. [They respond] like, yeah, yeah, yeah, they may or may not be useful, that's okay. I cannot cut loose 450. I can't do that whole thing I was talking about, this experiential way of trying to get things across. I can't do it. How with 450 people? Gigantic room.

Right? It becomes dog and pony. Like watch this [funny noises]. Here, watch a film. Oh yeah, how many of you are on Facebook right now? You know, 200. Excellent.

Even when working with smaller groups of learners, limitations created by time constraints can impact what kinds of learning seem possible. Francine talked about her work with English language learners and noted concerns she has related to working in different institutional contexts, like community colleges. She told me she is worried about how community college faculty members are “driven.” “I’ve gone to conferences and I know they talk about holistic teaching and this and that and the other thing. And then when you see them in their classroom, they’re going boom boom boom, follow the book, follow the book, gotta finish it.” Ivy spoke about the essential work of naming privileges and building anti-oppression model from the beginning of programs that feel like they speed by “Cause one of our challenges is we’re only 8 days, so if it takes 3 days to build the community, you don’t have that much time.” And, even in a class one-tenth of the size Xavier described above, Odessa told me that creating learning conditions necessary for students to really “get it,” which can require reworking a paper or project multiple times, is often just not possible given the time constraints she feels:

Because I have 45 students, I don’t feel like I can have people keep turning in work until they get it, so that’s something that I feel bad about, but I don’t have the time. So, you know, I’m like, alright, so I can’t do that.

Many of my research partners also noted the contradiction between their own political commitments and the goals of their pedagogy with the institutional situations in which they teach. Jack, Martin, and Vince all spoke about the tensions between their emphasis on “egalitarian relations” and the institutional context in which they teach. Here is Jack:

Obviously part of what I’m doing is evaluating students and giving them grades and everything and the whole hierarchy of grading and the hierarchy in the classroom being the professor and all these hierarchies figure into the dynamic of what happens in the classroom. I mean I try to emphasize egalitarian relations and dialogue and everything, but all of that is occurring within an institutional context that works in the other direction, right?

Martin described the realities of grading in the context of working for liberation as the “weirdest contradiction.” As he put it,

Yeah, there’s certainly contradictions. One is that I’m looking at an emancipatory politic and I’m looking at a revisioning of different ways to do things, but in the end I am their teacher. And in

the end it's an authoritarian relationship. In the end, if they don't write well, I'm going to fail them. In the end, if they don't turn in the assignment, I'm going to fail them. And I think that that's the main thing.

Vince told me about grading. At “the end of the day,” he tells me, “I have to give every single person in that room a number. Right?” And the number is not insignificant, he explained. The “number is super, super important. It's important for them psychologically. It's important for them economically and socially in terms of what they can do after they leave that room.” He sees it as the “most depressing, worst part of my job, oh my god – and I hate it, I hate it, hate it, hate it.” Grading is an extension of the institutional and social power imbalance that concerns him:

Because there's a few students where I'm like, I love that I'm giving you this grade, you rocked, this is totally awesome. And then there are other people who, for whatever reason, and there are many, didn't perform in the ways that I requested that they perform within the parameters that I, as the person in charge, set up. They didn't jump through the right hoops in the right way in the right timeframe, and they're not gonna get a good grade. And in some instances, they fail. And that's no fun at all. That fail... is often not productive. I'm told by many people, they're like, oh, maybe somebody needs to fail, you know, to be able to see that they can do something differently next time. But it's really hard. And so that gives me a lot of power in that situation.

My research partners indicated that they are also aware of some of the ways their institutional power couples with various forms of social power to impact their relationships and constrain learning possibilities. Vince told me about how power imbalances can interfere with creating more democratic learning contexts he would prefer:

The biggest thing that I'm constantly and always aware of, at least I try to be, is my own privileged position. I've got a PhD. I'm an able-bodied white male in the United States of America. I'm, at this point, now that I'm a full time lecturer, very much economically in the middle class. I work at a large state university. There are layers upon layers of privilege that I bring to any situation. And particularly as University of Washington Bothell changes, I think we're at 49 percent first generation students for the incoming class this year, so almost half of the incoming cohort, when I teach this class in the fall, is gonna be the first person in their family to ever go to school. So there's this tremendous power differential just when I walk into that classroom. When students sit in that line-up fashion facing the front, I've got that big power point, linear slide and my smiling face, it's like, my way or the highway is very much the framework within which people view that situation. That's the script that many students are expecting when they come to the classroom.

Rita also talked about the myriad advantages she believes she has with respect to her students and her concern that these advantages may make her position as a role model questionable.

One of the things that I started talking about last week was the issue of privilege in the classroom. That's the most glaring contradiction that I experience now. It's not as if I didn't have to work extremely hard and persistently to get access to the position that I have and I certainly didn't have any breaks anywhere along the way or nepotism that allowed me to get where I am. But I'm aware that having arrived where I am, my students look at me as a role model, and as a role model I don't think it's a fair trade or a fair estimate of what they can achieve. It has to do with opportunities that I had early on in my life when the economic situation in the United States was quite different. It's a generational advantage, it's a locational advantage, it's an ethnic and intellectual advantage. There are many different things that they don't have easy access to. They're mostly the first ones in their families to get college educations, which is similar to my parents' situation, but, again, they were in a different time and a different moment historically. I just look at the opportunities that are available to my students and it makes me in pain.

### **Educational Conservatism**

Many of my research partners shared their view that in the contexts described above, the standards push, dominant institutional arrangements, curricula, and teaching practices function overwhelmingly in the direction of “reproducing the social order,” which they described variously as hierarchical, neoliberal, and oppressive.

Francine shared with me her concerns about standards. She told me she believes that even though there may be more and more “avenues of information” available today, she sees a situation in which, from elementary schools through colleges, educators are more “constricted in what they try,” that their practices are more regimented and more “rote learning is demanded.”

I think that when I was in college, I remember feeling really great, now I can learn to think. In high school, I wasn't allowed to think, I had to pass tests. And I actually had a broader education than many high school students had, but my impression is that even when people get through college now [they haven't had opportunities to think], maybe when they get to graduate school they're allowed to think.

She provided me with a longer historical view of what she sees as the current standards push stretching back to World War I, noting that although it's been going on for over a century, “it's gotten worse and worse.”

Hannah told me about her concern about the institution of education as a whole: “I just see the institution of education perfectly reproducing the social order. I see it from the faculty to the students to the teachers.” About the role of faculty, she told me, they “are all suburban, white, mediocre, often females who used to be teachers.” Her alarm at the situation is evident in her reflections about her own

daughter's education: "See I was never a classroom teacher, and if I knew what I know now...I woulda homeschooled. Seriously, I wouldn't have sent my daughter to school."

Some educators who work hard to involve their students in concrete political struggles outside the classroom told me about the constraints they feel in these efforts. Erin, for instance, told me about her own involvement with Take Back the Land and her desire for students to utilize their own involvement as learning experiences related to coursework with her. She described a situation in which students were permitted to do a fundraiser but not be involved more directly "cause the university wouldn't let them do anything else for Take Back the Land because it was involving illegal activities. The "illegal activities," she explained, involved homeless people taking over abandoned homes and fighting to keep people facing foreclosure in their homes. She complicated the framing of such actions – often done in solidarity – as illegal, offering "we can argue whether it's illegal to help somebody stay in their own home or not and whether it was the bank or you know the mortgage company that was doing something illegal."

Many of my research partners told me that an ideology of political neutrality permeates the contexts in which they teach and shapes expectations held by students with whom they work. As Quincy remarked, "most of the students expect a teacher to be politically neutral and not to try to impose political positions on them." In a context of expected political neutrality, educators face real risks in bringing more radical processes or content to those with whom they work. My research partners told me about students withdrawing, being put off, or feeling railroaded. Here is Vince describing some of the risks he perceives:

So that's one difficulty, I think, particularly when you try and talk about these things like capitalism, fundamental assumptions about our culture, like the American Dream of pulling yourself up by your bootstraps, and you start to break down how that actually doesn't, maybe that doesn't actually jive with what we see going on around us when you actually look around. But they're big ideas and they can sometimes really rock people's foundational assumptions around privilege and around what we deserve as privileged people.

Challenging people's fundamental assumptions can "rock" their foundations and expecting too much, too fast, as others (e.g., Griffin and Ouellett, 2007) have explained, may lead them to withdraw. Vince explained that when students feel too threatened, "I definitely see some people in the room glaze over and look the other way or stop engaging, stop asking questions, stop challenging." Nadine had a similar

observation, noting that it is difficult to teach about social movements “without them being put off right away because of the things that they've heard” about the women's movement or other social movements. “It's a problem of strategy and advocacy and how do we overcome that, I think is a key component.”

Rita told me about an activist art course she enjoyed developing and teaching, but noted that because the course took place in a privileged liberal arts school and because of the conservative backgrounds some students brought to the experience, “some of them felt a little railroaded by it.” As a response, they made a satirical T-shirt that spoke to this feeling and which played on her name. She found this clever, but also acknowledged a major part of the source of their action was discomfort with her radical perspective.

Vince told me “one stumbling block I think is when you come off as too radical that there's kind of a red flag that goes up that says, oh this person is off the deep end,” but he also noted that the risks of being perceived as “off the deep end” are different depending on educators’ social positionalities and told me about research that substantiates this view:

But the Chronicle of Higher Education article was based on a student survey and the interesting piece there is that then students evaluate faculty who are more left or considered to be more liberal more negatively, and so there are larger implications for tenure and promotion for particularly gay and female faculty members.

Carmen also spoke to professional concerns. Putting them in sharp political relief, she noted that red-baiting, “the challenges of fear and fear-mongering and targeting and labeling by the system that we are the enemy within,” is a real threat radicals continue to face today.

In the context of these risks, educators utilize different strategies. Some take a slow-build approach, using the process of building trust over time to work toward more radical content or process. For Vince, avoiding coming off as “as a foaming at the mouth, crazy person” involves trying “not to go too far in that direction all at once.” He believes, “I think over the quarter I can build toward that, once I build trust and students kind of respect me as a person.” Tom talked about his work as almost “missionary” in nature, “a conversion experience” akin to what politicized him. In his view, getting “people excited about what

they're not seeing and encourag[ing] them to see it and then to become involved” requires what he called “soft hands” in order not to alienate people. Rita also spoke about the need for subtlety:

It's so contradicting what they've been brainwashed with for so long, so they shut down. So I have to be very, very subtle in the work that I do. Sometimes I don't name very much about what we're doing because I want it to unfold very quietly, so at first they don't really understand what they're learning.

For educators like Vince, Tom, and Rita, this quiet, slow trust-building approach may mean not naming political identity outright. As Vince told me, “Although I do identify as an anarchist, I don't often use that word.” But for Carmen, in a context where “red-baiting” continues, a wholly different approach is a safer one. She names her radical politics outright:

I think with students I just say this is what I am, you don't have to be this, as a matter of fact I know most of us aren't this, and so I think to be really honest with students so you don't come back and get red-baited and then they'll say we didn't know she was this. So I think just trying to say this is what I am and this is why and we all have to go through a process of study and practice and struggle to figure out what is our world view, what is our understanding of the world and how do we move in the world, what is our critical practice in the world, personal and more broadly, and give people the space to disagree, especially in the university. But even in community. And so I think that's a little of how I resolve them, but I'm gonna say, it's hard. There's nothing easy about it.”

### **Authority and Authoritarianism**

Many of the educators I spoke with have a strong horizontal or democratic ethos that reflects their broader political values and desires, that they work hard to bring into their pedagogy, and that they hope students will be willing to experiment with, too. However, because of the institutional or organizational contexts in which their pedagogy takes place, educators sometimes feel called upon to practice forms of authority they seem to feel conflicted about.

When I asked about contradictions or tensions in my research partners' efforts to promote radical imagination, Odessa immediately responded, “Oh, well, the one between democratic pedagogy and having to have this really structured syllabus.” Rita and Kevin also shared with me concerns that the very structured curricula their teaching involves may interfere with more powerful learning that could result from a more open and fluid approach. Kevin reflected on the ways a “packed-full” curriculum can be a distraction from more fluid and perhaps self-driven community-based learning that might result within a

less formalized structure. But, he worried, without such structure some students might “fritter their time away.”

[T]he model for my program is experiential-based living in community and experiencing what it is like to live in a learning community, to live in a larger ecologically focused community, and unfortunately our curriculum is so packed and full that a lot of times students say 'oh I didn't really get to see the community that much or real specifically.' And so that's a challenge 'cause really one way to do it would be just be like, 'okay, we're bringing you here, go and learn a lot. Good luck.' And so again there's that tension between, 'okay these are the things I want you to learn, we're gonna have this class on eco-psychology now' or 'do these various things and just go explore [name of the intentional community] as a community, go figure out what you want to learn here and do it.' And I think unfortunately, yeah, there's this balance because especially some students would do that and they would just kind of fritter their time away, I think. There's that potential for that. And I guess, again, that comes back to the idea of it's their learning, so if they want to learn something they can and if not they've spent the money to come here, so. So that's a challenge of balancing our curriculum goals with being in the community and just using the experiential aspect of living in [name of intentional community].

Rita cited both the institutional need and her students' own fears as reasons she feels compelled to act against her own preference for a more open process and instead to come to classes with a fully fleshed out curriculum:

If I were teaching in a different context, with my ideal students, my ideal students being very eager to learn, being very open, being very thirsty, like in a Goddard context, throw it away and just come into the room and see what's there, what questions need to be answered. And there are times when I will be spontaneous in the classroom, but the syllabus, for the bureaucracy which I teach in, has to be this form. It's just become a form, even though I created it myself to create an entryway for the students who are more conservative, the students who are more frightened. And I'm eager to see if there's another teaching context on the other side of this job for me where I can just sit in a room with a group of people and have a conversation and then the conversation will move to researching different things, or experimenting with different things and being more spontaneous. But I don't think that, my students have been so miseducated that they're not able to cope with my peak experience educationally. So that's a frustration that I'm reminded by as I sit with my syllabi.

Like Rita, Anna notes that “working against eleven years of public school education” poses major challenges to a more democratic practice. She describes the challenge: “Most of the time students [are used to] having the teacher in the front, you don't ask questions, when you ask a question it's 'well we'll read it in the book,' 'you didn't do your homework'.” She told me about her desire to work in a classroom in which students collectively determine the agreements that will allow them to feel safe enough to learn and to work in a way that balances her knowledge with the knowledge that students bring to the room. Still, she told me that there are times when her authority and action as a teacher is needed. For instance, in

moments when students are harming one another, she feels ultimately responsible for stepping in, in ways that she seems to have some ambivalence about:

sometimes I do have to be the authority and step in and say ‘what you said is intolerable, you have to leave the class.’ And that’s hard to do, but it is easier to do when we’ve all agreed on the same rules and values and they’ve agreed to, so that there’s a reason, ‘you had to leave the classroom because you said this racist thing and then it’s not a safe space for the other students.’ And I’m still working with this idea that they are in high school and it’s my job to step in, ‘cause I’m not used to that.

Davis told me about some of the challenges he faces in attempting to share power. “It’s kind of a tricky position as an educator,” he observed, “to constantly want to democratize the space, but then in some ways if you democratize it and they don’t understand the responsibility that comes along with it, then it’s a tough thing. And so we have to talk about responsibility and accountability right from the beginning.”

Kevin and Sarah both reflected on feeling torn between directly sharing knowledge they have accumulated and making space for learners to come to ideas themselves. Here is Kevin:

And I guess I’m torn sometimes by that because I know I could teach things sometimes in a way that would be more direct and saying, ‘here’s what I know and I know all this stuff and I’ve looked at it a lot more than you and so this is the answer.’ And I just think that prevents them, I personally choose that way because I do think it is more powerful as a learning tool for them to come to these ideas themselves. But, occasionally they won’t hit the mark the way that I would want them to if given a choice. And so trying to combine those things into my classes is definitely a continual process because there is some balance in there of how to do it effectively so that they are coming closer to hitting the mark.

Sarah spoke at most length about this dilemma, describing her sense of responsibility as a movement elder to directly share lessons she’s garnered over three or four decades of activism, but also a strong desire not to perpetuate what Freire has referred to as a “banking model” of learning. She described ways that this challenge plays out in activist communities in which she is involved:

This has to do, too, with being an older activist in that it’s great to say that we’re gonna all discover ways to do social change together and we’re gonna all experiment with stuff and try stuff that hasn’t been tried before. However, it’s also true that since I have been doing this for 40 something years, I can identify that there are some things that objectively do not work! Or at least, not the way you want them to work. And so trying to get that across when I’m also trying to encourage people to think big and come up with as many different possibilities as they can think of, but not to come down like a wet blanket of well, yeah, well that’s what we thought about that in 1978, too, and let me tell you what happened. But at the same time, I’m very consistently challenged by my younger colleagues that if I don’t put forth my own experience, I’m cheating

them out of my experience. And that we don't have the luxury of unlimited eons in which to, every generation figure out the same lessons! So, that I'm kind of abdicating my responsibility as an elder if I don't find a way to put my lessons into the mix. So I get that challenge quite a bit. And it is a challenge to try to hold that responsibility at the same time as trying to use methodology that really invites people to throw out their own ideas and mull over their own ideas and dialogue and debate and kind of, yeah, it's a tension that I live with a lot. I guess it comes down it that I do have some things to say finally! Although I do not believe in the banking model of education, there is a certain tension of like, well, but there are some things to say! [Laughter both].

### **Challenges Posed by Specific Types of Learners**

An additional, and related, dimension of the contextual challenges my research partners face in their imaginative efforts has to do with the particular humans involved in the learning communities in which they work. I would like to note again that I have teased out the reflections about students or learners as part of an analytical and writing strategy, but it is important to keep in mind the ways many contextual factors, those I discussed above and others, have shaped the students my research partners describe below. The next set of reflections I share center on what Rita called “poor intellectual nutrition,” the reality that learning spaces involve people with diverse experiences, histories, and identities, and the variety of resistances my research partners say they see among students with whom they work.

#### **Poor “Intellectual Nutrition”**

Many of my research partners shared a concern that the learners with whom they work have not had a chance to develop skills they see as basic, let alone the somewhat more ambitious kinds of capacities outlined in chapter 4. They describe a situation in which inadequate access to “intellectual nutrition,” “miseducation” (Carmen, Rita, and hegemony (Carmen, Jack, Lou) result in students who are either unprepared or resistant to engaging in learning that might advance their imaginative capacities.

Rita likened intellectual nourishment to physical nourishment and told me about her concern about working with students who have had “poor intellectual nutrition.” She explained that although her partner always tries to remind her that she’s “teaching on the front line,” she sometimes finds herself surprised about the kinds of students she faces.

I have all kinds of students and a large group at one point of time, at different periods of time, there are cycles when I get a lot of reborn Christians or a lot of people who come from very conservative backgrounds or people who have never been in a museum or gallery or have never listened to anything except Fox News, so it startles me, it's like nutrition in general, how poor nutrition is in the culture on an intellectual level as well as a physical level. And I have many colleagues who are startled by that as well.

A handful of my research partners spoke directly about their view that providing accurate information to people about what's happening in the world is an important precondition for being able to develop critical analyses, envision alternatives, and work toward them. Francine described a situation in which "lots of people...have very little exposure to information that would help them think differently," noting also "I'm not saying that exposure to information necessarily will convince people to be different," but that it is an important ingredient in developing critical, creative views on the world. As Tom put it similarly, telling me the educational process involved in sharing information can be a "precondition" for the kinds of imaginative thinking and action he would like to see, but that it is "necessary but not sufficient."

Given a situation in which so many students experience "poor intellectual nutrition," a number of my research partners make a compelling case that stresses how important basic information sharing and skill growing can be as preconditions to more substantial political development. Some seemed almost exasperated as they talked about situations in which the learning opportunities students have had, both formal education and more broadly, means they must focus on developing more basic skills before even getting to work on some of the more imaginative aims of their work. For instance, Hannah described her concern about the "astounding lack of reading comprehension and writing skills" among her elementary education students. Nadine explained that beyond not coming to school as activists already, students may not even be in touch with what issues concern them, commenting that they sometimes do not "have topics for their own persuasive speech." Responding to the need to develop skills for critical analysis which students don't bring to class, Lou talked about how essential he sees his work to "interrupt their preexisting frameworks and to provide alternatives, alternative critical frameworks." Hannah remarked that her overwhelmingly white students, who are learning to be teachers themselves, "can't think critically. And they don't want to. It's like it's painful for them, it's miserable. And so they're not going to be able to

enable their students to.” I asked her to tell me more about the students she works with and she explained further:

They’re like lower middle class. They love Dunkin' Donuts. They're not sophisticated, they grew up 3 hours from [large city], if they've ever been to [the large city] it was to go to [a sporting event] and come right home. We're 10 miles from a city that's 57 percent people of color, black and Latino, they're terrified of it. So, the segregation is very acute. Here [in Seattle] you can go, ‘well they just aren't here,’ right? They're there. But they're in all the places that the students are afraid of. So you also see that reproduce itself.

Describing her students as “very mediocre,” she told me that for students in the context in which she works:

At the risk of you thinking I'm just a mean person, I'm just gonna say, it seems like if you're middle class and you're going to college, even if that's first generation, and you're gonna go to college and you're a white female, but you're mediocre in basically every way, and it may not be your fault, it may have been the system that made you mediocre, but at this point you're pretty dull, you're gonna go into elementary education. And then you're gonna perfectly reproduce the social order.

Although Hannah was the most forthcoming person I spoke with about the challenges she feels working with students who have been made “dull” by the social, political, and cultural milieu in which they live, others also hinted toward these feelings. Erin told me she thinks people today have been “dumbed down,” but offered what might be read as a more hopeful viewpoint:

And I think the thing that's most powerful right now is that we're all blaming each other as opposed to blaming the people that hold the money. Like if we're nice to the banks they'll give us something, right? But it's proving more and more that that's not gonna happen. So I think it's continued education, I think it's about trying to win folks over, folks who don't understand these concepts. Because we've been, America's been dumbed down, we've been dumbed down to not understand these issues. And if we can just get more people to understand how things are working, eventually we'll get there.

She told me that in her social and economic justice focused courses with her social work students, this means she has to step back and engage in “basic education”:

I think one of the barriers to that is that when I get the students they have no idea what I'm talking about. So, in social and economic justice I'm doing basic education of defining capitalism, socialism, communism, and fascism and if you ask them to define these they have no idea what they actually mean. If you say which one of these systems - without telling them, giving them definitions - and you say which one of these schools of thought would you want to live in? They all go toward capitalism, kind of because that's all they know. And so it takes a three-hour discussion to get them to think about a world in a different way...And so I spend a lot of time just planting the seeds of trying to even move toward anything more creative or being able to have any sort of discourse about social justice that isn't kinda mainstream media look at what justice is.

Benjamin describes working in an evening program with older, working class immigrant students in which it is difficult for people to break with their preexisting assumptions about what's possible. In this context, asking students to envision alternatives possibilities, "they don't know what an alternative looks like" he tells me. He sounded disappointed by the results of the semester-long manifesto project he asks students do to in which

the limit of their possibility is free healthcare, free education, childcare, and that's about it. It basically looks like Germany 8 years ago. And there's no, they have no ability, I just beg them all semester be as crazy as you can possibly be. So for some reason there's that lacking. I actually I don't know [why].

He wants them to go further. "Well, what if instead of just having free healthcare or having a four day workweek, workers were able to actually run the whole thing. Right?" But he lamented that in the end, "every single one is the same." In accounting for these imaginative difficulties, he told me:

Sometimes I've thought that it's a lack of knowledge of our history, left history, that there was once a movement with a utopian impulse that actually really did [exist], because you know the communist purge, not only wiped out the communists, but they really wiped out the memory of the communist, the history of the communists, and the history of the socialist movement which is pretty impressive actually. If we're able to successfully wipe out the memory of the neoliberal movement in the next four decades it will be as equal a feat. So I think that's part of it.

In this context, providing information about historical moments and movements which actually were quite different – "even though some of it's ugly and some of it's good" – is essential. Without this basic information, we end up in a situation in which people develop a "sense that what we have now is a natural trajectory of industrial capitalism, I think." In this context, people may be left with "a lot of very limp, watered down utopian impulses, like the world should be free and all these things." From Benjamin's perspective, this is not only a problem for the students he teaches, commenting that this is "also a real problem...even on the radical left, the anarchist left."

The comments above emphasize the lack of access to critical information, frameworks, or knowledge that might allow people to see the world in new ways, but also hint that there's more that blocks imaginative thinking or action than a lack of access to good information about the world. Some of my research partners spoke more directly about the ways dominant views create "ideological tugs," as Jack

called them, in particular directions. Lou told me that “there are any number of forces that are arrayed” to make students see the world “according to hegemonic ways.” In this context, undoing miseducation, indoctrination, and ideological hegemony, all of which create ideological investment in an unjust status quo, is long-term work. Carmen put the scale of the problem clearly in view she said as radical educators what we have to “understand is we’re dealing with lifetime and centuries of ideological bullshit and miseducation. Miseducation is humungous.”

In Carmen’s view, “the ideas of the ruling class” disseminated via corporate media and education institutions have led to a situation in which, like Benjamin’s comments above suggest, “we have been so indoctrinated and taught to believe that that the way the world is, that capitalism, is forever.” She told me that working with students to develop a systemic analysis of the forces that shape their lives and their communities can be powerful, noting “They say, we never really understood, some of them never really named capitalism, they never thought of it as a bad thing and they never understood how it operated to really harm you know them and communities.” But also spoke about the tenacious hold beliefs developed over a lifetime can have. “And it works and then there’s a lot of reversion. Not a lasting moment. Oh yes I get it and then they open their mouths and they often revert to what they’ve been taught for their lifetime.”

Many of my research partners articulated some version of a view that survival needs (or perceived needs) and professional aspirations urge material investment in existing systems. Jack told me he sees a situation in the global North in which “we are invested in our personal effects, our houses, our cars” even if a lot of people recognize that the way of life these material effects are built on is “ecologically speaking, problematic and unjust.” He told me “most people in North America have some investment in this system and even if they have modest means, they have this kind of personal vision that they could do better, they can be upwardly mobile. And those are very powerful ideological tugs away from people embracing an alternative vision.”

