Chapter 5. Putting Transformation to Work

Always challenging our quest for certainty, John Dewey challenged the Greek attempt to locate the meaning of an idea, such as "knowledge," within a transcendent notion of Truth. Philosophical pragmatism would, instead, locate the meaning of a concept, such as "engaged education," in its consequences. What difference would it practically make to any one if this notion rather than that were true? In what respects would the world be different if this alternative or that were true? There can be no difference anywhere that doesn't make a difference elsewhere . . . (Quest 142).

A secondary principle of American Pragmatism would locate "understanding" (something our courses hope to engender) not in what is taught, or even is what is learned, but in action. Pragmatism could be characterized as the doctrine that all problems are at bottom problems of conduct, that all judgments are, implicitly, judgments of value, and that, as there can be ultimately no valid distinction of theoretical and practical, so there can be no final separation of questions of truth of any kind from questions of the justifiable ends of action (C. I. Lewis, qtd. in West, *Keeping Faith* 109).

The Case

This final case study was engendered by curiosity about just what some of the "notions" Dewey refers to could come to "mean." Students had described the Leadership, Dialogue, and Change course and engaging in its Think Tanks as a formative experience of some kind (see Chapter 2, Case 2). I wondered what the consequences, in terms of action, might look like four, six, eight or ten years later. This case study draws on a small, highly selective, but I believe revealing sample of the graduate students who had participated in one (out of four) of these classes over this ten-year period. One has to be skeptical about the quality and accuracy of recall over this amount of time. Memories are open to reconstruction and any "experimenter bias" of being interviewed by a former professor/friend. However, one indication of impact and the kind of knowing these discussions reveal comes through in the clarity and specificity of the outcomes they describe (as it does in critical incident interviews). Frequently articulated with energetic certainty, they are typically focused around two or three well-articulated memories developed with examples or stories, sometimes noting as one graduate put it: "I think about this a lot." What I think we can say about this method is that it captures best what stands out, after the fact, as strongly memorable to these students. And, I believe, it suggests how engaged humanistic courses can develop some widely valued forms of understanding and a body of working knowledge that is associated in these comments with self-conscious leadership, reflective decision making, and independent, self-initiated learning—capacities many disciplines are eager to claim.

The interview template was relatively open ended, in that it did not emphasize the recall of course material but each graduate's personal take away and use of the course or Think Tank experience. Sending my questions ahead, I essentially invited them into an inquiry with me that would pose four kinds of questions:

- Do you recall one or two of the most important ideas or insights you took away, not as content knowledge but as insights you may have constructed for yourself?
- Have you used what you learned or taught yourself in any place since?
- Did you need to adapt or even significantly transform what you learned to this new setting?
- And although this may be more difficult to articulate, did this experience transform your understanding in any way?

Although this analysis will draw most particularly on the lens of leadership and decision-making, three striking observations capture the overall character and tenor of these outcomes:

- First, they are highly variable—not a predictable reflection of what was being taught. They typically take the form of quite personal insights.
- Secondly, although the memory of a method or strategy frequently prompted recall, that recall quickly took the form of action that typically had public outcomes. Their learning had consequences for other people.
- And in the majority of cases, these outcomes reflected not simply a transfer of learning but a significant, purpose-driven transformation.

This evidence of transformation may in fact be the most important outcome revealed by this longer look-back. The chance to interpret powerful ideas and test theories against the challenges of community experience opened a path to transforming one's knowing, to creatively rewriting and adapting it to new situations and contexts. They are demonstrating one of the deeper values we can claim for education in the humanities. Especially when it is socially engaged.

Using the Lens of Adaptive Leadership

Leadership, tied to decision-making and teamwork, was a foundational concept in this course. It is a hot topic in research as well as in training programs emerging in writing, psychology, management, public policy. Its combination of theory and practice articulates a set of skills often developed in socially engaged education. So this lens can make a case that resonates outside our own discourse for the kind of transferable skill also valued by managers, educators, and social activists alike, needed in public, professional and community settings. It gives us a socially significant lens with which to evaluate the outcomes of learning.

It also gives us a solidly grounded template for looking at our data in terms of four significant outcomes. The first is evidence that students have been rethinking their own *definition* of leadership and its rhetorical nature. Unlike an action that is judged to succeed or fail, with this outcome students begin to re-represent leadership as a form of inquiry. Secondly, they speak to transformations in their own *self-image* as a leader who, quite unlike the expert in charge, is able (and willing) to realize the complexity of a problem and bring others in. A third outcome they described can be the emergence of a distinctive perspective that integrates *theory with the collaborative practices* (as we saw in the Think Tanks), which often leads to reflection on their current notions and a new working theory of what that change means. Finally, for some, their stances have matured into what they call their leadership *role* which, unlike a position of merely designated authority, has been learned. In our case, students will describe a practice that combines active listening with strategically framing an adaptive problem that will draw others into a joint problem-solving inquiry.

