

*We are the Ones We've Been Waiting For:*

**A Students' Guide to Public Achievement**

Prepared by students at Naropa University

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– Eric Fretz

## Introduction: “We are the ones we’ve been waiting for”

By Harry C. Boyte

The voices that appear in this striking collection demonstrate the passion of young people at both Naropa University and Centaurus High School in Boulder County, Colorado, to make a difference, to create change. These stories blow apart the fiction that young people are apathetic, passive about social problems, or concerned only with their own narrow goals. Young people are full of energy and creativity. They also show an extraordinary *seriousness* that brings to mind the first discussions held 16 years ago

with 21 groups of teenagers from diverse racial and economic backgrounds in Minneapolis and St. Paul, when we began Public Achievement. We asked them if there were issues they worried about, changes they wanted to see, or things that made them mad. Every group we talked with came up with a long list. Then we asked what they could do about the problems they identified. Sometimes young people had ideas for what they might do, and sometimes they expressed doubts; most said they wanted opportunities to learn *how* to organize and to make change. “We’ve never had any course on that,” as one young woman put it. “But we’d like to learn.”



A few said that sometimes teachers or other adults had asked their opinion on what should or could be done to solve problems. But of course that is a different question than what they could do. Every single group remarked that no one had ever asked them what *they* could do. This idea of taking responsibility for addressing public problems, and learning the skills to do so, is the heart of public work—and the meaning of the song, “We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.”

The song comes from the citizenship schools of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in which I worked during the civil rights movement, as a young man in 1964 and 1965. Dorothy Cotton, director of SCLC’s citizenship education program, created the song, and often had groups sing it to get beyond what she called “the victim mentality.” The fact that young people had never been asked what they could do to address the public problems they were worried about showed a huge problem with the views of older adults: there had been a terrible decline in expectations about the public talents, imagination, and potential political savvy and power of young people. Older adults saw young people in terms of what they supposedly lack, not what they can create, build, and produce in the larger world. This continues. There is a deficit mentality about young people today that is part of the larger deficit mentality about most people in general if they don’t have the right credentials, degrees, or formal positions.

Public Achievement aims in part to reverse this deficit mentality. It is based on respect for the public potential of young people. And this manual is rich with lessons, experiences, and insights that demonstrate that potential. This guide will help young people involved in Public Achievement, and in other public work and organizing projects. I believe that there is also a larger lesson of this book: something is stirring among young adults, beyond Naropa, beyond Boulder, beyond high schools. A new generation is coming into its own politically. I believe young people are rediscovering the populist political tradition that held ordinary people to be the heart of democracy, and that democracy itself is a work in progress, continually renewed and re-energized by new insights, passions, innovations and creativity. In a way, “We Are the Ones” is a manifesto for a new democracy. It deserves a wide audience.

## Public Achievement at Naropa University/Centaurus High School

*By Eric Fretz*

This collection of student essays is designed to broaden, enrich, and re-define the core concepts of our democratic life. It is meant to empower readers to contextualize these concepts and develop public lives that “thicken” the associated life of our democracy. Ultimately, the strength of a democracy is contingent upon the ability of its citizens to negotiate, dialogue, deliberate, make compromises and take initiative around public problems that concern them. Strong democracies create “free spaces” where people combine their private identities (racial, ethnic, gender) with the common good.

But where and how do we learn to develop these skills?

At Naropa University, students enrolled in Humanities 330, “Democracy, Education and Social Change,” developed these public skills through their participation in a Public Achievement project at Centaurus High School in Lafayette, Colorado.

Public Achievement, an initiative from the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota, is widely known for its effective approach to youth civic engagement. Today, Public Achievement is both a program through which thousands of young people take public action, and it is a learning laboratory in which we develop and test new practices of youth civic participation. Public Achievement is predominantly school based, currently active in about 150 schools nationwide, including public and private elementary, middle and high schools as well as in colleges and universities and youth serving organizations and community centers. In Public Achievement, groups work across lines of race, class and age in a variety of urban, suburban and rural schools. The public skills that young people develop through Public Achievement are, in many ways, necessary tools for powerful participation in an increasingly divided society.

In Public Achievement, young people discuss their community’s needs and consider what they want to change. They host an Issues Convention, where all can express their concern for a particular issue and persuade others to join them in their efforts. The young people then create teams of six to eight participants, with each team focused on a particular issue. The teams work with a coach, usually a local college student, to research their issue and to develop an action project. Coaches work with their team to reflect on what has been learned throughout the process. Each meeting has a similar pattern of checking in on the work that’s been done, brainstorming and discussing options, and planning the next steps, with an emphasis on individual accountability and responsibility. All projects must be legal, non-violent, and contribute to the public good. Examples of past projects include building community playgrounds, holding public forums, and working on legislation (e. g. related to curfew hours, the test for U.S. citizenship, and health care), anti-racism workshops, and building better relationships with local police departments. Throughout the process, participants learn how to analyze an issue, write persuasive letters, speak in public settings, understand who makes policy decisions, and develop public relationships with those people. They use their collective imaginations to practice active listening, build consensus, define community problems and implement actions to solve the problems. Participants also learn to write and speak about their service-learning experiences as a valuable part of their college application process.

Naropa students serve as Public Achievement coaches in English as a Second Language, Social Studies and college preparation classes taught by Centaurus teachers. Past Public Achievement projects at Centaurus have included projects that mitigate school violence, promoting dialogue about controversial social issues, addressing problems of undocumented workers and working to resolve the problem of racism in the community.

The student voices in this book all emerged from participation in the 2005-06 project. In October 2005, Dr. Harry Boyte, the founder of Public Achievement visited our class and encouraged the Naropa PA students to create a handbook for college students who were interested in working for change in their communities. Over the course of the year, the PA coaches wrote about their experiences as PA coaches and tied that work to theoretical models of community organizing that we were working with in class. These theoretical models are heavily influenced by the work of Ed Chambers and Ernie Cortes. Ed Chambers is the Executive Director of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), a network of organizations that has led hundreds of successful community organizing campaigns since the 1930's. Ernie Cortes is an accomplished IAF organizer who worked in Texas and Los Angeles within the past 35 years to bring about progressive social change for the communities that he organized. Cortes' work is described in depth in Mary Beth Roger's *Cold Anger*, which served as the text for the 2005-06 Naropa PA class along with Ed Chamber's *Roots for Radicals*. Both texts are cited throughout this book.

This book will benefit people and groups who are interested in changing the culture of their institutions as well as transcending the polarized political debate in the United States to strengthen civic life. The core concepts explained in this book will provide readers with a set of public skills that will help them to work in relationship with others to affect real, sustainable and productive change in their schools, businesses, places of worship and neighborhoods. What distinguishes Public Achievement's model of culture change from others is a deep commitment to working within institutions, developing productive relationships with people in power, identifying stakeholders and creating tangible, winnable and public products.

Ultimately, this book is a testament to the power and passion of college students to affect real and meaningful change in their communities and to, in turn, have their own lives re-shaped through the experiences of working with others.

## Student Introduction

*By Susie Aquilina*

The following sections in this book consist of essays written by Naropa University students serving as coaches in the Public Achievement program. As a class striving to create work with true civic meaning, we asked ourselves, “How can our academic writing have a tangible public purpose?” We wanted to step out of the standard academic practice of university students writing to the sole audience of their professor, and produce papers that would reflect the skills that we were developing through our involvement with Public Achievement. It was out of this conversation that the idea for this handbook was born. We decided to create a toolkit for students like ourselves who were just beginning to become practitioners in culture making.

At the onset of work as coaches, we entered into a world that expanded far outside the comfort zone of Naropa University. Naropa, a very small, Buddhist inspired, liberal arts school sits in the heart of affluent Boulder, Colorado. Naropa’s curriculum is modeled after that of Nalanda University, which thrived in India between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries and was a center for honing the intellect while weaving it with Buddhist spiritual practice. Naropa’s mission seeks to bridge the various contemplative practices of meditation, yoga, and martial arts with the intellectual disciplines of Western scholarship. A great deal of the “Naropa journey” consists of the inner work of knowing the self. The Naropa Public Achievement program serves as the optimum vehicle to utilize the inner work that’s focused on at this university and put that work to good use through involvement with the larger community. This, however, is no easy task considering the cultural “jump” that’s made when this work happens.

The Naropa Public Achievement program takes place in Lafayette, Colorado, just twelve miles east of Boulder. The stories that you’ll be reading about in this handbook all occurred at Lafayette’s Centaurus High School. A quarter of Centaurus’ students are Latino/a, twelve percent are English language learners and a significant portion of Centaurus’ Latino/a students’ families have immigrated to the United States in their lifetimes. Thirty percent of Centaurus’ students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Since the issues and projects that our Public Achievement students work on are selected by them, the work done in this diverse environment reflects the cultural richness of the school and the salient issues that touch Centaurus’ students’ lives. For coaches and practitioners of public work, stepping into a culture different than what we’re used to and engaging in work with these students required a great deal of awareness, intention, and reflection.

The experiences that we encountered at Centaurus made for rich learning. Breaking out of the comfort of familiarity and working with these students was rife with opportunities to learn about issues surrounding racism, immigration, and privilege. Helping these students to realize their passions, hopes, and abilities taught us a lot about our own self interests and capacities to play active roles as culture makers in our communities. We hope that these stories pass on some of the richness of that learning and provide you, the reader, with a chance to encounter some of the lessons that we had the privilege of experiencing.

## 2005-2006 Centaurus Public Achievement Issue Groups

### Fighting Racism

Coaches- Heather Mueller and Neil Sharma

This group focused on the multi-faceted issues of racism, stereotypes, segregation, and the various inequities that are related. To introduce this issue to their peers, these students participated in a presentation for Centaurus's Diversity Day which included the unveiling of a mural that made public and celebrated the vast diversity at Centaurus. The group who created the mural included students of Mexican, Chinese, Sri-Lankan, Guatemalan, and various other ancestries. The creation of this mural gave them an opportunity to learn more about their own and each other's cultures, as well as to be proud of them and share them with the broader community.