Martin told me about teaching in situations where students’ desire to get a good job is the driving force in their approaches to learning and disrupts the kind of deep and critical thinking-for-oneself that he places at the center of his approach:

So I would ask them questions and you could see them being intentional about their language, you could see them spinning, you could see the wheels spinning, trying to generate what is a beginning, middle, and end to this question much more so than a discussion. And I think that's part of the ideological state apparatus, they're training these students to be lobbyists, training these students to be PR, training these students to be whatever they themselves want to be. I'm not saying that [my university] is authoritarianly training these people to do that, which it's also doing, I'm saying that these people see what they want to do, they're like 'I want to work for the Department of State, thus, I want to start answering questions in this diplomatic way.'

Tom and Vince talked about seeing students concerned about economic security. Vince told me about the students he works with whose lives may be “highly constrained”:

The majority of students that go to the [the university where I teach] are there to get a degree so they can get a better job than they already have or the multiple jobs that they already have. And so often, the university experience and my time with them can be seen by students in a very mechanistic manner. I'm here to get my degree so I can get job X and make enough money to have whatever life that I see myself having. And sometimes that doesn't jive very well with trying to grapple with these bigger ideas that don't make people money. So, again, if you can grasp this idea, if you understand, the ways that Foucault talks about power as a network distributed through society and being reproduced through lots of tiny interactions every day, then you can maybe get a better grade in the class, but that's not gonna get you the bank teller job that you want or whatever it is that people are going out there to do. So I think that it's sometimes difficult for students to see the radical change that maybe they become interested in in the context of their lives, which are highly constrained. That's maybe one kind of challenge to students thinking and working through ideas about vision and social change.

Tom told me that for students in the program in which he teaches “the ultimate goal is to be able to make a living while living your values.” But he wondered to me about a culture of competitiveness that he feels may be increasing among his students:

I feel like there's an intensified competitiveness, actually. The students are more and more concerned about grades and being able to make it. And that's both sort of around security, but it's also around status, is so powerful in our culture, obviously, and students wanting to be able to get a good job. And it's hard to be entirely critical of that, but that kind of impulse can interfere with a commitment to radically changing all institutions when you might actually want that institution to feed you. So I think that's a primary tension for folks.

Lou echoed his sense of how complex the situation is: “I don't think I have an answer for fully how to talk about how bankrupt most pathways to professionalization are, while still acknowledging that you still have to find your way through that.”

Xavier explained that he sees ideological investment in the status quo as a function of the degree and kinds of privilege people have. “In other words, being rich, being white, being male, all the things that'll stack up – additive theory, whatever, sorry, but in this case, I think it applies – the more privilege you

enjoy, the greater the risk of that flaming of the self. Because really, you are gonna have a worse life if you do this stuff. So that, to me, is the single biggest thing.” Exploring the way he sees privilege shaping the students he works with, he described a particularly troubling moment with a group of students:

And I remember there was a group of three, they lived together, they were really interesting, smart people, they actually, in the end...more or less said, ‘You know what? All this stuff you're tellin' us, yeah, yeah, yeah, we get it and we know what we should do, but we don't want to. We know what we're doing is mooching off the whole world, we know we're horrible dominators and exploiters, we know exactly how we're doing that. We're okay with that.’ [Laughter]. And this, to me, I mean, it's a dead stop moment.

The development of movement consciousness, deep personal work, cultivation of creativity, and healing work some of my research partners believe are so important in the pursuit of justice requires sustained daily practice and long-term commitment to which there are barriers. Vince registered his concern about the ways short teaching quarters and limited time with students combine with the many responsibilities students may be juggling.

I mean, I've surveyed my students and they're working an average of 22-23 hours a week, some of them more than full time plus a full course load, and they've got kids at home, a lot of them are single parents. So people have a lot on their plates.

Uma explained to me that even among the younger students with whom she works, “in the school that I'm in, they don't have to take standardized tests, but they're so over burdened with responsibilities, they don't even have time to be creative.” In this context, Uma told me she thinks that even before we think in broader terms of social justice, we need to be finding ways of “allowing youth to be youth or to be creative or just to have a safe space and care about their well being.”

Even though a number of my research partners spoke about their perspectives that contending with the massive problems we collectively face today will require a patient and complex approach, Hannah told me that she believes her students often want quick, simple solutions:

A lot of times students are like, ‘okay okay okay, now what do I do.’ And I see that as highly problematic because I see it as a jumping over the really deep kind of personal work you need to do to see how you've been socialized. You know, you don't get it because you took one class, right? And that kind of just give me the answer and that recipe-card kind of thing. So I see that as problematic, and even as we say we can't just tell you how to do it, we do tell you. It's kind of lifelong learning, continually building relationships with people that you've been socialized not to find valuable, getting involved in activism and organizations that would take you out of your, blah blah blah. So we have lists of what to do, but none of them is what they're really wanting. It's

the hard stuff, right? They're kind of wanting, just okay just tell me how to teach that kind of kid. Don't use your right hand when you shake or something, I think that's what they want.

Beyond wanting quick fixes to ameliorate harmful complex social realities, several of my research partners spoke about working with students who have experienced traumas that, no matter what other kinds of supports are given, just take time to heal. Rita described teaching a course in which she asks students to explore alternatives to war, asking “what does it look like to be in a world where conflict is resolved in a different way?” She told me

I sometimes get a lot of resistance around that and students want to spend more time talking about what it's like to grow up in the military or what it's like to be a veteran or what it's like to be the spouse of someone who's serving abroad. And I feel like I need to give them time to do that healing, so it's always a tension in my classes.

Carmen also described some of her thinking about the sustained work today's problems call for, noting that some teaching relationships offer more opportunities than do others:

If you're gonna develop a consciousness for a movement that is transformative, anti-capitalism and anti-oppression and so forth, it's only a sustained process of not only daily practice but analysis, reflection, and conceptualization of problems and solutions and where is the movement. [Tamara: Yeah, well you mean you can't do it in a three-hour workshop?] [Laughter] And you can't do it in a semester with your students! Yeah, which is why grad students are always, well, one, they expect a deeper intellectual activity, and then I'm with them from 3 to 5 years. It's a little different experience.

### **Different Learning Curves**

Many of the learning communities my research partners described bring together people with radically different experiences, knowledge bases, and access to power and wealth. Davis explained that in the context of the study abroad programs he leads, “we have a whole range of students and I would say the learning curves for students are all different because of where they're coming from.” He described this challenge by explaining that he works with students who range “anywhere from feeling bad for having voted for Obama to like a radical anarchist, I'm off the grid, I don't pay rent.” In this context, while the students who begin from more “radical” perspectives, such as the anarchist students, may “really have a pretty solid grasp on anti-capitalism and some have a decent grasp on gender dynamics and power structures” they may also still need to learn how not to impose their ways of understanding radicalism or

revolution on the communities with whom they study. Davis also remarked, “on the other hand, I feel like the students that are embarrassed in voting for Obama a lot of times have to reinterpret how they understand development and how they see other people as being less fortunate, how they're implicated in that.” Balancing the many learning curves and needs, while encouraging risk-taking and minimizing harm for all participants in these contexts can be extremely challenging. Inviting or pushing these different kinds of students to think in more complex, critical ways requires different approaches that involve “constantly trying to assess where different folks are in their transformation and in their process of growth, as well as my own process of growth and transformation. And trying to figure out how do you include appropriate challenges that don't automatically get discounted.”

Ivy said that in working with youth who bring very different kinds of power to learning settings it can be “just really hard to maintain safety when you're dealing with people with such diverse privilege versus oppression.” Ivy elaborated:

So a weird example, 'cause I think there's more, there's ways in which it affects us more, I think race and class are much bigger ones, but I just did this workshop at a different camp where it was a queer 101 class and it came out, and I had this conversation in a larger group around what are the challenges in our community? A couple kids raised their hands and were like 'homosexuals.' And I was like 'oh homophobia, yeah that's a real challenge.' And they're 'no, gay people being in our community is a problem.' Start talking it through, I use queer, they're like 'what's queer?' I'm like 'oh!' so it eventually got to this point where it was like, we'll do a workshop on what queer means. So I hold this workshop, very clearly this is not going to be a terribly safe space for queer people, for people really questioning their personal orientation, and yet it was the only space, so some of those kids showed up. Also, a lot of these kids who were doing some actually really interesting questioning, from a very homophobic, queerphobic starting point, were also there. And so I feel like camp in general, it's kind of a metaphor for camp for me of like how do you hold safety for those who suffer the oppression while also really valuing that people need to think it through. And that thinking it through often means coming from places that are kinda messed up. And that's always a challenge.

In a related vein, Hannah described working with students who bring their “white racial illiteracy” into learning settings where 98 of 100 students might be white:

So, it is rare for me to have a student of color. So there I have, say I have 100 students, 98 are white. And they're clueless about, they can't answer that, I see it as a kind of white racial illiteracy, right? So they've got to have their consciousness raised, I feel strongly about that. But it is at the expense of that poor fucking student of color who just has to sit through it. Not that they, many times they have no analysis either, I mean they certainly have a little more, but you know what I mean, they haven't been told. But, you know, so there's a certain cost there and there's also this kind of reinforcement I feel like I do of people of color as victims. I don't mean to, obviously, but

I'm trying to get my students out of denial that society is equal. And in order to get them out of denial, you have to show them all the inequality. I have 'em read Kozol, 'cause they think schools are all great, right? And Kozol is accessible and powerful, you know, *Savage Inequalities*. But then they come out with 'oh my god all the people of color have a horrible education and are beaten' and, you know?

For Hannah, raising consciousness and getting her students out of denial poses for her “a real dilemma, both the reinforcement of whiteness as, the master's tools dilemma, and the sense that people of color are all impoverished and victimized and there's no middle class people of color or anything like that.”

For both Ivy and Hannah, there is a significant challenge in creating spaces and processes in which all participants are asked to take risks that will both enable their own growth and benefit others. In particular, they both see situations in which those with the most power and privilege are often let off the hook:

When do white people take up all the space and when do they go silent? Well, when it's intellectual work we take up all the space and when it's the actual risk-taking then we let people of color do that work. That's the shit I wanna wrestle with 'cause that stuff's really fuckin' hard.

Ivy asked, “How do the privileged kids also have those experiences, so that those who are less privileged get to benefit from that?” Ivy told me about wanting to see anti-oppression curriculum and pedagogy that supports the assertion “you need to deal with this,” “you” being more privileged youth and “this” being their unfair access to power and privilege. Ivy talked about seeing an unfair balance in risk-taking, with young low income participants or participants of color with having taking enormous risks by virtue of their showing up to camp, which they might have little experience doing, in a mostly white environment so far away from home and white, class privileged young people feeling less pushed to their growing edge.

## **Resistances**

For educators who hope to nurture capacities that might aid in the work of effectively transforming our social world, the topic of resistance in educational settings is complex. Arnold et al. (1991) explain that while a central goal of liberal adult education is to “manage” resisters and suppress resistance, an explicit aim transformative educators share is to actually nurture resistance. As feminist theater educator Deb Margolin (Epstein, 2007) has reflected that all educators “get contrary students, students who when you ask them for this, they bring that, when you call for the fireman, they bring the arsonist.” And she

explains, particularly in relation to her work to nurture a non-judgmental classroom in which any idea can be entertained, “I welcome the challenge of that as we all do” (p. 127). Yet, in the context of the political and educational milieu that “miseducates” in so many ways, there are some kinds of resistance that we might see as reactionary, rather than potentially transformative, and because of this we might hope students will learn to examine their own reactions with a critical eye.

Rita’s recollections about a course she taught several years ago illustrate the ways resistance can spring from varying sources and take on different shapes all in the context of one class:

Well, the most difficult class I ever had was, I think it was in the spring of 2009, when the class was divided into three groups. There were the cynical environmental science students, the frightened and very polarized Christians, who didn't want to be reading Starhawk because she was a witch and it was taboo for them to even touch nature in the way that I was suggesting, and then I had a group of completely passive students. And the passive students didn't respond to either group. And the Christians and the cynical ones were spitting at each other back and forth and I was in the middle and they were calling me a missionary because of my ecological zeal. ‘Ooooh, you're like a missionary for the eco-people!’ Like, what?

One of the most surprising elements of the conversations I had with my research partners revolved around the ways their reflections pose a direct challenge to the idea that processes aimed at envisioning and working toward a healthier, more desirable world necessarily result in increased hope. In fact, my research partners described seeing in their students or members of their learning communities reactions including, anger, fear, despair, nihilism, cynicism, and apathy – each reactions that potentially foreclose the action to create change and which are rarely associated with the idea or feeling of inspiration.

Sometimes learning processes that “rock people’s foundations,” as Vince put it, can provoke intense anger. Rita explained to me that in some cases, she feels that students she has worked with “would like to kill the messenger because once they learn what they learn about the world, about the environmental crisis, about globalization, they're really pissed off.” She explained that while some students don’t fully take in the realities they are exploring together, whether because they are cynical or numb, “the ones who do take it in can get really, really angry about it.” And, she told me, “I've had situations where they attack me in the classroom.” She described one older student who’d worked at Home Depot who was completing a BA so he could get a promotion:

And he said now that I understand what I understand, it's gonna be very difficult for me to stay in my job and what good is that gonna do me...and now I understand my wife's consumerism and how she's filling a room in our house with things that we don't need and it's not helping my marriage. And, you know, he was just livid.

Earlier in this dissertation, I described some of Hannah's work doing mandatory trainings with other white people about race and racism. The experience was profound for her as an educator partly because it helped her better understand white resistance to coming to terms with the realities of racism and white people's complicity in it. But she also reflected on the intense reactions the work provoked in some participants:

going into these workshops with the most hostile fucking participants, they were pissed off, and they would slam their books on the table and they'd refuse to speak and they'd be all white. And I can remember...a white guy just pounding his fists on the table just red with rage. He was like, 'people of color, white people can't get jobs anymore'.

Related to the kinds of anger my research partners spoke with me about, fear was another topic they took up. Jack put it, "people fear change." The idea of risking losing what they have can feel very threatening. In Jack's view, "obviously we have the whole kind of ideological apparatus...constantly telling people that maybe there are some problems but they can be fixed by fine tuning and so on." "Of course we've had the financial crisis of 2008," which he framed as an ongoing crisis of neoliberal globalization, "but that's not experienced that way by people." Similar to the response Rita mentioned above, "people experience it as a threat to their own, what they've been able to pull together to create a certain life-world."

Kevin spoke to me about the intimidation he believes many people feel in the face of the scale of the social and ecological problems occurring today. Acknowledging these problems head on might cause distress that could feel unbearable:

Many people, I think the reason that they don't is they're too afraid to face the pain of looking at the suffering in the world. And so we need to be able to face that and to understand it and to hold that pain and also to kind of see beyond our individual selves and actually be able to work through those emotions so they can be used as positive tools in the world for change

Wanda and Rita had a little different understanding of the fear that people may feel when asked to consider radical alternatives. As Rita noted, "sometimes students really get scared because that level of

idealism feels terrifying.” She told me she works hard to persuade students to just give it a shot for 10 weeks, but that their worries about disappointment in the end can still interfere:

And sometimes that works and sometimes they do everything they can possibly do to jury-rig or booby trap that possibility, because it just, it feels like leaving the class, they're just gonna be left bitter and miserable afterwards. I'm gonna give them a little bit of a taste of something that they can never access. And I recognize that that's real, you know? That it's very difficult to construct a world where you continue to have that level of vision and imagination, you know?

Speaking about the place of fear in radical imagination work, Wanda described a situation in which people may experience a feeling of conflict given “the preciousness of what it is we wanna see happen and how fragile that is and how we need to protect it and those defenses, even if we have a beautiful intention” that can create a barrier to letting oneself feel and express a desire for change.

Some of my research partners described situations in which the learners with whom they work either totally shut down or avoid becoming motivated in the first place. In some cases, my research partners saw students who seemed to feel powerless to change the conditions they face. As I noted in chapter 5, in the context of her work on sustainability in the face of climate change, Odessa told me “a lot of times my students get totally, totally depressed” wondering how she and others can look so happy considering the kinds of social and ecological crises humanity is facing. Uma described working with children “coming from extreme, extreme conditions” that included living in public housing and often with non-parent relatives. She told me “for them it was difficult for them to dream or even imagine someplace out of their immediate surroundings. And it was difficult for them to even imagine their surroundings as beautiful.” She described attempting an activity where children would make collages depicting what’s beautiful about the city in which they live that simply didn’t work. Although by her account, theirs is “a pretty beautiful city, a lot of hipsters moving in and people wanna live there”:

for these young kids they couldn't picture it, they couldn't even imagine what beautiful could be found in [their city]. So that was probably the most challenging as far as getting them to envision that they had that empowerment or that they could picture their city as they wanted it to be. 'Cause all they could think of was, why would I even wanna be in this city?

Vince also described working with students who can’t imagine having a meaningful impact on the “potentially compounding forms of catastrophe and oppression” humans are facing today:

So there's definitely a tendency, particularly when I'm talking about this kinda stuff in class, for some students to kind of glaze over and say, oh it's all fucked, we're screwed, we're all gonna die, so forget about it. I'm gonna go play with my iPhone some more because it doesn't matter anymore because we're screwed.

Speaking again about a course in which she asks students to imagine “a world where conflict is solved peaceably” Rita similarly has observed students who feel that her efforts are totally “unrealistic.” They tell her, “don't you get it? Humans are always gonna be killing each other... You're really naïve.”

Xavier explained that he sees privilege as a source of nihilism, noting that “especially in progressive, radical circles, we're taught that those of us with privilege must deploy-slash-deplete, give away that privilege.” And some students see the limitations of that strategy “there is a point at which, and I think this is what those super nihilist students figured out, ‘hey, what do you want me to just go down into that sea of the people who are fucked?’ And they did say this. They said it. ‘So, what, there'll be one more fucked person. What's the good of that?’”

Hannah described a situation in which her students simply “don't have any energy” around the work to learn to see and dismantle the hierarchical social structures in which we are all immersed. Rather than curiosity, she tells me about “this blankness” she sees in her students:

Oh, incredible apathy. Incredible. ‘This is just something I have to endure, what I really want to do is go watch *The Bachelorette*.’ I had a student who said, ‘oh yeah, you know, I read *Cosmo* and it's just so much easier to read that than to read this.’ You know, that kinda stuff.”

Davis echoed worries I also heard from Hannah when he explained that even among people who do become actively involved in pursuing change there are enormous societal pressures toward complacency that require vigilance and active strategies for ongoing accountability to one's values:

And probably my biggest fear whenever I talk with students about their long-term commitment is if they believe that no matter what happens they'll stay committed to something. That, to me, is a warning sign that I try to convince them, no, if you want to stay committed to things you have to constantly latch yourself to things, you have to constantly make commitments...and you have to constantly surround yourself by people who hold you accountable. And if you don't do that, it is so easy, it's extremely easy, to become very complacent. I don't mean that to sound too nasty, but what I mean is if you have at one point in your life visions for radical social change and ten years later you believe you're just doing the best you can by signing online petitions and working within the system, I wanna convince students that you don't arrive there without getting outside of certain ways of thinking and certain ways of holding yourself accountable.

Whether people are working in classroom situations, community contexts, or other social movement settings, these kinds of reactions can pose major pedagogical dilemmas. On one hand, I heard from my research partners their understanding that the source of these reactions is the larger contexts they hope to change. But, because generating positive energy for change is a collective process, it's critical to attend to the ways expressions of anger, fear, despair, or other feelings I explored above are not only personal, individual experiences, but dynamic forces in group spaces. Odessa reflected about her view that generating creative energy as a collective process: "if there's enough energy in the class for it, I feel like even the people who would have been resistant catch that energy and that spirit. And if there's not enough of that energy then it goes the opposite direction, everything gets zapped."

### **Navigating One's Own Reactions as an Educator**

The sections above focused on the challenges posed by a political context hostile to the pursuit of justice, movements inadequate to the task of creating needed change, educational settings that limit our educational activities and approaches, and the ways the particular learners with whom we work bring particular kinds of challenges to the work of radical imagination. In this section, I zoom in on the ways my research partners talked about their own reactions to their work, the students with whom they work, and the contextual realities in which their efforts are nested. The comments below are more self-referential in nature and speak to some of the ways my research partners' biographies, positionality, self-understandings interact with the kinds of contextual factors in the first three sections of the chapter. In many of the comments below, I highlight what my research partners shared about how *they* feel in relation to their efforts to cultivate radical imagination.

#### **Struggling with 'Visionary Perfectionism'**

Tom used the term "visionary perfectionism" as one way to talk about his own dreams of a better world. But as my research partners' comments below illustrate, some dreaming may mean radical educators set their own bar higher than what is achievable in a given timeframe. In these contexts, educators may be

left feeling inadequate or not confident about their efforts, or feeling hypocritical or guilty because of the inevitable gaps they see between their visions of their best selves and the lives they are able to live in highly constrained circumstances. Tom spoke at length about the risks of setting a high bar for one's own actions in a society that, as Hannah and Davis noted above, pushes us in overt and insidious ways to settle for the status quo. Tom told me about his worry about hypocrisy related to the difficulty of "walking the talk," as fully as you'd like. He told me that while he believes his students must understand that systemic change is crucial, the individual action involved in living one's values is nevertheless significant in its own right.

But, I know for myself, I don't feel like I always am living my values. And most of that's not around I drive a fancy car or that kinda stuff, but around having enough time to get to all the things that I think are important and being as active politically as I would like or being as present as I would like, being as fearless as I would like. That's a real tension point about being able to live up to your own expectations. And be able to walk the talk, that's a tension point.

At the time of our conversation, Tom told me he was relatively new to formal university teaching. He told me about a conversation with a colleague a couple of years before who described his teaching work as his political work in the world. He described his reaction at the time being "uhhhh, that feels like a mistake, you really need to be working in a lot of different avenues to have a real sense of what's happening in the world." Having experienced his own struggle to balance many responsibilities, his viewpoint shifted: "now that I'm immersed in this world, I get it. I don't agree with it. Ideally, there would be more time. But to be a really effective teacher and to put out research that feels valuable and important and then committee shit and then living a life, you know? And partners and household duties. You know, it's like, fuck."

It sounded as though the experience of working in contexts that engender a "survival mode" mentality left him feeling overwhelmed. Exasperated, he asked, "How does anything else fit in?" For Tom coming to terms with personal and collective limits involved a "painful realization":

And I really feel like, for myself, it's increasingly important for the left writ large is an understanding of limits, you know? And capacity. And just the danger of visionary perfectionism, which I sort of ascribe to. I'm striving for excellence. A vision of an excellent, enlightened society. And another world is possible. And all this is extremely important, but a problem it can cause is just that there are limits. I'm learning that there are just limits to what I can do and that's a painful

realization. I'd like to be able to do everything and do it all well and make the best contribution, etcetera. But there are actually limits, I need to, myself, I need to start getting more intentional about what I'm focusing my energies on because I just can't do all that I would like to to be the person I would like to be, so that's a challenge.

Many of the educators I spoke had clearly set a high bar for themselves, with the integrity of living one's values as fully as possible a high priority. Living social justice values with integrity is a tall order in the context of a society that pushes against that at every turn. Even Hannah, who generally spoke with confidence about her ability to work with very resistant students in underwhelming circumstances told me in some ways she felt "a strong sense of inadequacy." Part of her sense of integrity seemed to spring from committing to bring difficult topics to the table, no matter the circumstances or potential push back. She described with some frustration working in a context in which other faculty send the message about her critical work "you don't do it right, you make us feel judged". She explained:

And how do I, god that's so hard, like it doesn't take long before a lot of faculty just avoid you, because you bring up hard issues. And I actually had a faculty member come to me after a meeting and go, you know, 'people don't want to feel judged.' You know, I was just like, oh god, okay so let's not talk about race and let's not point out any issues 'cause you guys don't want to feel judged. And you know, there's so much in that.

Erin told me about her own struggles with feelings of hypocrisy: "I struggle with, it's kinda like do as I say but not as I do, on some level." Working with many single moms who may be first generation college students means she wrestles with the complexity of the question of "how do you keep yourself alive in this current system and keep a roof over your head while looking for change and not killing yourself in the process?" She told me it's difficult to help students wrestle with theories of charity versus change and nudge them in the direction of transformational work, "but yet have spent my entire day at a charity organization, right? Or know that all my students are just gonna go to an organization that's a charity model. So I struggle with let's teach them how to create change, but knowing that there's really no option for them to create that change."

And there's a piece of me that's sad because they're not gonna get paid a whole lot and there's not gonna be any room to do that kinda change. I mean, they're gonna be helping people within the system, but as far as, you know, I do this sort of lecture on the notion of poverty-pimping, and some agencies, it's like the idea is to work yourself out of business. And lots of agencies aren't.

## Wondering ‘Does It Make a Difference?’

Many of my research partners also seemed to struggle with the question of whether the work they are doing in classrooms, community, or movement contexts will actually make a difference on any kind of broader scale. Radical educators may lack enough information to feel sure that their efforts will have impacts beyond the individuals they work with, for instance, creating change in communities, at different scales, or in the distribution of material resources. Jack described working in what he called the “advantageous location” of a social justice focused program into which students self-select and bring their curiosity and openness. Still, he explained that teaching in a university like his means he’s working with a particular segment of the population that’s typically middle class. In this context, “it’s hard to know how much difference it all makes.”

I think many students get their degrees and then go on to whatever white collar work they can get and it doesn’t necessarily stay with them, the kind of critical pedagogy that people like myself are emphasizing. I think it’s very selective. It does have a real impact in helping some students become activists or just become more radical in their thinking, but I’m aware of the contradictions and the limits of the whole process.

When I asked Tom what it looks like when he has been successful in helping students learn to see or imagine the world in new ways, he told me, “that’s a good question. It’s so hard.” Part of the problem is that he lacks the feedback mechanisms to know what impact, if any, his teaching really has in the long run:

You can get a sense of how a lecture went that day, but you have no idea, unless people contact you, how it’s been received. And so in terms of having effective feedback mechanisms, it’s hard for me to know. I’ve had students say very nice generous things around, this class has really opened my eyes about that or I feel changed about this. And so I do get nice warm fuzzy feedback in that regard, but it’s hard for me to know overall impact because I just don’t have the feedback mechanisms in place to know and so it is kind of a, we’re kind of throwing things out there with hope that it’s taking. But it’s hard to know.

In the face of the assumption that going on to graduate school is considered one sign of the success of undergraduate education, Tom seemed conflicted about this. On one hand he reflected that he had had a great experience, but on the other hand, he wondered, “is that what we need? Do we need more graduate students?” He wondered about the limits of an education as a primary approach to social change. “We can educate until the cows come home” but we need to come to terms with and directly confront the reality

that “until there's different ownership of everything...in particular of media and the forums of communication, the education system itself, all of these” the changes radical educators seek will be incomplete. Addressing material disparities, “raw power, economic power in particular,” is becoming more and more important, “especially as wealth is increasingly concentrated.”