The source for this lens comes from Ronald Heifetz, whose work we read in the class (cf. Chapter 4). A noted scholar at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, he nevertheless depicts an intensely rhetorical process he describes as "adaptive work" in *Leadership Without Easy Answers.* His conceptual lens will help us track a powerful outcome in which students have developed a new definition, self-image, stance and role that undergird the practice of adaptive, collaborative, inquiry-driven leadership. In traditional models the leader is a charismatic figure, an expert, or an authority, who frames the problem and by implication its solution. He (sic) draws others (the followers) into his vision. In Heifetz's model, however, leaders work as collaborative change agents, where success depends on being able to draw others to face what he calls "adaptive challenges." This stands in contrast to *technical problems* which "can be solved with knowledge and procedures in hand"—the standard ones for which you have ready-made answers. *Adaptive challenges,* on the other hand, often require "new learning, innovation, and new patterns of behavior" (Parks 10). Here success depends on something more difficult than marketing one's own vision, since the process can even call for "the transformation of long-standing habits and deeply held assumptions and values" just as we saw in Chapter 4.

Being a leader in such a situation calls for strategic work, not just a better argument or a charismatic personal style. The Think Tanks frequently plunged students into such challenges, in cross-hierarchy, intercultural rhetorical situations embedded in actual institutional decisions or concerns (such as creating a new Global Communication Center, recognizing a culture of stress on campus, or ways to deal with diversity). In this discussion, the term "strategic" refers to a kind of thinking that is planfully goal-directed, self-consciously adaptive, and open to change based on the test of experience. It stands in useful contrast to de Certeau's definition of "strategic" as an institutional power move and to the opportunistic, often practical "tactical" approach that Mathieu argues for (16).

Drawing instead on cognitive psychology, in the alternative approach used here "strategic" moves grow out of a more reflective process of choosing an action you can articulate and justify, then using that experience to develop and adapt that strategy based on what you learn.

Decision research can also help us identify other features of adaptive, collaborative leadership that engaged courses are good at developing. For instance, in the face of a decision a savvy leader will recognize the power of diversity and small group meetings over large gatherings. In fact, the "best approach may well be a series of interviews with individuals" because the "most important element is the *diversity* of perspectives you assemble" (Johnson 52). Why? Because this move lets you overcome the "unconscious response in humans to discuss elements that are commonly known to other members of the group,"—the groupthink that stifles innovation (52). A small group deliberation has a critical, individual cognitive dimension as well, because the "challenge, of course, is how to trick your mind into perceiving that third option, or the fourth or fifth lurking somewhere behind it" (52)—this is the "challenge of [what Johnson calls] full-spectrum thinking" (55).

Once again this is an educational issue. Early research by Paul Nutt argues forcefully for the need to *learn* such a skill. His first insight was the positive correlation "between the number of alternatives deliberated and success" (Nutt, qtd. in Johnson 67). Unfortunately, he also found that only twenty-nine percent of organizational decisions he studied considered more than one alternative. And teenagers barely edged them out with thirty percent when confronting personal choices. Moreover, there also appears to be a strong correlation between astute decision-making and recognizing—and embracing—uncertainty (56).

The Heifetz model, developed with powerful case studies drawn from dilemmas ranging from civil rights politics to environmental regulation to patient/doctor relationships, illustrates adaptive leadership in action. But does that imply that a college course can do more than describe this powerfully interactive kind of knowing? Motivated by the reputation of Heifetz's overflowing 90-seat classroom in Harvard's Center for Public Leadership, Sharon Parks fortunately undertook an intriguing, multi-year study of his approach, published as *Leadership Can Be Taught,* which will give us yet another lens for examining teaching outcomes more directly.

The educators' problem is reflected in the assumption that "leaders are born, not made." Can the academic paradigm of transferring knowledge actually "prepare people to exercise the judgment and skill needed to bring that knowledge in the intricate systems of relationships that constitute the dynamic world of practice" (Parks 4)? Moreover, "people must learn to *see* for themselves" and they "learn best from their own experience" (4-5). What Parks describes is a form of case-in-point teaching which includes some outcomes that could be used to document leadership learning in our own students. The most obvious outcome is being able to move from theory to practice as a participant. In

Heifetz's inventive terms, that is called moving from the balcony (where one can see larger patterns of interaction) to the dance floor. Once on the floor, students must be able to identify the primary concerns their specific group sees, as well as the "subtle, powerful, and unexamined assumptions they [themselves] hold" (51).

Developing leaders need to show they can think systematically about interdependent forces with "a critical, systemic, holistic perspective" (Parks 53). This includes recognizing/transforming some of one's own assumptions about leadership. The community-engaged course then works as a "holding place" to work on this transformation in which we realize we are not "in charge" or even autonomous in this radically interdependent world. Nevertheless, the actions we do take may have more effect than we supposed. We are all complicit. Finally, leaders need to regularly and persistently ask: "What are the (adaptive) challenges that are emerging" here, now (59)? Using a Heifetz lens brings into focus how a person's way of defining leadership, their own self-image, and role—from multiple perspectives—can add up to a distinctive practice of *adaptiv*e, *collaborative*, *inquiry-driven* leadership.

As we have seen, a community Thank Tank is a learning lab immersing student in deliberative leadership that starts with their exploration of a problematic issue using Critical Incident Interviews (Chapter 2, Case 2.). As we have seen, the competing perspectives they uncover and document in their Briefing Book give direction to a series of student-moderated Round Table discussions, in which a cross-section of the relevant "community" is asked to define the Problem, identify Options, and consider possible Outcomes. When the new, richly articulated foundation for deliberation and action is documented in the student-written *Findings,* it can be put into circulation as both a booklet and published on the web. Throughout the process, these students are engaged in a live experience with a generative problem-solving process where outcomes actually matter. This may explain why nearly everyone in this study talked about this process of inquiry as a key takeaway, even as they adapted it for some radically different contexts and goals.