### Raza Helpers

Coaches- Joshua Cuscaden and Jacob Winkler

This group formed out of a concern for the lack of bilingual education at Centaurus. These students worked out of the belief that Centaurus' reliance on monolingual, English education limits the achievement of its students whose first language is Spanish. In response, the group coordinated an after-school bilingual tutoring program at Centaurus. This program recruited high-achieving bilingual students to assist other students in attaining a greater proficiency in English, help them with their homework, and provide a greater degree of academic achievement.

### Anti-War in the Middle East

Coaches- Laura Zeigler, Jared Hassen, and Josh Gambrel

This group spent the year exploring the issue of war, its causes, effects, and implications. Through a deep exploration of cultural differences, these students came to see that religion is a very taboo subject in United States culture and that a lack of understanding around religious beliefs causes hostility and violence. Out of this revelation they planned a speaking series that consisted of religious leaders of a variety of faiths from within the community. They invited members of the Centaurus community to come and learn about different faiths and cultures in the context of war in a tolerant, safe, and pluralistic environment.

### Parking for Unlicensed Students

Coaches- Rachel Paine and Leanne Bird

After learning that students had to show a valid driver's license to park in the school parking lot, this group formed to advocate for the rights of undocumented youth. Aware that undocumented people in Colorado cannot drive legally, this policy stripped Centaurus' undocumented students of the right to park in the school lot, and, consequently, have their cars protected from theft or vandalism by being in patrolled school parking lots. These students spent the semester networking, researching the issue, and meeting with the principal. After discovering that this was a school policy and not a district mandate, the group submitted a proposal to the principal to change it. Impressed by the students' enthusiasm and determination, the principal temporarily changed the permit application process and is currently amending the rule in the school handbook.

### Ending Segregation through Diversity

Coaches- Rachel Paine and Leanne Bird

Concerned with the presence of segregation within Centaurus High School between students of various cultures and ethnic backgrounds, this group formed to provide students with a venue to share their cultures with other students as well as learn about students' cultures that are very different from their own. Ultimately this group hoped to create an environment of plurality and understanding across differences at Centaurus.

### Bilingual Support at Centaurus

Coaches- David Secondo and Karen Amidon

This group formed out of a concern that there are limited bilingual counselors and staff at Centaurus. Students established a dialogue around the problems that stem from monolingual administrative officials at Centaurus who are unable to speak Spanish. These problems include parents unable to call to report their children's absences. This results in those students being penalized and stigmatized for being "truant." The issue group also recognized a problem concerning the lack of community that results from their parents being unable to communicate with teachers and staff members about the academic lives of their children. The group spent their semester building a relationship with the principal and raising awareness around the identified problems. As a result of this relationship, the principal agreed to hire bilingual staff members for the academic year of 2006-07.

### Public Perception of Centaurus

Coach- Joshua Cuscaden

Concerned with low enrollment and the lack of funds for Centaurus, this group formed to address the misperception that Centaurus is not a good school in the public eye, especially when compared to "wealthier" schools in Boulder County. Believing that Centaurus is recognized solely for its sports teams and not for its other valuable aspects, such as diversity, students created a school-wide survey to identify ways in which to shift the prevailing paradigm. Coupled with survey results, interviews with a number of students, faculty, and staff were compiled, and the findings are to be published in a series of articles in Lafayette's local city newspapers.

## A Letter to a New Public Achievement Coach

By Leanne Bird

Dear Incoming PA coach,

At the beginning of the year one question kept pounding in my head, “What makes a good coach?” Over the year I discovered answers to this question, so I am now writing to you so that I may share these answers. I learned the importance of building relationships in coaching and public work as well as the role trust plays in building relationships and how this affects what gets done.

As a coach, the goal is to guide students into finding a public voice by providing them with an opportunity to engage in work that matters to them. This is done through the creation of a space where students can develop public skills and engage in public work. It is extremely important that the students take the lead in what happens. If this is successfully done, they will then own the experience of developing the project themselves. This is what makes the PA program unique: the students are able to express their ideas and learn through experience that they are capable of figuring out the “hows” of getting things done. The coach must actively facilitate and encourage their students to take on the responsibility and direction of the group. It is important to help the students locate their ideas and interests by strategically questioning them and then affirming the students when they do contribute. As a new coach, your role is to coach these students while holding them accountable, but the end goal is for the students to develop the confidence and skills to do public work independent of a coach.

This idea of independence is central to community organizing. The Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), which emerged in the 1940s as the premier community organizing network and has continued to thrive up to this day, provides us, as coaches and practitioners of public work, with the model for organizing people around their self interests. The iron rule of the IAF is to, “never, never do for others what they can do for themselves.” I struggled with this idea throughout the semester, and still need to remind myself of it from time to time. This rule aids people in becoming empowered and self-sufficient. Today, social change generally runs on the model of “experts” telling other people what to do and how to do it. As soon as the experts leave and the next problem arises, the people are back where they once were, without the ability to address the problem themselves. Mary Beth Roger’s *Cold Anger* quotes Ernie Cortes as saying “When people have a charismatic leader who does all their thinking, they become dependent. They become passive. They lack initiative.” (15) If people don’t learn public skills and receive the opportunity to exercise these skills and to think on their own behalf, they remain dependent on others.

In both groups that I coached, the students’ self interests were key to their projects and issues. In the first group that I coached, the students were concerned with the necessity of a driver’s license to park in the school parking lot. The reason that the students were frustrated with this policy was because a significant portion of Centaurus’ students are undocumented and cannot legally obtain a driver’s license. This caused them to have to park on the margins of the school, leaving their cars subject to vandalism and theft. Most of the students in this group were themselves undocumented so the issue touched their lives directly. In the second group I coached, the students wanted to increase dialogue and understanding around the diversity of the school. This group consisted of an Armenian immigrant, an African American, a Hispanic, an immigrant from Turkmenistan, three white students one of who was an out-of-the-closet lesbian, and a student with a disability. The

group reflected the cultural richness of Centaurus. It was their goal to create a pluralistic method of dialogue within the group that taught them the skills to talk about and celebrate the diversity of the school with people outside of their group as well as with one another. Since the students in both groups were directly affected by the issues that they worked on, they were greatly invested in the work that they did.

It is important to identify each student's strengths in order to create opportunities for them to exercise these strengths while also addressing their weaknesses. Edward Chambers explains in *Roots for Radicals* that "organizing is about more than winning on issues - it is about developing people's potential to realize their hopes" (60). In both groups I coached it was not nearly as important that the students were successful with their issues as it was that they developed the skills and confidence to realize their hopes.

The students in both of my groups gained the opportunity to adopt a leadership role in the meetings they held with their principal, Dr. Pilch. For the first meeting, I created an outline on how to run a meeting with important items for them to remember to do at the beginning, middle, and end. This also included some example questions they could ask her. Before they met with her we assigned roles for the meeting. In PA, the assignment of roles is important in all meetings because it allows meetings to run more efficiently. The roles include a recorder (takes notes in the meeting), the time-keeper, the facilitator (holds the group accountable to the agenda), the encourager (boosts morale), and the evaluator (encourages the group to look at what can be improved). It is also important to rotate the roles in the weekly meetings because this allows each student to experience a different aspect of the group dynamic while also giving each student the occasion to achieve new skills by being in a new role. These actions provided the students with knowledge on how to make the meeting a success, but in order for it to be the students' success, I also allowed them be in control of the meeting once it began. Afterwards we evaluated the meeting, and I gave the students feedback on what they did well and how they could improve. With each subsequent meeting I provided less guidance for them, and consequently they took on more responsibility to employ the skills and tools they were learning. Although they were doing this to address their issue, they were also learning that they had the ability to negotiate for what they wanted with the people who held power.

Forming relationships is crucial in group work. Thus the building of relationships with my students became my top priority. I believe that consequently the students found greater value in the work that they were doing because they were being valued. This is extremely significant as Rogers talks about how the IAF stresses the importance of "inciting the first revolution—the internal one that comes with an awareness of self and self-worth. . . people who have a strong sense of self can afford to take the risks involved in relationship building" (61). Helping your students to develop a sense of self worth will give them the confidence to put themselves out there and develop a public life.

Building relationships and developing trust requires great attention to what is said and also to what is not said. And it requires patience, lots and lots of patience. Most of all it requires love. If this word seems too emotional or sentimental, think of it as acceptance. Accept your students. Tell them when they do a great job. Tell them what they are good at, and with gentleness and mindfulness, tell them how they can improve. Chambers writes that "one should never treat a human being only as a means to some end...Love means sustaining relationships in which the interdependence of one's own and others' interests is recognized and respected" (30). I strongly believe that love plays a huge role in coaching and is vital to the success of the group. However it is essential to balance this love with power and to remember your role as a coach, holding the students accountable when necessary.

“Power without love is tyranny, and love without power is sentimentality. In power and love, the interests of both parties matter. To power and love well is to respect the other and the self” (Chambers 31). Love the students and accept them, but also create a space where they are held accountable so they will develop skills and responsibilities that will help them accomplish their project and be successful throughout their lives. And don’t forget to have fun with them, because fun is what keeps people excited and coming back for more.

My coaching partner Rachel and I went into our groups with a very clear intention that forming relationships with our students was our top priority. In our second semester group, Rachel and I started each meeting with a check-in. We told the students that the purpose of this time was for each of them to be able to talk about whatever they wanted. Rachel and I would both check-in with them as well and tell them about what was going on in our lives. We would also take other opportunities to tell the students about ourselves and our worldviews so that they could feel like they knew us. We were however, also very careful not to fill up the space with our ideas so there would be room for the students to confidently form their own opinions. I feel we created strong relationships with these students because we made ourselves appear human and therefore approachable. We shared ourselves with these students by showing them we were emotional, that we struggled, that we wanted to have fun and have friends as well, and that we were also insecure at times.

An easy way to begin to develop relationships with students is by asking them questions. Ask them about the work your group is doing or about their personal life—just ask them questions so they know that you are interested in them as individuals. Remember if they had a sports game the week before and ask them how it went. It’s key to do this with genuine interest, or it will feel awkward and false to the students.