So, again, education's important in all of that, but we need to find ways of actually expropriating wealth and redistributing wealth. Education can be an important precondition to that, but just publishing another book or giving another really good lecture, that can inspire that, but...I'm not articulating it well, but education is not enough. So, it's key, necessary but not sufficient.

Ivy and Patrick also shared their sense that while their pedagogical work may be meaningful, and even transformative, for the individuals with whom they work, whether the work is meaningful on a broader scale is less clear. “I don't have a lot of vision for how it's meaningful on a larger level.” As Patrick put it, “there's kind of an element of, we can have these wonderful moments when we're in the classroom, but, again, how do we get that out into their life outside the classroom? So as soon as they step out of the building, how can it change their interaction with everyone else that they meet?”

As was the case with most of our conversation, Hannah put the issue in stark terms, noting that the absence of a larger curriculum aimed at the kinds of goals her courses promote contributes to resistance among her students and her own sense that the work she does may not be enough to make a significant difference:

The one that's coming to my mind is just, it's that kinda, does it really matter? It's one course that's not supported by any other course. Even the chair, she observed me, and she's just like, ‘no other course asks them to think like this.’ And she's very impressed, but I'm just like ‘well thank you and that's a problem, right?’ So, they're clearly not used to it and that's part of their resistance, too. It's almost like it hurts their brain to have to think in that way. So, I mean it certainly covers them that they've had their diversity course, but if it's not supported anywhere else, does it make a difference?

### **Feeling Hopeless**

Given all of this, radical educators may struggle to be as inspirational in their efforts as they want to be. They may struggle with their own sense of overwhelm and hopelessness in the face of social, economic, political, cultural, and ecological problems that seem nearly insurmountable. Above, I shared my research partners' reflections about the nihilism or hopelessness among students with whom they work, but

educators may struggle with these feelings, too. When I asked Erin about her own vision for change, she told me it was difficult task, “Cause it's like that kind of like dream a little dream, what do I want the world to look like? And then like all these ideas like of how impossible that is sort of filter in.” Patrick articulated an idea I heard from several of my research partners when he likened necessary social and environmental change work to trying to stop the Titanic from sinking:

One of the challenges that we find, or that I find, especially dealing with sustainability and climate change is how do we approach the gravity and the immediacy of these problems without the doom and gloom and hopelessness that sometimes results? I find that opening a lot of the time, one of the reasons that people aren't always touching these issues with young people is they don't want to scare them and it's really hard not to. And it's really hard for them not to just feel like, wow, that's just, I mean, how can we expect them not to feel that way, when that's kind of how I feel? We're just, we're rearranging chairs on the deck.”

Reflecting on the environmental damage and climate disruption, Hannah told me flat out, “I don't feel hopeful at all, I feel very cynical. I think we're just gonna wipe ourselves out and then something new will be emerged. I hate to say that...that's not a good vision.” Odessa who studies climate science in the context of her sustainability work shared some of these feelings, too. In this context, she's telling me about what a more honest approach to talking about climate change might actually entail:

We could say, you know, if we don't cut our energy use, fossil fuel use right now, we're gonna lose 70% of the species on the planet. If we continue as is, this is what the world will look like. This is what the world is looking like, it's more like a feudal system where you have the very wealthy and the very poor, is this what we want? Those are more powerful messages, based on hey this is what's happening. And that's not happening in the mainstream media, I do not see, I see people talking around it. And more like, oh climate change is problematic, or whatever, but you don't realize they've never read what's gonna happen. And this is conservative science, I read the conservative science on climate change that scares the shit out of me, I start crying. And people aren't saying that...you know?

As in several of the sections above, Tom was perhaps the most forthcoming person I spoke with about the difficulties he feels not only in creating meaningful experiences within learning communities, but in attempting to put his commitments into practice in a way that contributes to creating transformative change – not only in consciousness, but in material realities. He talked with me quite a bit about the kind of “political depression” he has experienced. “I definitely feel a bit bereft, to be honest, of hope... This is not a permanent feeling, but I've talked to a number of people who are in a bit of a political depression in

the current moment.” His comments here help illustrate how particular political moments can create exciting and inspiring contexts for radical educators to engage in teaching work:

And just as an example, I started teaching formally in 2007 and this is the time, especially in the environmental vein, where it was very exciting, that public consciousness around climate change was really accelerating. Gore's movie had just come out, Katrina had recently happened. And there seemed like there was going to be a real shift. And this is obviously the same time, or just soon after, the economic crisis, or financial crisis, hit, Obama, you know, is energizing all kinds of excitement. And so it really felt like, in some respects, the global justice movement is at least, well there's obviously a big debate in the global justice movement whether the problem is neoliberalism or the problem is capitalism, you know? So there are sort of tension points there. But everyone agrees that neoliberalism is problematic and 2007-2008 was this moment when neoliberalism appeared in great crisis, which is very exciting. And it felt like alternatives were afoot here...It felt like, it's not like Obama was gonna revolutionize things, but it just felt like there was some opening, political openings, you know? Which was a very exciting time to be teaching, because you could suggest to students, look, things are messed up, here's some history, but, in the current moment there's all kinds of different things happening within formal political structures, within informal, there's interesting things going on.

But in the years between the moment he describes above and the time of our conversation in 2011 his sense of possibility and buoyancy shifted:

And right now, it's less possible to offer that. The financial crisis is turning into an economic crisis, that's breeding, from what I can tell, intensified conservatism, not sort of left populism or not as much as we would like. The neoliberal agenda if we can speak so broadly is intensifying or using the crisis as an opportunity to entrench. And climate change is off the agenda of the US and at least a good part in Canada, because, I think, real concerns around economic security. And so some of those openings, formally, anyway, in formal political structures feel less manifest at present right now.

As Tom continued sharing his reflections on the political moment, the descriptive, analytical, observational tone evident above gave way to a more visceral sense of the struggle he feels in being part of a movement that simply lacks the resources it needs for success. “I'm also so sick and tired of losing and...I would like us to have access to resources and be able to have a much bigger voice in the political domain.” He described a political moment that seemed to feel harsher and darker to him than in the past, one that he spoke about as “uncertain and unsettling,” which left him feeling “a bit less hopeful than I may have in the past.” He told me that the times he has felt most excited and energized are those in which he's been involved in on the ground work that excites him. And “right now, I'm having a hard time doing that.” And he shared his worry about the impact of what he called his “political depression” on his ability to fire up the students he works with.

I like to be able to inspire students and [to] get them excited about the future and the present is something I've liked to do and have had some success doing, but a real tension part right now is that things do feel dark to me actually. And, like a couple of years ago I could much more convincingly inspire people. Right now, I feel a struggle in that regard, I don't feel super excited politically in some respects and so that's a challenge. That's a real challenge. I'd like to be able to fire people up, but then I also want to be realistic about, holy shit, you know, is another world possible? I guess that's almost a difference is I feel like I've moved a little bit from 'another world is possible!' to 'how possible is another world?' So that's where some heaviness comes in. So I'm actually struggling with that tension myself. And I still hold that it is [possible]! It is! But I feel more tension there, where, in the past, it was just like oh, of course, it's a given. But things feel a little more harsh politically and a bit darker and it's important to be real about that with students, but I don't want to depress them.

In addition to reflections shared by Patrick and Erin above, Benjamin's comments illustrate that Tom is not alone. Reflecting on the challenges associated with imagination and vision, he talked about movement-level depression rooted in questions about whether creating broad change is actually possible. He describes a "brief moment, utopian moment in the late 90s" that ultimately ended in a situation in which a "lot of the radicals sort of hung their head down and joined the anti war movement which wasn't that radical. More recent political circumstances have not been helpful, either. "Obama didn't help it, we fucking got a black president, but he sucks."

[W]e have this president who demanded that we be audacious in our hope and then hired Goldman-Sachs to basically run the economy and I think that really depressed honestly a lot of leftists who actually took time off, worked for Obama, went out, pumped the pavement and then they get this. I think people were kind of like fuck it. Whereas the right was like, oh shit, we have a Black president, we have to really get off our asses and do something. The left kind of was like more depressed.

### **Feeling Contempt**

Similar to the perspective Estrada (2006) wrote about in her dissertation, a perspective with which I opened this chapter, some of my research partners also reflected on feelings of contempt or judgmentalism toward the students or collaborators with whom they have worked. Although it is difficult to hear colleagues wrestle with very difficult teaching circumstances – in part because it is always difficult to hear that colleagues who are doing important work are struggling and also no doubt at least in part because it calls up my own feelings about students I have worked with when I struggled to find the kind of generosity I strive to practice – I was grateful that Hannah was willing to share these reflections:

I'm gonna be honest with you, I don't like my students. I don't really respect them and I have some bit of contempt for them that I struggle with. I've been struggling with it for five years and it's not good, it's not useful, I get it. But they are not my type. I mean, I just, I just don't get 'em. And I'm not like that and I don't get that incredible dullness. And it's just constant, you know, I mean I can't tell you how many times I've gone to faculty that are friends that I trust and just go, 'I can't figure out how to reach them, I can't figure it out.' And I'm not alone, it's a chronic, I mean we have really passive students. And I think it's more specific to teacher ed. And they're white.

Even though she has a clear sense of why her work is so important and she has friends who affirm that these kinds of students are “exactly who need you,” she explained that she struggles with her own unhappiness in the situation, telling me, “I want out of there super bad.” “It's like why does my life have to be this unhappy? Uh-huh, I am so underwhelmed and unfulfilled.” Rita also shared her struggle with losing compassion for students:

Sometimes on a more personal level, I have to really confront my own tendency to lose compassion and to be very judgmental when students are really thick-headed and close-minded and stubborn. I have very right-wing students who come in my class and they say, well you have an agenda. And I do. I say to them, ‘yes I do have an agenda, my agenda is to open your mind.’ ‘But you want us to think just like you do.’ ‘No actually, I don't. I want you to think like you do, but I want you to be aware that there are more options.’ ‘Oh that's not true, you come from this left-wing perspective and you have an ideology.’ ‘Yes, I have an ideology, I own it. Your teachers who don't own it, they're bullshitting you.’ And that confuses them a lot, too. They get frustrated by it.

On a related note, but very different kind of context, Sarah told me about her struggles in movement organizations during times when she felt very disappointed in her colleagues. “One of the times that I felt the most disappointed with the people I was trying to work with was when we did visioning.” She wondered in exasperation, “it's like how could you possibly believe that this could happen in ten years?” Rather than being a good way to “rally the troops,” she told me visioning exercises often left her disappointed in her colleagues for “thinking really woo-woo stuff or things that possibly 50 years from now could happen, but surely not in the next 10.” She explained that some of the visions people came up with “were things that I thought, there's just absolutely no way this is going to happen in ten years. You people are being completely unreal...it's really, it's stupid.”

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented four main types of struggles my research partners say they face in the pedagogical work they do around radical imagination: challenges of the political milieu, struggles they face in the more particular educational contexts in which they work, difficulties they attribute to the students with whom they work, and the tensions they experience when their own biographies and commitments come up against all of these challenges. In many ways, the struggles my research partners describe mirror those faced by many social justice educators. And, Generett and Hicks (2004) observe, they raise questions about how educators can be supported to respond to the demoralizing contexts in which we sometimes find ourselves. As they ask, “What habits of mind must teachers exhibit to sustain themselves during intense times of frustration and hopelessness?” (p. 191). This chapter has not addressed this question, but I will return to it in the following pages.

The next chapter concludes the more “academic” dimension of the project, reflecting on its limitations and offering ideas about how the project could have been strengthened, as well as turning to the question of the significance of the previous chapters for radical educators whose work is grounded in a commitment to the pursuit of justice.

# Chapter Seven

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## Project

*Our theorizations of the imagination lead directly to what sorts of strategies, organizations and tactics we consider effective. But unfortunately, movements rarely take the time to talk about the imagination explicitly.*

Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish, “What is the Radical Imagination?”

This chapter is titled using the idea of “project” in a double sense. In the first sense, the purpose of the chapter is to revisit the project (pro’-ject, n.) as a whole. This chapter summarizes the main assertions I have made in previous chapters and, further, revisits them in light of their significance for education for social justice, particularly given the field’s transformative social aims. In its second sense, “project” (project,’ v.) refers to the chapter’s goal of describing this study – it’s process and its main findings – as a springboard or launch point for new directions for future research, practice, and movement building.

### **Strengthening the Research**

At some point, every dissertation writer has heard the words “the best dissertation is a done dissertation.” Like many pieces of well-intentioned advice, it is of course easier said than put into practice. Perhaps because this project is the culmination of a degree process that took me a decade and a half to complete, perhaps because it also draws together many threads of a lifetime’s commitment to the ideas under study, perhaps because “academic writing” is decidedly not the communicative mode in which I am most at home, I can see many ways the project could be strengthened. “The more you know, the more you realize how little you know” sometimes got in my way. Throughout the project, I struggled with my own version of the “visionary perfectionism” Tom talked with me about and which I discussed in chapter 6 above. Before turning to a discussion of the constructive interventions I believe this study makes to education for

social justice scholarship and practice, I would like to offer my appraisal of a few of the project's limitations. Consistent with the project's emphasis on enhancing perception of the possible, I will frame my reflections as a set of constructive proposals for how I might strengthen the project in the context of future work.

First, choices I made about the size and selection of the research group posed several challenges. On one hand, although I do believe that my review of a several bodies of relevant literature, my own social movement involvement, and my relationships with lots of radical educators helped me situate perspectives shared by my research partners in a broader stream of ideas and practice, the project might have been strengthened by utilizing a method through which the pedagogical perspectives shared by my research partners could be placed in an even broader context. Some researchers, like Australian research team of Boyd, Wadham, and Jewell (2007), for instance, investigated the justice-related pedagogical views of a much larger group of educators. In their study, the research team mined journal entries and responses to Likert-scale questionnaires from compulsory courses in a teacher-training program. Studies like theirs could be instructive should I choose to expand the participant group in the future.

Furthermore, with this relatively small group of research partners, because I did not set up the project to deliberately construct a community of research partners that would be as socially diverse as the community of radical educators actually is, I created a situation in which some groups are overrepresented (white people, people with lots of formal education, people who mostly described themselves as able-bodied and/or not disabled). This made it difficult to compare and reflect in even initial ways about how the social positioning of my research partners might shape their thinking about and practice of imaginative pedagogies. A more intentional and extended invitation process that purposely seeks out a community of people positioned in different ways given current hierarchies would be one way to address this limitation.

On the other hand, the group was too large to investigate and describe individual educators' ideas and practices in depth in their specific context to the degree I would have liked. Although my original intent was to speak with nearly double the number of educators that I ended up speaking with for the project, as

it turns out, a still smaller number might have allowed me to accomplish some of my goals more effectively. My emphasis in my analysis and writing was to provide enough information from my research conversations to illustrate that a particular idea was shared by at least several of my research partners and significant considering the project's focus. Although this was not case study research, I strove to provide enough depth and context so that my partners' comments might make sense to readers in light of their work, but in order to keep the dissertation to a reasonable length I avoided trying to depict a fuller picture of the range of contextual specificities that shape the choices these educators make on the ground. A comparative case study approach with a smaller group of research partners could be a next step in further investigating the ways educators navigate the creative tensions they face. Connie North (2009), Argawal et al. (2009), and Stovall (2006) each examined justice-focused philosophies among small groups of educators and offer more nuanced and contextualized views of pedagogy in practice. These studies are helpful potential models of the insights small sample groups can yield.

Second, in examining the ways educators work to nurture imagination, in seeking to identify specific strategies used by my research partners to cultivate radical imagination in different kinds of spaces, I chose to follow Hung's (2010) lead and focus most of my attention on pedagogical strategies, activities, and processes utilized by my research partners and the reasoning behind them. Although this approach provided me with a more focused lens than a more expansive approach would have offered and it therefore made my discussion in chapter five somewhat more manageable, this choice was perhaps more restrictive than I imagined it might be. Pedagogical work is always a relational endeavor and seeking greater understanding of the moves educators make with those with whom we work within specific learning communities, for instance, and our reasoning for these choices would be one way to complicate the picture further. Frazer's (2009) study, which distinguished among *instructional* actions and *curricular* actions, which are similar to the processes on which I focused, and *dispositional* actions engaged in by social justice focused outdoor educators sheds light on another other kind of pedagogical action that I find both interesting and important, but which was only implicitly addressed in the previous chapters. North's

(2007b, 2009) discussion of “relational literacy” in her dissertation and subsequent book offers another example of this focus.

Additionally, because my inquiry relied on interviews and in some cases a bit more additional information about teaching philosophies and pedagogy, like course syllabi and follow up conversations by email, my focus was on reported pedagogical strategies, rather than those I observed myself. Since my interest was primarily in understanding the sets of ideas, commitments, and beliefs that animate the pedagogical work in which my research partners engage, I am satisfied that this strategy served the aims of the project. However, there are a number of recent case study investigations of social justice pedagogy in practice that are stunning examples of the insights that can be produced when researchers and educators partner to create new knowledge about what social justice teaching entails, including the many struggles educators face in our work. Chubbuck and Zembylas’s (2008) case study of a “novice” teacher committed to social justice is an excellent example of how powerful this work can be when observation in combination with collaborative critical reflection among researchers and their partners is undertaken over an extended period of time and when there is already an established relationship of good-will and trust between researcher and research partner.

Third, although I give attention to such issues throughout the dissertation, this study did not deal in a sustained or in-depth way with questions about the different imaginative strategies that may be called for depending on the specific makeup of our learning communities and considering the differential access individuals with whom we work or the communities of which they are part may have to social, economic, and political power or material resources. As Uma reflected, the low income children she worked with in one after school program seemed to find it nearly impossible to dream of the world they hoped for or even to perceive the beauty in their own city, which by her account is “pretty beautiful... a lot of hipsters moving in and people wanna live there.” In this situation, Shawn Ginwright’s (2010) research on the themes of healing through collective visioning and action among youth activists of color may be instructive. What, too, of the complications that are involved in the work of visioning or strategizing for change in schools or other spaces in which people may lack an analysis of institutional power, domination,

or oppression or when their understandings of their personal experience of unearned access to power or wealth may be entirely absent? Deepened attention to the importance educators place on positionality and the different strategies they utilize within different kinds of learning communities could be useful in theorizing imaginative pedagogies. Although they are not the first to examine such questions, Curry-Stevens (2007) and Swalwell (2011) have argued persuasively that pedagogical frameworks aimed at the empowerment of oppressed communities may be ineffective as strategies to enable or encourage those with unearned advantages to look inequality in the eye and commit to undermining them over the long haul. Conceptualizing what a “pedagogy of the privileged” might look like in the context of imaginative visioning and visionary action-taking could be a next research step. In my own experience, learning communities are frequently quite diverse, comprised of learners and educators who occupy any number of locations in relation to different power structures. Often, we may have no idea what histories and positioning learners will bring through the door until we meet face-to-face and our work is already under way. What effective radical imagination work looks like in very diverse settings – as Ivy put it, how we push everyone to stretch and grow in mixed settings – also demands further attention.

Fourth, owing to the vast territories that “social justice” and “education for social justice” traverse, the range of more specific pedagogical traditions evident among my research partners was vast. It could be useful to examine the place of radical imagination within more specific pedagogical traditions, either traditions that have a more dominant place in education for social justice scholarship (e.g., among Freirean critical pedagogues) or those that are relatively neglected by the field (Illich-inspired “deschooling” advocates, anarchists, or indigenous pedagogues, for instance). Or, a more intentionally comparative case study examination of radical imagination across several political or pedagogical traditions could help identify shared ground and tensions.

Fifth, time and financial constraints were a barrier to engaging my research partners in exploring with me the findings I have drawn as I analyzed and wrote about their ideas, at least in the context of this document. Furthermore, in my more ideal methodology, I would have been able to take the subsequent and planned step of engaging my research partners in one or more roundtable conversations to examine

the significance of radical imagination for social justice education collectively, rather than to distill these lessons from the inquiry myself. In both my teaching on radical pedagogies and in community contexts, I have engaged in various forms of formal and nonformal “educator roundtable” conversations (some of which have involved people who participated in this project) and have found that the insights that emerge from bringing together voices from a range of contexts can be powerful and also play a valuable role in fostering ongoing collaborative relationships, even when these conversations are one-off or happen infrequently. Picower’s (2011) collaborative investigation of social justice education with new teachers who were part of the Critical Inquiry Project she facilitated is one way more intentional ongoing collective investigations can look, and many scholars have written about their attempts at collaborative or group self-study of ideas and practices involved in education for social justice across different contexts (e.g., Cochran-Smith et al., 1999; North, 2009; Sandretto, 2004; Sandretto et al., 2007). I view Khasnabish and Haiven’s (2014) project in this light, as well.

However, probably the most significant source of my understanding of the limits of the project resides in perspectives shared by my research partners’ themselves. In the final minutes of my conversation with each educator, I asked each person to tell me how they think academic research can best support justice movements right now as well as more pointed questions about how they would like to see me use the perspectives they shared with me and whether there were any particular forms of documentation that might be most useful for them given their political and pedagogical aims. On a general level, they offered the following guidance about the qualities of research that are of most relevance and value for transformative social justice movements today. They offered that research should be *participatory*, *allied*, or *collectively* produced. Some of my research partners offered that the most helpful research incentivizes *sharing* among those involved, others reflected their desire to be able to *connect* with others who participated in the study. They argued that research ought to be *action-oriented* and *strategic* in its intention to actually benefit movements, perhaps leading to new *strategies and tactics for change* as an outcome of the research. They hoped to see research that contributes to more accurate *movement analyses* by documenting radical histories, illustrating the interconnections of struggles and

issues, or addressing other key movement questions and issues. In light of my study's focus on imagination and pedagogy, some shared hopes that I would carefully document the specific and general *approaches, strategies, methods, activities, and materials* radicals engage in their teaching or facilitation. Some also expressed a desire to learn about the specific shape and content of other radical educators' own *visions* of change. Furthermore, among their recommendations, my research partners told me about their hope to see documentation of my research that is *concise, timely, widely-accessible, multimedia* (auditory and visual), *interactive, recurring, and normative*. They suggested such specific formats as magazine or journal *articles, books* for a popular audience, *manifestos, videos, blogs, and handbooks*. While I am pleased that at least some of these hopes have taken shape in this project thus far, it also doesn't take fifteen years in a Ph.D. program to recognize the yawning gap between the academic document that is this dissertation and most of these suggestions.

As a text, this document has been written to speak to a specific academic audience. Namely, it articulates my process and learnings to my Ph.D. advisors and dissertation committee in the academic form required to complete my degree. The gap that results from the translation between ideas about the creative practices of radical imagination and social justice pedagogy that are the subject of my writing and the actual form this dissertation has taken is a curious and quite uncomfortable one for me, a topic I take up further in the document's final section, the "Afterwords." However, I believe the collection of texts, perspectives, and other resources I have gathered in the course of this project will be of interest to others who are engaged in intentional formal or informal pedagogical work or who wish to be. My desire throughout the project has been and remains to find means by which to communicate my learnings to interested others in formats they, and I, will find more useful, interesting, and inspiring than an academic document such as this. Stay tuned.

## **Promise, Provocation, and Pain in Pedagogies of Radical Imagination:**

### **Implications for Educators and Social Movements**

These limitations notwithstanding, I do believe this study offers a variety of useful insights about both imaginative pedagogies and the theoretical and practice field of education for social justice. As I note in the epigraph that opens this chapter, Khasnabish and Haiven (2010) have observed that participants in social movements rarely take the time they believe is needed to theorize imagination in ways that might be helpful in making our collective efforts more effective, so they built an inspiring and interesting multi-year, collaborative research project around this agenda. This project also took one small step aimed at addressing this issue by engaging the perspectives of radical educators involved with a variety of transformative social movements about relationships among imagination, pedagogy, and the pursuit of justice. Drawing on conversations with my research partners and a variety of texts, I aimed to produce conceptual and pedagogical frameworks that might be of use to educators seeking to deepen their thinking about the role of imagination in the pursuit of justice or to put ideas about imagination into practice in new or more theoretically grounded ways. Additionally, I hoped to explore an issue I was curious about, but could find little direct writing about: What kinds of struggles educators face in our efforts to nurture radical imagination pedagogically and how we negotiate the challenges they face in these efforts.

At this point, a brief recapitulation of my main assertions may be helpful. First, while this inquiry confirmed that one important way educators conceive of the kind of imagination needed in social change work is as a capacity to envision social possibilities, it also illustrates that there are additional imaginative modes relevant to learning for social justice and enacting change that warrant consideration. I identified three main aspects of radical imagination (perception, vision, and action) consisting of nine modes of radical imagination (humanizing, connecting, critiquing, identifying alternatives, envisioning, hoping, strategizing, playing, and prefiguring) and identified some of the key reasons each mode is significant in the pursuit of justice. Second, conversations affirmed the unique roles the arts can play in cultivating imagination, but illuminated a variety of other pedagogical strategies that can be used to provoke the imaginative modes discussed in the dissertation's chapters. I identified five primary strategies which I

organized using the categories narration, travel, composition, experimentation, and experience and identified some of the pedagogical and political reasoning that undergirds the use of these approaches. Third, the study challenges a prevailing idea among its supporters that imagination necessarily builds inspiration and hope by outlining significant and painful struggles my research partners say they – and those with whom they work – face in working to foster radical imagination. These included challenges posed by the current milieu in which organizing, activism, and social movements take place; challenges related to working in specific kinds of pedagogical contexts; challenges of responding to the needs of different kinds of learners; and the ways these challenges combine with an educator’s biography and commitments to create reactions and responses which are difficult for educators themselves. I gave some attention to how educators told me they navigate these difficulties, although I did not dive into these strategies in depth.

In the pages that conclude this chapter, attending to the themes of *promise*, *provocation*, and *pain*, I reflect on my discussion in the previous pages to consider the broader implications of the project’s main assertions and make four main recommendations. First, I argue that as radical educators we work in all the spaces at our disposal to intentionally advance and amplify the view that in the pursuit of justice, imagination matters. Second, I urge educators to design and document a diverse range of imaginative pedagogies and to disseminate these to others who might benefit from them. Third, I stress that we need to attend to the creative tensions we face in our work as radical educators aiming to foster radical imagination. Fourth, I urge us as radical educators to take seriously the pain that is frequently part of social justice education and cultivate critical emotional praxis that may help us and those with whom we work ride out the challenges while benefitting from the many strengths of the work we do.