In terms of tracking, we will approach the transcribed data from my interviews from three perspectives. First, we do so by focusing on what stood out as three topics of major concern for these students: an evolving definition of leadership; changes in their self-image; and the connection between theory and practice. A second approach lets us examine this data in terms of those markers of success that we saw in the leadership research. Finally, our analysis will probe three major categories of knowledge outcomes they raised (capacity for inquiry, collaboration, and strategic response) and how they frame the markers of success. Table 5.1 lets us compare these three modes of interpretation. Designed to highlight some of the parallels between them, it not only helps us elaborate different facets of this "knowing" as James Greeno and his colleagues described it (100), but see the wider significance and reach of these transformations.

Table 5.1. Parallels between Perspectives of Students, Research, and Observation

Key topics the graduates brought up were	Learning research sees growth when students can	Knowledge outcomes can be described as
A revised definition of leadership as a process of inquiry	Take a critical, systemic perspective on a consciously adaptive process	Articulated critical insights from an inquiry, yielding both metacognitive and working knowledge
A transformed self-image and role	See themselves as implicated in the process—not in charge	A working knowledge of collaboration across difference
A new perspective on theory and practice learned from experience	Can move from the balcony to the dance floor	Actions that combine rhetorically attuned understanding with a strategic response

What We Observed

The following analysis explores the nature of the knowledge outcomes from the right-hand column in Table 5.1, fleshing out the three distinctive kinds of knowing these graduates appear to have constructed and the uses they are putting them to. Briefly described they are:

1. Articulated critical insights. Engaged education replaces a spectator theory of knowledge-making with an experiential one—it places us in the arena, in action. It calls out what John Dewey described as "experimental doing for the sake of knowing." To understand the nature of an idea, "we turn it over, bring it into better light, rattle and shake it, thump, push and press it . . . disclosing relations that are not otherwise apparent" (*Quest* 70). Dewey's metaphors anticipate a process we might describe today as embodied learning with material effects. He wants to make this distinction perfectly clear: "inquiry proceeds by reflection, by thinking . . . but *not,* most decidedly as something cooped up within 'mind.' For experimental inquiry or thinking signifies *directed activity,* doing something which varies the conditions under which objects are observed and . . . by instituting new arrangements among them" (99).

In addition, the most powerful insights students describe are typically based on the *outcomes* of their own embodied experience—their encounters with difference, uncertainty, unexpected conflict, unanticipated success. As Dewey would argue, you grasp the real meaning of an idea when you can describe the "conditions" in which it can exist and its "consequences." "From the standpoint of experimental knowing . . . the true object of knowledge resides in the consequences of directed action" (157). And it is "the consequences" of actions and their "connectivity within concrete experience" that let us test the nature and validity of ideas (92). And finally, as we will see in students' accounts of this engaged learning, their inquiry has achieved an impressively articulated clarity. It is rising to this level of reflective metacognitive understanding that can turn learning into a basis for choice.

2. A working knowledge of collaboration across difference. Rooted in experience and designed for performance, such metacognitive understanding also remains open to change, able to function as a working hypothesis. And in this case, the performance entailed collaboration across differences in race, culture and status.

3. A rhetorically attuned understanding and strategic response. This may be one of the least documented yet most significant outcomes a liberal education aspires to. The experience of facing challenges in highly interactive, social or public contexts is transformed into a rhetorically attuned understanding that can guide a strategic response.

Articulated Critical Insight

This first outcome to which students often referred was a significant insight or challenge to previous thinking, and in some cases, it was a formative experience. Some insights were recalled as one of those sudden realizations, while others appeared to be larger in scope, more profound or personal. Martha's memory is explici*t.*[1]

> I have this moment, can still see it in my head, where I was sitting over in the cafe reading this and just having this like ah ha, whoa, this is like holy cow, just like a moment of clarity . . .
>
> [On the Think Tank] One of the most profound things for me . . . was a process of thinking through a problem . . . looking at events or feelings and trying to embody multiple perspectives. First time I really tried to do that and I saw it worked! . . . Learned about what had happened, about my role in what happened and also how I could have done it differently or in the future.
>
> [Moreover,] that was really foundational for me, to think through problems and see that I had agency; didn't have to passively accept what happened in that case and other possible cases. [In contrast] to how I grew up, . . . it gave me a strategy for seeing that I could, not maybe radically change things, at least could influence them. That was really foundational

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[1] In the quoted excerpts which follow, editorial comments have been interpolated in brackets for clarity, including the topic of discussion. The speakers vetted this chapter and chose their own names.

> for me and then I adapted that assignment and used it in my freshman class.

We might read this last point as an instance of the transfer of an assignment (albeit to a significantly different context). But the more revealing outcome was her articulation of what was actually a set of *experiential* goals for learning that shaped the design of her own course:

> I think honestly, I wanted them to have an experience that was similar to mine. To do that process of thinking through what happened and have those moments of realization . . . I wanted them to do what I did [laughs], but also plumb the depths of self-advocacy.