It is also important that students have an opportunity to form relationships with other people who hold positions of power in regards to the issue on which they are working. One way to identify who has power in regards to your issue is to create a power map with your students. A power map is where you brainstorm and write down all the people who you could contact for information or help on your project. When we created a power map in our first group, the person the students felt had the most power over this issue was their principal, Dr. Pilch. They realized that in order for them to do anything about this issue they would have to form a relationship with her. Throughout the course of the semester, the students therefore held three meetings with Dr. Pilch, as well as wrote her letters and proposals as needed. Through this the students and Dr. Pilch developed a public relationship. The students learned that Dr. Pilch shared their sadness over their issue, saying in one meeting that the challenges faced by undocumented students often wanted to make her cry. Through this comment and the other conversations, the students and the principal realized they had the same self-interest: wanting to help undocumented students feel less segregated at the high school. They were then able to work together on this issue. Throughout the semester the students researched the issue, surveyed other students at the high school, and made phone calls to various schools and district officials. They then reported the results to Dr. Pilch in their meetings. At the end of the semester the students wrote a proposal to change the requirements for obtaining parking permits. Dr. Pilch agreed to this and changed the school’s policy. I strongly believe that the relationship the students created with her through their meetings significantly affected the level of commitment she had for this issue.

Relationships were central to every aspect of our PA work. The public relationships that I formed with my students allowed us to foster trust, talk about difficult issues, and do the difficult work of

culture change. The truth is I adored my students. I thought about them when I wasn't in their school, and I got excited to see them every Wednesday. I waved at them when I saw them in the hallways, and I smiled at them when they spoke in our group. I told my friends about them and what they were working on. I believe that it is so important to love what you are doing and this without a doubt applies to coaching.

I'll leave you with this: have fun while coaching, build relationships and trust with your students, and cherish your time with them. With these things I am confident that you will be on your way to being a successful coach. Enjoy! Public Achievement is an incredible journey.

## LEANNE'S TIPS FOR BEING AN EFFECTIVE COACH

1. **Enter coaching with an open mind.**
2. Expect that each student has something to offer you, and that that you are there to learn from them just as they are there to learn from you.
3. Help your students develop a sense of self worth, both in the work that they are doing and as individuals.
4. Want to be with the students because they will know if you are faking it; this will jeopardize what gets done in addition to their confidence in what they are doing.
5. Step back and let the students do the work.
6. Be flexible.
7. Ask good, pointed questions that will probe and challenge them.
8. Show the students you are interested in them, both in terms of their issue groups and in who they are as individuals.
9. Be open to their suggestions and experiences.
10. Be willing to be wrong, to not know the answer.
11. Know that this experience is not about what's on your agenda. It is about them and they will be much more connected to the work when they are driving it.
12. **Most importantly, build relationships with the students.**

## Interview with Dennis Donovan, National Organizer for Public Achievement

**Q:** What are the pedagogical roots of Public Achievement?

**A:** There are three pedagogical roots of Public Achievement. The first one is the Citizenship Schools of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference during the 1960's United States Civil Rights Movement. The second root is from the broad based citizenship organizing of Harry Boyte and myself, and the third root is from the work at St. Bernard's School in St. Paul, Minnesota, when I served as principal. I wanted to change the culture of the school and used young people and organizing as a major piece of the strategy.

**Q:** How do you feel about the current state of education, both K-12 and university level, and what role does PA play at these levels?

**A:** Education plays a very important part in renewing civic life in America. Schools alone are not responsible for education. Education is the responsibility of entire communities. Families, libraries, churches, congregations, parks, etc., should be working together on this extremely important work. In general, schools have become stress centers of testing. Teachers are not allowed to teach and students are often forced to spend all of their time preparing to take tests. We must have accountability and performance assessment, but what about the arts, athletics, culture, life skills, relationship building, and community? Public education is about preparing people to become active, productive citizens not merely consumers and academics. There is great abundance in America. Everyone including our young people and older adults have gifts and talents. Getting to know each other, creating free spaces for honest debate and learning, and not being afraid to take risks and be creative might be a good step in creating "education through community resources". When Public Achievement is more than a program, it becomes a very powerful vehicle for organizing, developing public skills, understanding relationships and power, developing a persons "public life", hope, and transformation. Through the process and actions of Public Achievement there can be the possibility of culture change. Public Achievement is not a dress rehearsal for life, it is doing life as people who want to make a difference. They learn how to do the everyday politics necessary to build a park, create street safety, change a school recess policy, develop a job program, or win an affordable housing initiative.

**Q:** How do you integrate your self-interests into the work that you do?

**A:** Over the past 20 years as I get clearer and clearer about my self-interest, I become more strategic and productive in my life and work. My faith also plays a very important role in my work. I do not separate one from the other. I accomplish things through the relationships that I build. The medium of exchange in the public arena is self-interest. Understanding my own and others self-interest allows me to get things done around my self-interest in education and public leadership development of people.

**Q:** What advice can you give to new coaches and other community organizers?

**A:** Coaches should write what they want to learn through the coaching process before they start coaching and keep a reflection journal. If coaches do not change and grow during the

experience, Public Achievement is not working. They should get to know the team members that they are working with. Coaching takes place in the group setting and you shouldn't forget the strategy of individual coaching styles. Coaches should understand the culture of the site they are working in and do one-to-ones with key power people. Coaches must never forget to include staff people like support staff, cafeteria, and custodial people in the visits. They should also be proactive with the team by giving them concrete ideas of potential actions and projects that may address the team's identified problem.

Being a community organizer is a beautiful journey of learning, teaching, agitating, reflecting and growing. It is hard work. Organizers must be clear about their public and private life. They should enjoy people and have a passion for doing big things.

Coaches and community organizers make the one to one relational meeting a central part of their public lives.

## One-to-One Spotlight

*By David Secondo*

Ernie Cortes once said “for you to grow and develop, you have to get out of yourself into the skins of others” (Rogers 64). As a Public Achievement coach, I worked with this idea on a weekly basis by trying to get an idea of what my students’ beliefs, passions, and self-interests were. This helped me in understanding and accepting why they think differently than me on a multitude of issues. From my experience, the one to one relational meeting is the best way to go about achieving this understanding.

A one-to-one meeting is a focused interview done with another in order to understand her or his values, with the goal of fostering a public relationship. Though it is mainly used for connecting with people in power, it can also connect people on all levels. It is an art form requiring flexibility and attention. The interview can start out with general questions like, “How did you get to where you are today?” or “What are your goals?” These are open-ended questions that will lead to responses full of “nuggets,” or bits of information that give the questioner insights and avenues for further exploration. Good follow-up questions can be as simple as “Why do you say that?”, “Why is that important to you?” or “How do you plan on accomplishing that?”

An example occurred when I interviewed a very shy Latino boy in my PA group named Carlos. I asked him how he got to be a high school student in Colorado. He replied with a story of his family’s struggles while living in Mexico and how they first moved to Texas and then to Colorado. His story provided information not only about himself, but also about the environment that he grew up in as well as his family dynamics. Already I was much more aware of his mindset, and I had numerous “nuggets” that I could use to further discover not only his self-interests but also the reasons he had his self-interests.

By far the best way to work well with somebody is to get to know them. When doing one to one’s with your students, the interview also becomes an exercise in relationship building. In Carlos’s case he had not said more than a few words in the four weeks of our group working together. His teachers told me that he had personal problems. My coaching partner and I had concluded that he was depressed. None of these labels were helping him. After interviewing him, I began to understand him through knowing his struggles, his goals, and his fears. Once he started talking, personal stories came flooding out of him. In the interview he acted like a confident, outgoing teenager. He was just shy in groups. After our interview Carlos contributed much more to the group. He still didn’t talk as much as some of the other students, but smiles had replaced blank stares and he was not afraid to participate

Another excellent use of one-to-one’s is to have your students do them with each other. Prior to having our students conduct one to one’s with each other, our group was apathetic and racially segregated. This severely impeded their ability to work as a team. The energy was low and the initial motivation around the issue had become nonexistent. Consequently, we decided to have the students do one to one’s with each other. They spent an hour interviewing one another. This process gave each student the opportunity to share their passions and self-interests around the issue with the others. The room was transformed with an energy I didn’t think possible. It brimmed with the bustle of conversation and loud exclamations of agreement. Students in the group who had not looked at each other in the weeks prior were now emphatically nodding their heads at one another.

At the end of the class period, the kids thanked us for loosening things up and were excited for next week's meeting.

The next week began with bad news: our project of presenting a movie at a school function that would expose racism in different social situations was cancelled by the school administration. My partner and I were worried that our students would be devastated, but the opposite was the case. Here is an entry from my coaching journal that week:

We started our group meeting by telling the kids that we could no longer present at (the celebration). They immediately countered by proclaiming they were going to do their project anyway, at a different time and place. They brainstormed where, when, and how they were going to do it and got to work on making it happen. They joined together and worked on multiple tasks throughout the rest of the day. The evaluation at the end of the day was replete with a sense of accomplishment and a realization that they had a lot more work to do if they wanted achieve their goal. This incident marked a turning point for the team. The team-building from the previous week was exactly what the doctor ordered as they now were comfortable and confident together. They are a real team now, trusting in each other's ability and drives to accomplish their goals. I underestimated these kids all year and found myself wanting to do their work for them to help them succeed. Last week I realized that they can only succeed if they do the work.

This coaching experience helped me to realize the need for the students to feel personal empowerment, for them to own their experience. The students shifted from consumers to producers. Cortes says, "Organizing is a fancy word for relationship building. If I want to organize you, I don't sell you an idea. What I do, if I'm smart, is try to find out what's your interest. What are your dreams? I try to kindle your imagination, stir the possibilities, and then propose some ways in which you can act on those dreams and act on those values and act on your own visions. You've got to be the owner. Otherwise, it's my cause, my organization. You've got nothing!" (Rogers 17).

## Diversity Spotlight

*By Heather Mueller*

The Public Achievement group that I coached first semester was made up of a combination of students from a college-prep program called Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and an English as a Second Language (ESL) class. AVID consists of students who want to do well in school and go on to college, so the class serves as a means to develop effective skills that will help them be successful. The ESL students are predominantly Spanish speaking immigrants with limited English and tend to be more marginalized as members of the community than their AVID counterparts. All semester, I had been frustrated that our group meetings seemed to be taken over by the AVID students, who were generally more confident as leaders, while the ESL students, self-conscious about their language skills, hardly ever spoke out. One ESL student, Jose, seemed to be having a particularly hard time following our group discussions. Instead of participating, he would often stare off into space or play games on his cell phone. Whenever my co-coach, Neil, and I asked him to put away his phone or to try to participate, he would get defensive and distance himself even more from the group.

