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***DYNAMICS OF FACULTY ENGAGEMENT IN THE MOVEMENT FOR DEMOCRACY'S  
EDUCATION AT NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY:  
BACKGROUNDS, PRACTICES, AND FUTURE HORIZONS***

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## Introduction

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Over the past several years, the growth of faculty-based initiatives in democratic pedagogy, civic engagement, and public scholarship at Northern Arizona University (NAU) has exploded. Indeed, there are significant signs that the democratic agency of faculty from myriad backgrounds—in collaboration with students and members of the broader community—is beginning to generate significant institutional and cultural change on campus, in the city of Flagstaff, and beyond. Here we analyze 17 interviews that we conducted during the spring of 2014 with faculty who have been engaged in this democratic movement. Our purpose is to collaboratively and dialogically explore questions that contribute to a more textured understanding of the backgrounds, motivations, visionary aspirations, and pedagogical practices, as well as the spaces and initiatives that faculty employed for collective action. We seek to offer a rich interpretation of the transformations that faculty are undergoing in this dynamic process, as well as broader shifts in the cultural meanings and institutional practices at NAU.

In the first two sections, we explore the backgrounds and motivations that tend to be intertwined with the democratic agency and civic initiatives of faculty who have been among the early leaders and adopters in the movement for democracy education at NAU (in most cases faculty are both leaders and early adopters insofar as nearly all became teachers and learners amidst the growing group of faculty who form the core of this initiative). In the third section, we examine how faculty negotiate and seek to reconcile their professional work—particularly their pedagogical practices—and their civic identities. We find that even as this work is very demanding and involves risks, most faculty discern profound synergies that often enhance *both* their professional aspirations, agency, and efficacy, *and* their democratic civic commitments, engagements, and co-generative powers. These faculty are profoundly creative in terms of how they invent and interweave multiple registers of aspiration, empowerment, and accomplishment. Unleashing this creativity is integral to their resilience as well as to their growing ambitions. In the fourth section, we trace how faculty involved in democratic and civically engaged practices are often transformed—their sense of self, who they are, their scholarship, their sense of how they want to be as members of the academy in relation to

the world of broader publics—especially as they begin to weave previously disparate social justice work into more integrated narratives of democratic pedagogy and civic possibilities. These transformations both register and provoke further shifts in the culture of our institutions, which as we discuss in a later section, are absolutely crucial to movements of democratization that are profound and resilient. In the fifth section, we explore spaces and collective practices that faculty have employed and crafted in order to move beyond both the isolation that is so common in academic cultures, as well as the legacies of pedagogy and institutional relationships, patterns, and power that are significantly at odds with democratic practices and public purposes. These collaborative practices have been integral to exchanging and cultivating knowledge about democratic pedagogy, scholarship on teaching and learning, and multiple modes of civic engagement. They are, in fact, profoundly intentional engines of personal and collective transformation and cultural development. In section six, we investigate ways that this transformation moves outward to catalyze broadening democratic empowerment and change across NAU and in the wider community. In our conclusion, we reflect upon both the precariousness and the promise of this movement for democratic educational transformation at NAU and in broader national networks.

Throughout this essay, we seek to remain attuned—and to attune our readers—to the dynamic and often musical processes that we take to be the heart and soul of this democratic movement. In our previous research paper for the Kettering Foundation, we discussed the concept of vocation at some length.<sup>1</sup> The richest articulations of vocation speak to the profound articulations of our inmost passions and interests with public goods and life.<sup>2</sup> As we conducted interview dialogues with our colleagues, we were repeatedly struck by how these articulations unfold in a dynamic process. As noted above, faculty

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<sup>1</sup> Romand Coles and Blase Scarnati, “Democracy Education Beyond Enclosure: Reflections on Liberal Education, Engaged Democracy, and Vocation,” research paper written for the Kettering Foundation (October 30, 2013). This paper is further developed in Romand Coles and Blase Scarnati, “Transformational Ecotones in Higher Education: Craftsperson-Ethos and Northern Arizona University’s CRAFTS Movement,” in *Democracy’s Education: Public Work, Citizenship, and the Future of Higher Education*, ed. Harry C. Boyte (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015); and Romand Coles and Blase Scarnati, “Beyond Enclosure: Pedagogy for a Democratic Commonwealth,” *Higher Education Exchange* (2014).