When asked about "usefulness," her comments switch to an on-going reflective process on her own social agency:

> Significantly useful. It really shaped everything . . . For me individually it was my most foundational academic slash life experience. And that's why maybe I'm still [eight years later] figuring out why that's the case. I think it has to do with problem solving; I think it has to do with recognizing possibility . . . even when it's like . . .

Leaders need her insight into the value of recognizing possibility despite difficulty. The challenge is translating that into knowledge you can use. Insights are more likely to become genuine working knowledge when they are transformed into *articulated* insights. Developmental psychologists Carl Bereiter and Marlene Scardamalia can see this outcome in the psychological transition young (and poor) writers can make from "knowledge-telling" to "knowledge-transformation." In knowledge-telling writers can rehearse (or even knowledge-dump) what they already know. But "transformationrequires moving from a "content space" into a "rhetorical space" which demands rethinking, reworking one's knowledge into more responsive and fully developed thoughts. It is this "interaction between problem spaces . . . that is the basis for reflective thought in writing" ("From Conversation" 11*).* We can see Martha as a writer in the act of articulating and transforming old interpretive accounts of her potential:

> I never felt like I was doing something, like I was making something happen . . . [It] spoke to the difficulty of getting people to do things, or changing things for the better. It just made me see it was possible—but that it was also really difficult. And that is something that has probably stuck with me, since . . . I think it is something that shows up in my dissertation too, that it's possible, but it's hard. A lot of work. But for me that was hopeful because I think prior to that I think I thought it was like "What's the point?" You know these things could be changed, and should

> be changed, but *I* [emphasis added] certainly don't have the resources or the wherewithal, or the ability or the whatever, the authority to change them. And I think I learned that it wasn't about me necessarily, and that I could, we could, it's just kind of a matter of embracing the uncertainty and seeing the possibility . . . Spoke to like hope.

Throughout these case studies of adults, we are seeing a remarkable degree of self-awareness linked to a style of metacognitive inquiry. They have made the experiential leap from Bereiter and Scardamalia's potentially "inert knowledge" into actionable understanding—a leap which is the mark of engaged education ("Knowledge"181). This self-awareness often includes a situated recognition of contradiction within their own experience, as seen by Megan below:

> My take away? It challenged ideas about what I thought leadership meant . . . as something you either succeed or fail at. For example, I taught a lesson in class that didn't go the way I thought it was going to go so I identified that as failure of leadership. After talking with you and my peers, we realized that that wasn't the problem . . . it was how I approached the situation, didn't fit the context appropriately. So one of the things I learned is it's really about taking positions of inquiry in deliberation. That it's really all very contextually based. Which make a lot of sense. Silly I didn't think of that before because we study rhetoric [laughs].

For Devon, learning new tools of inquiry turned into what he called his "major revelation" when he felt the contact with the social reality of writing:

> That was the eye-opening. Forced to think about own writing. It was a break through moment to think about: what is my purpose for writing? At that point I was, "I'm writing this paper for the teacher who likes . . ." [And then] I personally just said, "No I'm writing for myself. What am I trying to achieve? What are *my* purposes? What is my plan? I'm writing for the larger community and what do I want to do?"

When rhetorical and analytical methods (in this case, collaborative planning and problem analysis) are both studied and put to use in a context that can push back, students may learn as much about their own unquestioned practices as about the tools. In the cases which follow, students will often refer to a specific, research-based, named strategy that was used, discussed and adapted to the project at hand. (See Chapter 2, fn. 13 for an overview.) But what matters is what they *did* with it.

What stands out about this sort of outcome—these articulated insights—is how they have moved into so many different life situations, from writing and teaching to reflecting on your upbringing and the possibility of personal agency.

Of course, this is what education is supposed to do. But note how these outcomes are couched in the multi-faceted language of experience shaped in social interaction. And like the sensitive quills of a porcupine, such knowledge can be easily triggered by all manner of new events. From the first Community Think Tank, this way of representing ideas had emerged as a distinctive outcome. Unlike a standard academic or policy deliberation, these "results" were being framed as actionable take-aways relevant to the participants and their differing social, cultural, and workplace domains. This, I would argue, is the added value of engaging with new ideas on the playing field of social experience.

A Working Knowledge of Collaboration across Difference

If the first set of comments captures the articulation of insight that experiential learning can prompt, another category of outcomes shows that new understanding being developed into what I have called *working knowledge* (Flower, "Intercultural Knowledge"). That is the sort of knowledge that may be theory-based or a hypothesis but in a form tied to practice—a kind of knowing that *works.* Here we see learning being put to active use in the individual's own research, teaching, and, well, in places you might not expect. In these accounts, one practice that frequently rises to the surface is the student's new understanding of collaboration and the role of conflict.

Teamwork, of course, is highly valued in many of the professions students are aspiring to and is frequently assigned rather than taught in many disciplines in college. Moreover, instructors are "rarely aware of the problems students are facing" (Wolfe v) and students often equate teamwork with merely the most efficient division of labor (Rooney et al.). By contrast, the working knowledge the Think Tank graduates describe seems much closer to the best practices from teamwork research, which can range from serious listening and eliciting silent stories to using difference and managing productive conflict (Paulus and Yang). And when that difference also includes race, gender, culture, and status, how many standard college courses are ready to equip students with more than good intentions?