One day towards the end of the semester, our group was scattered. Some students were doing research on classroom computers while others had left to meet with the principal. I was left in the classroom with two students – Jose and an AVID student named Sergio. Whenever I walk through the halls of Centuarus, I am struck by the mixture of Latino and Caucasian students. The schools that I went to growing up in New Hampshire didn't have this kind of diversity, so I was curious to find out how it affected the students. I asked Sergio, "There's so much diversity at Centaurus. Do you think there's any tension or problem around it, or does everybody just get along?" Sergio looked up from his desk, "Mmm...I guess it depends. There's a lot of different people, but if you walk into the cafeteria, all the Latinos will be sitting at a table, and the jocks will be sitting at another table, and the Asian kids will be somewhere else. There's a lot of segregation. People don't really talk to each other."

"Why do you think that is?" I asked him.

"I think it's mostly about language," he told me, "Everyone's talking about the same things, you know? About the movie they saw this weekend or who they have a crush on. But everybody talks in different ways. They don't know what to say to each other and they don't want to get made fun of."

I looked across the room at Jose, slumped at a desk, playing on his cell phone. Sergio was right, and the fact that I hadn't had a single conversation with Jose was just another example of how hard it can be for two people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to actually sit down and talk to one another.

Sergio got up to work with the other students doing research, and I moved over to where Jose was sitting. He seemed surprised to see me coming over. I said, "Jose, did you hear what Sergio and I were just talking about?" He blushed and nodded, looking down at his phone. I began asking him questions about his friends and his family. He responded with mostly nods or one word answers. I could feel him increasingly opening up, but it got to a point where I didn't really know what else to say. I looked at the clock and realized the bell would ring in just a few minutes. So I went for the

obvious, the one thing that usually remains unsaid, “Why do you think it’s so hard for us to talk to each other?”

Jose shrugged and blushed, “Because I can’t speak English.”

“You speak English much better than I speak Spanish.” He looked at me and laughed. I continued, “Do you think it’s possible for people who speak different languages to understand each another?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you think there’s ways of understanding people other than words?”

“Yes.”

For the first time all semester, his cell phone was sitting on the desk and he didn’t even seem to notice it. He was sitting up a little straighter, with a shy smile on his face. I said, “Let’s make it our experiment. Let’s see if we can be friends even though we don’t speak the same languages.”

“OK,” he smiled wider.

The bell rang. I got up and started erasing the white board and arranging desks back into neat rows. Jose packed up his backpack and started for the door. He stopped and turned to look at me. “Thank you,” he said, “I’ll see you next week.”

Diversity is necessary for any kind of organizing work because it provides the tension that creates change. By encountering different ways of thinking, we are forced to consider our own beliefs. Things that we have taken for granted and assumed to be true are no longer stable –not an easy thing to be confronted with. Sitting in front of Jose and being confronted with my own ignorance, not able to speak his language or knowing what it’s like to live his life, was scary. But with diversity comes flexibility - the ability to work with different viewpoints and question your own. This is where we learn things. This is where we change, and find the strength and motivation to change our world. As a creative writing major, I spend countless hours thinking about and working with words. But my conversation with Jose taught me something essential and obvious about language that I had never considered before. He taught me about the power words have to separate and categorize things, how language can sometimes be a barrier to communication. In getting to know Jose, I had to work with language in a way that was new to me, paying more attention to body language than to words. When I got home that day, I wrote a poem that focused entirely on body language and sound, a work that is completely different from anything I have ever written and that I am extremely proud of. In recognizing and working with the tension of diversity, the way that I think and write about my world changed and expanded.

In organizing work, this tension is everywhere. The students in my class experienced it when discussing controversial and personal issues within their groups, or when compromising with the administration to change school policy. Working in pairs, we often found that our coaching partners had very different ideas about how a PA group should be run, and we had to work with that tension to find a compromise. In the process we all learned that diversity is something that can’t be ignored. We are not all the same, and our differences, if we are willing to acknowledge them, hold tremendous power to teach us about ourselves and the world around us.

## The Gold in Relationships

*By Rachel Paine*

Will, a sophomore transfer student, walked into the classroom dragging his heels, dressed in all black with his headphones on. He collapsed into a chair and slouched, waiting none too eagerly for us to begin. Kevin, another sophomore, proudly entered the classroom with his chest held high. He had recently performed in the school's production of *Grease*. Kevin sat down in a chair and folded his hands on the desk. Sophie, a senior at Centaurus High as well as the student president walked gracefully into the red-carpeted classroom. She put her purse down on her desk and sat with excellent posture. Annika, a freshman and the only African American in our group, slowly made her way to a desk. She sat down and, letting out a long sigh, pulled her cell phone out of her backpack and played a game. The rest of the students – Erika, a transfer student from Texas, Rick, a senior and veteran of the Public Achievement program, and Kairat, a recent immigrant from Turkmenistan dressed in a button-down white shirt and neatly ironed black pants, all arrived. I was ready to begin.

“Alright, let's get started,” I said.

We pushed our desks into a circle and began discussing our topic: diversity. Sophie began the conversation. “The thing that bothers me most at Centaurus is the homophobia. More than racism it seems we have more trouble with gay bashing. A student just recently transferred out because he was picked on for being gay.”

I had been struggling with the issue of coming out to these kids with my homosexuality for the entire semester. We had decided that, as a group aimed at working with diversity, our first step was to share our own unique cultures and identities with one another. Keeping my sexuality from them felt like I was leaving an important piece of myself out of our discussions, but I was afraid for a variety of reasons. Just recently a teacher at the school got into trouble for hosting a gay panel (question and answer) at a school diversity celebration. I knew the issue of sexuality is very fragile at public schools and I kept my identity hidden from the students for the six or more months I'd already been there. Finally, I was afraid that these kids would no longer accept and feel comfortable with me, after coming out to them. Our biggest strength, as a group, was our ability to discuss controversial issues and I was afraid that these students would no longer feel comfortable being vulnerable and honest with me once I came out. I didn't know what to do.

The discussion continued to open up. Everyone had something to say on the topic. Kevin explained his disgust at having to ride on an airplane with a gay flight attendant. I asked him if the flight attendant was hitting on him.

“No, I just wanted to get off that plane,” he said with a shy grin on his face.

I facilitated the discussion and asked everyone for input. Both viewpoints concerning gay rights were voiced. At one point I asked Sophie, a proponent for gay rights, why she was so accepting.

“Because I grew up in a very open-minded family. My parents always taught me that you couldn't judge someone.”

I wanted to come out because it would be honest and my vulnerable identity in general could be an example for these students. Being vulnerable is an opportunity to take the relationship deeper and make it stronger. But I knew that coming out could also make it more difficult for the students to talk as freely once they knew a gay person was in the room. I was worried about losing the respect of the students who were against this lifestyle, in addition to the possibility of getting in trouble with the school. I continued to facilitate the discussion and kept questioning the students in order to get deeper into the subject. Despite my own identification, I supported each student's right to express how they felt.

I asked Kevin and Kairat, two students who openly disagreed with the gay lifestyle, why they felt that way. Kevin said, "God didn't intend for people to be gay. That's not what is supposed to happen. Gay people are just confused. I think it has to do with how they were raised. Or gay people want to get attention or be different." Kairat agreed that humans were not created to marry or have sex with the same gender. While Kairat was talking, Kevin excitedly commented, "It's not Adam and Steve, it's Adam and Eve!"

These students didn't realize they were making generalizations about homosexuality. The difference of opinion in the room created tension, which is a positive and powerful way to learn about pluralism. To disagree on a sensitive subject and be willing to openly discuss it is an opportunity to gain a new perspective.

I wanted to take the tension a step further and really challenge the student's opinions. We had about five minutes left of our time together, so I asked each student how they felt the discussion went and if they learned anything from it. Each made their own evaluative comments. Most said they felt enriched from hearing so many different points of view. I was the last person to reflect with only a minute or two left before the bell. I took a deep breath, knowing what would inevitably come out of my mouth: "Thank you all for sharing so intimately today. I really appreciate all of your honesty. I also enjoyed the tension in the room and how we sat in it for over an hour on such a loaded topic. In order for me to be honest with you all, you should know that I am gay." At that point I wasn't thinking of all the repercussions this could or could not have. The time had felt right and I couldn't pass up the opportunity with this group of students.

Slow shock spread across the student's faces. None of them had known that throughout the entire conversation someone was present who identified as gay. I imagine many of the students had trouble believing what they had just heard me say. Their coach, whom they had seen every week for months, whom they had grown to trust and respect, just revealed that she was gay. I think many of them felt disoriented. Was I the same person that they originally thought I was?

One reason I was able to be so honest and vulnerable with this group is because of the safe space we created together. Our group established a place and time where we could share our different opinions and not be attacked. Ed Chambers writes about how power works in relationships and free spaces, "People who can understand the concerns of others and mix those concerns with their own agenda have access to a power source denied to those who can push only their own interests" (Chambers 29). The free space that we created is a rich environment to cultivate power. I believe that this particular discussion drastically affected how each student thinks and feels about gay, and about themselves. We become more knowledgeable as people when we share our diversity. Chambers goes on to say that, "To be affected by another in relationship is as true a sign of power as the capacity to affect others" (Chambers 29).

Along with the power in each student's opinions there was respect and listening. We all learned that you don't have to 'fit in' or say the same things as everyone else in order to be accepted and loved. There were no hard feelings when everyone had very different viewpoints. Instead, our conversations, rich with diversity, brought us closer through the trust our acceptance developed. It is impossible to know difference until you love it in someone else.

The next time our group met, after spring break, I was slightly nervous about how they would react to me after so dramatically shifting the group homeostasis. As we were checking in, Kevin, a student who shared strong anti gay statements weeks earlier in our discussion told a surprising story. Kevin worked building houses in Mississippi over spring break. This is part of the story he told.