Congruent with the study’s aim to generate knowledge that might spark deepened thinking about our pedagogical efforts or resources that might bolster theoretical foundations for praxis, I direct my comments here specifically to those of us who consider ourselves radical educators pursuing an agenda of social justice in the context of collective struggle for transformative change. My hope is that these reflections and recommendations might offer one small step toward the development of stronger, more

intentional practices among educators – whether our efforts take place in classroom, community, or other social movement settings – and more effective transformative movements. I offer them as springboards for reflection, inviting readers to consider the idea that even if these comments only provoke curiosity or critique they still may be useful. I also invite readers to identify their own lessons from the project.

### **Advancing and amplifying the view that imagination matters**

As I have noted in the opening pages of this dissertation, among some detractors, and even among some social justice activists, a focus on imagination is sometimes perceived or framed as escapist or “touchy-feely” – a non-rigorous, even naïve way to engage with the so-called *real* problems in the world around us. In contrast, my research partners’ perspectives and literatures I have drawn on for this project together illustrate that among its advocates, imaginative perception, vision, and action considered important, even essential, resources for and aspects of transformative change work. The view of radical imagination advanced in this project lends itself to pedagogical processes that many consider more *holistic, solution-focused, and action-oriented* than other approaches to education for social justice. For these reasons, its promises are many.

In the simplest terms, this dissertation argues for a view of radical imagination as a process which can enable people better understand the world as it currently exists (including how it came to be), envision a more just world, and take individual and collective steps to pursue it. In much of the educational literature I engaged, radical notions of imagination are often practically synonymous with “visions of change.” Maxine Greene (1995b), for instance, whose ideas are widely drawn on among education scholars who take up the issue of imagination, conceptualizes social imagination, as “the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, in our schools” (p. 5). However, while at the start of this inquiry process, I, too, was focused on imagination *as* vision, what also emerged in the previous chapters is a complex picture wherein imagination can be and is conceived in a variety of ways. As Haiven and Khasnabish (2010) have written, “we approach imagination as a process by which we collectively map ‘what is,’ narrate it as the result of ‘what was,’ and speculate on

what ‘might be’” (2010, p. iii). These are goals widely referenced in education for social justice scholarship across a variety of more specific tendencies. Taking this more expansive view, social justice educators will have many more options for designing powerfully imaginative learning processes when we ground our practices in the awareness that perception, vision, and action are all imaginative acts.

My discussion in the preceding chapters illustrates a range of strengths these many modes of imagination offer to those pursuing justice. According to my research partners, a pedagogical focus on radical imagination can offer more holistic – and therefore more transformative and memorable – types of learning than many other approaches. For one, focusing on radical imagination offers pathways to engage our range of human *senses* (sight, smell, touch, taste, sound) and a broad array of human *emotions* like fulfillment, happiness, joy, anger, despair, and fear which enables different kinds of learning and growth than those which are conceptualized, as primarily “cognitive” processes. I vividly recall the comments of a young woman in her early 20s after a guided visioning session I facilitated in a course on the topic of diversity several years back. After walking students through a “day in the life” of what might be your more desirable future community, I asked what aspects of the imagined day stood out most, “What surprised you?” There was some trepidation in her voice when she told the group, “I’m not sure if I did it right, all I could do was smell my grama’s breakfast cooking and I just wanted to stay there!” We laughed as she beamed and I asked whether those insights might tell her something about the world she wants to live in. Relatedly, and especially, radical imagination, takes *desire* seriously, noting that experiences such as investment, motivation, drive, purpose, uplift, nourishment, inspiration may be integral to or result from the processes in which we engage to nurture radical imagination. The kinds of imaginative pedagogies my research partners described can nurture a sense and feelings of *possibility* and *hope*, which critical pedagogues McLaren and Jaramillo have described as the “oxygen of dreams” that “provides the stamina for revolutionary struggle” (p.55, quoted in Cibils and Pruyn, 2007) by challenging narratives of inevitability and engendering the belief that transformation, and even miracles, are possible. While the ways we perceive the world around us through our human senses, as well as the feelings and emotions educational processes raise, also need to be the subject of our critical investigations, they are significant

educational and political phenomena that are too frequently neglected. Giving attention to imaginative pedagogies highlights them and creates space for us to build on their strengths.

The perspectives shared in the preceding pages also indicate that radical imagination directs attention toward the identification of possible *solutions*, imbuing the idea and practice of vision with ethical and moral content. It can enable people to perceive the targets of their desired change in new ways, identifying how power is at work in various settings, and appreciating the connectedness among different domains of human and other life in new ways. Even when focused on critique, an imaginative approach allows people to move beyond a reactionary or oppositional stance only (although it will often be inclusive of critique) toward a set of relations we hope to bring into being in the world – a better state of affairs one hopes for. It puts criticality to work for goals beyond its own ends – criticality itself can become a mode that can inspire, offering not only hope, but concrete direction. According to the perspectives highlighted in this project, a focus on imagining and enacting solutions offers guiding information about how we might transform the quality of our immediate relationships, but also can offer, for instance, solutions that cut through the chatter of “greenwashing” or other forms of “kinder, gentler capitalism” and which may have a real chance at guiding much larger scale material and cultural change in relation to existing social, political, and economic realities. It can enhance possibilities for sustainability, species survival, even and planetary well-being.

Radical imagination urges us beyond survival and routine and is frequently *action-oriented*. It can nurture dispositions that support agency and action taking, nudging experimentation with various forms of social and political involvement, interaction, and movement. It enables and demands strategizing, emphasizing intentionality, directionality, and productive action. It encourages us to put our ethics in action and model changes we seek. It helps clarify the posture and resources needed for desired change, such as curiosity, humility, and spontaneity, as well as the level of urgency necessary in a given moment. It enables people to think about the relationship of individual, local, and broader scale actions so that strategic choices can be made about how to best pursue change considering our aims. My research partners also emphasized a view of radical imagination as encouraging and enabling not only the

identification of individual pathways to action, but collective action, by allowing dialogue and debate that fosters collaborations small and large, radical imagination that captivates, galvanizes, democratizes, and draws in ever wider communities. Radical imagination contributes to a fundamental aim of social justice education – democratic deliberation about how we are to live and with which values at the core.

Articulating stories and visions of desired transformation enables us to clearly identify our own core values and normative ideals and share those with others for democratic deliberation. In Khasnabish and Haiven's (2014) terms, attending to radical imagination allows us to examine, complicate, and continually evolve our understanding of the relationships among imagination, strategy, and tactics.

In short, a focus on radical imagination links in obvious ways with the pedagogical goals and agendas articulated as part of the shared ground of social justice education that I identified in chapter 2 – it engenders learning that complicates how we perceive the world around us, it nurtures visions of change, and it encourages action on their behalf.

Although the language of “radicalism” may be threatening to critics of social justice education, one incredible strength that a focus on imagination offers is that it directly speaks to and undermines the arguments of these critics that those involved in transformative movements – whether in our classroom or community provocations – seek to indoctrinate or build a movement of zombie-like adherents to some radical party line. Imagination, as conceived in this dissertation, is grounded in an assumption that comparative perspectives are absolutely essential to the process of radical imagination and that through a variety of non-coercive approaches, people can be invited to come to their own conclusions about the social, economic, and political issues that matter most. In this light, highlighting the imaginative dimension of our efforts could benefit those teaching in very constrictive settings, such as K-12 education, but could also make the more radical strands of our movements perhaps less intimidating and more welcoming to curious new folks.

For these reasons, educators committed to social justice would be smart to both advance and amplify the conversation about the promises of pedagogies of radical imagination using the many relationships, venues, and strategies at our disposal: by fostering conversations in person through the intentional

cultivation of one-off or ongoing conversations in existing classroom, community, or movement spaces or new ones; by circulating ideas in writing, via various scholarly and popular journals and other media, on blogs, in books; and in all spaces, places, and formats available to us and both within our pedagogical communities and networks, but also in broader educational and political contexts.

### **Designing, documenting, and sharing a diverse range of imaginative processes**

In congruence with the view shared among many theorists, researchers, educators, and activists that the many literary, visual, performing, and other arts – genres like music and storytelling, visual arts and theater – offer invaluable mediums and experiences for cultivating radical imagination, especially assisting us in perceiving the world in new ways and helping us tap our own desires for change. This may be particularly true of participatory encounters with the arts, wherein arts are not only actively sensed but created, designed, and composed (Weems, 2001, 2003). However, in probing Harlap’s (2006) assertion that the arts may be the exclusive domain in which “new visions” and “new imaginations for what the world could be” (p. 196) can be opened, this project offers a counter viewpoint, illustrating a broad range of other means and modes by which social justice imaginative processes may be effectively catalyzed, provoked, and expressed – including, for instance, the travel-based approaches involved in both close-to-home field trips and international travel, the composition approaches of definition-building, guided visioning processes, or manifesto-writing, and the prefigurative work of building new kinds of social relationships, practices, projects, institutions, and movements. Our abilities as educators to be “willing to give up attachments to this method or to that ideology or practice, in order to remain alert to emergent, yet to be seen, possibilities that may take us in more fruitful, liberatory, and loving directions” (Bell and Desai, 2011, p. 293) will be honed when as we continue to develop, document, and share the wide range of strategies we utilize to cultivate the skills and practices of radical imagination.

Hung’s (2010) dissertation outlined a range of ways that youth activists’ geographical imaginations may be “provoked” in a justice-oriented Harlem-based youth organization. Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) spent the past several years experimenting with and documenting the results of a research

approach they call “convocation” and which aimed at calling the radical imagination into being among mostly adult radical activists. Stout’s (2011) *Collective Visioning* is a refreshing and practical guide for inviting small or large groups to develop justice-oriented collective visions and identify concrete steps for action among young people and those who are older. Walidah Imarisha and Adrienne Maree Brown (2014) have begun to share and document their strategies for inviting imagination among activists, grounding their efforts in the inspirational world of science fiction writing emerging from social justice movements and centering a process they have dubbed “emergent strategy.” Chapter 5 of this dissertation both resonates and builds with these initiatives, identifying a wide range of pedagogical strategies by which the imaginative modes involved in perception, vision, and action for a better world may be nurtured. We need to continue to build on these efforts, documenting our attempts to call radical imagination into being by identifying how we design learning encounters with various groups and why, as well as what happens when we do. In particular, working to intentionally extend our conception and conversations about learning beyond what occurs in traditional “schools” and “schooling and highlighting pedagogical approaches that speak to older youth, adults, and intergenerational communities can help to open an exponential range of possibilities for designing and engaging in imaginative pedagogical work in the many places we live our lives, which is to say, the many places that learning and teaching happen.

### **Navigating creative tensions**

Writing as a person who has had both heart problems and heart surgery, I say with both humor and dead honesty, social justice facilitation is not for the faint of heart. My discussion, especially in chapter 6, indicates in no uncertain terms that social justice pedagogies entail a whole range of difficulties, even the supposedly inspirational work of imagination-focused pedagogies. One aspect of these difficulties arises because of the tensions we face in our efforts.

Parker Palmer (1998) has written about the kinds of “paradoxical tensions” he believes educators navigate as we seek to imagine and design learning spaces. Among these, for instance, are the ideas that the “space should be bounded and open” and that it should “support solitude and surround it with the

resources of community” (p. 74). He comments further, “holding the tension of the paradox so that our students can learn at deeper levels is among the most difficult demands of good teaching” (p. 83). As he has argued, it is essential that educators recognize that

the tension that comes when I try to hold a paradox together is not hell-bent on tearing me apart. Instead, it is a power that wants to pull my heart open to something larger than myself. The tension always feels difficult, sometimes destructive. But if I can collaborate with the work it is trying to do rather than resist it, the tension will not break my heart – it will make my heart larger (84).”

Working these tensions intentionally and deliberately can allow both our students and us grow in otherwise impossible ways.

My discussions in the preceding chapters also reveal that in working to nurture radical imagination, educators must directly grapple with set of creative tensions that force difficult and thoroughly context-dependent decision-making. Here is a partial list of tensions I see across the dissertation’s chapters (especially 2, 4, 5, and 6) which are faced by many of us as we work to design imaginative learning encounters, courses, curricula, programs, organizations, or schools. My research partners and other readers may recognize more:

←TENSIONS→

Urgency	–	Patience
Authority	–	Democracy
Gravity	–	Buoyancy
Risk	–	Safety
Holism/Global	–	Focus/Local
Unity	–	Diversity
Purism/Integrity/Idealism/Perfectionism	–	Flexibility/Compromise/Realism/Practicality
Within the System	–	Outside the System
Emotion/Feeling	–	Rationality/Critical Distance
Caring for Self	–	Caring for Others

Of course framing tensions in this way contributes to the problem of reifying dichotomies many of us as justice-focused educators are actively seeking to undermine. Recognizing that each of these tensions could be (and sometimes are) framed in more multitudinous or complex ways would undoubtedly help disrupt the idea that we are faced with either/or choices between “right” and “wrong” ways to approach our work. With this significant conceptual limitation in mind, and nevertheless, in my own teaching and organizing work, every day I notice the feeling of being pulled in multiple directions (often in ways that

feel quite dichotomous), observe an internal struggle to decide which of many priorities to emphasize, and try to shoehorn *too* many things that feel *too* important to exclude into *too* short a period of time. This is as true of sessions in my courses as it is of agendas for collective house meetings or yearly plans in organizations of which I've been part. At the conclusion of this research, one set of burning questions that remains for me is how, specifically, we as educators working to nurture new ways of understanding and being in the world navigate the kinds of creative tensions we face in our own practice. The list above represents what could be one starting point for generating a series of questions or topics for collective investigation. Here is an imaginative approach we might take.

Anu Taranath, a colleague whose pedagogical work I am consistently inspired by, has recently compiled a collection of letters she and her student colleagues, who dubbed themselves “the Letterwallahs,” call *TIPS to Study Abroad: Simple Letters for Complex Engagement*, in which letters are directed to Things, Ideas, People, and Self. In it she shares some of her own letters. Here is one:

Dear Slow,

In a fast-paced world buzzing along capriciously, you are clearly a less glamorous second. Many think of you as an impediment to progress or inherently lazy. I wonder: Does that make you feel bad? You are, after all, what helped that underdog tortoise unexpectedly make it to the finish line before the speedy, puffed-up hare, right? You must find great pride that lately, a grassroots movement has grown around you. The “slow movement” is now an actual force, with supporters promoting slow food, slow parenting, slow cinema, slow gardening, slow architecture, slow everything. Slowies simultaneously advocate for less and more: less hustle and bustle, more flavor and savor.

I think you're a great idea for education, too. Can we please slow things down in the classroom? Start an educational movement that prioritizes meaningful relationships between people as they learn and teach? Let's call it slow pedagogy. Slow pedagogy turns away from corporate modes of education – including teaching that makes consumers out of learners. Instead, slow pedagogy makes time to get to know our students, and crafts learning that matters. It builds on the work of many educational progressives, and who knows, could very well enact a cultural shift to make us better collaborators and community members.

I know that what I am suggesting is an ideal. But if the slow foodies have been able to transform the dreaded “What can I throw together for dinner?” panic into an experience to treasure, surely we can do something meaningful in the classroom?

Unhurriedly,  
AT

Taranath's short gem is one a poetic take on the costs of urgency and a plea for patience. It also illustrates an imaginative way to address the kinds of creative tensions I noted above. In reflecting on the list, Taranath comes down very clearly on the side of patience, but not, I believe, at the expense of urgency. Instead, I believe her hunch is that the patience she advocates is what might allow for learning meaningful enough to not only *touch* those with whom she works, but *move* people to act on our most pressing human and ecological crises (Morrison, 1994). Furthermore, through practices like "critical thirding" (Tuck, 2009) or other acts that disrupt "the closed circuit of an irreconcilable binary" (p. 49) we might be able to identify a much wider range of trajectories out of the binds that leave us perceiving ourselves to be stuck in either/or pedagogical dilemmas. Perhaps a collection of short letters written by radical educators addressed to the issues that vex or inspire us in our imaginative practice? Perhaps a call for educators to identify how we navigate, or disrupt, these tensions through the kinds of within- or across-institution "teaching exchanges" described and advocated by Feigenbaum (n.d.). Even the step of explicitly naming these tensions for ourselves seems like a helpful step in the right direction.

### **Developing critical emotional praxis**

My discussion in this chapter and those that precede it further complicates the picture by illustrating that while imaginative work is often touted as a way to bolster hope and inspiration, ameliorating a "doom and gloom" (Johnson, 2005) attitude toward social problems, it unfortunately appears that things are not so simple. As Mintz (2013) has written, it is a vocational paradox that an aim of social justice focused education is to eliminate, or at least minimize, suffering but that education for justice produces suffering in its own processes. Beyond the kinds of tensions I noted above, the struggles experienced by both educators and learners in their imaginative endeavors in many ways mirror those faced by people doing other types of social justice education work, involving palpable discomfort and pain and evoking feelings such as fear, anger, cynicism, and despair. Perhaps the most surprising lesson for me in the context of this project has been how widespread and deep this pain can be, even within more visionary and action-oriented approaches.

As is true for other social justice educators, the perspectives I examined over the course of this project illustrate the kinds of barriers (Frazer, 2009) and struggles (Argawal, et al., 2010), and the resulting “emotional ambivalence” (Chubbuck and Zembylas, 2008), that educators can find ourselves facing as we navigate the work of dreaming big dreams of change – and inviting others to do the same – in contexts that present us with obvious challenges. These are contexts where we may be working with learners who bring radically different experiences, identities, and needs to the table; we may be practicing in educational institutions where we are not supported at all in our work and where we may, in fact, face red-baiting or similarly threatening institutional risks for holding radical views or enacting radical pedagogies; and we may feel the weight of our beliefs that the broader social movements in which we are working currently lack the infrastructure and scale needed to effectively respond to the urgent social and planetary crises we face, let alone to achieve our more ambitious, visionary aims. In my view, this calls us to more directly address the kinds of pain that are part of any process of justice-focused learning, including those that center the work of imagination. I see this as the most surprising, and perhaps the most important, assertion I make in this project. The implications for radical educators are many and I will note just three here.

First, we need to continue to draw on the many genres of educational theory and research available to us to explore viewpoints of both educators and learners in order to deepen our appreciation of the kinds of pain those with whom we work experience as their worldviews are rocked, foundations undermined, and deeply held beliefs questioned. Even in imaginative pedagogies that do not require that learners adopt particular viewpoints, we are asking people not only to experiment with perceiving the world in new ways, but to explore what responsibility for acting on new understandings and newly identified desires might entail, as well. This is a tall order and requires much of us as facilitators of learning processes.

The varying positionalities and biographies learners bring to any learning community, and those that we as educators bring, mean that this support will need to take different shapes with different people at different times. There are pedagogical tools, for instance, concepts and practices such as “multipartiality” (Routenberg, Thompson, and Waterberg, 2013), which may help educators attend to the needs of different

kinds of learners in one space without striving for some unattainable and undesirable version of “neutrality.” Still, putting an idea such as multipartiality into practice in settings with, for instance, 45 students, as Odessa spoke about, about or 400, as Xavier mentioned, poses the challenge at a different scale. My own experiences in classrooms as small as 7 and as large as 200 bear this out, as well. How we effectively practice education in pursuit of radical imagination especially in large learning contexts in a way that attends to who the individual learners are that come through the door is a challenge that still calls for sustained thoughtful and creative attention. The costs of not creating conditions in which all participants can find connection and meaning can be significant. While some participants may simply leave and never return, reactions like the passive and mostly hidden strategy of mentally or emotionally checking out or more active forms of sabotage (Bell, Love, Washington, and Weinstein, 2007; Burke, et al., 1991) among those who stay, for instance, can not only diminish the opportunities for growth among those who engage in them, as Odessa noted, these actions can “zap the energy” from a collective space, impacting all participants.

Furthermore, the individual and collective development we are talking about require time and support, the kind of support that needs to be at least somewhat reliable across contexts over the long haul, and here I am speaking about years (even decades), not the course of a weekend workshop, a unit, or even a semester, however “slow” our work aims to be. This reality encourages us to help those with whom we work to identify people and other resources in their own lives that may offer some form of consistent support for continued learning and growth. It urges that we who are working in schools, at a minimum, find ways to share with colleagues the work we are doing with our students and, more ideally, collaborate to create means by which students can follow up on struggles, development, and growth-in-progress from one learning experience to the next. It also suggests that educators working in community organizations or movement contexts may wish to communicate about the approaches we are taking and the kinds of reactions we are seeing among those with whom we work. These actions might enable us to both build more effective pedagogical praxis within our specific teaching-learning settings and deepen our appreciation of the pedagogical eco-systems in which our teaching is nested.

Second, we need to take seriously the pain which was evident among the educators whose ideas I explored. The gap between one's own vision of a better world or better educational process and the realities we face today can, at times, feel excruciating. Like any teaching, working for radical imagination in the kinds of political and educational contexts I have described – whether formal or nonformal, whether based in classrooms, communities, or other settings – can be overwhelming, exhausting, frustrating, and, ultimately, can result in burnout and permanent withdrawal from the work if adequate sources of support are not identified and utilized. In her reflections, Rita told me that she had a vision of teaching that would bring her into dynamic conversation and connection with lots of other educators, but what she mostly found was isolation. She also told me about how important self-care is in this context.

And so, one of the main things that I can counsel radicals who want to teach in academia and work for social movements is you need to take care of yourself. And try to be aware of when you're maxing out your system. And be aware that that's not gonna help the movement to have you burned out. It's not going to impress your students if you're sick a lot. And to recognize it's a very long process and patience is part of what will make it work. And waking up the collective? Who knows. You know, you just show up and do what you can do.

As I noted earlier, several of my research partners joked that our conversation was like “political therapy” and Khasnabish and Haiven (2014) heard similar reactions in their project. Given these realities, expanding and sustaining our discussions of what self- and community-care look like among radical educators in our individual lives and communities is essential. In recent years, in various online forums, there have been active, sometimes very contentious, conversations about how essential it is for radical movements to direct our attention to the significance of care in our efforts and lives and what effective practices might entail given the different experiences, bodies, and strengths we bring to our movement work. Movement-based radical theorists and activists like INCITE's Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha have argued compellingly and vociferously that a suck-it-up, we'll-sleep-after-the-revolution approach to change work is extremely troubling for a variety of reasons. In addition to the need for consistent vigilance about how oppressive dynamics may shape and severely narrow our assumptions about what “good” activism entails or “good” activists do, there are a variety of concepts, like “trauma stewardship” (Van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009) and social change focused “boundary setting” (Storm, 2009), that can offer

additional useful tools for determining when we are taking in pain in ways that harm us and undermine our efforts and for strategizing about how to care for the self while caring for others and the earth. We need to view imagining and practicing care that sustains us as integral to our work.

Third, left largely unresolved in my discussion are issues of which kinds of pain may be essential elements in the process of developing new perceptions of the world, visions of change, and ways of acting on our dreams – and teaching toward these goals – and which kinds of pain are unnecessary or unethical. Directly asking how we can we thoughtfully discern between ethical and unethical provocations of pain within pedagogies of radical imagination and how can we create conditions that maximize the possibilities for productive pain and minimize the possibilities that pain may be traumatic and ultimately harmful seem worthy of sustained collective attention.

Chubbuck and Zembylas's (2008) elaboration of the idea of "critical emotional praxis" offers what I see as a very promising model for investigating and cultivating dispositions and practices that may be helpful in navigating the difficult waters in which we swim as radical educators and supporting the others with whom we work to do the same. In particular, they advance a model of critical emotional praxis which entails "[1] a historical and political understanding of the role of emotions in power relations within a classroom and the society at large; [2] an acknowledgment of the transactional role of the teachers' emotions in the local context; and [3] a translation of those emotional understandings into relationships, teaching practices, and policies that benefit teaching for social justice" (p. 312).

We would be wise to cultivate these aspects of critical emotional praxis in our own pedagogical communities and help nurture them among others in our learning communities, too, although it is likely obvious to readers that this is a suggestion easier made than accomplished. Considering the wide variety of settings in which our work occurs, there are many ways this might look. For educators trained in teacher preparation programs, program faculty or other cohort members may be able to offer new educators support. A growing body of local, regional, and national justice-focused teacher networks may be another source of support. As this dissertation clearly indicates, however, intentional pedagogical work takes place in many contexts outside K-12 schools. In addition to the teaching work that takes place in

colleges and universities, where support is widely variable depending on the specificities of one's institution, discipline, and unit, my research partners spoke about facilitation work they have done in popular education organizations, free schools or free skools (see Meza-Wilson, 2013, for this distinction), autonomous universities, temporary autonomous zones, long-term intentional communities, community media projects, youth arts organizations, community centers, study groups, various other social movement formations, as well as the pedagogical work of parenting and informal mentoring, which take place in many contexts, and more. Those practicing in venues that are less often considered explicitly "educational" need to identify different possibilities for cultivating the skills and habits of critical emotional praxis. Sometimes support may lie close to home among colleagues or comrades we regularly see (colleagues in our organizations or institutions, friends in other fields); other times it may need to be sought among folks who may be able to offer perspectives from a useful critical distance (therapists, members of geographically dispersed networks of radical educators). The choices we make along these lines will always be situational and vary depending on the skills and habits of critical analysis, reflection, community building, organizing, and leadership we most need given the particularities of our pedagogical contexts.

### **Questions for our Movements**

Rather than leaving ourselves or those with whom we work with a sense of certainty, Bell, Love, Washington, and Weinstein (2007) have argued that as social justice educators a "better indication of our effectiveness might be whether participants leave with more questions than when they entered, are unsettled by what they have learned, are pushed to know more about core assumptions in their own socialization, or feel a need to get more actively involved in the world around them" (p. 388). In the program in which I teach at our university, one organizing principles explains "The questions are the content." In our social justice focused research, as well, questions can be powerful traveling companions that walk with us as we endeavor to construct knowledge about our shared world that can help our social movements gain strength and vitality. In recognizing this, movement-engaged scholars frequently invoke

the Zapatista-inspired idea that, as Dixon (2014) has put it, “walking we ask questions.” As this chapter draws to a close, I would like to offer a few questions that I believe my analysis gestures toward, but leaves largely unaddressed and definitely unresolved. I believe grappling with any of these questions would benefit our movements. I invite readers to add their own to the list.