Westin was facing his own challenge as a white man committed to working across racial difference in a community project. Speaking of the leadership course:

> This was my most sustained teamwork project I have ever done, still have ever done. I thought that was really great because you don't get that in the humanities . . . When I think about my ability to work on a team, I mostly think about this . . . In an ideal sense you are drawing out other people's strengths.

Megan had a more personal response.

> Writing together was really useful for me. It took some of the pressure off me, like feeling I had to craft perfect language . . . It

> was 100% collaborative and it took some of the burden of perfection off me.

For some, their working knowledge shows up as a key practice in their own research, especially in this case from Maureen when that research is actually focused on professional teamwork:

> Most memorable, first is . . . the critical incident interview. Being able to . . . reveal some of the tacit knowledge, . . . [which] they would not be able to reveal . . . if you just asked. Versus summarize. Tacit knowledge is one thing I'm trying to tap into with professionals . . . [Laughs] So I definitely think about [these two ideas] kinda all the time. Talk about transformation!
>
> Another thing is group work—also part of my dissertation [laughs]. When I think back to the most memorable collaborative experience that I've had, that class with the think tank was the most memorable group work that I've I had. There were challenges we faced, but the collaboration we did, part of my research is also on productive conflict. When I think of the ideal situation where I engaged in productive conflict, that project immediately pops into my mind. We'd get together, have our own viewpoints, then we would challenge each other, pull apart ideas . . . then like merge things together. Yeah, it was incredible. I enjoyed every single minute of it. (Maureen)

As Craig Moreau discovered, this sort of productive conflict fostered by difference-driven inquiry was a real driver of innovation in professional teamwork ("Teams"). However, in the professional writing courses he then studied, student teams were marked by conflict avoidance and even found it "counter-intuitive." Happily, his workshop on strategies for "productive conflict" produced some statistically significant changes. But dealing with conflict is not easy, as he concluded: "students need more scaffolding to see difference as a generative resource" ("Teaching" 29). Experience with situations in which your innovation might count is the ideal scaffold.

As teamwork research also notes, homogeneous groups do indeed build better social bonds but not necessarily better work (Woolley and Malone). And Maureen's experience with community inquiry locates her team's productive bonds in the value of a more widely shared engagement across difference.

> Homogenous? There was definitely diversity. [She reviews the team's makeup: two MAs, three undergrads, Hispanic, non-native speaker, first generation, and privileged backgrounds.] We talked about outside experience and pulled on those to help us come up with different plans like . . . how do we get the administration involved [She describes how one member pulled on

> his experience on the student paper, "like these are some things we do" and another on "connecting to roots" in non-profit outreach.] We just pulled on these different things. It's like I have no experience doing either of those things. That's amazing. What can WE do to help out.

Although the critical incident interview is basically a research method, her representation of it sounds much more like a stance to research that became tested and refined.

> I initially went into the critical incident interviews with the understanding that you're constantly trying to push people to be a little bit more accountable to the things that they say and to explain those things in more detail . . . [However, the working knowledge she went on to develop is more clearly about the interactive nature of inquiry.] But I also remember [in yet another piece of research] I kept on trying to push them too far because I was looking for something that wasn't there, so I realized I need to be a little more perceptive about when to stop. (Maureen)

In particular, roadblocks and problems that challenge assumptions often produce such realizations. This graduate continued:

> Another thing I really took away was how to bridge gaps between different stakeholders. When we talked to admin, students, faculty, I remember the big thing was [whether] there was communication or lack of communication and misconceptions about what other groups thought . . . I remember [at a round table, some of the administrators] had absolutely no idea what was going on with the students, just like so mind blowing to me; how do you guys not know this? It's right in front of your faces, right under your nose! Then I realized there is a certain kind of information that just gets circulated in these groups. And because there can be such insularity . . . that it's really hard to be aware . . . Yeah, of course, people should be talking to one another, but taking that class made me really realize the gravity, the importance of getting people to communicate with one another across these differences. Now it's something even in my research I am trying to bridge, in technical communication [in college and workplaces]. (Maureen)

Difference takes many forms. In this next excerpt Andre describes a technique he, as a teacher, imported into his Public Problems course. (His students called the technique "a kind of Creative Thinking.") When I asked if there were any parallels to our course, his response was rather emphatic.

> Useful? Oh yeah, oh my gosh, absolutely. The process of Rivaling. For writing proposals . . . Shaped how I taught. Constantly trying to get students to think about alternative perspectives or how adequately are they representing the voices of other people who have a stake in this issue. (Andre)

Here a strategy for responding to difference could mean a fundamental shift is how you envision stakeholders and an audience. It's not like

> who you are writing to in academic lit or to people you are writing about in your topic area, but they are the people who live right next door to you or [whom you] attend classes with that are making decisions . . . Having had some experience dealing with a public problem in the Think Tank, where the stakes are real, . . . absolutely influenced [my teaching].