"I was in line for dinner after a long day of building a house, and I was goofing off with my guy friend. We were just being silly. This girl standing behind us in line snickered at us and said, 'You all look like homosexuals. We should have ourselves a good ole fag drag.' I thought that this was so offensive and such a mean thing to say, because what if I was gay—that would really hurt my feelings. I mean, I'm not gay, but if I was I wouldn't feel so good after hearing someone say that."

Just a couple weeks after saying hurtful and judgmental things about gay people, Kevin was empathizing with them. The relationship between myself and the student's went to a powerful place when I made myself vulnerable by coming out to them. The authenticity and power of this experience is what makes it lasting. We didn't build a playground or affect change in the community physically, but we wielded immense change in the internal structures and filters we experience the world through. Our discussion was a real, relational experience that broadened our understanding and appreciation of each other. It deepened our diversity by making us question our beliefs and open up to new insights. This is the bones of community organizing.

## **A Glimpse of a Civic Professional – Danielle Peterson**

*By David Secondo*

Danielle Peterson is a change agent in a world that is increasingly focused on materialism and self-fulfillment. And though she has many personal goals, they all seem to be connected to a vision for the equality of all people. Her work, through multiple efforts, involves helping others realize and attain their own dreams for a better world. She is a dedicated community organizer and an even more dedicated mother. What's more is that she is still a student.

She holds the position of Minnesota Public Achievement Organizer for the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota. This compliments her major in African-American Studies because as an organizer her passion is undoing racism. Her job consists of organizing public work and trainings for individuals, groups, and institutions who are partnering or interested in partnering with Public Achievement (PA). She also provides technical assistance and support to partnering institutions in Minnesota and other PA regions, as well as developing the leadership throughout the PA network.

I asked Danielle what makes her a civic professional. She responded by stating, "I would say that I am a public professional. My work has real public implications that are shaped and formed by my public partners, either here at the Center, or the schools and institutions we work in." Danielle's motivations come from her belief that the only ones qualified to solve problems are the individuals who are directly affected by them. She goes on to say that "this means that the only people with the talents, insights, passion or emotion required to take action and to see it through are the ones with the problem. I am driven to develop these talents and skills in people to work towards achieving change."

One example is when she worked at an apple orchard that employed a large number of Hmong people to do the most difficult manual labor. After a short period of time, she learned how little these workers were being paid. Their low wages incensed her, and she subsequently organized them to create a plan demanding higher wages, a plan that was ultimately successful.

The challenges that Danielle has faced throughout her life motivated her to pursue the work she is doing today. As an African-American growing up in a small town in Minnesota that was 99 percent white, she faced a lot of ignorance and racism. She was adopted into a mixed family. As a four year old girl she remembers being called "nigger" and her brother, who was white, being called "nigger lover." She was the first black person to attend her elementary school. Danielle says she always resisted the ignorance she faced and looked to civil rights history for strength and courage while yearning to understand racism and injustice. "Racism and race have been and will continue to be a fundamental part of my life," she says. "My passion is undoing racism and facilitating others to examine the United State's white supremacist capitalist system and learn how it affects all of our lives. Part of this system includes the struggles that help shape it, which ultimately, implicates all of us to take action."

Danielle's heroes include many women from the civil rights movement. "Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Septima Clark, and Joann Robinson are just a few of the women that made the freedom movement possible," she says. "They were natural organizers and great leaders that were able to organize millions of ordinary people to create change." She admires how these women understood

how to work with people who did not think they could change things. Another one of Danielle's heroes is Charles Howard Houston, the founder of Howard University's Law School. He taught and mentored lawyers who would represent all of the separate but equal cases leading to the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. "He was a premier public professional!" says Danielle. A present-day hero of hers is Angela Glover Blackwell. Danielle regards her as a visionary and powerful leader because she is a vocal proponent for strong communities and good public policy.

At the University of Minnesota, Danielle is also the community development chair of the Black Student Union. She uses PA to develop leadership within this student group. One of their primary projects is to change the school's predominantly white-centered culture by organizing a college day where 400 high school students of color planning to attend college will receive a tour of the campus by university students of color. Workshops run by members of the Black Student Union will also be offered to visiting high school students. She and the group she leads believe that efforts like this will help to increase diversity at the university.

Danielle's values remain a significant inspiration for her work. She says that "throughout all of our lives people desire to be loved and to love. We need to look very closely at what it takes for all of us to create a beloved community. Although this is a utopian vision, it is what I strive for in my work. This, however, does not mean that we shy away from the most painful and difficult elements in our communities and our nation. Rather, we must look deeper at these issues and how we have been able to shape them in the past and how we might continue to shape these problems. We need to understand how families, history, class, race and culture play a role in this." For Danielle, a life well lived is one with vision, filled with constant learning where she continues to challenge herself as a mother, organizer, partner, friend, daughter and sister.

One of the major things Danielle learned through her work is that everyone can be culture makers and public professionals. It is just a matter of shifting your perception of one's place in work and in society. We are accustomed to thinking that we are separate, that our actions do not affect one another. Everything we do has some impact on the world. Danielle advises to discover how your work connects with the community. She says to reflect on how you create culture in your environment as well as how you are part of the culture in your environment, whether that environment is your work, your place of worship, or some other public place where you spend time.

She recommends talking about these goals with someone who can hold you accountable to your vision. "Making an impact and becoming powerful is a learned skill or craft. It doesn't just happen," she says. "Study the people who impact your issue. If they happen to be in your community, make an appointment with them and learn all that you can about their work and their vision. Some of these people may be your professors. Try to initiate a public relationship with them. Build public relationships with people who are concerned with the same issues and are taking action on your campus. You will be uncomfortable while working for change, let this be a challenge to you."



***"Making an impact and becoming powerful is a learned skill or craft. It doesn't just happen."***

## Coaching Challenges

*By Heather Mueller*

In the book *Cold Anger*, Ernie Cortes tells the reader, “Anger gives you energy” (47). I remember feeling startled when I read this quote for the first time. I had always thought of anger as something negative, a feeling to either repress or deal with quietly, on my own. Through my work as a community organizer I have learned how to turn anger into something useful and constructive that is welcomed and worked with. Working with many different kinds of people – all with their own ethics, ideas, and personalities – I have come up against many situations that have pushed my limits. One example is my relationship with my Public Achievement coaching partner, Neil. Through this experience, I learned that in order to make any kind of effective change, a person needs to take responsibility for their own feelings and convictions. You need to actively work with the people around you to create relationships that will sustain the kind of world you want to live in. This process, in turn, will change you. Each conflict that I have encountered, each bit of tension that I’ve worked through has taught me how to be more effective in working with others and has helped me to define the kind of a world I want to live in.

Neil and I finally had our big argument in February. Tension had been building up for weeks around our different coaching styles. I focused on our team’s goals and getting things done, while Neil concentrated on team building, approaching meetings in a hands-off, improvisational manner. I was worried that we weren’t moving along with our project, while Neil felt that my approach was narrow and over-bearing. The problem was that neither of us succeeded in communicating our feelings. Worried about hurting each other or creating conflict, we kept our frustrations to ourselves and dealt with them passively. Meanwhile, our group meetings turned into a constant power struggle between the two of us. In class, we constantly cut each other off and vied for control of discussions, which left hardly any space for the most important aspect of our work – the voices of the students in our group.

Our frustrations finally broke loose after a particularly low-energy meeting. That day, almost half of the students in our group were absent and the others were tired and listless. While I tried my hardest to motivate the students, Neil seemed only to be acting as a distraction. After class I took a deep breath and all of my frustrations came pouring out.

“Neil, I can’t believe you let Sun watch movies on his iPod for the last 20 minutes of class!” I burst out tactlessly as we pushed the desks back into order, “I’ve been trying to get things done all afternoon and you didn’t do anything. All you did was distract the students; I feel like I’m doing all the work and it isn’t fair!”

But Neil wouldn’t listen to anything I had to say. Instead, he was focused on defending himself against my accusations.

“What are you talking about?!” he sputtered, “I’ve been working just as hard as you have. How can you say that? Besides, Sun was only watching movies for five minutes.”

We walked out of the school building and ended up in the parking lot, yelling at each other, neither one of us actually listening to the other’s point of view. I remember standing in the parking lot,

unable to even look Neil in the face, instead staring down at the ground, watching the shadow of his arm wave across the pavement while I gritted my teeth with anger.

In that moment, I was at the heart of the tension between “the world as it is” and “the world as it should be”. In his book *Roots for Radicals*, Ed Chambers talks about the necessity of not being afraid of conflict, but instead welcoming this kind of tension and be willing to work within it – because it’s the only place that real change can take place. Now that our frustrations were out in the open, Neil and I had come face-to-face with our differences, and we were being forced to work with them. The trick would be finding a way to communicate about it effectively. What was once a power struggle was on its way to becoming a lesson in compromise and flexibility.

My conflict with Neil was mostly about power. We each wanted to run the group our own way, based on our own expectations and way of getting things done, without considering how this was affecting the other members of the group. Chambers writes, “Seeing clearly that every act of power requires a relationship is the first step toward realizing that the capacity to be affected by another is the other side of the coin named power” (Chambers 28). Being powerful means being aware of the ways you are both affected by and affect other people. It means being in relationships with as many people as possible, which in turn means being flexible to the input of others and open about what you want from a situation. Neil and I both wanted to be powerful coaches and role-models for our students, but because we were not considering the ways our different approaches affected the others in the group, we were not being very effective.

Before our argument, I thought that I could ignore my problems with Neil. It seemed easier to just not say anything and deal with it on my own. But not communicating about how I felt only added more fuel to our struggle over class time. The angrier I got, the quicker I was to cut Neil off when I felt he was taking the class off on a tangent. I was more likely to get stressed out and come off as overbearing or controlling, the exact things that bothered Neil about my approach. By not communicating, we were each triggering the other person into doing the exact things that frustrated us, without even realizing it. Even when I finally confronted Neil, I only did it because I could no longer take the stress. It wasn’t until after we left the parking lot and I had time to cool off and reflect on the argument that I finally felt ready to take responsibility for the situation and listen to Neil without blaming him.