<sup>2</sup> These articulations may be situated along a spectrum from relative harmony to heated and disruptive dissent, and many may shift their positions or occupy more than one in various aspects of their vocational work and action. We emphasize this to underscore the importance of communitarian, deliberative, and agonistic thematics in many robust forms of democratic engagement.

members' deep passions, narratives, and visions led them to experiment with democratic pedagogical modes that not only had a transformative impact upon their students, but upon themselves as well. Often practices of pedagogy reflected back upon and modulated their own sense and story of themselves—their “public narrative,” to borrow Marshall Ganz’s term. Their democratic commitments and sense of a calling became richer and stronger—acquiring new and sometimes unexpected meanings, textures, and directions. These, in turn, led to further experimentation with emergent practices—with their students, their colleagues, their communities. The dynamic spirals to and fro between inner depths of purpose and external engagements and practices that become, we believe, the vital movements through which our sense of our calling and the myriad forms of democratic work are energized, repeatedly find emergent forms that are responsive to shifts in ourselves and the world, and gradually acquire the sorts of resilience that are key to flourishing democratic cultures. They engender and embody the *living* character of vocation.

In our previous research paper, we also discussed Richard Sennett’s conception of how “domain shifts” are key to the excellence of seasoned craftspeople, as we take ideas and modes of working in one area and bring them creatively to bear upon another. In the spiraling between the depths of our selves and the world of relationships and practices, we repeatedly see such domain shifts playing an integral role in the co-creative character of democratic transformation in faculty. We see this, especially, as new democratic ideas and ways of doing circulate provocatively among diverse practices, such as teaching, community collaborations, and relationships among faculty, as well as our engagements with the university’s administration.

This democratic evolution of selves and practices is nothing if not musical, recalling again the vocal resonances in the etymology of *vocation*. As we listen to our colleagues, we are repeatedly struck by how profoundly musical their stories, affects, achievements, and struggles—their lives—have been and continue to be. We are teaching and learning with each other as we seek to advance democratic pedagogy, scholarship, civic engagement, and institutional change in higher education. Much has been accomplished. Yet running through it all, and perhaps most significant, we believe that we are once again learning how to *sing*—vocare, *to be truly in vocation—to listen closely*

*when others do, and to call to each other in this amazingly musical and democratic improvisation.*

This paper is both a reflection of and a hopeful contribution to that always precarious and uncertain improvisation of democracy. We are inexpressibly grateful for our colleagues, their knowledge, their bold practice, and the musical examples of their work and lives. We are so very grateful, too, for Kettering Foundation, which made this work possible. While the authors take responsibility for the words that follow, we are joyfully aware of how the “we” that sings here is much bigger than “us.”

## Who are these faculty?

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The faculty we interviewed were early adopters of and often leaders in the Action Research Teams (ARTs)—the civic engagement initiative at Northern Arizona University (NAU). Many, as they came into the ARTs, were already working in very interdisciplinary ways. Most were focused on problem-based research and were driven by a personal sense of public engagement and purpose. Two faculty were hired by the First-Year Seminar (FYSeminar)-ARTs Program directly from their work with the ARTs as Graduate Assistant Mentors while completing their Master of Arts in Sustainable Communities (MSUS) degree at NAU. Two others were graduates of MSUS, but returned as faculty after completing their PhD work elsewhere. Other faculty came from diverse interdisciplinary fields of study, such as African American studies, anthropology, criminal justice with an interdisciplinary social justice emphasis, environmental studies, ethnic studies, Latin American studies, and sociology, among others. Some came from less interdisciplinary backgrounds, such as biological sciences, political science, political theory, and Spanish. This huge range of disciplinary orientation is emblematic of the ARTs. As one colleague said, the ARTs “requires a lot of people from all over the place to talk with one another,” who also “have a common interest, but no common backgrounds.”