Of course, it's reassuring to see the usefulness of specific applications you may teach toward (as when students say, "I did value being able to bridge theory and practice.") Or when a graduate comments: "I think back to think tank approaches and how I can implement them in my research right now" or with a graduate advisor. However, other uses—of say, problem analysis—turn up in unlikely places:

> Another big takeaway—naming things, giving something a name. . . . in my research and in my personal life . . . being able to have a reference that links a bunch of ideas together and being able to talk about it . . . My boyfriend and I get into debates . . . Politics, . . . we unpacked this term conservative . . . where it came from . . . I was telling him, there just wasn't a term conservative, (it) described values . . . (Maureen)

What these comments help document is first how the knowledge people describe is not just propositional, but is a form of working knowledge. That is, that special form of knowing that is grounded in concepts, theory, or methods, but has also been transformed into socially embedded practices (like persuading your boyfriend). And the well-articulated character of this conceptual understanding is what makes those practices both testable and revisable. This second outcome, not surprising for a community-based experience, is the enthusiastic capacity we see for working collaboratively across difference. This striking outcome can be hard to come by in academic settings (Bennett et al.).

A Rhetorically Attuned Understanding and Strategic Response

Perhaps the most intriguing and complex outcome of engagement is this third one: the sophisticated form of knowing that emerges when students *try out* both theory and rhetorical practice *in live contexts*. The experience not only prompts them to draw on learned insights, but to do so with a more rhetorically attuned understanding of the situation. They are able to transform knowing into thoughtful and strategic responses to challenging social interactions. Secondly, they are doing this with a remarkable level of metaknowledge that lets them articulate and evaluate their own choices. From an educational point of view, as we saw in Ryan Roderick's work on self-regulation (Ch 2) documenting this level of reflective and clearly conceptualized self-knowledge can make a powerful statement about learning and the usefulness of engagement.

Having evidence of longer-term effects is obviously relevant to our case for the humanities and engaged education in particular. Can we show that such courses build not only personal agency and social responsibility, but also skills valued in our public and professional lives? How do these skills stack up against social expectations for, say, productivity, knowledge building, teamwork, or leadership? The interview questions asked these graduates for evidence of transfer, such as, if or when they used the course or the Think Tanks tools for inquiry on their own. However, the following accounts are better described as the result of a *transformation*.

In this process of adaptive re-creation, the first step is often not tinkering with a rhetorical tool but working from a new starting point they described as a change in "how I think about . . ." Or "how I approach . . ." And from here graduates describe the experience of strategic knowledge building, creating related but novel moves, intentionally adapted to specific challenges, from leadership to job hunting.

In a nice example of traditional transfer, a graduate laughingly describes how, yes, the various methods of the Think Tank shaped her own research: "I used the Think Tank method to motivate my dissertation research method . . . How to bring people together to collaboratively solve a problem." But when asked if she has thought any more broadly about the model of leadership we studied, her picture of on-going, creative, self-directed performance emerges:

> I never stopped thinking about it. Taught it to my first-year writing students, then [a colleague] and I organized a conference [for a national organization] on how to be a graduate leader . . . I think of my research as being about writing as leadership. . . being an academic leader . . . I think about that a lot . . . ["About" I ask, "transforming your understanding?"] Transformed the way I think about leadership . . . Informed the way I see myself as a leader . . . When you first gave us that assignment, I thought, "I don't see myself as a leader." Transformed the way I think about my work, . . . now as a professor . . . as a woman . . . and having a role in the university where I have some power. (Amy)

> I don't think it was like "transfer." For me it was more individual, it kind of influenced how I approached what I was doing,

> whether it be teaching, my own research, my own [laugh] life. I think it helped me keep asking questions. ["How come?" I ask.] Because I embraced the idea that problems are never as simple as we think they are . . . Bringing in other people. That has really stuck with me on so many areas . . . But I feel like that problem-solving stance has to be adapted. (Martha)

For Dasen, the process of "adapting" starts with a new way of thinking about problems and collaborative leadership from which he creates some original, inventive practices of his own.

> The Think Tank process was very illuminating . . . What I learned from that, what I took away as valuable from that, "We think we know . . . Oh, here's a problem; here's the solution." We think we know the solution. Well, we really don't know the solution. We've got to get behind the solution; we've got to investigate. And I've taken that in two different ways.

Which for him turns out to be not just two, but a set of radically different adaptations to being an executive officer in an organization, on the one hand, and to being a part-time student, on the other.

> And when I first took over [this leadership position] I actually sat down and talked it out with each of department heads to find out what are the issues, what am I not seeing, and how can I best assist. These questions, these techniques are things I think I learned from the Think Tank. And I also learned . . .

As he goes on to describe these situated, reflective translations, their strategic, adaptive nature becomes clear.

> On the job market . . . I invoked my experiences with the community think tank, I even gave . . . them a copy of the . . . materials and . . . link to the website, that I was a part of! . . . To demonstrate I've got some experience thinking about these larger issues . . . Got offered a job. So it helped [laughs]. . . . I'm thinking about rhetoric and leadership from both a theoretical and practical perspective—and in my dissertation as well. [And that was not all.] And I've applied it in different situations, in my home life: just talking to people and listening to people and really getting the Story-Behind-the-Story.

There is clearly an impressive individual personal stance that stands behind this portrait of knowledge transformation across contexts. It builds on a disposition and ability that is not *created* by a class, however strong its reported impact. On the other hand, from the perspective of leadership and decision making, one outcome more directly attributable to engaged learning is this strategically constructed metaknowledge which gets articulated as his “own leadership style.” The capacity for such knowledge making clearly has reach, showing up in both teaching and in the following case, in job hunting.