Because I had the responsibility to be an effective coach and help the team accomplish their goals, I had no choice but to confront my frustrations with Neil and actively work with him to find a solution. Even though it might have seemed easier, or at least less scary, to bury the tension and go back to the way things were before, I knew that we had to talk about what happened and work through the tension. In *Cold Anger*, Ernie Cortes says, “To be an organizer or a leader in our effort, you have to initiate relationships. You have to see yourself as an actor always and never as a passive person” (Rogers 56). The organizations that Cortes works with create change by identifying their self-interests and then contacting people in positions of power to figure out how those interests can become a reality. In much the same way, I was learning to identify the causes and self-interests behind my anger, while remaining flexible enough to work with the other people to translate those interests into action.

As I began to reflect on the situation, I realized that a lot of my frustration came because I had a very specific and narrow idea of how the group should be run. I thought that everything needed to be planned out ahead of time; Neil just let things happen. Because Neil didn’t share my approach

and my exact views, I felt like I had to work extra hard to keep things operating in a way that I was comfortable with. I realized that the exact things that frustrated me the most about Neil – his flexibility and willingness to be distracted – were actually his biggest strengths – and my weaknesses. And vice versa. We had the perfect combination of skills; we both just needed to communicate and be willing to do things in a way that was a little different from our usual norms.

The process that I was going through with Neil, learning to work with his point of view and identify his strengths, is the same process used by large-scale community organizing projects to affect change. These movements are made up of people willing to stand up and identify what kinds of lives they want to live, what kinds of lives they deserve to live, and to work with power to get it. In the words of Ernie Cortes, “self-interest requires that you recognize yourself, that you say ‘I count’” (Rogers 62). This means identifying the things that make you angry, but instead of holding them inside and ‘just dealing with it’ or lashing out in revenge or rage, it means taking responsibility for your feelings and using them as energy to confront the problem and work with others to fix it.

Part of my frustration with Neil was that I felt I wasn’t being listened to or appreciated. Because he approached class so differently, I thought he simply didn’t care about my opinions. It was only when I took responsibility for these feelings and communicated them – instead of feeling defeated and upset – that I was able to see his side of the situation, and work with him to find common ground. Ernie Cortes tells us, “For you to grow and develop, you have to get out of yourself and into the skins of others” (Rogers 64). You have to be willing to work *with* people, and consider their standpoint, even when it seems like they are working against you. The day after our argument, Neil and I met in our teacher’s office to talk through our problems. Because we had reflected on the causes of our frustrations and let the initial anger cool, we were able to see clearly where the tension was originating from, and how we could work to resolve it.

Tension – and anger – are inescapable, especially for someone who is engaged in community organizing or social change. To have ideals (a distinct view of the world as it should be), and to work within reality (the world as it is), as all organizers and activists do, means to constantly encounter conflict. Organizing is built on the creation and sustainability of relationships with many different kinds of people, many of whom will have different styles of working and different beliefs than you do. But this kind of diversity, and the tension that invariably comes with it, is absolutely necessary for any kind of change to happen. The trick is to recognize tension, anger, and discomfort as a place of potential.

The key to turning tension into something positive is in your willingness to work with it. Evaluation and reflection can help you actively question the situation along with the motivations, feelings, and thoughts of the people involved to better understand what you have to work with. Saul Alinsky writes, “Most people go through life undergoing a series of happenings, which pass through their systems undigested. Happenings become experiences when they are reflected on, related to general problems, and synthesized” (Rogers 91). What could have remained an unpleasant confrontation between Neil and me was transformed, through reflection and a mutual evaluation, into fuel for a positive experience of change.

By listening to each other’s frustrations, Neil and I were able to recognize and change things about the way we interacted in our group meetings, which have made things smoother for everyone involved. Now, Neil is more mindful of his tendency to ramble or take discussions off topic, and I am able to calm myself down when I start to feel the need to control. Since we are no longer

competing, Neil and I have both backed off and left more space for the students to run the meetings and direct discussions themselves. By reflecting on the situation and being open to change my approach, I was able to recognize which aspects of my approach were not as effective as they could be, and as a result I have grown to be a better leader and organizer.

Ernie Cortes often echoes a question often asked by Saul Alinsky, “How do you feel about people?” Cortes, Alinsky, and other organizers obviously have a passion for people and believe that everyone deserves to speak for themselves and have the chance to work for the kind of world they each want to live in. In every conflict and each bit of tension, people constantly ask one another, “How do you feel about me?” By approaching a conflict with flexibility and enthusiasm, you can show someone that you believe they are worth considering and working with. A willingness to work with tension means that you are able to hold yourself responsible for the anger that you feel, and hold others accountable for the ways they might be contributing to it. Taking an active role to work with conflict is a sign of respect, both towards your self and others. It shows that you believe in yourself – and that you care about who you are working with enough to deal with difficult issues together. This consideration and respect is what has the power to turn anger into fuel for positive change.

## **The Power of Calmness**

*By Neil Sharma*

Protest politics seems to be the most popular means of trying to do public work. I remember seeing a protest at Naropa University by students in the BFA (Bachelor of Fine Art) performance program over the unexplained firing of the chair of their department a month before school ended. The intensity and passion of their anger was clearly demonstrated by the protest skits in which they mocked the president of the university followed by a public discussion with the president over why their chair was fired. This was less of a discussion and more two hours of rapid firing from the BFA performance students to the president. They had a lot of “hot anger” because the president could barely get a word in. No compromises were offered and the environment was marked by tremendous polarized tension. There was no ground of clear communication and no calmness. Everyone was focused on defending their opinion instead of trying to listen. Ernie Cortes would tell the students that for effective community organizing, they need to take “the hot impulse of their anger and cool it down so that it can become a useful tool to improve individual lives and the quality of the common community” (Rogers 10).

As a Public Achievement coach and community organizer, I have realized that public relationships and politics are at the core of public work. Instead of merely protesting against someone and debating an issue, it is important to work with others. According to Edward Chambers, public relationships are a “world of exchange, compromise, and deals” (73). It is easy to get angry and frustrated and draw battle lines, but if one is to create effective change then it is critical to develop and maintain these public relationships which are based on mutual respect. Harry Boyte suggests that it is important to discipline anger, “recognizing that even in the midst of sharp conflict it is important to keep long term relationships in mind” (Boyte 53). In moments of tension, remaining calm is a powerful technique that can help keep open lines of communication. Calmness breeds calmness and has the power to settle emotions, enabling disputing parties to reach a compromise while maintaining a solid public relationship.

In conflict, emotions like anger and defensiveness arise when one’s viewpoint is challenged. These emotions cloud a person’s ability to listen and understand what the other person has to say. In emotional heat, being on the offensive or defensive polarizes one’s opponent in the opposite direction. This does not lead to an effective public relationship, because there is no room for compromise and change.

I experienced this challenge as a Public Achievement coach. My coaching partner Heather and I decided to plan activities that would help the students identify what issues they cared about. One of my students, Gabe, decided to speak out against the new hall pass policy which required all students to have a pass if they were out of the classroom during class time. Gabe believed that not having a hall policy would help cultivate self-discipline and self-accountability among students. He felt that the current policy only impeded the development of the maturity that is necessary in college where students are more responsible for their education. I was amazed at how poignant Gabe was in articulating his view, immediately recognizing him as a potential leader. We went on to create signs that made public the students’ concerns.

While we were posting our signs in the hall the assistant principal, Mr. Roper, approached us and told us that we needed approval before we could put anything up. We made some adjustments and

headed to the front office to have our poster approved. We saw Mr. Roper talking to the principal. He motioned for us to enter, and Gabe and I found ourselves face to face with the school's principal, Dr. Pilch, and other administrators. It was definitely intimidating at first, and it got more so when we told the principal what we wanted to put up in the hallway.

Her face flushed as she asked, "Have you seen what this school was like before the policy?" Gabe replied, "I was here, but I still think that this policy prevents students from taking responsibility".

She seemed very angry with both of us. She turned to me and asked, "Who are you?" I was a bit timid and replied, "I am from Naropa and I am a coach with Public Achievement". She quickly responded, "Do you see that this policy is in place for an important reason? I understand your intentions but will not compromise the safety of our students. Since the safety and well-being of these students are my top priority, I'll consider leaving PA out of the curriculum if this continues."

This shook me up, and I immediately felt both anger and fear rise up in me. I thought, *what have I gotten myself into?* Time seemed to freeze and I stood there thinking about how I should proceed. The lines of communication were fragile and I knew that there would be nothing gained if I'd let my frustration and fear run away with me. I had learned through my meditation practice that calmness breeds calmness and that I should demonstrate it so that Dr. Pilch could know our that our intentions were not to create problems for her. Cultivating calmness is turning that murky water of mind caused by thoughts and emotions to settle and become clear. If one is able to practice this type of calm, then one will be able to maintain and even strengthen public relationships, and effectively engage in public work.

To first create calmness in this situation, I focused on my breath for a couple of seconds, a practice that I have learned at Naropa, so that I could remain calm and strong. After I cleared my mind, I told her in a gentle voice, "We are not here to create dissent. My only goal is to help cultivate these students own inherent power to affect change in their community."

Her demeanor instantly changed. In a calm manner, I went on to explain the poster that we made and how it connected to the concept of doing public work. Gabe took my lead and restated his stance on the hall pass policy. It was incredible at how Dr. Pilch changed her tone. In response, Dr. Pilch told us much more calmly than before about why she had adopted the policy. Because we were calm enough to be receptive to her side of the issue and because she was able to explain clearly, we understood that it was not a matter of maturity, but safety. The hall passes were necessary to keep unwanted visitors out of the school. She told us that she admired what we were doing, but for the greater good of the school and its safety, it was important to have hallway passes. We made a mutual decision to disregard the signs we had made and not put it up in the hall. At the end of the conversation, we all laughed about how tense it had been. And we all apologized for the miscommunication. When we left the office, I felt that we had created a strong relationship with the principal which has helped us many times when we needed further approval on other projects. If I had not remained calm, the principal could have decided to cancel Public Achievement at the high school. Calmness, I realized, is a potent means of opening lines of communication and understanding which are the foundations for a good relationship, public or private. Although remaining calm can be at times a Herculean task, it is critical to discipline one's anger and work with conflict to be an effective community organizer.