Many, too, were working on research that focused on social problems, but the ARTs allowed them to bring their research into direct engagement with community members to cooperatively bring about change. For example interdisciplinary, engaged, problem-solving work brought one faculty member back to higher education. She had focused her career on teaching expeditionary learning at the high school level because she believed that higher education was too disengaged with the greater world. Another, who was employed in a state body working with institutions of higher education in Mississippi, pursued philosophy at the graduate level because of her personal passion. She would ultimately work to connect people “working in the world” to the still current ideas of classical philosophy. This allowed her to bring together the frames of “field philosophy” and “public interest” that are now key to her approach. So, too, another colleague who does research on social movements, women, and violence is now able to

connect her interest in civic engagement with her public work to create deliberative forums in Arizona. A faculty working in biosciences has always had a passion to “get [scientific research] out in public” and acquired a degree in graphic design to help bring that about. Now this colleague is using slam poetry and other artistic modes as vehicles to connect her interest in facilitating communication around public issues with students and the community in our Arts Through All Media (ATAM) ART. For another colleague coming from African American and ethnic studies, public art has long been incredibly important to him. Beginning as a journalist focusing on community concerns in an east coast city, he became an “activist-scholar coming out of art.” He brought the Flagstaff Southside community together to collaboratively work on a large mural, painted on the side of the Murdoch Community Center, that features prominent African American Flagstaff citizens from the last century. The coalitions built through the mural project remain important catalysts for community activism.

Another colleague talked about how interdisciplinary work and teaching in the ARTs has reshaped her sense of self as a scholar. She said, “I really feel that, in some ways, I don’t really have a discipline anymore.” Prior to coming to NAU, she had taught in a political science department where she “increasingly felt that there was a staleness about teaching canonical political theory.” One of the things that had attracted her to the academy was that she sought time to be solitary; to read and reflect on deeper questions about the political realities of the world. Yet there was always “this activist itch”—“this desire to understand why things are the way they are . . . and thinking that academic work could help me with an explanation and, therefore, also perhaps with the kind of activist part of my life. I think that I have always thought of myself as a scholar-activist—pretty much all through the time that I have been an academic I have been active in political and community work. So, I think there [are] some continuities and discontinuities [between her disciplinary work and the engaged, public, and political work of the ARTs]. . . . I deeply believe . . . in empowerment . . . in a citizen sense, . . . in a sense of being an active, shaping voice in community concerns in one’s public world.”

For the faculty who were early adopters of and leaders in the ARTs, finding problems to explore through their research that involved public purposes was not difficult. Given their own personal orientation, they were able to bring their disciplinary

research and public work together in complementary ways. For many, the ARTs enabled them to connect with earlier efforts in public work and then move their practice to a much more intentional level. One key dean on campus who has supported civic agency work at NAU noted how faculty working in the ARTs are linking their individual research to community-engaged work. The ARTs, she said, provide an “opportunity to articulate the discipline with the real world.” We see this as an important and very hopeful observation. If, indeed, the ARTs are able to open a space where faculty can now begin to actualize the connection between disciplinary research and practice, and public research and personal passion, then perhaps the ARTs present one motivated locus of power for institutional change. We are seeing the ARTs enable many faculty to overcome both the barriers of institutional and disciplinary silos and the dampening effects of institutional inertia on individual initiative, as we discuss more in a later section. Perhaps we are on the cusp of breaking through to a new level, although only time will tell. One measure is that there is a growing sense among key players in the administration that these connections are extremely valuable to teaching, scholarship, and cultural change at NAU. This is borne out by the fact that we have experienced markedly increased levels of budgetary support over the years and have most recently seen the creation of several new lecturer positions in the FYSeminar-ARTs Program, promotions of instructors to lecturers in FYSeminar-ARTs, two new tenure-track civic-engagement hires in sustainable economics and water-food issues, and new staff positions as well.



## Faculty Motivation

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Much of the interdisciplinary work we have been discussing involves external action and sets of choices by individual faculty. But this begs another question—one that moves in counterpoint to the externality of interdisciplinary work and is more internal: why? What is the internal motivation of these colleagues? What are their values, passions, stories, and narratives? Most of the faculty we interviewed had a strong sense of social justice, ecological sustainability, and a grassroots democratic orientation. These are faculty who passionately believe in a world where people are not only treated fairly, but are also enabled and empowered. In addition, the faculty believe they are responsible for caring, tending, working, and acting in, for, and *with* their communities and the planet. The many passionate ways that so many speak of this is remarkable. So, too, are the many disconnects that faculty see between their own values and passions and what is valued by their disciplines. For many there is also a belief that the academy, as it is normally constituted, is not living up to its call to educate people for such a world. These colleagues talk about the many ways that higher education pedagogically, administratively, and culturally is often either indifferent to, or actively suppresses these goals and aspirations.