> I thought about it as a listening tour. I actually use the phrase, “a listening tour.” That’s what I got out of me doing interviews for our Think Tank. Essentially what I am doing is listening. That’s part of my leadership style . . . listening to people I may necessarily have authority over . . . people who are involved may have better ideas, better strategies. (Dasen)

In teaching returning veterans, he, like Martha, adapts collaborative planning to recreate his own learning experience, to get them, as he says, “at the beginning, to help get them thinking, to stimulate metacognition.”

Another feature of socially engaged learning is the way it can disrupt not just prior knowledge, but practice. As Megan relates, the community context “challenged some ideas I had about what leadership meant and how I see myself in relation to that concept.” What Megan recalled, however, is not just a tool or method but how this experience with a demanding situation shaped her performance, as well as her attitude and confidence.

> Having to the facilitate a Round Table itself . . . [in a later] similar situation I felt a little more comfortable jumping in . . . asking “could you go back to . . .” Felt I would be able to adapt, to react to what others might do or say.

This comfort dealing with problem-solving, inquiry and/or uncertainty also turns up in changes in her practice in teaching and research.

> [Another] thing I think about a lot, that’s rivaling . . . That’s something I find myself doing with myself with the work I do . . . Analyzing something and I think “This is what the problem is or I am reading it this way?” I say well, what if it’s not that way, what if it’s something else, or why do you think it has to be that way, why can’t it be something else?
>
> [In teaching] It make me feel less prescriptive . . . Now a little more flexibility in what you can do in a classroom. Now, “here’s the goal, if it doesn’t happen that way, we’ll figure it out!”

Because the experience of a community-engaged class working toward real outcomes can raise the stakes and relevance of one’s choices, it is more likely to force a reconsideration of old assumptions.

> Working with people I would never otherwise work with, exposed me to different ideas and different approaches to tasks,

> and I remember thinking, “Why did they do it that way! I didn’t do it that way!” . . . Initially it was uncomfortable; I didn’t like it, cause I couldn’t control it [laughs], but . . . now I can see the connection to . . . working with different faculty members . . . to see things from their perspective. (Megan)

The challenge of carrying out effective social interactions comes up frequently in these comments. For Andre like Dasen it starts with reading the situation. For him what “stuck” as the “Number 1 insight from the readings” was the “ways people conceptualize problems in a deliberative or decision-making space . . . It shaped the way I think about problem[-solving] strategies . . .” More significant was the next step when he used Heifetz’s distinction between technical and adaptive problems to shape a strategically attuned understanding of what was happening in a non-profit organization he had started to work with.

> In the midst of a discussion, in the back of my mind I recognized, as I was hearing what the person was saying. [It was that] tendency to gravitate to, “Oh let’s find a solution” . . . [in place of] a more labor- intensive process of figuring out what their problem looks like from multiple perspectives, then actually figuring out a way forward that weighs those against each other . . .

This sort of “fundamentally useful” metaknowledge, which he attributes to “doing the interviews for that course work,” in turn shapes his strategic response. In practical situations and his own research, you need to know:

> How to think on your feet about the kinds of questions you are asking and what you want to get from that interview. How to reflexively handle myself in these situations. (Andre)

The path of transformation, however, is not straight forward. Some, like this graduate student Westin, explicitly reject or “don’t relate to transfer,” focusing instead on the work of building their own model which Westin describes as: “I watch you, saying, ‘I am going to also take a stand in this difficult thing.’ You gave me one model or template for doing that.” The path Westin recalls involves both difficulties and potential outcomes, starting with his skepticism about the whole practice of local deliberation, and his question:

> Is that [process] successful when it becomes institutional? . . . Not sure . . . At the time I was much more skeptical.

Yet in the next breath:

> This was the most productive entry point for me in all of my course work about thinking through an individual scholar’s agency within an institution. By far. Who else even tries?

Speaking on the “model” he saw:

> It was a very difficult class to know what we were learning at the moment. But I think that’s your teaching philosophy, so . . . I continue to think about Heifetz’s “technical” versus “adaptive challenge.”

As an aside, he notes:

> I thought in a faculty [job] interview, how I would be able to politely ask, “What’s the last adaptive challenge that your department has faced?” And if they can’t say anything, that would be a sign to me. [laughter]

Then back to the difficulty of all the new terms,

> But what I eventually internalized is, I name them as scaffolding strategies for getting people to talk. I’ve really taken that question with me.

When I ask: “The question?” he replies:

> How do we scaffold people into inquiry?

Not a small question. As Westin suggests, this path of transformation is often motivated not by the current situation, but by the desire to nurture an aspiration or vision in a complex (sometimes seemingly intractable) social setting or institutional practice.

Our final account of transformation introduces just this sort of dilemma, suggesting why learning in the context of a live, socially engaged learning experience may be so significant when we pose the question: So what?