## Civic Professional – Michael Kuhne

*By Heather Mueller*

Michael Kuhne began his career in education with a one-year teaching position in Minnesota, followed by four years of teaching in southern Colorado. Here, he became “both angered and inspired” by “the remarkable young students, young people living lives on the edge, on the margins, under the radar.” He explains that he was “angered because public policy and education policy continue to keep these young people and their families on the margins, yet inspired because they show up, day after day, believing in a dream, I felt I must play an efficacious role in that dream.” It was in graduate school that Michael read Paulo Friere’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and realized “that my political and educational passions could be intertwined in creative, constructive ways.”

Michael received his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota, with an expertise in curriculum development. He currently works as an English professor at Minneapolis Community and Technical College; this semester he is teaching two writing courses and a literature class on epics. But Michael sees the main focus of his work as directing the school’s Urban Teacher Program, a position he has used to confront many of the frustrations he felt during his first years of teaching.

Michael co-founded the Urban Teacher Program in the fall of 1999 to address a widespread teacher shortage that had occurred the previous year. In 1998, the Minneapolis school system had been 175 teachers short, a problem that Michael realized was caused by a lack of training available to those interested in becoming teachers. Furthermore, obtaining a teaching license required a degree from a four year university, while many people in the city only had the time and resources to complete a two-year program. In a traditional two-year urban community or technical college, there was never time for the student teaching practicum necessary to receive a license. Furthermore, the Urban Teacher Program found a solution to this dilemma by using Public Achievement to integrate teaching experience into the curriculum of a two year program.

Much of Michael’s work is a response to the problem of pre-packaged curriculums and over emphasis on standardized testing that he thinks is “taking the human quality out of teaching”. This is a problem that has deepened with the passing of the *No Child Left Behind Act* in 2002. The act set new standards for public education, with huge penalties for schools and teachers that fail to meet requirements. Students in grades three through eight are now given standardized tests every year, the results of which are then compared to standards set by the state. Each year, a school must increase the number of its students who achieve state standards, with the goal of having all students be able to pass the tests within twelve years. The act also sets new standards for teacher qualifications, in some cases requiring teachers to receive an extra degree or pass a standardized test in the subject that they teach. Statistics comparing the number of teachers and students who meet state standards in each school are made public, and parents can choose to transfer their child to another school if their district consistently fails to meet state standards.

Even as national standards such as *No Child Left Behind* focus decreasingly on the personal aspects of education, the Urban Teacher Program seeks to train its students as civic professionals. While the standards and testing of *No Child Left Behind* closely monitors the progress of each student, many see the act as focusing not on the causes of failure, but the effects. Teachers are evaluated not on how well they connect with their students, or how many meaningful relationships are created within the classroom, but rather on what percentage of their students succeed on standardized tests. Many fear

that as education becomes more focused on national standards and percentages, the unique personalities, talents, and needs of the students will be ignored. The value in fostering self-esteem, passion, and engagement seems to be slipping away. It is Michael's hope that graduates of the program will view teaching not just in terms of state percentages and test scores, but will recognize the potential of their profession to shape and affect our culture.

Using Public Achievement in the curriculum has helped to achieve this goal through its focus on creating relationships with others in a public context. In this way, students of the Urban Teacher Program begin to create public lives. Developing a public life, Michael says, forces a person to actively consider "how you want to be with a group of people".

It is essential to constantly relate theoretical concepts to action:

I believe in a holistic version of human beings, and the mind is a major part of this. That said, I also believe that we – those in academia – have the sober responsibility to use our trained and refined intellects to make the world a better place. Teaching Toni Morrison's *Beloved* can definitely make the world a better place – don't misunderstand me; words and ideas have power – but I don't believe that this is all that I can do. Who will be the next Toni Morrison? The next Amiri Baraka? The next voice to be heard and to light a fire? If I can help students read Morrison and then *act* on what we learn, my mission will have been a success. So, we can either discuss how we might act, or we can act. I'd rather be acting.

Public Achievement has become another tool that Michael uses to relate concepts and ideas to problems in the immediate community. He has used variations of PA in many of his undergraduate classes. In one of his research writing courses, centered on the theme of community, students each choose a service-learning project to incorporate into their writing assignments. Writing on local issues, Michael says, gives the students a specific context to write about, and lets them share personal stories and examples. Writing about issues that matter to them and that directly effect them often improves students' work. Research and writing assignments that are grounded in the real world makes college and education into something that is relevant and useful in a greater context.

Such an approach, Michael says, is about "replicating the richness of democracy beyond the theoretical level. It allows us, as intellectuals, to connect not just with our hearts and heads, but with our hands and feet."

Michael estimates that about 15-20 percent of his students are from Minneapolis' Somalian population. Because so many of his students come from a community that has been underprivileged and marginalized, creating free spaces plays an important role in his classroom. He says "It is my obligation to make sure these communities are communicating," and he accomplishes this by continually reminding his students that "we are creating a free space."

Michael points out that working with students of diverse backgrounds and perspectives means "I don't have twenty similar voices". This effects not only classroom discussion but also his teaching style. In working with people from other cultures, he says "I can't make any assumptions". He must always remain completely conscious of how he is relating to his students. Communication as subtle as body language and hand gestures can often be interpreted differently than intended through the lens of another culture. Working with such diversity, his classes often find themselves

encountering tension and conflict, but he reminds us “that’s what democracy is” and the most important thing is to “keep moving”.

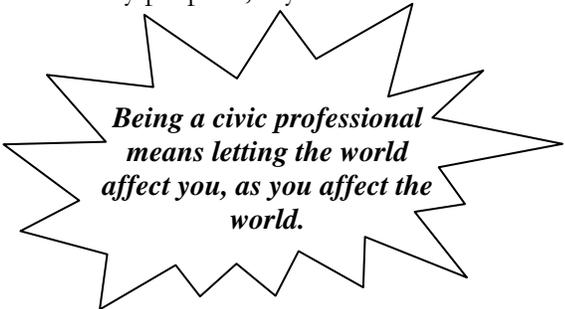
Taking action and getting involved “beyond a theoretical level” can often get messy. Such an approach requires flexibility and open-mindedness, as one is constantly being forced to redefine and question the very concepts and ideas that seem so stable within a book or classroom. In Public Achievement and other forms of civic engagement, participants learn to work with and confront failure. Michael says that one of the greatest skills he learned from PA was flexibility and a willingness to change plans. This is because the program is not based on teaching in a traditional sense, but on listening to and responding to the students. In this dynamic – far from the pre-packaged curriculums of *No Child Left Behind* – the teacher or coach is constantly rediscovering the material, forming a two-way learning relationship with his or her students. Michael references Harry Boyte’s idea of “experts on tap, not on top” as a way of creating an environment where teachers and coaches become resources and students learn to think for themselves.

Like students writing research papers on topics they are interested and actively involved in, or the teacher who rediscovers the material by creating dynamic classroom relationships, the civic professional is one who can combine private self-interests with a public, professional life. Michael believes that a person’s public and private lives are “complementary components of the whole.” He writes,

I do think that my private life (my poor and working class background, being the youngest son and being raised in an all-female household, losing my father at a relatively young age...) profoundly influences my public life. And the reverse is true: my public life (as a professor, as an organizer, as a public K12 advocate, as a writer) profoundly influences my private life. There is a symbiotic relationship. When the two are unnecessarily disconnected, both suffer; when they are blurred, both suffer. It is a fine line, one that demands constant attention and vigilance.

To keep this balance, Michael takes on projects “not merely out of a sense of obligation or service, but because he really want to make a change”. He advises that when creating a public life, it helps to be clear about one’s mission and goals within one’s vocation, to keep in mind questions like ‘What do I want to achieve?’ and ‘What do I want to be able to say that I have accomplished?’ He writes, “I need to remind myself constantly WHY I am doing this and WHAT my purpose, my larger vision is.”

Michael Kuhne is an inspiring example of a civic professional who realizes the reciprocal nature of developing a public relationship with the rest of society. For him, effective and meaningful work is that which provokes self-examination and a constant redefining of self-interests, which in turn brings forth more meaningful and effective public contributions.



***Being a civic professional means letting the world affect you, as you affect the world.***

Being a civic professional means letting the world affect you, as you affect your world. The work Michael does on a public level is inspired by his own passions and self-interests. This is what makes his contributions effective, useful and worthwhile, to both himself and others. He writes that his hope for young people is that they “come to learn the why and the what of [their] educational

journey. To do so means to live a life of rich self-examination and tremendous public contributions.”

## Appendix 1.

*The Commonwealth Project: Building a Culture of Relational Public Work*, by Harry Boyte

The nation is in a profoundly important “war of values,” but it’s not the one we’re used to hearing about. Today’s unproductive, polarized politics is a symptom of deep cultural problems that often go unnamed. These are dramatized by Katrina, where the disaster in governance -- the failure to work together to prevent death, suffering, and looting -- paralleled the natural disaster. Americans remain a compassionate people, as the outpouring of support for flood victims shows. But our ability to work together across differences on public problems has eroded, and this erosion endangers our democratic way of life. We need to rebuild a culture of relational cooperative work if we are to preserve and deepen the democratic heritage. This is a thought piece to stir discussion on the topic.

American culture, understood broadly as a way of life, is spinning out of control. We have become more pawns of mass culture than creators of a democratic way of life. Many culture-making institutions convey values that the great majority of people, across divides of “Red and Blue America” or religious, racial, and income differences, find distasteful at best, often appalling. Today’s images of the American dream, what it means to be a “success,” have become hyper-competitive, materialistic, focused on celebrity, defined by private pursuits. There is a mania for “bigger” and “faster.” The enduring values of our democratic and religious traditions -- the priceless worth of every person, liberty and justice for all, the value of cooperative labors that build our common world -- are more pieties than principles we live by. Such dynamics play out against the backdrop of the global gap between rich and poor. As the UN Development Programme put it in 2005, “the space between countries is marked by deep and, in some cases, widening inequalities in income and life chances. One-fifth of humanity live in countries where many people think nothing of spending \$2 a day on a cappuccino. Another fifth of humanity survive on less than \$1 a day and live in countries where children die for want of a simple anti-mosquito bednet.”