While the faculty we interviewed are strongly passionate in their beliefs, many also believe that they have a tenuous relationship both to the academy and to their disciplines. As one colleague commented, “These stories [about the ARTs] have a tension in relationship to the academy—a story of opportunity, precarity, and tension.” Faculty find themselves working in a hierarchical academy, stratified in a class-conscious faculty of tenured, nontenured, and part-time ranks, in “rigid situations and one that is not what they had hoped for.” The pervasive neoliberal culture of continual assessment that is embraced by the academy—especially in state comprehensive universities—often works actively to counteract and stamp out innovation and creativity among faculty. One ARTs colleague lamented that he believes that he must, in a manner that is paradoxical given the pedagogy of the ARTs, reduce risk-taking in the classroom—the very thing that is an elemental aspect of learning for us as faculty. To risk low student evaluation numbers can endanger the retention of nontenured colleagues and jeopardize any future increase in

salary. The result is a perception that there is no room to fail, to learn: “we don’t have room to do re-combinations and reconfigurations—we have to follow the recipe now. We don’t have room to make that bread that is so crazy [and] outside of the box that everyone would think that would be great.”

Many faculty also observed, with regret, how often their colleagues—even from the most democratic, social-justice, and civic-oriented departments and programs—are mired by incessant complaining that is entirely devoid of agentic horizons and then remain completely inactive. While these colleagues may be passionate individuals, they choose to continually pass on opportunities to express themselves through imaginative democratic pedagogy or active and transformative engagement on campus and in the broader world. What many experience in disciplinary departments is a widespread culture of disengagement, despair, cynicism, and a style of complaint that is profoundly disempowering.

In marked contrast, one colleague in the ARTs is bounding with a sense of pedagogical, ethical, and community purpose and passion. She sees infinite possibilities in engaged work with students. “What motivates me, mostly [about this pedagogy]: I just went from [being] one person, having one person’s impact, to being 200 people that can have that much more of an impact on society . . . less apathy and more engagement which ultimately will create change . . . [and] give voice to the voiceless.” She believes, “I can multiply myself in each student that I have, *by [them] being engaged*, even if they do not mirror my thinking.” At the same time, she finds that faculty in her home discipline’s department “are very disconnected outside of faculty meetings, when we are required to come together.” In the department faculty meetings, “at least in my experience . . . , for a lot of folks, it is an opportunity to complain—just to release these tensions, and stresses, and anxieties that they’ve had—and they do not seem very solutions-oriented, nor do they seem very student-centric. And so, I feel as though there isn’t a healthy outlet in place for faculty to come together as collectives, or at least if it exists I have not seen it.” She goes on to say, “I feel like we need to foster more of a sense of community in faculty.” What we see here is not the absence of passion, but passion thwarted through department cultures that become incapacitating—one that is the polar opposite of the deep aspirations that propelled many into academia in the first place. This sentiment was also echoed by

faculty in the departments of ethnic studies, politics and international affairs, and elsewhere. The point here is not that criticism and complaint are not crucial aspects of the academy and democracy, but rather that it often takes a form that appears to be an end in itself—a “wounded attachment,” to borrow Wendy Brown’s term.<sup>3</sup>

Another colleague, whom we have already mentioned, was pursuing her PhD and yet was wary of the disengaged character of higher education, focused on expeditionary learning in secondary education with an idea of founding a school. “I didn’t want to work in higher education, where traditionally the theory and [practice] . . . [were] separated from action in the community.” Her sense of connection to the community and the need for engagement drew on her own deep Quaker beliefs and her experience as an undergraduate attending a prominent Quaker college where most decisions were made in a consensual and collaborative way between students, faculty, and administration. She said that it was her work with the ARTs at NAU that drew her back into engaged work; that it was “just a part of who I am.” She said that she “cannot live a life of contradictions.” Teaching that is powerful, especially that is “directly aligned with my outside passions,” gives her “great joy.” She pursues her passion for community and public gardens through the ARTs. One such garden is next door to her home and she often invites ARTs students who are working there in for dinner.

Another colleague, expressing the sentiment of many, is deeply motivated to continue to work in the ARTs “by the fact that it is working. The fact that we see tangible, on-the-ground change happening. The fact that every time I walk into a [First-Year] Seminar course I watch my students [being] transformed, and I see light bulbs going off, and I have sometimes emotional connections, and ‘ah-ha’ moments with my students.” She goes on to say, “There is a sense of urgency in our work, a sense of knowing that it is our responsibility . . . to participate and create the change in the space that is there for us to do so. I almost feel as if it is not a choice at this time in our lives. We are living in a world that is so desperately ready for this . . . so ready for this type of education and this collaborative movement forward.”