> The biggest impact was the power of how you define a community problem. . . [As in, “We don’t have an XXX Center.”] We were assuming we had the solution in how we were defining it. A big moment for me . . . the process of redefining . . . Number One I think. That continued to stay with me as I became involved in university work . . . I became very attuned to how people were defining the problem at hand . . . Transformed for me how to participate . . . and how to take on leadership roles [when you need to] get people to define a problem in a different way. Doing that in a meeting was something I think I got from doing the Think Tank. (Katherine)

The capacity to draw folks into re-defining a problem was called into play again when Katherine’s campus group had, as she said, already dived into the “rabbit hole of getting data” on the solution to a problem they had already framed as “We need a Child Care Center!” To replace that process of solving a "technical" problem with inquiry, Katherine reframed the proposed solution as a question: "Well what were the issues the graduate students were having . . .?" And her approach was to pose that question at a regional conference, where the tendency was,

> they always want to make a survey. My take was . . . we started hosting lunches on their experiences . . . mixed with critical incident interviews . . . [And] found out we needed to understand what people were already doing . . . [and recognize there had been a] big change in graduate demographics.

The strategic nature of her knowledge transformation (into what she calls "certain principles I followed") stands out when the members of the national project she directed wanted to devise a strategic plan. In making their case, many groups wanted

> to produce a student bill of rights. . . . In a leadership role it felt to me like a big choice that really weighed on me. On the one side, there was the more activist side. Framing [the response] as a bill of rights had the potential to empower students. On the other hand, what the community think tank bought into the picture was "What does it mean when you're trying to make an institutional change?" . . . I remember you saying, "But how do you think [that an administrator] is going to feel when she reads, or . . . the department head . . . you are going to circulate this around campus . . ." It kind of became my approach to dealing with the graduate students. It opened me up to having to think about other institutional actors and also hierarchy . . . Doing the community think tank helped me think strategically about how to use certain forms of hierarchy, bringing certain people into these things, and how you often needed their leverage.

Her comment about a simple exchange between student and professor is a nice example of constructing a practice from an idea. Like a Bakhtinian utterance that implies a response, Katherine translates my simple problem-posing question into a model of intervention and interaction. And that transformation occurred, as is often the case, when a conflict pops up, well after the class is over.

> There were things I didn't get at the time. Like trying to make the Think Tank reporting be "dialogic." Don't think I really quite got that [laughs.] . . .Maybe I understood the principle of it, but it wasn't until I was in a situation where I could start the see the problems [when the group] wanted to create institutional policy like documents, wherein they had a very clear solution of what they were trying to go for and I'd walk into the meeting,

> knowing "No one's ever going to go for this." It's like one idea; it's not budging; it's not showing other perspectives; we're doomed . . .
>
> I began to see, "oh right, when we go into these things, we need to bring in, we need show a bit of a dialogue." Somewhat similar to what they talk about as transfer, but I don't think it was something I got and I was transferring; it was more like a delayed, putting-it-together. I felt like it was always at times when it felt like something didn't work.
>
> At the time I thought that part of trying to represent this in a dialogic way came out of a sense of principle that that was somehow also the right thing to do, to represent all the different stakeholders, but I think it was in these moments of also seeing it as a strategic move.

Katherine's description of "using things from this class" extends to a controversial choice between working like an

> activist ("We just need to go on strike!") or more like corporate leadership . . . . But how are grad students supposed to adapt to either of these models? So I was trying to find a way to use the approach in the community think tank model. It had a way I could see it straddling or blending parts of this . . . It spoke to a position graduate-student leaders are often facing . . . Which model, what kind of framework am I using to approach this?

For this graduate, the process moves into a larger intellectual arena of shaping educational policy and the experience of negotiating among different problem frames. But the cognitive move is not the transfer of tools, but rather a way of constructing a challenging new question for herself as an act of inquiry. Note, too, how this form of knowing is built progressively, a constructive process set in motion when she encounters a new problem. Along this path, her "biggest insights" come to influence

> my own research interest in education policy . . . This class actually started to shape my research interest, trying to understand, if the problem I was really interested in was how to change or how to shape some these policies. A lot of the focus was always on these critiques . . . and the thing that was the big shift for me after this class and for my later work, was actually looking to, "Well, what were other people either in higher education or in other professional organizations, what were they doing that influenced, or didn't, any of this other stuff?" I think there was an orientation shift . . .

When this focus on inquiry turns up in teaching, it is again on a personally defined problem

> I can't teach a community literacy course . . . A dream course. So I adapt. [In her workshop on writing a research proposal, she sees the educational goal as seeking] knowledge that we don't have, something that we need to understand . . . [on the] problem, defining and how we make that compelling.

As other participants have mentioned, the desired outcome of this teaching goes well beyond transfer to instead construct the kind of experience she had had.

> wanted them to see with their own experience, as students, their own senses of expertise . . . Create something where they had some level of their own situated expertise to bring to it . . . build from community problems here. (Katherine)

Like her aspiration to create dialogic encounters, this is a rhetorically strategic response emerging from both that "sense of principle . . . the right thing to do" and sustained adaptive reflection.

It is rather hard to sum up all these innovations, interpretations, aspirations people see as linked to an often-distant experience in a course. That is as it should be, because what they are tracing are paths of transformation. Out of the interaction between theory and practice that engaged learning can offer, each has developed and can articulate a richer rhetorical understanding of new situations tied to their own distinctive, thoughtfully strategic response. Other community linked courses will combine academic ideas with personal engagement in different ways and are likely to produce different, but related learning outcomes. However, what we are seeing is the nature of learning that an engaged education is in fact creating–and the value of tracking it.