The cultural crisis frames the work of what are called broad-based citizen organizations. I first saw this in a “values workshop” in the early 1980s in the Mexican American barrios of San Antonio. The citizen group, Communities Organized for Public Service, was working on issues like jobs and schools, but Andres Sarabia, the first president of COPS, told me “issues are the dessert, not the main meal.” The main meal was about values of democratic and religious traditions such as concern for the poor, the dignity of the person, family life, human relationships, the ability to work across differences, participation, community vitality. Organizers contrasted these with the “world as it is” -- “go for the gold enchilada,” “never give a sucker an even break.” Organizing was aimed at giving power to religious, and democratic values in a world which marginalizes them.

This approach has spurred the growth of networks like the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), Gamaliel Foundation, and PICO, racially, religiously, politically diverse, based in poor, working class, and middle income congregations of Christian, Jewish and Muslim faith and other local institutions. They now include several million families in more than 150 organizations. The nation, reads the IAF statement, *Organizing for Families and Congregations*, faces a “values war” over “the fundamental question: who will parent our children? How will they be taught and trained and nurtured?” By addressing the cultural crisis in community life, such citizen groups have been able to enlist support

among mainstream members of communities, beyond activists, who sustain core community institutions. As they have organized, citizen groups have created counter-cultures built on deep relationships, against the grain of a culture which fragments, isolates, and trivializes. Yet they have not organized to change the culture-shaping institutions generating the larger crisis.

But signs of a broader movement, focused on real issues, developing capacities for cooperative work across lines of bitter division, and impacting the culture are appearing. Young people are creating alternatives to negative images in the mass culture in efforts like Positive Hip Hop among young blacks, countering their portrayal as thugs and addicts. Higher education groups like AASCU and Campus Compact, as well as the “civic mission of the schools” effort, counter the message that education is simply about monetary gain with a message of active citizenship. Environmentalists have made long term agreements with industry to create sustainable ecosystems, building new relationships and mutual respect. The Global Campaign Against Poverty connects Americans to other parts of the world.

"Culture makers " include clergy, educators, artists, entertainers, health workers, communications workers, journalists, businesspeople, politicians – as well as housewives and steelworkers. All of these and others shape the culture, its values, practices, and directions. Culture-makers also include people as consumers – students, shoppers, audiences, spectators – who organize to press for socially responsible businesses. “Making a culture of public work” – or, using our colleague Bill Doherty’s pithy formulation, “Taking Back our Culture” -- means cultural organizing around people’s conditions of work as well as consumer roles.

It is time to build on such examples by organizing for culture-change among cultural and knowledge workers of all kinds. Many today are appalled at the prospect that the future could be dominated by private images of the good life -- reality TV shows, strip malls and schools that teach children to pass standardized tests while they fail at life. The movement we need is based on the idea that *we, the people, can make democratic culture*, our common world, through everyday practices, in roles as producers and consumers. Today most people feel powerless to change prevailing trends. But if called to the task -- challenged to recognize, in the words of the old civil rights song by Dorothy Cotton, that “we are the ones we’ve been waiting for” --millions of people might take up the challenge of being culture shapers, creating alternatives to a culture based on celebrity, materialism, and private pursuits, not public contributions.

Social historians have described how such culture making took place in the 1930s and 1940s on a large scale. Cultural workers organized particular groups like the Newspaper Guild, the Screenwriters Guild, the American Writers Congress, and the Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences, and Professions. Larger culture change also depended on creating vital local public cultures full of what can be called “free spaces,” in which people of different interests and views learned to deal with each other -- the Harlem Renaissance, or Doland, South Dakota, where Hubert Humphrey’s father’s drug store town was a civic center of the town. David Levering Lewis (*When Harlem Was in Vogue*), Lary May (*The Big Tomorrow*), and Lisabeth Cohen (*Making the New Deal*), among others, document how cultural organizing shifted the American dream from individualist, WASP-oriented, consumerist ideals of the 1920s to a more cooperative, racially pluralist and egalitarian vision in the 1930s. Cultural workers developed a consciousness of their role in the battle of ideas about the good life. They saw themselves allied with workers, religious groups, racial minorities, farmers and small businesses. Again in the 1960s, the civil rights movement worked profound changes in American culture. In both periods, millions of Americans came to see

themselves as builders of a democratic way of life. Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) continue in this tradition with a strong emphasis on educating people for positive culture-shaping roles.

*There are three practical elements in creating a culture of public work:*

1) **Public spaces.** There can be change in particular settings of what C. Wright Mills once called "the cultural apparatus" -- the culture-making systems that shape the world. But the larger culture won't change without renewing free spaces that create alternatives to the dominant culture, like the Humphrey drug store or the independent book stores of today, where people of different views and interests can learn how to be in conversation and work with each other.

2) **Citizen professionals.** Places like Harlem or the Humphrey drug store depended on professionals who saw their work as building the civic life of places, doing far more than dispensing services. "Never a pill without an idea," was Vice President Humphrey's chapter title describing his father's store. But in recent decades professionals today are to look at people in terms of their deficiencies, not assets and talents and to be detached from the civic life of communities. This training weakens professionals' sense of citizenship. It won't change until professionals, "knowledge workers" of all kinds," acknowledge their own interests in a good society – not pretend that they are self-less service providers. This requires professionals' developing respect for local knowledge. We are in urgent need of citizen-clergy, citizen-teachers, citizen-businessmen, citizen nurses, citizen journalists – and citizen politicians.

3) **A different kind of politics.** Finally, on this topic, we need a different kind of politics beyond partisan warfare -- broadly democratic but also non-ideological, aimed at building a good society, developing capacities for public work, and engaging the nation with the global challenges of lessening poverty, violence, disease, and fundamentalism. As Ella Baker, a great civil rights leader, once put it, it is necessary "to redefine politics as including as many kinds of people as possible and as many kinds of experiences as possible." This requires work across parties, remembering historic precedent in groups like the Nonpartisan League of the 1920s. Such politics needs to be dedicated to building the public life of places. It needs to fight injustices like growing poverty – the passion of many progressives -- and also to change public institutions that condescend to people's intelligence and values – a concern of many conservatives. Culture changing politics expands the commonwealth, the public things that we all depend upon. It is founded in deep faith in ordinary people's energies and talents. It draws from different traditions, from Republicans as well as Democrats, from Jews, Muslims, and Christians. We need such a politics in order to counter the ways in which gated communities of the mind, not only of neighborhoods, are overwhelming politics on both left and right. Mass politics uses a formula developed in the early 1970s: demonize an enemy, define issues as "good versus evil," and develop multiple ways to inflame emotion through communications technologies. Both Michael Moore and Pat Robertson use this formula, as do many election campaigns.

### **Public work history of the CDC that leads to culture change**

A number of years' work at the Humphrey Institute's Center for Democracy and Citizenship ([www.publicwork.org](http://www.publicwork.org)) with partners create possibilities for such an effort. Organizing for culture change includes what Dennis Donovan, the national Public Achievement organizer, describes as

working with “teachers as citizens,” calling schools to live up to their civic potential, organizing for the power to make it happen. It is the mission of the Neighborhood Learning Community in St. Paul, creating a “culture of learning” in which immigrants and others, from libraries to businesses and congregations, are responsible for children’s learning. Minneapolis Community and Technical College prepares student-teachers to be agents of culture change in schools who understand the life of real places and develop organizing skills. Colgate University has challenged the “Club Med” culture on campus, helping students create their own solutions to problems, not be serviced by experts. The Families and Democracy partnerships of Bill Doherty and his colleagues help families organize to counter frenetic over-scheduling, consumerism, and hyper-competitiveness.

From 1988 to 1994, we organized with a group of institutions through Project Public Life, an initiative aimed at renewing public life. Teams in different places – Augustana, a Lutheran nursing home, the College of St. Catherine, public schools and religious schools like St. Bernard’s, the Metropolitan Regional Council, Minnesota extension and others -- regularly met to deepen civic engagement. From 1993 to 1995 we coordinated a broad, nonpartisan national alliance that worked with the White House to analyze practices that overcome the citizen-government gap (<http://www.cpn.org/crm/essays/declaration.html>). Since the late 1990s we worked with Campus Compact, AASCU, Imagining America and others on the civic mission of higher education (<http://www.compact.org/civic/Wingspread/Wingspread.html>).

**Next steps:** This piece draws on the thoughts and experiences of many people. Next steps will emerge from the dialogue. Possibilities include continuing discussions in many settings on these themes, the collective drafting of a call for cultural renewal with stories that show culture change in many different settings, and creation of a sponsoring group to further the process.

## Appendix 2.

### The Core Concepts of Public Achievement<sup>1</sup>

Core concepts are a defining feature of Public Achievement; they distinguish PA from community service and many forms of service learning. Public Achievement is unique because speech and action are framed in terms of their political and public dimensions.

1. **Public Work:** The organizing concept of PA, defined as the work of ordinary citizens, who together, solve public problems and create things of lasting importance in our community, nation, or world.
2. **Politics:** Politics is the everyday processes of negotiating situations involving power relations and making public decisions (i.e. bargaining, making decisions, and thinking strategically).
3. **Citizenship:** Citizenship is the on-going contribution of citizens to our common world.
4. **Democracy:** The rule or work of the people.
5. **Freedom:** Is a product of collective self-determination. In other words, we are free if we live under the laws, society, or world that we have made for ourselves.
6. **Public:** There are three related meanings to the concept "public" that are relevant to Public Achievement: as a group of people, a kind of space, and a common interest. Creating a project that is "public" is one of the important steps in the Public Achievement process
7. **Free Spaces:** The concepts of public and freedom are combined in the idea of free spaces. Free spaces are places where people can express themselves, honestly disagree, and work together to take action. Public Achievement presents an opportunity for citizens to create their own free spaces for action.
8. **Interests:** What makes a particular person or group connected to (or interested in) an issue or problem.
9. **Diversity:** Is a fact of public life. In the public world, one encounters a variety of different people, ideas, histories, and cultures. To effectively solve public problems, one must learn to listen, appreciate, and work with others who, while different from themselves, are also affected by the same public issues and problems.
10. **Power:** Is the ability to influence other people, institutions, or processes.
11. **Accountability/Responsibility:** Being accountable is being answerable to, in PA students are accountable to the group and the public world.

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<sup>1</sup> Available online in the Teachers Guide of the Public Achievement website:  
<http://www.publicachievement.org/TeacherGuide/CoreConcepts.html>

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