A colleague declares that we must do this work, because “we have no option. There is no option here. . . . What keeps me going is that, regardless of the criticisms,

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<sup>3</sup> Wendy Brown, *States of Injury* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

regardless of this pessimism, regardless of the darkness that I see, I can't stop. . . . There is no clear other path that I can fall into, that I say, hey, . . . we can be doing this." He relishes how the ARTs are becoming a source of radical democratic power in the university, and sometimes are able to defeat the administration when it seeks to make anti-democratic and pedagogically deleterious changes: "for me, the charge comes—there are glimpses of it so often . . . — when [in such cases] we bring down an administration to their knees . . . that gives me an enormous amount of joy. . . . And that's the ARTs, because it involved the relationships that [were] built in building the ARTs, it's all of those networks, it involved all of those students who know how to organize and know what to do." He goes on to say, "Another thing that gives me joy is when I see a student just take off . . . just lighting up."

Many colleagues working in the ARTs are simply not intellectually engaged by the standard research pursuits of their disciplines. One faculty stated, "I just think that work that is produced by and for an arcane group of specialists who have no desire, and even denigrate practical applications . . . in a world that needs the best thinking possible, is an abdication of responsibility. But it is held up as the highest [standard of work in the discipline]." Others see engaged pedagogy as a way out of this disciplinary dead end. "I tell every faculty person I meet who is in there [working in self-referential disciplines that are stagnant and eschew broader purposes], working away, and they are bogged down teaching the same thing—teach a First-Year Seminar, teach a First-Year Seminar—it will change your life." This colleague goes on to say, "The thing that I am most passionate about . . . is teaching students the skills they are going to need as our society is going to be forced to change. . . . If we can prepare them to work together with each other for a solution—and that's why I become so turned on by this method of teaching—. . . they are taking what they are passionate about and trying to change something to move to where they want it to be."

For many of the faculty interviewed, their attraction to working with the ARTs stems from a deep, personal passion. The work of the ARTs, however, not only feeds their passion, it also creates a horizon of possibilities that sustains it and keeps many faculty from turning to resentment and despair—unlike many of their disciplinary colleagues. This is an important aspect of the cultural shift that the ARTs are enabling—

one that empowers faculty to rebound in generative, creative, transformative, and fulfilling ways in the academy. The ARTs culture and the broader ecology of democratic pedagogy and civic-engagement practices create a zone that nurtures a flourishing of democratic and agentic passions—a hopeful space for them as they begin to develop transformative impacts—and keeps individual faculty’s passions from turning against themselves as they unwittingly generate cultures that amplify, rather than diminish, the disempowering and toxic aspects of the academy. For many, work in the ARTs propels us beyond static and vitiating ruts that, ironically, would attenuate the very agency we might otherwise seize if we mustered up a more transformative imagination, broader networks, and skillful democratic organizing. We are finding that the ARTs creates a faculty cultural space of value-imbued practice, and a space that actually amplifies and informs the passions that one brings to it.

## Democratic Pedagogy and the Amplification of Faculty Agency

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As we have discussed in many other publications, the ARTs initiative is at the heart of the movement for democratic pedagogy, civic engagement, social justice, and sustainability at NAU.<sup>4</sup> More than a dozen ARTs (many with multiple subteams and projects) interface with myriad First- and Second-Year Seminars on related topics. Both the seminars and the ARTs typically involve high levels of democratic participation. The vast majority of the ARTs are engaged in rich collaborations with numerous community organizations, social movements, local schools, green businesses, and other public institutions. Several hundred first-year undergraduate students are enrolled in First-Year Seminars involved in the ARTs each semester, working on problems on immigration, K-12 grassroots democracy education, health, sustainable energy, cooperative economics, climate change, indigenous environmental justice, animal rights, water conservation and rights, campus sustainable gardening, K-12 school gardens, democratic engagement in Flagstaff politics, civil deliberation around difficult issues, sexuality and gender, campus and community composting, and more.