One set of questions that directly speaks to some of my comments in the last section involves how to build *pedagogical knowledge and skills* that can be most useful in nurturing the many modes of radical imagination described in this dissertation on movement-wide levels considering the varied contexts in which radical learning and teaching occurs. Although decentralized groups such as the AORTA Collective or Training for Change offer transformative movement participants opportunities for pedagogical skill-building in many contexts, the value of expansive, deep, and comparative pedagogical knowledge and skills for nurturing powerful learning seems to be underappreciated within our radical movements. How can we address gaps and build on existing opportunities for pedagogical theorizing and skill-building among folks who do not currently or never intend to practice in K-12 education? Is there anything people working outside traditional education settings might take from the kinds of teacher preparation those working in the K-12 system typically experience? What pedagogical lessons might radicals who have chosen to work outside traditional educational contexts offer those who have chosen to work within the relatively more constrained contexts of K-12 schooling or research universities? How can we utilize existing networks both within and across sometimes vastly different contexts as forums for disseminating ideas about especially promising pedagogical strategies and creating ongoing collaborative reflection that might yield powerful new practices?

A second set of questions was highlighted by Carmen and has to do with the *division of labor* among radical educators in our movements. Having both co-founded a popular education institution and having taught in a university for decades, she asked what specific movement contributions people working in different kind of educational institutions might offer and urged that we address this question on the level of our radical movements. How can educators make decisions that will yield not only meaningful interventions in their own political contexts, but also be impactful on a broader scale, considering the

broad array of pedagogical settings in which radical education could and already does take place? What might enable university-based educators to most effectively wield what Haiven and Khasnabish have called their “weird” power to build the imaginative capacities and power of our movements via their classroom teaching and research agendas? How can community-based educators continue to build sophisticated, movement-sensitive practices and amplify these both within and outside activist enclaves? How can educators working in settings that may be perceived as very restrictive (religious institutions, for instance, or public schools) bring their commitments as fully into their work as possible given the institutional and other constraints they may face? What seldom-recognized promises might the efforts of folks working within these kinds of settings offer our broader movements?

A third set of questions revolves around what kinds of movement *infrastructure* might best support our collective agendas for change. As Benjamin put it, “you don’t learn anything in school that we think people should know and you don’t even learn anything in college that people should know, really.” Although others among my research partners might have more hope that existing schools offer at least some benefits we can either build on or exploit, throughout the pages that make up this dissertation, and as I noted just above, my research partners pointed to a broad array of alternative and counter spaces in which intentional learning and teaching happens. Considering these, and others, what kinds of educational projects, organizations, and institutions should we prioritize strengthening or building given our current social, political, economic, ecological realities? What new or underutilized movement formations might create space for necessary pedagogical work that will better help us achieve our collective aims? Should intentional educational work and projects be nested in or remain autonomous from other movement infrastructure? What are the possibilities and limitations of any choice we might make?

A final set of questions emerges from the need to find more effective means by which to *coordinate our movements*. What conditions, postures, and practices will support those on the radical left to coordinate our movements in a way that both draws on the possibilities that come with shared ground and acknowledges the reality that some of our commitments and aims are incommensurable? Considering the enormous range of theoretical understandings and political commitments claimed by radical educators,

how can we make thoughtful decisions about when strategic alliances among educators, communities, and movements should be built and when, instead, un-coalescence is called for? I conclude this chapter with a few reflections on this topic.

### **Closing: Linking Imaginative Pedagogies and Social Movement Work**

Although social justice education is, on one hand, about the learning of the individuals and groups who are part of the pedagogical processes we facilitate as radical educators, its larger aims are to transform political, social, economic, ecological, and educational realities. Regardless of the specifics of the changes we seek, transformative change cannot be accomplished only through individual or small group efforts; instead it demands collective action in relation to all the places we live our lives. It means working with others to transform educational contexts that restrict or undermine possibilities for creating powerful educational experiences. It means working within our communities to transform the many institutions in which we learn and which shape our lives. It means working against larger structures and historical processes, like neoliberalism, capitalism, colonialism, and finding, creating, and participating in visionary movements that aim toward the worlds we deeply desire, including the healing of collective and historical trauma created by these realities.

In our final few minutes talking, I asked each of my research partners what I could create that might be practically useful to them in their own pedagogical work. Ivy told me,

It'd be really interesting to see a tree of life of radical educational pedagogy. I don't know quite how this works and maybe it's part of the tree, but some sort of like 'if you want to study in this way, here are the books that you should read,' so you can build your own radical...pedagogy education.

While it has been beyond the scope of this dissertation project to undertake this task fully, it is important to note that this project does point to some important limitations in the ways the field of education for social justice is frequently conceptualized, that is, the way the education for social justice “tree of life” is imagined. As it stands, the vast majority of the academic writing about education for social justice describes the field as an extension of a fairly small body of scholarly traditions and often frames the work

of education for social justice in individual or small-scale terms rather than in light of the movement-based action it must be. These are problems for several significant reasons.

A number of my research partners explained that although they know that Paulo Freire's ideas are, as Maurianne Adams (2010) has put it, "foundational" to what is generally considered the main body of radical education theory today, they are highly resistant to the idea that particular voices or perspectives, Freire's or others', should dominate so intensely or remain relatively unscrutinized. Their reference to a far broader terrain of political and pedagogical perspectives that animate their practice urges that a more accurate portrait of the field is necessarily more complex and nuanced, including a broader range of political influences and pedagogical underpinnings. So on one hand, there is a concern that describing the field in relation to only a small number of tributaries is troublesome because of its inaccuracy.

The situation in which we find ourselves, one in which certain voices predominate, also rightly opens the broader field to criticisms of dogma and educators to charges of an agenda of indoctrination. If part of the strength of radically imaginative pedagogies is that they are comparative ways of looking at the world – thereby not doctrinaire – we would be wise to walk the talk and continually seek out pedagogical perspectives that help complicate frameworks that go largely unquestioned among radicals on the left. In this light, describing the field as comprised of a small body of historical, theoretical, or political ideas is politically problematic for educators and activists committed to anti-authoritarian or democratic approaches to change.

Not only does focusing on a small number of tributaries leave us more open to criticisms of rigidity or dogmatism, when the many historical and contemporary theoretical and political traditions that animate the efforts of radical educators are made invisible, their analytical, visionary, and strategic tools and resources are not available to those who might benefit from them. I noted in the introductory chapter of this dissertation that there are a variety of political and educational traditions that advocate the importance of radical imagination for the well-being of our individual and shared lives, for our human and more-than-human communities and for the planet we share. When we conceptualize radical education's "tree of life" in ways that excise some of the more radical contemporary tendencies animating social justice education

efforts today – traditions like anarchism (DeLeon, 2008; Haworth, 2012; Suissa, 2010) and autonomism (Coté, Day, de Peuter, 2007a, 2007b), indigenous philosophies and pedagogies (Battiste, 2002; Brayboy and McCarty, 2010; Cajete, 2000; Dei, 2011; Grande, 2004; Gross, 2010), queer pedagogies (Heckert, Shannon, and Willis, 2012; Loutzenheizer, 2010), or radical forms of movement-grounded adult education (Brookfield and Holst, 2010; Newman, 2006; Preskill and Brookfield, 2009), for instance – the broader stakes of these approaches, the *transformative aims of justice movements out of which these traditions emerged*, may be obscured. Furthermore, in times such as the present, which, as my research partners’ words highlight, can feel bleak for those seeking a healthier world, we can also lose sight of the long-term trajectory – stretching deeply into both past and future – of our efforts. Explaining her call for the most “radical possible futures” we can imagine, Angela Davis’s (2012) reflections about prison abolitionism help illustrate how important it is to recognize both that our efforts have deep roots and that our actions will have consequences down the road which we are unlikely to be able to fully appreciate:

Let us not be afraid to imagine the most radical possible futures. Even when it is said “this goes against human nature.” Without prisons, for example, we would be unable to deal with the dangerous people of the world. The process of imagining radical futures with prospects for freedom requires us to stretch our minds and our vocabularies and to recognize that even if prison abolition or the eradication of violence cannot be achieved in our lifetimes, let us stretch our imagination much further than our lifetimes, further than the lifetime of our children or grandchildren and even great grand children. When I think of committed activists like Frederick Douglass or Ida B. Wells, they never woulda been able to imagine our present, but without the movements with which they were associated, we would have no foundation on which to build radical futures today.

We must keep the aims toward which we are striving, the “radical futures” we desire, front and center as critical parts of our collective dialogue and debate if we want education to fulfill its promise of being one among other effective strategies for creating transformative change. One promising way scholars and educators are undertaking this work very intentionally, and encouraging others to do the same, is by utilizing the idea of utopia as a heuristic device for linking the work of bold vision with audacious action in our learning spaces (e.g., Cote, Day, de Peuter, 2007a, 2007b; Levitas, 2007; Milojevic, 2006; Webb, 2009).

I noted in chapter 2 that while some see promise in the “big tent” version of social justice education, others have sounded an alarm about possible incommensurability among the politics and visions of these divergent approaches. For instance, while Tuck and Yang (2012), like others, believe in the importance of “fluency” across radical theoretical and political traditions, they argue that the core assumptions of many human and civil rights-based social justice endeavors place them at irresolvable odds with some other radical perspectives and projects, such as those aiming for Indigenous sovereignty or land repatriation. Even “some of the most radical efforts to reimagine human power relations,” they argue, “simply cannot speak to each other, cannot be aligned or allied” (p. 28).

I wish to make it clear that I do not want my arguments in this chapter or the dissertation as a whole to imply that I believe the “big tent” version of “social justice education” should expand to embrace any and all ideas and practices or that an open door kind of discourse or political community is always strategically effective. I am very aware that scholars, practitioners, activists have significant legitimate concerns (which I share) about the cooptation or domestication of more radical approaches by frameworks with which they may view their approaches as at basic odds. And, while I am less concerned about this possibility, I can also imagine “liberal” or “progressive” advocates of social justice education choosing not to align themselves with those advocating more radical approaches. I agree with Martucewicz (2012) when she writes that although “there are multiple truths” and we can learn and find value even across different philosophies of life, we “need to be careful of what we try to merge: colonization should have taught us that. Differences, the fundamental stuff of life and love, really do make a difference” (p. 223).

With these cautionary notes in mind, I would like to argue that in addition to offering the benefits I noted above (undermining the charge of dogmatism, keeping stakes and aims in view, and giving us access to the tools that emerge from various radical movements), casting a net that better depicts the wide array of social movement strands that are part of the history and contemporary radical pedagogy “tree of life” can do several things that will benefit our collective efforts. Just like Solnit’s (2004) encouragement that we learn to better “count our victories,” a big tent approach to education for social justice offers one

way to better count *ourselves* and, in turn, to gain a greater appreciation of the magnitude of our movements. In doing so, it can allow us to respond to the too-easy dismissal that those seeking justice are simply a few isolated “wingnuts” whose ideas will never be palatable to a larger constituency. In fact, there already exists a sizeable constituency – one with significant tensions and differences, but meaningful nonetheless – who share a commitment to a healthier, more democratic, ecologically sane, and just world. Creating a tent under which to assemble can allow for people to find like-minded others across the myriad discursive and linguistic differences that characterize our field; and it can also provide openings for new folks to explore and participate in our diverse ecology of movements and find *their* people. In grappling with the myriad and significant differences among us, sometimes it may be useful to set differences aside when they do not interfere with effective collaborations. Even if we disagree and do choose to reject particular perspectives or positions, I wonder if on most occasions we may be able to see the identification of areas of contention as an act that itself strengthens our individual and collective praxis. I agree with Chapman and Hobbel (2010) when they assert that a big tent approach offers the possibility to “reconcile and affirm profound, real, and ideological *differences* among us and still be able to critique and *move towards action*,” (p. 5, emphasis mine) in a way that is largely impossible when we stay, as Wanda put it, in our theoretical or political “silos.”

Taken as a whole, my research partners’ efforts to foster radical imagination traverse an enormous range of, theoretical and political ground. As well, many of my research partners work within interdisciplinary frameworks, whether by virtue of the field within which they work or because they intentionally bring a range of pedagogical methods to bear on their efforts to foster learning. While there are real tensions among the pedagogical and political ideas presented in this dissertation, I believe every one of the perspectives offered by the people who were generous enough to speak with me in the course of this project offer unique and important insights for our imaginative social justice educational practice, wherever we do our work, and that all of the perspectives and strategies they shared can play a part in strengthening our broader transformative movements and in paving the way toward a more humane, ecological, and just world.

# Afterwords

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*When you have nothing, it forces your mind into gymnastics. Some days, your imagination has to do a double-back-flip just to find a way to eat.*

Rick Bragg, *All Over but the Shoutin'*

*The truth about stories is that's all we are.*

Thomas King, *Truth About Stories*

There is a picture on our refrigerator at home that friends and often laugh about. In the picture, I'm missing two front teeth, wearing a long sleeve button up shirt with small bits of fabric sewn, quilt-like, into the shape of flowers, and there's a fake mountain range behind me. I recall hasty explanations to people who saw the picture when I was younger that my hair looked like it did because picture-taking happened just after recess. I was also a rough and tumble tomboy and my mom had recently given me a home perm. With these details in mind, it may not surprise readers to learn that in the world of the photo, it is the late 1970's and I am in the second grade. Many times over the months leading up to the end of this dissertation process I have found myself stopped in front of that photo, looking back into my own 7 year-old eyes, thinking about what the ideas about radical imagination that occupy so much of my writing, teaching, and activism today have to do with my background.

Bell hooks (2000) has observed that although she had written many books about injustice and ending race, gender, and class exploitation, none more than her book *Where We Stand* – up to that point her only that focused squarely on the issue of class – touched her so deeply. “More than any other book I have written, writing it arouses in me intensities of pain that often left me doubled over my writing table, hurting to my heart, weeping” (p. 157). Although I have not written books, I have spent more than two decades in spaces as varied as university and high school classrooms, study groups and movement workshops, gymnastics camps and classes, free meal programs and shelters for homeless youth, anarchist collectives and intentional communities, and various other social justice-oriented spaces intentionally

learning with others and teaching about the many insidious and more obvious ways the cultures of domination with and in which we live harm us. In these spaces, I have been lucky to find fellow travelers – young and old and in between – willing to experiment to create more humane, reciprocal, and generous ways of seeing and treating one another, and to think through what we’d need to learn to make these experiments more impactful and long-lasting. In most of these spaces it has also been daily practice to talk directly and in a sustained way about such topics as homelessness, intimate partner violence, hate crimes, racist police murders, rape, war, violent authoritarian regimes, and genocide. I am not a stranger to looking directly at the violence and inequities of the world people have managed to build and finding ways to both cope with the grief I feel about these realities and transform my anger about them into what I hope will be constructive actions. This may be why my emotional experience writing this dissertation was so startling to me.

While the extended focus required to write this dissertation sometimes felt like a gift of time and space to probe some of the ideas and practices that matter most to me, the process also forced me to reflect about why I have chosen to do the work I do as an educator and organizer in a way that quite often felt relentless. The process frequently took me by surprise, bombarding me with images from across my life that sometimes left me reeling:

“Your car is a piece of junk!” a seven year-old classmate bellows at me and my grandma across a busy elementary school parking lot just before the school day begins. Thirteen years later: “Your house is a dump!” the seven year-old I am nannying shouts when we stop by my house to pick up something I’d meant to bring with me to work.

My sister worries that the rats we hear in the walls might fall onto her while she sleeps through the place over her bed where a leaky roof had caused the ceiling to give way.

“Are you sure you *all* need help?” my otherwise thoughtful guidance counselor asks skeptically when I request help from our school’s booster club to attend our graduation night-out after explaining that neither my two closest friends nor I can afford the cost of the event.

One of us hauls water every night from the bathtub faucet to the kitchen to wash dinner dishes, then dumps the dirty water in the backyard because the kitchen plumbing doesn’t work. Along the way, we dodge a forest of bamboo that has grown up between big chunks of patio concrete left broken after the hasty fix of a blocked underground pipe.

We purchase bags of ice for the cooler-turned-refrigerator for the year and a half our fridge doesn't work and before our neighbor finds and delivers a used one we can have for free.

We put full garbage bags in the garage for months, rather than down on the street for pickup, when there is no money to pay and the city cuts the collection service for good.

My grandma loses their teeth throughout my childhood, sometimes using candle wax to fill the gaps. My mom loses hers before she is 40; she hates to have her picture taken.

My sister spends late nights studying in the bathroom during her first year of college because with me asleep in our shared bedroom, my grama in the other bedroom, and my mom sleeping in her "bedroom" on the livingroom couch, there is no other place she can work with a light on.

I plan to go to California to be a contestant on The Price is Right when I turn 18 so I can win a new couch for my mom to sleep on.

My grandma breaks her ankle when I am 11 and does not seek medical attention. When I am 23, she waits hours before going to the doctor when she has a heart attack. This ultimately results in her death a few weeks later.

A social worker looks at my mom, my sister, and I in horror when we echo her words back that we might have to "abandon" my grandma's body after her death because we don't have money for burial or cremation.

A lawyer explains that it is not worth it to file a wrongful death lawsuit on behalf of my mother even if the institution in which she died was in the wrong. As he explains, lawsuits like this are based on the amount of money a person would make in their lifetime. At 52 years old, with bad lungs and on Disability benefits, my mom isn't "worth," much even if she lives for years.

And so on.

Like Thomas King (2003), I don't share these memories to "play on your sympathies" (p. 9), or my own. In fact, it was a difficult choice to write these words considering that some of my committee members knew my mom and I wonder if she would feel embarrassed about my decision to share these reflections with them or with others who might read what will become a public document. I am sure my grandmother would prefer I not write about these things. Though my sister told me she is proud of my writing, I worry a bit about what feelings of pain these reflections may spark in her. I wonder if I will feel embarrassed or ashamed. But these are my stories, and, although I was unsuccessful in my hope to find a way to bring reflections on my life into the dissertation in a more substantial way, the ways poverty and its structural causes have shaped my family's history and, in turn, my commitments as an educator and activist today are undeniably significant to this project and to my efforts as an educator and activist.

I often hear it said about poor people that we don't have psychic room, the mental space, to be creative, to be imaginative, to think outside current constraints or work to pursue them. At a recent visit to a local youth leadership nonprofit in the city where I live, a staff member at the organization made a compelling case that poor young people living in families facing economic insecurity often lack opportunities for open and imaginative space to think about or feel their dreams so that they can pursue them. At the time I am writing this piece, an "expert" on public radio recently made the case that poor people suffer the affliction of "bandwidth poverty," a cyclical process in which a focus on meeting basic needs in the moment stifles an ability for longer-range planning that might help alleviate poverty in the long run. Even Robin Kelley (2002), whose work focuses squarely on the prevalence of radical visions of change among Black visionary activists has remarked "sometimes I think the conditions of daily life, of everyday oppressions, of survival, not to mention the temporary pleasures available to most of us, render much of our imaginations inert. We are constantly putting out fires, responding to emergencies, finding temporary refuge, all of which make it difficult to see anything other than the present" (p. 11). As I reflect on Rick Bragg's observation that "some days, your imagination has to do a double-back-flip just to find a way to eat" that I opened this chapter with, I too am reminded of the mental gymnastics all poor people are forced to practice on a regular basis: doing damage-control with bills, paying the most urgent, ignoring the rest; jumping on the exploitative merry-go-round of payday loans; dodging phone calls from medical debt collectors; scheming about how to find ways to afford small treats here and there to make the hard times (which inevitably continue) a little more bearable. When I am feeling most weary from the kinds of experiences I recounted above, I sometimes find these arguments persuasive. But while it is undoubtable that events and realities stemming from the pressures of poverty have constricted my life, and the lives of other poor people, young and older, in ways I am both aware of and unaware of, there is certainly more to our stories than these desperate "damage-centered" (Tuck, 2009) depictions suggest.

In my university teaching, I regularly work with undergraduate peer facilitators who take on formal and shared facilitation roles in the courses I teach. At the time I am writing this, not much time has passed since a group of students in the summer internship program I coordinate organized a generative session

focused on the significance of “story” in the ways we perceive ourselves and the world around us. In one activity, after reading excerpts from *The Velveteen Rabbit* and doing a bit of collective work to generate ideas about the story’s intended and possible meanings, our facilitators passed around orange cards with one word written on either side. Springboarding from our discussion of core themes in the storybook version, we were invited to construct our own stories using one of the terms on the cards to shape our telling. Words I saw included “passion,” “empowered,” “harmed,” “doubtful,” and a few others. We began with one term as a guiding idea and once our few minutes of writing was up, we were instructed to pass the cards to the left, choose another card, and rewrite the story using a new word as a frame. With each new guiding term, the stories changed dramatically, yet we noticed and observed there was “truth” in them all. This activity was part of the nourishing conditions that grew the seed of an idea into these Afterwords. There is truth in my story that my commitment to imagination and the action it can produce springs from living in conditions such as the ones I recount above and watching the people I love most struggle with inadequate access to some of the most basic resources needed for healthy, dignified lives. The intense anger and deep sadness that result from watching people I love hurt and struggle to live and raise children in a profoundly harmful society systematically ordered to benefit some people at the expense of others is part of why so much of my waking (and dreaming) life is directed toward thinking, strategizing, and acting in ways that I hope will contribute to the broader struggles for social and economic justice that I consider myself to be part of. Living in, with, and through the realities of poverty such as these profoundly shaped my commitment to working toward a world in which all people have access to the resources they need for healthy, dignified lives. As many have argued, the experience of oppression can heighten our abilities to detect oppressive harm by perceiving the world in ways that may promote justice more so than the blinders that the “protections” of privilege can create. However, I am also sharply aware of how much my capacity to interpret these events not as personal failures of individuals who had a fair shot in a meritocratic world but as the most likely results of a rigged game is due to the pedagogical support of the many informal and formal teachers in my life, starting with my mom. My awareness that there is nothing “natural” about having developed a politicized interpretation

that holds capitalism, patriarchy, and ablism responsible for my family's experiences of poverty is part of what has shaped my belief in the critical importance of building intentional pedagogical work into our social movements. It also resulted in my commitment to hone my own pedagogical skills to strengthen my own and others' abilities to detect the harms of inequitable, hierarchical relationships and name these clearly for ourselves and our transformative movements. All of this is true.

But let me offer another framing for my dedication to the work I do that is equally truthful.

I come from a small but determined family of women dedicated to leaving the world healthier than we found it. In his book *Freedom Dreams*, Robin Kelley (2002) could be talking about any of the women in my family when he writes "she would not allow us to live as victims. Instead, we were a family of caretakers who inherited this earth. We were expected to help any living creature in need, even if that meant giving up our last piece of bread" (p. 1-2). I grew up with a grandma (whose husband had died of a heart attack at the age 42, leaving her with two children to raise on her own in the mid-1950s) who worked until nearly 70 years of age as a personal caregiver with elderly people in their homes, as a nurse's aid with residents at the place we called the old folks' home, and as the primary caretaker of sister and me when my mom was at school or work. For the past two decades, my sister's commitment to minimizing the blunt impacts of poverty on poor people and tackling their systemic causes has engaged her in direct service and allyship with homeless youth, as well as community organizing and legislative advocacy for adequate housing for all people in the context of a broader agenda of ending poverty. Relationships with these two women have had a profound and inspirational impact on the way I have chosen to live my own life – they have set for me high bars and offered meaningful inspiration. Still, I consider my mom's influence to be the bedrock of the integrity I humbly strive to express as a social justice organizer, researcher, and educator.

Late-night office-cleaning shifts combined with welfare, food banks, needs-based grants, support from her mom, and her own tenacity allowed her to pursue a college degree in her late 20s. After her several years of community college, she transferred to UW to earn a bachelor's degree in social work and subsequently began a master's degree at the UW's School of Social Work. Her intention, in part, was to

continue work she had been doing to help other poor people navigate the time-consuming, punitive, often humiliating vagaries of bureaucratic “social welfare” programs while also working to undermine the systemic inequality that necessitated those dehumanizing systems in the first place. She began the program in the fall of 1980, but shortly following the happy start of the program, she slipped a disc in her back, leaving her couch-bound for weeks; a month later, I was mauled by a St. Bernard and several weeks of physical recovery was followed by a longer period of emotional and psychological healing. If she were alive today, she might sarcastically refer to that fall as a season marked by a Series of Unfortunate Events. After a stint working at Toys-R-Us that same winter, I watched her teach preschool for fifteen years, making minimum wage or just above it, before returning to the UW in the mid 1990s.

Once back on campus, she pursued a post-baccalaureate in American Ethnic Studies and then began a master’s program in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. Our shared interests in better understanding how and why liberation struggles and movements sometimes clearly succeed and other times clearly don’t meant that we pursued these courses of study together, at times taking the same classes. From the mid 1980s through graduate school, she experienced persistent health problems that hospitalized her repeatedly and with increasing frequency, yet up until the last few weeks before she died, her support for people both far away and closer to home, with humor, never waned. Stuck at home with a hand-me-down computer that a school friend had gifted her, she got on email lists and maintained communication with friends and comrades around the world, especially to learn more about the interwoven ravages of capitalism, colonialism, and racism and to offer moral support and encouragement as people told her about their many struggles and strategies to fight back.

Even at her most tired, lugging around her bulky portable oxygen tank or maneuvering carefully around the apartment we shared during the last year of her life with an extension cord for the even-less-portable machine, she would email me with reports about how many stairs she was able to walk up during the hours I was at work (“five steps! [signed] –yr mum”), but also to ask me how I was doing at balancing my support for her at home or visits to the hospital with my volunteer work with homeless youth at Teen Feed, gymnastics teaching, advising Women Studies students, and beginning my doctoral program.

Shortly after her death in November 1999, she and I were recognized together, along with a handful of other activists in our college, for our dedication to social justice and advocacy in our communities. I have no doubt that those involved in the process knew it would be a tremendous honor for me to be acknowledged alongside her in that way and for that I have continued to be grateful. I was also humbled by my knowledge that no one at school could or would ever have a clear picture of how deep her commitments ran and how thoroughly and consistently she infused her beliefs in every action, interaction, and relationship in her life.

Throughout the chapters that make up the project, I have woven bits and pieces of evidence that illustrate how and why my curiosity and passion about imaginative approaches to education and organizing stem from some of my earliest memories. Although the reflections about the pain of poverty that I offer above are one part of the story, the loudest of my memories are happy, hopeful, creative, trusting, collaborative, playful, inspired and, indeed, grounded in desire. Again, I hear my own voice in Robin Kelley's when he writes, "call me utopian, but I inherited my mother's belief that the map to a new world is in the imagination, in what we see in our third eyes rather than in the desolation that surrounds us"

(p. 2-3). Consider the following:

"Come to order! Come to order!" I shriek while enthusiastically banging a meat tenderizer-turned-gavel on the coffee table to get our consensus-based weekly family meeting started.

My grandma's wallet lives on the dining room table, its usually limited monetary contents available to anyone in the family as long as we tell others what we need it for.

My mom treats my sister and I, kids in our neighborhood, and the children at the preschool where she works with all the respect she shows to older people, valuing our intelligence, curiosity, and self-determination in small and larger ways.

Even though my mom and grandma feel embarrassed because of our house's disrepair, they are happy that friends (even the ones with fancy houses) usually want to spend time at our place.

I go to school every day with several pages of lined paper filled with notes that read "Please excuse Tamara's absence yesterday, she was ill." And "Please excuse Tamara's late arrival today, she had a doctor's appointment." I am trusted to use these notes as needed. My sister and I never have a curfew, instead we are encouraged to make good decisions about when to come home from the many late nights we spend at dance clubs and at hip hop shows with groups like Public Enemy where some of my most powerful political education occurs.

The TV in our house is almost always on, usually accompanied by constant and witty

observations about how racism and sexism play out in the media. Watching a TV commercial with my mom, my sister, at around age 6, lisping through missing front teeth retorts “That’s false advertising! They’re just trying to sell me stuff!”

My mom invites all the kids from our neighborhood to come read and talk about the book *Where do I come from?* (a cartoon book about sex and sexuality) as long as they get their parents’ permission. In the early years of the AIDS epidemic, the “easter bunny” leaves condoms in our teenage easter baskets. “God, mom, not the sex talk *agaaaaaaaain*” I whine in response to her ongoing encouragement to make whatever decisions about sex we feel are right, as long as they are thoughtful.

Laughter, teasing, practical jokes (with kindness), and humor are part of connecting in everyday life. A few friends and I watch with glee as my mom tiptoes up behind her manager at Toys-R-Us, both hands full of crazy foam, poised to clap him on both ears during the busiest moment of the winter holiday shopping season.

On one hand, dreaming of a world outside poverty was encouraged by what I remember as a sense of unconditional support from the adults I lived with about whatever path in life I might choose. It was also nurtured by growing up in a home where adults and young people puzzled out together ways to share power and practice everyday democracy, where money was scarce but freely shared, and where dignity and respect for all was not only taken for granted but openly discussed and practiced intentionally. There was also a humor in the face of authority that sticks with me so vividly today. In my work with students who are understandably grouchy about the prison-like character of K-12 education, I often share letters my mom wrote to principals and vice principals in response to policies she considered absurd, punitive, and ageist which were full of eloquent arguments, but also punctuated with characteristic sarcasm about things like the “paranoid refusal” of adults to accept and support young people in making decisions for themselves at age 17 that they will be expected and required to make at age 18. My mom was an anarchist without calling herself one, I often tell people. I wonder what she would say to that.

As I got older, I began more and more to see these small-scale efforts to regard others with dignity and love, to share power and resources individually and interpersonally, and to critically question and regard institutional hierarchies in a playful manner as directly linked to social, economic, political, and cultural activism to create better communities and, ultimately, a better world for all. For instance, those weekly house meetings have directly unfolded into a deep belief that all people should have the

opportunity to actively participate in all the decisions that impact us and a commitment to try to build participatory decision-making structures in all the spaces we live our lives – home, school, work, and so on. “The money is on the table” has evolved into a philosophy which directly influences my draw toward projects and movements in which an ethic of sharing is common to the group and integral to organizational structure and my commitment to working with others to strengthen community and broader-scale economies grounded in solidarity, cooperation, and community-wide sharing. My mom’s practice of valuing the intelligence, curiosity, and dignity of all the children in her life profoundly influenced my own belief in the importance of anti-oppression work. Challenging adultism from a young age has unfolded into a commitment to work with others to better understand how we may undo the many manifestations of ideological and structural supremacy, and also to creating spaces in which all people and the many kinds of diversity we reflect are not “tolerated” but respected, valued, embraced, and viewed as essential elements of healthy, thriving communities. And the use of humor to name and challenge authoritarianism and hierarchy has resulted in my interest in “playful” activism, culture jamming, and the importance of laughter and joy as essential ingredients in both everyday life and our social movements. Although my respect and admiration for my mom can’t be measured, we know from examining the history of innumerable atrocities that even when facing the most dehumanizing, repressive, violent conditions – even when trauma is acute, collective, deep, generational – there is also evidence that humans continue to strive for their own liberation, and that of others. Under unfathomable conditions people resist. Human resilience remains.

I opened this dissertation by describing a perspective I have found to be more pervasive in activist settings than I wish were the case: That focusing on our dreams of justice, our visions of an anti-oppressive, non-exploitative, healthy world are somehow a distraction from the “real world” and the “real work” of organizing and activism. But as the brilliant poet, theorist, and historian Eduardo Galeano has remarked about utopia, “She’s on the horizon...I go two steps, she moves two steps away. I walk ten steps and the horizon runs ten steps ahead. No matter how much I walk, I’ll never reach her. What good is utopia? That’s what: it’s good for walking.” When I reflect on the kinds of relationships, practices, and

values my mom and my grandma nurtured at home as my sister and I grew up, as I have above, I can see these as the seeds that have grown into my own commitments as a radical educator and activist. They were most certainly a means to a broader end, helping me create my own ethical compass and nudging me in the direction of participating in communities, networks, and movements to fight for broader changes toward social, economic, political, ecological justice that cannot be created by individuals alone. They were also deeply prefigurative, glimmers of what might take some more robust, durable form at some future time. But at the conclusion of this dissertation, at the end of a process that has deeply reaffirmed my own belief that scaling up both our social visioning and our imaginative actions are both absolutely essential to bringing about the transformations we seek, I also want to affirm an idea the undergraduate students I work with frequently push me to remember and which are confirmed by my own life: that in some important ways that are frequently undervalued in our social movements even the smallest scale and most fleeting of these imaginative acts has significance that demands our attention.

In this light, the “islands of decency” Myles Horton talked about are not *only* meaningful as springboards toward collective actions that will be significant at some *future* time. These moments and actions are not only prefigurations of some other more systemic, more structural, more scaled-up, more “important” end (although they certainly may be). In the context of a world in which violence and alienation are considered to be unstoppable, inevitable, and all-encompassing, the affective spaces we create help us understand that at least some of the qualities of the “better world” we most deeply desire are already in our midst. On a busy street, a homeless teenager stops a university student who is in tears to ask if she’s okay. During rush hour someone yells to the busdriver to wait as a stranger runs for the bus. A care package makes it into the hands of a struggling friend. A bullied child relaxes into the adventure of a visionary novel. A six year-old wakes up in a dilapidated house to a bedroom 3 feet deep in birthday balloons her mom has spent the whole night blowing up. What could an anti-oppressive world look like? What could it feel like? Love, connection, joy, care, curiosity, humor, shared power, dignity, allyship. If we are observant, we will notice ways we and others enact and reaffirm our most cherished values every day in hundreds of ways.

Something else: the writer Piers Anthony, reflecting on his own rough childhood, observed “people talk – they sneer at escapism. Well, there are those of us who need it.” Like Anthony’s pull toward the world of fantasy novels, the urge to get some distance from the many harms of poverty or *any* oppressive relationship, process, structure, or dynamic – realities that *every single person on the planet faces* – is not only reasonable, but smart. Rather than simply being individualistic lifestylism or self-indulgent withdrawal, what we sometimes call escape can provide a healing balm, it can offer emotional room, a safer place in which to survive and to rest. This was certainly the case during my childhood, as my mom and grandma worked hard to create “imaginative breathing space” from the psychological and material impacts of poverty.

As the metaphor of pursuing our dreams as a long walk toward a better world reminds us, making time for rest and respite, taking shelter, nourishing ourselves is utterly essential. These imaginative escapes are moments in which we are creating the qualities of life we most want *today* and as my research partner Hannah noted, that matters. Making time to laugh and to play, to connect and to care, to be kind and to love ourselves enough to daydream – creating time to escape, even momentarily, the cultures of domination and alienation within which we live – should be valued as skillful moves in a harmful world. Escape, too, can be radical.

# Appendices

## Appendix A Author Example Syllabi

*If a school were designed to address the questions you bring to it, which ones would you bring?*

-School for Designing a Society



### Imagining 'Eutopias' Deschooling for Social Justice

Autumn 2014  
Tues & Thurs 1:30-3:20  
Denny 209  
<https://catalyst.uw.edu/workspace/tmyers/28031/182913>  
Email List: [chid480c\\_aut14@uw.edu](mailto:chid480c_aut14@uw.edu)

Facilitators:  
Tamara Myers: [chidtam@uw.edu](mailto:chidtam@uw.edu) (meeting hours: T/Th after class by appt.)

### COURSE OVERVIEW

"There Is No Alternative!" This statement is a political strategy used to maintain educational and social realities and it can act like a vice grip on our imaginations. But, when faced with injustice and dehumanization, people have *always* found ways to put their visions of a better world into practice in many ways, small and large. How have people enacted their visions of change educationally? How do they do so today? Those will be our main questions this quarter.

Building on the work of activists and scholars who view "utopia" as a practical tool for creating *social* change, this course begins with the idea that bringing utopian thinking into our *educational* change efforts can also be useful. This course uses two overlapping ideas – '*eutopia*' and '*utopian pedagogy*' – to invite participants into a process of critically analyzing, envisioning, and practicing radical pedagogies and projects within a broad framework of *social justice*.

Utilizing a "deschooling" framework, this quarter we'll zoom in on community and social movement projects, organizations, institutions, and other political formations to examine how educators and learners are working outside K-12 schools and universities to enact education for transformative change. As we explore, we'll draw on diverse intellectual and political (e.g., critical, postcolonial, indigenist, feminist, anarchist, autonomist) traditions and pedagogical traditions (e.g., democratic & queer, popular education, DIY education, unschooling, freeschooling, deschooling, alter-globalization & indigenist pedagogies) as we identify our own and others' aspirations for transformative educational change.



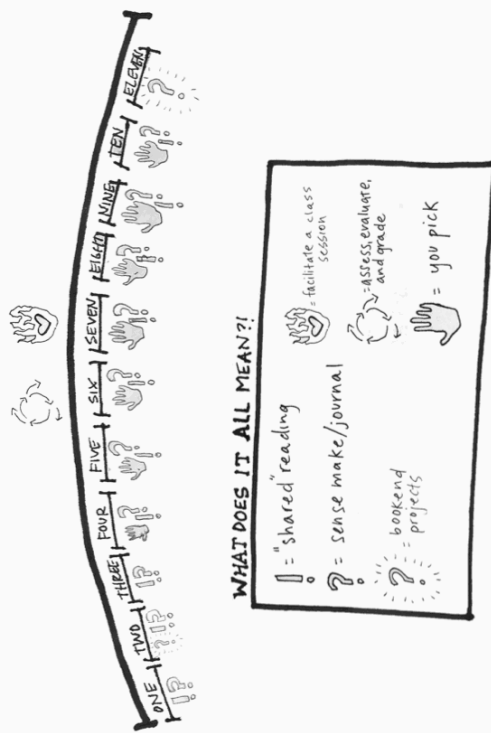
The overarching aims of this course are to equip us with *concepts* to complicate thinking about educational problems; to enhance our *creative capacities* for envisioning transformative educational and social change; to identify and develop specific *skills* and *knowledge* for desired educational and social interventions; and to maintain *curiosity* about what might happen when members of a learning community complicate our roles and collaboratively and reflectively experiment with a variety of diverse 'edutopian' ideas, practices, and relationships in the context of a CHID course.

*She's on the horizon... I go two steps, she moves two steps away. I walk ten steps and the horizon runs ten steps ahead. No matter how much I walk, I'll never reach her. What good is that? That's what: it's good for walking.*

Eduardo Galeano (quoted in Duncombe, 2007)



# A VISUAL MAP OF OUR QUARTER TOGETHER



## Weekly Learning Experiences

Each week, you'll be responsible for engaging in a range of learning activities. Some responsibilities will be held by individuals, other responsibilities will be held by groups. Check out the above visuals and look for symbols as you read on! Each week you can expect to...

**Actively prepare and engage in class.** There's no back seat in this course! We'll need everyone to be active in your learning and to play a role in facilitating the growth of others. You will be responsible for preparing to share your ideas during every class session and for engaging in a range of creative learning methods in class. Only you will know your limits, but expect to be uncomfortable some of the time. When you notice yourself feeling uncomfortable, ask what that's about. Are you on your growing edge? What kind of support do you need to stay there?

**Read shared materials.** Readings with the arrowhead symbol like the one below will be read by all class participants (**arrowhead** is not on website, always consult your physical syllabus first). For the first 3 weeks, both Tuesday's and Thursday's materials are all shared. For weeks 4-10, Thursday's we switch to "you pick" options (see below). You're responsible for reading closely and taking notes **before** the class for which the reading is listed. Plan to spend about **4 hours** each week reading course materials.

> Bell et al., "Knowing



**Make sense.** Please plan to spend **at least 2 hours each week** actively sense-making. Get yourself a "journal" in which to organize and synthesize your evolving ideas. It should be able to hold your weekly "sense making," as well as being a space for you to record thoughts during class. Bring it to class every session. These will be **semi-public** documents, always shared with weekly facilitation teams and peer facilitators, sometimes shared with your pod and others.

For weeks 1-3, please consult specific "journal" prompts at the bottom of the week's page in this syllabus. You will have journals for both **Tuesdays and Thursdays**.

For weeks 4-10, there are three "journal" tasks to do **before every Tuesday session**:

1. **Write a summary sentence for every text/source** — these sentences should encapsulate what you see as an author's main point *and* their method.
2. **Identify a significant tension you see between at least two of the week's texts** — in *one full spaced page*, identify and describe a key tension related to the week's conceptual theme; illustrate this tension with quotes from shared materials.
3. **Creative engagement response** — using the tension you identified as a springboard, create something that reflects and illustrates your own current thinking about the tension. (Possibilities are endless: academic-style essay, poetry, mix-CD, found poem, spoken word piece, song, collage, map, drawing, mind map, video, screenplay...your ideas?)



**You Pick!** In addition to weekly texts and other resources that we will all examine, **beginning week 4 and going through week 10**, before Thursday each week you'll find a film, text, organization, or other resource to explore your own curiosities). It should be a substantial experience (at least 60 minutes long). Ideally, you will share your experience with someone in your pod or with someone in your life outside the class and have a discussion about the experience. Plan to spend **at least an hour** each week and make sure to include a **summary sentence** in your course "journal."



### Pedagogy Podlucks & Substantive Reflection with your Pod

At least once during the quarter, partner with your pod-mates to co-peer facilitate a session of the class. **Your task will be to utilize ideas from our shared texts to create a process through which we can explore a significant tension or tensions in the week's materials considering the week's theme.** You have 3 tasks:

1. **Plan.** Planning takes a lot of time - start reading & meeting early! Part of this step will be to email [redacted], and Tamara (cc-ing all of your podmates) by **5 pm Sunday** of your facilitation week.
2. **Facilitate.** Remember to show up early enough to set up the room and coordinate with your group. Breathe deep and have fun!
3. **Reflect.** Instead of a weekly journal, for your facilitation week please write a text-*engaged*, well-edited, substantial (2000-3000 words) "academic style" reflective paper that synthesizes your thoughts about your experience planning, designing, and facilitating your session in light of the texts, ideas, and practices we have explored so far in the course. Please utilize at least **4 texts** to reflect on both the choices you made in setting up the facilitation and what happened during the session. Use quotes to illustrate. Please conclude the paper with a bullet point list *lessons you would offer others who have yet to facilitate*. This paper is **due in class the Tuesday** following your facilitation week. Please also **post your bullet point lists** on the "facilitation resources" by this time.



### Bookends

Twice during the quarter (week 2 and week 12) we'll be sharing our best, most creative ideas about 'edutopias' or 'utopian pedagogies.'

#### Front Bookend

Take 60 minutes (not much more, not much less) design an 'edutopia' you believe would support a specific learning community you can imagine. It can take any form you like - use a mode that helps you explore and capture your ideas!

#### Back Bookend

Your facilitation team proposes we collectively produce a 'zine that synthesizes our learnings and pulls together resources can be useful to real people in our lives who were not part of the class. The possibilities for this project are endless. We're only limited by our imaginations and, of course, the time and energy constraints we face in an 12-week quarter! How can we make our experiences live on into the future and be useful to others? How can this course be part of a "big here and a long now" educationally? We need to nail down our plan by the end of Week 3!



\*What do you think about this as a framework for working with course materials? What ideas do you have about a shared final project?

Lined writing area for student responses.

## ACCESS, ACCOMMODATIONS, SUPPORT

Your experience in this class is important to us, and it is the policy and practice of the University of Washington to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law. If you anticipate or experience barriers based on disability, you are welcome to meet with Tamara to discuss options – we may need to partner with Disability Resources for Students (DRS). If you have already established accommodations with DRS, please provide us with your letter of accommodation when we meet to inform and guide our discussion of options.



### Campus Resources

#### Disability Resources for Students

<http://www.uw.edu/students/drs>  
206-543-8924 V 206-543-8925 TDD  
[uwds@uw.edu](mailto:uwds@uw.edu)

DRS offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between you, your instructor(s) and, as needed, DRS. If you have, or think you have a temporary or permanent disability that requires accommodations (this can include mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to contact DRS.

#### Odegaard Writing and Research Center

<http://depts.washington.edu/owrc/>

The OWRC exists to empower writers and foster a supportive learning community on the University of Washington Seattle campus by collaborating with students, staff, and faculty on all kinds of writing and research. It's open to all members of the UW community and features exceptional tutors and convenient hours. Go to the website above to sign-up for an appointment today!

#### Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity

<http://www.washington.edu/omad/>  
Find OMA/D Counseling Services programs in the Center for Undergraduate Advising, Diversity, and Student Success in Mary Gates Hall 141.

#### Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity Instructional Center

<http://depts.washington.edu/ic/content/index.php?style=graphics>  
The academic arm of the Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity (OMA/D), the Instructional Center (IC), serves any students that are affiliates of the OMA/D. Our commitment is to assist students in getting the academic assistance they need in a positive and efficient manner. Students not affiliated with OMA/D may visit the front desk of the Instructional Center to inquire about the availability of services.

#### International Student Services

<http://iss.washington.edu/>  
Schmitz 459  
(206) 221-7857; Fax (206) 543-9772  
[uwiss@uw.edu](mailto:uwiss@uw.edu)

International Student Services provides support to UW international students so that they may reach their educational goals. A professionally trained advising staff helps students understand benefits and restrictions of F-1 and J-1 visa status, as well as changing to those statuses by providing knowledgeable and empathetic advice to F-1 and J-1 students. ISS is accessible by phone, email, live chat, or in person, year round including quarter breaks, except for weekends and major holidays observed by the UW. On the website above, find general regulatory information, procedures, forms, and contact information.

#### Q Center

<http://depts.washington.edu/qcenter/wordpress/>  
HUB Room 315  
206-897-1430, 206-221-2863 (fax)  
[uwqcenter@gmail.com](mailto:uwqcenter@gmail.com)

The Q Center facilitates and enhances a brave, affirming, liberatory, and celebratory environment for students, faculty, staff, and alumni of all sexual and gender orientation, identities, and expressions. It is a fierce primarily student run resource center dedicated to serving anyone with a gender or sexuality: UW students, staff, faculty, alum, and community members. We host and support student groups, put on regular programming events, house a lending library, and amplify student voices on our Student Blog. Explore our website for more about us or stop by the HUB.

#### UW Women's Center

<http://depts.washington.edu/womenctr/>

The University of Washington Women's Center is a vital place where women and men partner to build a culture of gender equity campus-wide, locally and globally. We provide educational programs, individualized services, skills training, research and community outreach.

#### UW Counseling Center

<http://www.washington.edu/counseling/>

The Counseling Center is staffed by psychologists and mental health counselors who provide developmentally-based counseling, assessment, and crisis intervention services to currently-enrolled UW students. To schedule an initial appointment, please call the Counseling Center (206) 543-1240 or stop by the Center at 401 Schmitz Hall.



*\*Other resources you want to share?*

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### WHAT ELSE CAN I EXPECT?

Much of our work together will be evolving, but you can expect some things to be consistent throughout our time together.

#### As a participant, you are expected to:

1. Attend all class sessions (email the whole group if absent & ask your pod-mates to give you a report on class and any important info you may have missed).
2. Complete all of the assigned course readings. Bring hard copies of readings to class each meeting.
3. Complete and bring weekly assignments & bookends to class on time.
4. Participate in all class activities and discussions, stretching yourself to stay on your learning edge.
5. Collaborate to shape a healthy learning environment.
6. Share relevant insights, information, and experiences.
7. Engage generously, reflectively, and actively with opinions, ideas, and contributions of others.

#### You can expect:

1. To be treated by Tamara ( [REDACTED] ) intelligent, thoughtful member of a participatory learning community.
2. To receive timely responses from facilitators on your work.
3. To be nudged onto your learning edge regularly.
4. Not to agree with all course materials, participants, or facilitators.
5. For our classroom dynamics to be considered shared course material, open for group discussion.
6. For facilitators to encourage risk taking and mistakes.
7. For facilitators to take risks and make mistakes.
8. That facilitators will challenge racism, sexism, classism, homo/transphobia, ableism, ageism, & all forms of oppressive aggression.
9. That facilitators will sometimes unintentionally enact these forms of aggression and will be consistently on the lookout for ways to notice when this happens, change behaviors, and minimize harm.

*\*What course agreements are important to you?*


### COURSE AGREEMENTS

We'll collaborate to make a range of agreements during our first two weeks together. Here are a few that are essential to Tamara and that we want to say upfront.

#### Preparation.

We'll decide more specifically what this means together, but at a minimum you need to come to class having completed all readings, taken notes, watched films, checked out websites, journaled, or otherwise prepared for class based on the plan laid out in the syllabus. You are responsible for bringing printed copies of each day's reading to class with you.

#### Computers and Phones in Class

Please plan to turn your phone's sound off and put computers and phones away before coming into class each session. Although there may be times when we use computers to support our shared experiences, because our focus will be on participatory learning and we will rely on each other to build knowledge together, our face-to-face time is precious. If you know you need a computer to support your learning, let's talk about it & make a plan.

#### Academic Honesty

We ALL build our ideas in relation to the ideas of others. In this course, we'll be exploring ideas from books, articles, the web, films, music, various arts, ideas of guest speakers, and a whole range of other sources. Plagiarism ("academic dishonesty") includes copying sentences or paragraphs from the web, books, articles, or other sources and using them without proper citations, representing someone else's words and work as your own, and other forms of academic dishonesty. It's awful to deal with for everyone involved and may result in loss of credit for assignments or for the course (check your student handbook for information about the university's policy on this issue). Please do not do it. If you're having difficulty with any aspect of the course, please get in touch with Tamara, Sabah, or Addyson – we will be more than happy to help you and/or help you identify campus resources that you can draw on.



## WEEKLY THEMES & READING SCHEDULE

Each of us will bring different questions and interests to this course, no doubt about it. So, we've made a strong effort to include a variety of types of reading for each week. We've tried to include historical, theoretical, case studies, and hands on materials, and we'll be drawing on our own stories as course texts, as well. We agree with Murielle Adams, whose work we'll read in week 3, that radical pedagogies emerge in important ways from activist movements, so we've done our best to make space each week to draw direct ties to the many movements that shape radical pedagogies today.

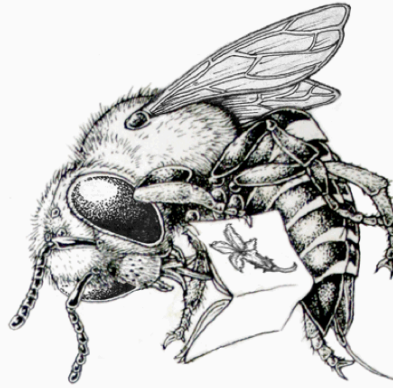
### Weekly Schedule and Readings

Readings are listed for the day we'll be discussing them. In other words, you are responsible for completing readings **before** the class session for which readings are listed. All shared readings can be found in our two course texts:

### \*\*Syllabus

### \*\*Course Reader

The reader for the course is available at the Ave Copy Center. You are responsible for purchasing the reader or otherwise obtaining **printed topics of all readings so that you can have them available in class**. We encourage you to write lots of notes in margins, make your reading a dialogue in whatever way works for you!



## PART 1: BUILDING A TOOLBOX

This section of the course will help us begin to build a few of the resources we'll need for our learning journey - a sense of who we are, where we've been, and where we hope to go; curiosity, courage, and other emotional tools; skills that will help us build together creatively; and a range of conceptual tools. Of course, we'll continue working to strengthen these throughout the quarter.

### Week 1: Storytelling

From drawing on our own life-stories to build collective strategies for change to using story as a tool to disrupt dominant narratives via shifts in messaging and framing, storytelling has always played an important role in justice movements. What can different storytelling practices do for justice-focused pedagogies?

### Thurs 9/25: Where we've been, where we are, where we're going

- Bell et al., "Knowing Ourselves as Social Justice Educators" in *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*
- Iseke & BMJK, "Learning life lessons from indigenous storytelling with Tom McCallum" (selections) in *Indigenous Philosophies and Critical Pedagogies*
- Canning & Reinsborough, "Think Narratively" in *Beautiful Trouble*

### Organizations

Bechive Design Collective — <http://bechivecollective.org>  
Storytelling and Organizing Project (STOP):  
<http://www.stopviolenceeveryday.org/stop-2/>  
Highlander: <http://highlandercenter.org/>  
Beautiful Trouble: [beautifultrouble.org](http://beautifultrouble.org)

*\*In-class Journal: Six word memoirs: Learning, journey, UW, education, community, utopia, deschooling, social justice.*

"The truth about stories is, that's all we are" — Thomas King

### Week 2: Intend

Our first few weeks will help us set individual and collective intentions and introduce resources we'll need for our journey. What role might intention, active facilitation, and courage play as traveling companions in our collective efforts? What other resources will help us create a learning community of joy and meaning, and in which we view conflict as a source of powerful growth instead of something to avoid?

#### 📅 Tuesday 9/30: Building Intentions, Gathering Skills

- Griffin & Ouellet, "Facilitating Social Justice Education Courses" (selections) in *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*
- Hunter, "How Ground Rules Can Hurt Us" (Training for Change)
- "Group Norms and Guidelines" in *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*
- AORTA Collective, "Community Agreements" in NW Tour Resource Zine

#### 📅 Thursday 10/2: Working with Conflict

- Smith, Selection, *Killers of the Dream*
- Freire, "Don't let the fear of what is difficult paralyze you" in *Letters to Those Who Dare Teach*

#### Organizations

Training for Change: <http://www.trainingforchange.org>  
Consensus Network: <http://www.consensus.net/>  
AORTA Collective: <http://www.aortacollective.org>

**\*Journal (Tuesday):** Find a partner to interview over the weekend. Before meeting, choose 3 objects that help you tell the story of your educational past, present, and imagined future. Interview each other, making sure to take notes. Journal about the experience. How does your story connect with the person you interviewed? Bring objects to class on Tuesday.

**\*Journal (Thursday):** What traveling companions will you bring on your learning journey this quarter to help you stretch and grow this quarter? Which will you offer our community? Which will be new for you?

**\*Front Bookend (Thursday):** Drawing lessons from your educational journey, create a design of your own utopia or utopian pedagogy.

"Social justice education is not simply new content but also often a radical change in process as well, one that requires us to expand beyond traditional models of teaching."  
—Lee Ann Bell, et al.

### Week 3: Skill-Build

CHID was founded on the proposition that ideas have real significance for our on-the-ground lives. They matter. As in all CHID courses, some of our traveling companions will be ideas! This course is organized to introduce new key concepts each week via weekly themes, but there are a few concepts that we'll emphasize all quarter: utopia, social justice, deschooling, and pedagogy. Why bring these ideas together in a course like this? How could this kind of exploration benefit the work of activists and educators in formal and informal settings?

#### 📅 Tuesday 10/7: Utopia

- Cote, Day, de Peuter, Greig, "Utopian Pedagogy: Creating Radical Alternatives in the Neoliberal Age"
- Webb, "Where's the vision? The concept of utopia in contemporary educational theory,"
- Meza-Wilson section in "School, Education, and Learning," *Say Solid*
- Watch Astra Taylor on "The Unschooling Life"  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lwly1Fi-4Q>

#### 📅 Thursday 10/9: Social Justice Education

**\*Guest: Bill Aal**

- Burke, et al. "Working on our Feet: The Practice of Democratic Facilitation" in *Educating for a Change*

#### Organizations

Education for Liberation Network - <http://www.edliberation.org/>  
Catalyst Centre: <http://www.catalystcentre.ca/>  
Trapeze Collective: <http://www.trapeze.org/>  
Build the Wheel - <http://www.buildthewheel.org/>

**\*Journal (Thursday):** Have a conversation about the course with someone in your life who is not part of our class. Do your best to explain concepts that might be unfamiliar in language the other person will understand. Ask the person what we could produce at the end that might be useful to them. Journal about these conversations.

"It is a terrible error, and a failure of solidarity, to assume that racism, sexism, and homophobia will somehow magically disappear from alternative spaces simply because they are 'alternative.' Indeed, the struggle against domination in all of its myriad forms must be relentless and central to any utopian pedagogy worthy of the name." —Cote, Day, and de Peuter

## PART 2: EXPERIMENTS IN ACTION

In this section of the course, we'll explore many experiments in radical pedagogies taking place in classrooms, communities, and social movements. Some use the heuristic "within, against, and beyond" to describe three approaches to social or educational change. In the first case, "pockets of hope" are created *within* existing institutions; in the second case, efforts are made to interrupt the workings of harmful dominant systems and institutions as people seeking change fight *against* injustices; and in the third case, alternatives are created outside – *beyond* – existing systems. Our efforts this quarter will emphasize the third approach, with some attention to the other two. Keeping this heuristic in mind – and identifying your own interests and ideas about social change strategies – may help guide your choice-making throughout the quarter as you seek out videos, audio, and organizations to check out.

Our exploration of the movements that inform pedagogies today will take us from the Black Freedom Movement in the US South to the struggles for dignity of poor people in Brazil and Peru, from the Surrealists to the Situationists, from environmental justice activists to movements for indigenous sovereignty to feminist, socialist, anarchist movements around the world. And, although all the resources in the course can be considered "radical" in some sense, there are important differences at work – keep an eye out you



## Week 4: Self-Determine

Collective self-determination is a means and end of many democratic movements and education traditions. What's the spectrum of self-determination you see in this week's readings? What's the relationship between self-determining education & creating a more deeply democratic society?

### Tuesday 10/14

- Ransby, "Mentoring a New Generation" Ch. 8 *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*
- Horton, "Workshops" and "Islands of Decency," *The Long Haul*
- Dixon & Berger, "Navigating the Crisis: Study Group Roundtable"
- Millstein and Ruin, "Borrowing from the Library," *Paths Toward Utopia*



### Thursday 10/16

#### \*Guest Yecelica Jaime Valdivia

- You Pick option

## Films

- Adventures of a Radical Hillbilly* (1982)
- You Got to Move* (1985)
- Myles Horton, Pablo Freire, and Friends Gather at Highlander* (1998)
- Walkout* (2006)
- In Pursuit of Social Justice* (2007) <https://www.unrh.org/video/player.aspx?dnid=9682>

## Organizations

- Seattle Young People's Project: <http://www.sypp.org>
- Highlander: <http://highlandercenter.org/about-us/>
- Asian & Pac. Isl. Freedom School: <http://apifs.wordpress.com/author/apifs/>
- Tyrec Scott Freedom School: <https://atsc.org/category/topic/tyrec-scott-freedom-school>
- Clearwater School: <http://www.clearwaterschool.com/sudschools.php>
- Innercity Struggle: <http://www.InnerCityStruggle.org>

## Readings

- Ransby, "A Freirian Teacher, a Gramscian Intellectual, and a Radical Humanist" in *Ella Baker & the Black Freedom Movement*
- Horton & Freire, "Educational Practices" in *We Make the Road...*
- Shor, *When Students Have Power: Negotiating Authority in a Critical Pedagogy* (Ch.2)

\***Journal Tuesday:** *summary sentences, critical engagement with tensions, creative response.*

"Popular education should give people experiences in making decisions." — Myles Horton

### Week 5: Play

Drawing on legacies from Surrealism to the Situationists, today's radical activists use creative pedagogies to unveil dominant discourses and shed light on taken-for-granted assumptions about how things should be - poking fun and sometimes suggesting alternatives in the process. From political satire to the culture jamming of the Yes Men to feminist improv, creative play continues to be an essential tool of movements for radical change and a vehicle for both formal and informal pedagogies.

#### Tuesday 10/21

- > Parenti, "Playing Attention to Language"
- > Boyd and Mitchell, Intro *Beautiful Trouble*
- > Rude, Mechanical Orchestra, "RMO 'Zine" & Watch <http://rudemechanicalorchestra.org/>
- > Malitz, "Detournement/Culture Jamming", on *Beautiful Trouble* website (see below)

#### Thursday 10/23

- > You Pick option

#### Films or Audio

- The Yes Men Fix the World* (2009)
- Healthcare in All the Wrong Places* (2013)
- Couple in the Cage* (1993)
- Sonic Outlaws* (1995) <http://archive.org/details/dom-25571-sonicoutlaws>

#### Organizations

- School for Designing a Society: <http://www.designingsociety.org/>
- Creative Tools for Critical Times - [http://ct4ct.com/Culture\\_Jamming](http://ct4ct.com/Culture_Jamming)
- Dream - <http://www.dreampolitik.com/>
- Clandest. Insurgent Rebel Clown Army: <http://www.clownarmy.org/>
- Adbusters: <http://www.adbusters.org/>

#### Readings

- Scott, "Foundational Ideas of the School for Designing a Society"
- Kelley, "Keeping it (Sur)Real"
- Darts, "Visual Culture Jam"
- Rude, Mechanical Orchestra, "RMO 'Zine"

**\*Journal Tuesday:** *summary sentences, critical engagement with tensions, creative response.*

"What does acting like a chicken have to do with learning to be a trainer? people grumble. 'Role-plays aren't the same as real life!' they cry. 'Can't we just sit down and talk about it? We don't have time for this. We need to get back to work.'" —Hannah Strange

### Week 6: Prefigure

Prefiguration or prefigurative politics describes social movements, organizations, and strategies that seek to transform systems in part by putting dreams of change into action in the here and now. As a radical pedagogy, this approach elaborates on the democratic impulse from week 4 & insights about body from weeks 5 & 6, assuming that developing subjectivities that strive toward justice requires actually living and struggling for change every day. The experiments we'll explore this week transform the idea of "being the change you wish to see in the world" from an individual to a collective one focused on systemic change.

#### Tuesday 10/28

- > Find Boyd, "Prefigurative Intervention," on *Beautiful Trouble* website
- > Andrew Cornell, Selections, *Oppose and Propose: Lessons from Movement for a New Society*
- > Bufo and Neutopia, "Design your own Utopia"
- > Skim "False Statements" pages of SDaS *City Imaginings* 'zine (around p. 13)

#### Thursday 10/30

**\*Guest: Chris Dixon**

- > You Pick option

#### Films

- Shift Change* (2012)
- Hommage to Catalonia II*: <http://permaculture.tv/hommage-to-catalonia-ii/>
- Zapatista* (1999)
- Wilhelm Reich* (2012)

#### Organizations

- National Students of Cooperation: <http://www.nasco.coop/>
- Communities: <http://www.ic.org>
- US Social Forum 2012: <http://www.usf2010.org/>
- Incite! Women of Color Against Violence: <http://www.incite-national.org/>

**\*Journal Tuesday:** *summary sentences, critical engagement with tensions, creative response.*

"...radical movements like the Zapatistas are spaces of prefiguration and possibility, living processes of resistance and alternative-building that are vital to the elaboration of ways of envisioning and enacting radical and even revolutionary social transformation." —Alex Khasnabish

### Week 7: Embodiment

Because injustices don't only take the form of harmful ideas, meaningful change requires not only changing minds, ideas, and ways of thinking, but by changing our actual embodied practices. In addition, building on last week's insights, self-determination requires not only *thinking we can do*, but actually *doing*. Radical educators take up this idea in lots of ways. Pedagogies that involve performing arts especially view our bodies as essential tools for radical pedagogy. What does this look like in action? In the pursuit of justice, how & why do bodies matter?

### Tuesday 11/4

- Boal, "Theater of the Oppressed in Peru"
- Scham, "Play Fair: Feminist Tools for Teaching Improv" in *Radical Acts*
- Watch Taylor and Butler walk around San Francisco, from Astra Taylor's *Examined Life* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0HIZaPlF6qE>

### Thursday 11/6

\*Guest: **Theresa Ronquillo**

- You Pick option

### Films

How to Survive a Plague  
Judith Butler talks about gender (check website for ideas)

### Organizations & Websites

*Leaving Evidence* blog of Mia Mingus <http://leavingevidence.wordpress.com>  
Mandala Center for Change: <http://www.mandalaforchange.com/aboutus.htm>  
Gas & Electric Arts  
[http://www.gasandelectricarts.org/Gas\\_%26\\_Electric\\_Arts/HOME.html](http://www.gasandelectricarts.org/Gas_%26_Electric_Arts/HOME.html)  
Theater of the Oppressed Intl -  
<http://www.theatreoftheoppressed.org/en/index.php?useFlash=0>

### Readings

- Tinsley et al., "So much to remind us we are dancing on other people's blood"
- Bogod, "Electoral Guerrilla Theater" in Beautiful Trouble
- Saxon, "Forum Theater" at Beautiful Trouble website:  
<http://beautifultrouble.org/facfic/forum-theater/>

\***Journal Tuesday:** *summary sentences, critical engagement with tensions, creative response.*

"Perhaps the theater is not revolutionary in itself, but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution!" –Augusto Boal

### Week 8: Interconnect

A range of ecological, indigenous, and feminist movements are grounded in understandings that human experience today is part of a stream that connects past with future, a sense of place that links local with global and universal, a sense of self that sees all human and other life as connected. Radical pedagogies grounded in these insights in part seek to foster a sense of interconnection that can guide social change and day-to-day actions. How do different activist education approaches seek to foster a sense that we're all part of a "Big Here and a Long Now"? Why does a sense of interconnection matter for radical pedagogues?

### Tuesday 11/11: NO CLASS

- Cajete, "Indigenous Knowledges: The Pueblo Metaphor..." in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*
- Bechive Collective "True Cost of Coal"
- "Why Somatics for Social Justice?"
- Visit the Long Now Foundation and explore the 10,000 year clock project: <http://www.longnow.org/clock/>



### Thursday 11/13

\*Guest: **Briana Herman-Brand**

- You Pick option

### Films

*Mindwalk* (1990)

### Organizations

Bechive Collective: <http://bechivecollective.org>  
Generation Five: <http://www.generationfive.org>

### Readings

- Macy, et al, "Guidelines for a Council of All Beings Workshop," "Our Life as Gaia," and "Evolutionary Remembering in *Thinking Like a Mountain*"
- hooks, "Spirituality in the Classroom" in *Teaching Community*
- Selections from *Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on Education*

\***Journal Tuesday:** *summary sentences, critical engagement with tensions, creative response.*

"I wrote in my notebook that December, 'More and more I find I want to be living in a Big Here and a Long Now.'" –Briana Eno

### Week 9: Free

Freedom is a central theme and fundamental goal of many radical movements for justice, but is conceptualized in a whole range of ways. This week, we explore ideas from advocates of anarchist, deschooling, and unschooling practices to see what contributions they offer.

#### Tuesday 11/18

\*Guest: TBA

- Suissa, "Anarchism goes to school," *Anarchism and Education*
- "Learning Everywhere" section of SDA's *City Imaginings* 'zine
- Hern, "Getting Busy" in *Everywhere All the Time*
- Read one interview from: *Class War at University*: <http://classwaru.org/>

#### Thursday 11/20: NO CLASS

- You Pick option

#### *Films & Audio*

*Living Utopia* (1997) watch online: <http://vimeo.com/17879997> or [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PL\\_Y3Qdb7Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PL_Y3Qdb7Y)  
*Free to Learn* (2006)  
*I Want to Do This All Day*: <http://dothisallday.org/>

#### *Organizations & Websites*

Purple Thistle Center: <http://www.purplethistle.ca/>  
Seattle Free Universe-ity: <http://freemiversity.wordpress.com/>  
Freeskool Wiki: <http://freeskoolproject.wikispaces.com/>  
Classwar University: <http://classwaru.org/>

#### *Readings*

- Illich, selections from *Deschooling Society*
- Hern, "Getting Busy" in *Everywhere All the Time*
- Willis, Heckert, & Shannon, "Loving-Teaching: Notes for Queering Anarchist Pedagogies"
- Haworth, "Introduction" in *Anarchist Pedagogies*
- McKellar, "The Purple Thistle Center" in *Everywhere All the Time*

\***Journal Tuesday**: *summary sentences, critical engagement with tensions, creative response.*

"... Ferrer saw his school as an embryo of the future, anarchist society; as proof that, even within the authoritarian society surrounding it, an alternative was possible." –Judith Suissa

"... Ferrer saw his school as an embryo of the future, anarchist society; as proof that, even within the authoritarian society surrounding it, an alternative was possible." –Judith Suissa

### Week 10: Decolonize

There are streams of ideas about teaching and learning, education and pedagogy that start from the premise that education, at least in the US, has always been fundamentally tied to the interests of a colonial project. Readings and experiences this week aim to help us explore ways learning might be approached as part of a project of decolonization. What might learning for decolonization look like?

#### Tuesday 11/25

- Grande, Preface and Chapter 1, *Red Pedagogy*
- Stuchul, Esteva, & Prakash "From a Pedagogy of Liberation to a Liberation from Pedagogy" in *Everywhere All the Time: A New Deschooling Reader*
- Tejeda and Espinoza, "Toward a Decolonizing Pedagogy"

#### Thursday 11/27

\* Guest: Bo (John McClung)

- You Pick option

#### *Films*

*Alcatraz is not an Island* (2001)  
*Kambsashtke: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993)

#### *Organizations*

Táala Hoogan Infoshop <http://www.taalaahooghan.org/about/>

#### *Readings*

- Bamhardt & Kawagley, "Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Alaska..."
- Gross, "Some Elements of American Indian Pedagogy" (Anishinaabe)
- Williams and Tanaka, "Schalay'nung Sxwey'ga...cross-cultural pedagogy..."

\***Journal Tuesday**: *summary sentences, critical engagement with tensions, creative response.*

"Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools." – Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang

"The educators have educated the world in the fallacy that education is as old as the hills. But it is exclusively modern; it was born with capitalism and for the same purpose. We colonize the past if we consider education as an equivalent to other past or present practices and institutions to learn or study." –Gustavo Esteva

### **PART 3: SHARING VISIONS**

We'll utilize the final two weeks of class to creatively synthesize our individual and collective learning.

#### **Week 11: Designing Bookends**

This week, we'll redesign the course for the next group to be involved and workshop evolving bookends.

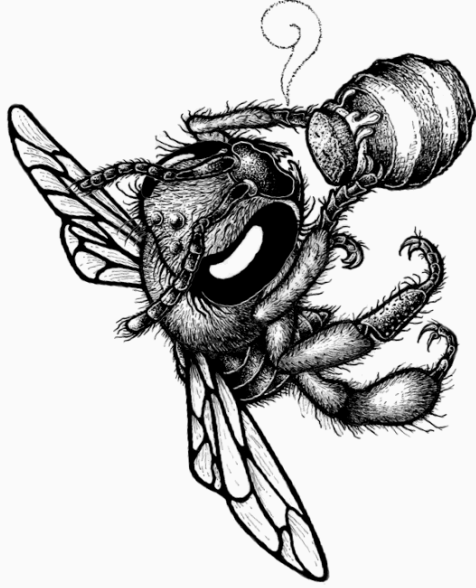
#### **Week 12: Potluck and Share!**

Final Session: Friday, December 12

We'll celebrate our work together and whatever we have produced as a final project. Because we're operating in a bureaucratic educational institution, regardless of how we decide to approach our own evaluation of our experience together, we'll need to save 15 minutes for formal course evaluations!



*Most of the artwork in this syllabus was created by members of the Beehive Design Collective. Check out campaigns, educational tools, and art at [www.beehivedesigncollective.org](http://www.beehivedesigncollective.org)!*

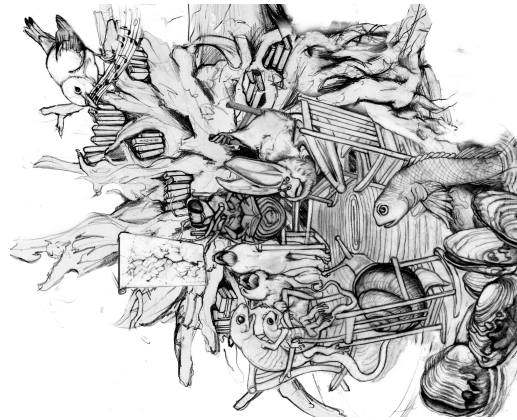


*\*\*Please understand that this syllabus is a living document and may be modified over the course of our work together with reasonable notice.*

*\*Andrea Marcos worked hard on the 2012 version of this syllabus!*

**How do we produce a vision that enables us to see beyond our immediate ordality? How do we transcend bitterness and cynicism, and embrace love, hope, and an all-encompassing dream of freedom, especially in these rough times?**

-Robin Kelley (2002)



## Utopian Visions for Social Change

Summer Quarter 2011  
 Course Website: <https://catalog.uw.edu/socialscz/dmrcsz/18209/>  
 Course Email List: [ehid480a\\_sst1@uwashington.edu](mailto:ehid480a_sst1@uwashington.edu)

Course Facilitators:  
 Tamara Myers [tdham@uwashington.edu](mailto:tdham@uwashington.edu)

Tamara's Office Hours: M, T, Weds by Appt.  
 Peer Facilitators: All course participants!  
 Course participant contact list coming soon...

*She's on the horizon... I on no steps, she moves, no steps away, I walk, no steps and the horizon runs ten steps ahead. No matter how much I walk, I'll never reach her. What god is implicit? That's what it's god, for building.*

Eduardo Galeano (quoted in Duncumbe, 2007)

### Course Overview

The course begins with the assumption imagination has something—a very *important* something—to do with social change. We'll try on the idea that particular kind of imagination—a “utopian,” imagination—can be a practical resource for us to do several things: better *analyze* existing social relations, institutions, and practices, *offer implicit values and ideas* about “the good society” in our own thinking and that of others, and *generate more concrete individual and collective visions* for how things might be otherwise. We'll also see how the idea “utopia,” might point the way for *action*. We'll begin with the assumption that education can and should be linked to real-world problems and the course will hold space for you to explore social problems that most concern you and to experiment with course materials to imagine or enact possible interventions.

Here's a quick snapshot of our time together: we'll examine theoretical perspectives about the idea of utopia and the value of learning big dreams of change. We'll compare and explore how science fiction and fantasy authors, activists, and members of historical and contemporary intentional communities who work within particular projects and social movements articulate their utopian visions. Along the way, we'll examine how we as members of a learning community can and do invoke the idea of utopia and engage practices like: “utopian thinking,” and “dreaming a better world” in our own pursuit of social change.

Although we will spend a little time exploring critiques of utopia as naïve, escapist, or totalitarian (and you are certainly free to conclude at the course's end that you agree with these critiques), we'll be taking both a more modest and a more hopeful approach, exploring provisional and malleable forms of utopianism, where utopia is not so much a place we might reach, but an ongoing creative *process of becoming*.

### Course Questions

This course begins with several basic questions:

*How might the concept of utopia serve as useful tool/neuristic in our efforts to create real social change on the issues we are most passionate about?*

*What are the strengths and limitations of various methods for nurturing utopian thinking and dreaming?*

*How will our own utopian visions change over the course of the quarter?*

*Within our constraints, how can we envision and create a powerful collaborative learning community to help us explore these questions meaningfully?*

**\*What questions brought YOU to the course?\***

### Course Goals

As a result of this course, you should be better able to:

- Develop your own learning goals for a college course and use course framework to move toward them, evaluating growth along the way.
- Participate actively in a learning community, as an agent of your own and others' education.
- Name power imbalances that shape learning communities and suggest strategies for addressing them.
- Develop a plan and collaboratively facilitate group discussions in a college course.

- Articulate in writing and verbally others' ideas about how "utopia" (and related ideas) can serve as a tool for social criticism and social change.
- Compare and assess different methods for fostering and expressing utopian thinking. Articulate your views about strengths and limits of different approaches.
- Use course materials to develop a rationale and concrete framework for engaging a community of which you are part in a visioning workshop.
- Construct and creatively articulate your own dream or vision of what a healthy community, society, or world might look like.
- Identify specific ways you might begin to act on your visions of change.

**\*What are YOUR goals for the course?**

**Course Requirements**

**Participation (20%)**  
 We will each participate differently considering our relationships with the course's ideas, our personalities, and our goals. If we will each participate differently, we will be held responsible to articulate our own contributions and to ensure that promote the growth of all members and to challenge oneself to try out new educational modes that may be new or uncomfortable. Each participant will be expected to develop personal participation goals and to formally reflect on one's engagement at several points during the course.

Other participation expectations developed together in class.

**Utopian Visioning Bookends (20%)**

Twice during the quarter, construct a utopian visioning project aimed at surfacing your core values and ideas about your desires for your community, society, and/or the world. The first will be a short (60 minute limit) version; the last will involve substantial effort and builds on and/or reflect changes in your utopian dreaming. This is an invitation for you to practice a method of thinking - utopianism - by unshackling your creativity, juicing your brain, and tapping into your vision for a better world. Your task is to imagine and find a way to articulate this vision for yourself. Your vision can take form in words, pictures, drawings, dance, music, a diorama, theater - options are endless! May be individual or collaborative. Will be shared with others at the course's end.

**Weekly Journal (20%)**

Keep a course journal in which you reflect and build on your own interests and the course's key themes via weekly journal prompts suggested by Tamara and peer facilitator teams. These will be **semi-public documents** that you will sometimes share with Tamara and with other students in the course.

For every class. You are responsible for bringing **one page of notes** about readings that can help you meaningfully engage in discussions. These should reference to specific quotes and page numbers, specific questions the readings raised for you, and any other observations about readings that will help you participate in conversations with others about them.

Weekly: Other prompts will be developed by course and weekly facilitators depending on the week's topics, guests, and readings.

Weekly Go-Posting (by Sunday evening), post the name of an organization (near or far), project, or method that grounds it's efforts in the idea of "utopia" or the practice of envisioning social change; include a brief description and note what's interesting to you about your example. Bonus round for linking with the week's topic.

**Peer Facilitation (20%)**

At least once during the quarter, work with several other participants to develop topics and a framework for the class to explore the week's materials for an hour-long session. Planning takes a lot of time (plan 2-3 hours with your facilitation partner or team)! Start meeting early! Be creative! Part of your responsibility will be to meet or consult with Tamara to plan your session. See "Pedagogy Resources" page of course website to download pedagogy zine that may be useful as you plan.

**Visioning Workshop (20%)**

Drawing on methods from the course and other sources, design a "utopian visioning" workshop for a community you consider yourself to be part of. This project may be done collaboratively with classmates within a real community or organization of which you are part, or on your own. More details to come...

**Assessment, Evaluation, and Grading**

You will have lots of opportunities over the course of the quarter to provide feedback to yourself, to Tamara, and to others in the class. You will receive feedback from other course participants and course facilitators (Andrea will take part in providing feedback as well, but will not be involved in any way with grading).

I'm opposed to grading because I think it usually interferes with learning instead of enhancing it and am curious to hear your thoughts about the possible value of grading. Unless we come to a different agreement, each major aspect of the course will be weighted equally, with each smaller component being evaluated on a credit/no-credit basis: participation 20%, design your own utopia bookends 20%, weekly journal and go-posting, 20%, peer facilitation 20%, visioning workshop 20%.

**\*What do you think about this as a framework for working with course materials?**

**\*What kind of evaluation would exist in your educational utopia?**

**Course Agreements**

We'll be making a range of agreements with each other during our first two weeks together. Here are a few that are essential to me and that I want to say upfront.

**Preparation**

We'll decide more specifically what this means together, but at a minimum you need to come to class having completed all readings, taken notes, watched films, checked our websites, journalled, or otherwise prepared for class based on the plan laid out in the syllabus. You are responsible for bringing printed copies of each day's reading to class with you (I strongly recommend purchasing a course reader and bringing it to class each day - I know it's heavy! - so that we can look back to older readings when that's useful).

**Plagiarism**

I hate even including this, but you might be surprised to learn how often it comes up. We ALL build our ideas in relation to the ideas of others. In this course, we'll be exploring ideas from books, articles, the web, films, music, various arts, ideas of guest speakers, and a whole range of other sources. Plagiarism includes copying sentences or paragraphs from the web, books, articles, or other sources and using them without proper citations, representing someone else's words and work as your own, and other forms of academic dishonesty. It's awful to deal with for everyone involved and may result in loss of credit for assignments or for the course (check your student handbook for information about the university's policy on this issue). Please do not do it. If you need help, please get in touch with Tamara, other course participants, or draw on the many university resources available that we'll talk about in class.

**Electronics**

Unless there is a critical need for you to be reachable during our class time (e.g., a family member relies on you to be accessible), please turn off all electronic devices during our class time - phones, computers, etc. We have precious little face-time together, let's focus on being present with the group during the moments we can. (There may be a few exceptional times when we do some internet searching with laptops.)

#### Accessibility Policy

Please see Pedagogy Resources on course website for much more information about this course's approach to fostering an inclusive learning environment that frames diversity as a valuable resource and strength for individual and group growth.

If you would like to request academic accommodation due to a disability, please contact Disabled Student Services, 448 Schmitz, 544 8024. If you have a letter from Disabled Student Services indicating a disability that requires academic accommodations, please bring it to class during the first week so we can discuss what accommodations will allow you to participate fully and meaningfully in the course.

#### Weekly Schedule and Readings

Readings are listed for the day we'll be discussing them. In other words, you are responsible for completing readings before the class session for which readings are listed. (I also suggested getting an early start to the novel, since we'll be moving through it fairly quickly.)

There will be two books you need to purchase for the course. You should be able to get the *Piercy* or Butler novels for a couple of bucks. Kristen Storm's book is usually \$15 and she offered us a 10% discount if we order from her directly.

Piercy, M. (1976). *Woman on the Edge of Time*. New York: Kropf

Storm, C. (2009). *Living in Liberation: Boundary Striving, Self-care and Social Change*. Feral Books Press.

Course Reader

The reader for the course is available at the Ave Copy Center. You are responsible for purchasing the reader or otherwise obtaining **printed topics of all readings so that you can have them available in class**. I encourage you to write lots of notes in margins, make your reading a dialogue in whatever way works for you! (And, remember to bring in one page of notes for each day of class to help guide our discussions!)

#### PART I: EDUCATIONAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

This section of the course will help us begin to build a sense of individual and collective curiosity, articulate individual and shared goals, and access a range of existing theoretical and conceptual resources to start us off.

Week 1: Cultivating a Learning Community for All

Monday:  
6/20 Introduction and Questions  
In class handouts

*\*Journal: Explore your ideas about this question: What does your "educational utopia" entail? (i.e., in an ideal world, what does education look like?) Be ready to discuss it class on Wednesday.*

Week  
6/22 Individual and Shared Intentions for the Quarter  
Course Syllabus  
books, "Engaged Pedagogy" in *Teaching to Transgress*  
Horton, "Islands of Decency" in *The Long Haul*  
Check out: School for Designing a Society <http://www.designingsociety.org/>  
Check out: Highlander Research and Education Center <http://www.highlandercenter.org/>

*\*Journal: Design your own utopia. 60-minute limit. See below for further details.*

Week 2: Theorizing Utopia

Monday:  
6/27 Utopian Pedagogies and Educational Utopias  
Bate and Neutrop, "Design Your Own Utopia"  
Cote, Day, & de Pature, "Utopian Pedagogy: Creating Radical Alternatives in the Neoliberal Age."  
Miočević, "Hegemonic and Marginalized Educational Utopias..."  
Check out: <http://affinityproject.org/radicalions.html>

Wednesday:

6/29 Theorizing Utopia  
Levinas, "Looking for the Blue: The Necessity of Utopia"  
Kelsey, "Preface & 'When History Sleeps': A Beginning," in *Freedom Dream*  
Loren & Klinefish, "What is Radical Imagination?"  
Check out: <http://www.mindbody.com/articles/CL151628>

PEER FACILITATORS

*\*Journal: At this point, what do you think about the prospect of utilizing the idea of "utopia" to create real social change? What differences do you see in articles so far? Which ideas in the readings are troubling or puzzling to you? Which are intriguing or inspiring?*

#### PART 2: IMAGINING UTOPIAS: ART AS METHOD

In this section of the course, we will explore various artistic methods (science fiction, visual arts, music, and theater) artists use to depict their utopian imaginings and ask about the promises and limits of each.

Week 3: Vision and the Arts (Sci-Fi/Speculative Fiction/Critical Utopia)

Monday:  
7/4 University Holiday

Moylan, "The Literary Utopia" and "Conclusion," *Demand the Impossible*

Wednesday:

7/6 GUEST: Katie Sparrow, author, activist, new mama: Critical Utopias  
Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*  
Listen online: <http://www.alicandrea.com/books/how/stories/2011/02/20060432.htm>  
Check out: <http://zkrain.com/streams/2011/>  
Check out: The Terms Project <http://thetermsproject.org/>

PEER FACILITATORS

*\*Journal: What do you think is far about utopian fiction as a method for fostering utopian thinking? Did *Woman on the Edge of Time* spark any new ideas about change for you?*

Week 4: Vision and The Arts (Visual Arts and Music)

Monday:  
7/11 Beverly Naidus: Visioning with Visual Arts

True Cost of Coal Narrative  
Stern, "Art Against Authority"  
Audits, selection from *Art for Change*  
Check out: Delective Design Collective: <http://www.bwhivecollective.org/>

Wednesday:

7/13 Music and Radical Change  
Kelley, "Dreams of the New Land," *Freedom Dreams*  
Berardi, "Thoughts about Alternative Social Organization in the Light of Improvised Music"  
Music Root Folk: <http://musicroot.org/>  
Film: *Musiques Rebelles/Rebel Music*: Americas

PEER FACILITATORS

During the last section of the course, we'll turn to an examination of small and large-scale intentional communities – sites in which people have experimented and continue to experiment with various methods for putting values into action on a day-to-day basis.

**Week 8: Living Utopias**  
Wednesday: 8/8  
GUESTS: Sybil Kashlan and Bobby Barnes, Spanish Revolution  
Intro and readings about Spanish Revolution  
Headfield, "points and Protest in the Spanish Anarchist Movement"  
BEFORE CLASS: Watch "Living Utopias" (at Media Center)

Wednesday: 8/10  
GUEST: Ady Ashwell, Emma Goldman Finishing School & member of Sherwood Cooperative  
Butler and Rothstein, *On Capital and Co-ops*  
Check out the fellowship of Intentional Communities, <http://www.ic.org/>  
Check out: The Emma Goldman Finishing School, <http://efsf.org/>  
Check out: The Fellowship of Egalitarian Communities, <http://the.fec.org/>  
Check out: Sherwood Cooperative, <http://sherwoodcooperative.org/>  
Check out: Evergreen Land Trust, <http://www.evergreenlandtrust.org/>  
BEFORE CLASS: Watch: Cooperative Living in Seattle <http://xmu.co.com/1847823>

PEER FACILITATORS \_\_\_\_\_

**PART 5: YOUR UTOPIAN VISION**

Monday: 8/15  
GUEST: Sharing Utopian Vision Bookends  
Sharing Visioning Workshops

Wednesday: 8/17  
GUEST: Sharing Utopian Vision Bookends  
Sharing Utopian Vision Bookends

**Week 5: Vision and the Arts (Theater)**  
Monday: 7/18  
Interactive Theater  
Boal, Theater of the Oppressed in Peru  
Mandala Center for Change: <http://www.mandalacenterforchange.com/aboutus.htm>  
Wednesday: 7/20  
Mid quarter check in – Visioning Workshops

PEER FACILITATORS \_\_\_\_\_

**PART 3: LIVING UTOPIAS: ACTIVIST PROJECTS**

In this part of the course, we'll explore ways individuals and groups are putting their utopian thinking and big dreams of change to work in the here and now via activist projects and organizations and we'll explore some of the specific strategies activists use to foster visions of change.

Wednesday: 7/27  
GUEST: Stef Brendler (maybe Andy Allen & Marc Mizique), Movitas Parade and Street Bands  
Duncombe, "Imagine an Ethical Spectacle," *Dynem*  
Rude Mechanical Orchestra zone  
Check out: Rude Mechanical Orchestra: <http://rudemechanicalorchestra.net/>  
GUEST: [Allycat Acres...? Food not Lovers... UW Farm... The Capacity Project...?]

PEER FACILITATORS \_\_\_\_\_

Monday: 8/1  
GUEST: Jeremy Louzao (Seattle Young People's Project), Participatory Economics  
Storm, *Living in L.A. Revolution*

Wednesday: 8/3  
GUEST: Jeremy Louzao (Seattle Young People's Project), Participatory Economics  
Miller, "Solidarity Economics: Strategies for Building New Economies from the Bottom-Up..."  
Albert, Parecon, *Realizing Hope*  
Albert, Parecon, *Realizing Hope*  
http://www.parecon.com/whatdo.html?article=1464&article=1464&feature=player\_embedded  
BIOETHICS ASSOCIATION: <http://www.bioethics.org/>  
Check out: Grassroots Economic Organizing: <http://www.geocorp/>

PEER FACILITATORS \_\_\_\_\_

**PART 4: LIVING UTOPIAS: MOVEMENTS & INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES**

## Utopian Visions in a Postcolonial Setting: An Experiential and Comparative Study of Community



Auroville, India  
Winter 2010

Instructors: Amy Pelloff and Tamara Myers

### Program Description

In this quarter-long program, we will explore the idea and practice of *community* experientially and from multiple perspectives. Through ongoing dialogue, exercises, brainstorming, readings, films, field trips, visioning projects, and community engagement, we will explore such questions as: What constitutes a community? How do boundaries, create and enforce? What values or vision of a "good society" underlie community as imagined and practiced? How are deeply held values put into practice? What contradictions exist between community as imagined and practiced? How do community members make sense of and respond to these contradictions? What are your visions of a healthy community and a "good society"?

The program will take place primarily in the international intentional community of Auroville, established in 1968 and located in South India, and will include groups and individual travel throughout South India in order to help contextualize Auroville culturally, socially, and politically, as well as regionally.

The idea and practice of community provides focus for the program which we will explore in a multi-phased way, as we examine and reflect on our own learning community, the community of Auroville, other past or current experiments in community living, communities as imagined in utopian/dystopian sci-fi/fantasy novels and films, and our own emerging visions of the "good society" and healthy communities.

We might find it helpful to think about engaging with the program in several *modes*. We will be exploring community as Ruth Lewis put it: *architecturally* and *politically*. In our architectural mode, we'll seek understanding by identifying the "implicit good society" embedded in visions and practices in Auroville, our texts and films, and our own learning community. Our *political* mode will allow us to build, as we create, reflect upon, and change our own learning community and our visions of alternative models of how society and communities might be.

We will also continue to hone our abilities to practice the two modes we began to develop together during fall quarter: *generativity* and *critique*. In our *generative* mode, we will strive to understand the program's myths and content from the perspectives of members of Auroville, authors and filmmakers, and members of our learning community. In this mode we will ask: What is compelling about a particular view or practice of community from the perspective of those espousing or practicing it? Our *critical* mode will allow us to bring other theoretical, conceptual, and political frameworks to bear on these perspectives, providing us lenses with which to see contradictions and challenges and to evaluate and assess the strengths and limitations of these visions and practices of community.

### Program Curriculum

We encourage participants to view this program as an experiential exploration of community in which all facets of our experience throughout the quarter will provide opportunities for individual and collective learning, growth, and insight. However, there are three courses students will receive credit for upon completion of the program.

these and other methods will allow us to explore the program's substantive content in many ways.

As a result of the program, we hope program participants will develop or enhance:

- Knowledge and skills for living in an intentional community (e.g., decision-making, communication, conflict resolution, facilitation)
- Knowledge and skills relevant to students' internship area/field
- Theoretical and practical knowledge of core course concepts (e.g., community, colonialism/postcolonialism/neocolonialism)
- Skills for effective critical analysis, reading, and writing
- Ability to connect one's personal experience to ideas and practices explored in Auroville
- Ability to construct alternative visions of how society might be
- Ideas about how to apply learning done in Auroville at home
- Understanding of Auroville's history, current practices, and vision for the future
- Ability to identify what visions of "the good society" are embedded in specific political, social, economic arrangements
- Ability to critically examine the relationship between a community's stated values and its practices
- Ability to generate constructive ideas about how to strengthen the connection between a community's stated values and its practices
- Basic understanding of the South Indian and global context in which Auroville exists
- Skills for and commitment to ongoing reflection about privilege, oppression, resistance, and power, both personally and as they impact experiments in community

## Weekly Calendar of Topics

### Imagining Community: Utopian and Dystopian Experiments in Living

Each week we will ask the following questions: What are the major values of this community and how do these priorities impact the design and functioning of the community?

Week 1: Jan 7-9

Welcome to Auroville!

Week 2: Jan 10-16

Humans Living with/in Nature

Ernest Callenbach, *Zenobia*. Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2004. Orig. published 1975.  
One of the major recurring themes in this program will be how humans imagine living in community with the rest of the *natural world*. What role does the natural world play in the community of ecotopia—is it an active participant or a passive object? As Callenbach wrote *Zenobia*, Auroville was being imagined and created. Was Callenbach able to push his imagined community into more creative directions than Auroville was because he was not limited by practical considerations?

Week 3: Jan 17-23

### CHID 475A (5 credits) I&S

**Imagining Community: Readings in Utopian/Dystopian Literature and Theory**  
In this course, we will explore writings that envision utopian and dystopian communities, primarily through the genres of science fiction and fantasy novels, but also through fictionalized and non-fiction portrayals of community in film. These representations of community offer visions for radical social change as well as warnings for the continuation of existing social patterns. People have repeatedly tried to create—both in practice and in theory—ideal human societies with varying degrees of success. We will examine how the authors' social, historical, and cultural contexts influence which components of community are considered significant and study the lessons they offer as the authors critique their present and offer lessons for the future. We will also explore the ways these visions and practices shape our own ideas about the "good society" and healthy communities.

### CHID 475B (3 credits) I&S

**The History and Practice of Auroville**  
This course will be made up of a series of lectures, discussions and readings organized and facilitated by current citizens of Auroville. Together we will learn how Auroville was designed to realize the utopian visions of Sri Aurobindo and Mirra Richard (The Mother), and how Auroville continues to strive towards those goals through a variety of projects. In this course we will strive to understand Auroville from the perspective of Aurovillians.

### CHID 499A (5 credits)

#### Engaged Community Learning Project

Each student will participate in one of Auroville's diverse projects. Some examples of areas of focus are architecture, farming and forestry, teaching, town planning, design, IT, health, village development, landscaping, social research, project writing and administration. The goal of this work is to have us be active participants in the Aurovillian community rather than outside observers.

### Program Goals:

Primary goals of the program as a whole include:

- Form a viable, sustainable, participatory living community among ourselves
- Engage with the community of Auroville in mutually beneficial ways
- Collectively explore the idea of community through comparative examination of imagined and real case studies

### Learning Objectives:

One thing we say in the CHID program is "the questions are the content." However, it may also be helpful to think about our study together in terms of substantive content and method. In this program we will develop collective and individual knowledge about complex and contested ideas like community, utopia/dystopia, colonialism, postcolonialism, postcoloniality, and ecology. It is also a program in which we will strive to hone our methodological skills for critical analysis, parallel thinking, active imagining, writing, conceptualizing, curious questioning, and active listening. Developing our abilities to engage

### Theorizing Community

Levitas, Ruth. "Looking for the Blue: The Necessity of Utopia." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 12.3 (2007): 289-306.  
The main thrust of this program is grounded in the assumption that imagining utopia is a useful practice for pushing human development into more positive directions. But is looking for the blue a matter of imagining perfection or is it a matter of imagining something better than what we have now?

### Week 4: Jan 24-30

#### Envisioning Anarchism

Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*. Harper & Row 1974. Avon 1975.  
As made clear in the title, Le Guin has mixed feeling about the utopia she has imagined. Why then does she still call it a utopia? What aspects seem useful and which do not? How do we account for the limitations of a society that is striving to be a healthy community?

### Week 5: Jan 31-Feb 6

#### Colonialism in Community

Butler, Octavia. *Dams*. Grand Central Pub, 1987.  
Butler takes up the question of whether or not two groups can together build a new community that grows out of a history of colonialism. Can positive partnerships grow within unequal power relations? How can we distinguish among practices of oppression, resistance, survival, accommodation, and cooperation?

### Week 6: Feb 7-13

#### Comparative Feminist Utopias

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *Herland*, 1915  
Hossain, Rokoya Sakawat. *Sultana's Dream*, 1905  
Writing in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, both Hossain and Gilman imagined communities based on their experiences of gender oppression. Despite living on opposite sides of the world and in very different cultures, their visions are remarkably similar. What could account for those similarities? Do you think their utopian visions would have changed if they were writing 100 years later?

### Week 7: Feb 14-20

#### Creating Borders

Tepper, Sheri S. *The Gate to Women's Country*. Doubleday, 1988.  
One recurring problem in establishing utopian communities is making sure that the members of the communities share the same basic values. Often, this seems to be accomplished by establishing borders around the community. Tepper takes up this practice of how membership is established and maintained in a more explicit manner than any of the authors we have read to date. What are the pros and cons of the practices established by the women's towns?

### Week 8: Feb 21-27

#### Reimagining the Real

Percy, Marge. *Woman on the Edge of Time*. New York: Fawcett, 1985/1976.

Percy offer the most dramatic re-imagining of society of any of our authors by tossing out some of our basic assumptions about the way the world is organized and how it works. Which of these challenges to our understanding of reality seem to be the most powerful and productive for the creation of a utopian community?

### Week 9: Feb 28-Mar 5

#### Memory, Identity, and Community

Chabria, Priya Sarakkai. *Generations 14*. Zuban/Penguin, 2008.  
What roles do memory and history play in the establishment of communities? It seems like a "clean slate" would help us overcome some of the problems of history that Butler explored in *Dams*. Yet for Chabria, the lack of history creates the foundation for dystopia. How does memory make Clone 14/54/G more human?

#### Films:

*Black Runner*  
*Brigadeiros*  
*Comuna* – Documentary about Black Bear Ranch in Northern California  
*The Garden* – 14-acre community garden in S.C. L.A. growing food, family, community.  
*The Humantail's Tale*  
*Galatas*  
*The Island of Dr. Moreau*  
*Land and Freedom*  
*The Lark of Haman*  
*Legion's Run*  
*Rollerball*  
*Together* – Swedish feature film about intentional community life

#### Assignments:

Amy and Tamara believe that our learning goals will be best served by taking a flexible approach to assignments and leaving room to respond to group and individual energy and curiosity. Therefore, we will be developing more specific assignments on a weekly basis as we move through the program. However, we can highlight two aspects of our work together now:

**Weekly Journaling** We will ask you to keep a journal that you are willing to share with us that reflects on at least three things. You may keep this more "public" journal in addition to a personal journal you use or you may combine the two. Although we will be asking you to reflect on your personal experiences and to share those with the community as we build our collective knowledge, it's always up to you to decide how much you want to share with us and with the community as a whole.

1. Your evolving vision of a healthy community and/or the "good society"
2. Your ongoing assessment of the program as a whole, considering your experience and the critiques others have shared about Auroville (Can this program happen ethically? What would need to change? What should stay the same?)

3. Connections you are making among the readings and films, speaker/activities series, and your life in our learning community and Auroville as a whole.

**Final Visioning Project:** As a capstone project for the program, we will ask you to engage in a more in-depth and fully descriptive creative project that reflects your "utopian thinking" about community. Like our first whack at this in the fall, this is an invitation for you to practice a method of thinking - utopianism - by unshackling your creativity, juicing your brain, and tapping into your vision for a better world. Your task is to imagine and find a way to articulate this vision for yourself. Your articulation can take form in words, pictures, drawings, dance, music, a diorama, theater – seriously, the options are endless! We'll be sharing these with each other at the program's end.

**Other possible assignments:**

- Self-critique your emerging utopian vision
- Go to a particular place in Auroville and observe for an hour, then reflect using guiding questions
- Identify the specific values you see expressed in novels, films, and Auroville
- Articulate your ideas about strategies to create the change you seek
- Interview people about their perspectives about Auroville and compare what you learn
- Identify your core values and their relationship to Auroville and/or other program material
- Draw/create a map that represents your vision of a healthy community
- Reflect on and articulate what your learning means for your life at home in the US
- Articulate your views about what this study-abroad program could/should look like next time it's offered, 5 years from now, 10 years from now
- Select one aspect of the guided visualization we did at the retreat and flesh out your ideas about it in writing or in some creative way
- Select one of your dominant and one of your non-dominant identities from the "power flower" exercise explore their significance for your experience in community in Auroville and at home in the US
- Articulate your views about what ways you see the community of Auroville attempting to "human unity in diversity," and what challenges the community seems to face in fully expressing this value. Compare to a community you are part of at home.

**Appendix B**  
**Email to Research Partners Requesting Demographic and Identity Information**

From: [tlmyers@u.washington.edu](mailto:tlmyers@u.washington.edu) [[tlmyers@u.washington.edu](mailto:tlmyers@u.washington.edu)]

Sent: Tuesday, March 19, 2013 8:05 PM

Subject: Pedagogy, Social Movements, and Radical Imagination - Request for follow up info

Dear friends,

Tamara Myers here, your (sometimes) rusty (almost always) trusty dissertation writing radical educator comrade on the west coast. For those of you who've been through the kind of writing process I am in the thick of - holy cow! Quite a test of endurance and my hat is off to you in a new way. For those of you who do alllll the other kinds of difficult work to balance organizing with teaching with community-building with family and friends with personal physical and emotional health...etc...I would like to stand up and applaud you right now. Everyday when I sit down to write, I want to send you each a bouquet of your favorite flowers, a box of your favorite candy, or a giant can of revolution to express to you how grateful I am that you are doing such important work in the world and that you were willing to share your reflections with me. I say this jokingly partly because there isn't really an adequate way for me to communicate how sincerely I feel about this.

In terms of finish this project, I'm getting there!

Today, I'm writing because I've been compiling brief bios based on our conversations that will be included in the dissertation. They're very simple 1-2 paragraph summaries in which I describe in very short order basics about how we connected, your political affinities or movements you have participated in, pedagogical traditions you resonate with, your basic approach to social change and pedagogy, perhaps a quote about your take on the importance (or not) of radical imagination or vision as you described these things to me in our conversation.

As I write these, for some of you, I am realizing I have lots of demographic or identity-focused information, either because we know one another well or because it was part of our conversation, for others I realize I do not. While one limitation of this project is that it doesn't do more to examine/explore how our personal histories shape our radical political or pedagogical work, I do think it would be helpful to include as much demographic/identity information in the dissertation as possible.

I completely recognize that many of you will be much too busy to want or have time to respond, but for those of you who would like to make sure further details are included, I would be happy to hear from any of you about any aspect of your social identity/ies you wish to share with me, including but not limited to the following list. You would be most welcome to simply cut and paste the list (adding, of course, any other aspects of your identity you choose) and send me a word or phrase that tells me more about how you identify in the world:

Race  
Ethnicity  
Age  
Class background and/or current class  
Ability/disability  
Gender  
Sex

Sexuality  
Citizenship  
Religion  
Political identity  
Languages spoken  
Etcetera...

I know it took you each 20 or 30 or 40 or 50 or 60 or 70 years to live your complex experiences and reducing important aspects of ourselves into a word or phrase is simplistic and can be troubling – please understand that I get this! Just trying to make sure I have especially salient details as I continue my writing...(email to participants, March 19, 2013).

**Appendix C**  
**Phase II In-Depth Interview Guide**

**I. Background and Current Work – Social Movements and Education**

- What's your involvement been with different social movements? Your history as an activist or organizer? Can you give me a brief history of your political involvement?
- What do you see as the goals of the movements you're involved with today?
- What's your own vision of a healthier world look like? How would you describe it?
- How did you develop your ability to imagine transformative change and envision a radically different world?
- Can you tell me about your background doing educational work?
- What's your current work as an educator like? Where, with whom, what do you teach?
- What educational traditions most shape your educational work? What makes these approaches different from others?
- What are your main goals as an educator? How do you hope people will learn and grow as a result of working with you? What capacities, skills, knowledge do you hope they will develop as a result of working with you?
- How does imagination and vision fit into your constellation of teaching goals? Do you have experience helping people develop their imagination or vision for change?

**2. Meaning and significance of vision & imagination**

- Why do you think imagination and vision matter for individuals and social movements?
- Why are they important in this historical moment?
- When we talk about vision, what is it we're talking about?
- What specific kinds of imagination or vision do you think people need to create meaningful change?
- How does imagination and vision relate to other things people need to learn to create change?
- What do you think is the connection between vision or imagination and political action?

**3. Pedagogical approaches/methods for fostering social imagination**

- What range of methods and what specific methods you use to invite others to envision change? General approaches? Specific exercises or activities?

- What do you think are the promises of these practices? What makes them effective?
- How do you tell that/when they are effective?
- Any resources you could share with me to help me understand this visioning work?

#### **4. Challenges involved in fostering social vision**

- What do you think interferes with people developing radical imagination or visions of change?
- Considering the particular kinds of people you work with, what gets in the way of folks developing visions of transformative change?
- Are there pedagogical tensions or contradictions you feel in your work? Particularly related to helping people envision and create change? What are they?
- If you could pick the brains of other radical educators, what would you want to talk about? What do you feel like you're most puzzling over right now?

#### **5. Future conversations**

- How can we make a more effective place for vision and imagination in our social movements?
- How can we make a more effective place and role for popular and other liberatory education in our social movements?
- What kinds of connections among folks doing radical education could make our role in social justice movements more effective?
- What do you think we need to be doing differently to strengthen the efforts of radical left social movements today?
- What kinds of conversations do you think most need to be happening right now among social movements on the radical left? Who needs to be talking? About what?
- How do you think academic research can best support social justice movements right now?
- How would you like to see me use these interviews? What sorts of documentation would be useful for you in your work?
- Is there anything else you want to tell me about your work or anything we've talked about?

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