One question frequently asked by people unfamiliar with the ARTs is, how do you keep this work from totally overburdening the faculty? Indeed, these concerns are very real, and some of the faculty we interviewed gave expression to issues that must be repeatedly negotiated. As one faculty member put it, democratic pedagogy is exciting, powerful, and effective, but “it’s hard. . . . The work that we do is messy and it’s not always successful. . . . It’s a vulnerable practice. And along with that, there aren’t any

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<sup>4</sup> For more on the ARTs at Northern Arizona University, please go to [www.nau.edu/CRAFTS](http://www.nau.edu/CRAFTS). See also Romand Coles and Blase Scarnati, “Supporting Students Through Community Connections,” *Diversity & Democracy: Civic Learning for Shared Futures* 14/3 (Fall 2011): 15; Romand Coles and Blase Scarnati, “Transformational Ecotones in Higher Education: Craftsperson-Ethos and Northern Arizona University’s CRAFTS Movement,” in *Democracy’s Education*, ed. Harry C. Boyte (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015); Romand Coles, “Transforming the Game: Democratizing the Publicness of Higher Education and Commonwealth in Neoliberal Times,” *New Political Science* (2014); Harry C. Boyte and Blase Scarnati, “Building Democracy Colleges: A Different Kind of Politics,” *The Blog: Harry Boyte, Huffington Post*, May 3, 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/harry-boyte/building-democracy-colleg\\_b\\_1471717.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/harry-boyte/building-democracy-colleg_b_1471717.html) (accessed September 18, 2015); Harry C. Boyte and Blase Scarnati, “Transforming Higher Education in a Larger Context: The Civic Politics of Public Work,” in *Civic Studies*, ed. Peter L. Levine and Karol E. Soltan (Washington, DC: Bringing Theory to Practice and AACU, 2014); and Romand Coles, “Environmental Political Theory and Environmental Action Research Teams,” in *Oxford Handbook of Environmental Political Theory*, ed. David Schlosberg, John M. Meyer, Teena J. Gabrielson, and Cheryl Hall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2015).

guarantees for success. And so, sometimes the failures can be exhausting. . . . It is the most time-consuming practice that you can imagine.” She goes on to say, “You are putting yourself out there to a group of students [used to the rote practices of extreme ‘banking education’] who have never in their lives . . . , most likely, been in a learning environment like this, so you are going to be met with a little bit of resistance and/or student confusion, or exhaustion in that work. So, it takes a lot of time to create a space for this to work.” Other faculty note that it can be difficult to get students, who have been disciplined for years into passive forms of education, to really “get” the democratic practices that we are trying to teach in FYSeminar and the ARTs. It often takes most of the semester for many students to gain facility with these new modes. As noted earlier, colleagues state that they believe there are distinct risks for faculty (especially nontenure-track colleagues) to be involved in democratic pedagogy, especially with the more emergent and experimental initiatives that can come with significant risks of failure. And sometimes, in ways that can be both exciting and challenging, students also employ the toolkit of democratic practices offered in the ARTs to organize around aspirations that may involve a degree of contestation with faculty. On the other hand, some faculty experience a lightening of some of the burdens of teaching as they deepen their democratic pedagogies and find it “freeing not having to know everything.”

Crucial responses to these challenges for faculty involve an elaborate and very supportive platform that we have built (with support by our administration) for FYSeminar-ARTs courses, that includes hiring two undergraduate Peer Teaching Assistants for each ARTs-related seminar course to focus on ARTs facilitation, Graduate Assistant Mentors, strong staff support, faculty workload adjustments, and faculty-to-faculty mentoring (all issues to be discussed in detail below). This platform is continually evolving in relation to a variety of factors, as we all repeatedly revisit how we can make it more workable for faculty, enhance undergraduate and graduate education, and meet the collaborative needs of our community partners.

Yet an equally important aspect of our response to the question of how faculty are able to engage in this movement for democratic pedagogy without it becoming totally unmanageable, is the fact that it *empowers* us in many ways that enhance our agency in relation to teaching, scholarship, and (what universities commonly call) “service” on the



campus and in broader communities. Very frequently, instead of there being a primarily *antagonistic* relationship between the deep faculty commitments to democratic processes, practices, civic engagement, social justice, and sustainability, on the one hand, and their responsibilities to teach well, conduct research, and perform “service” on campus in a variety of capacities, on the other, faculty find this relationship to be significantly *synergistic*.

As one colleague noted—although shifting to democratic modes of pedagogy can be terrifying to faculty as they give up significant degrees of control to generate more horizontal practices in their classrooms and as they articulate their FY Seminars with ARTs that have significant autonomy insofar as they are guided by collaborations between students and community partners—faculty, nevertheless, typically remain with this democratic practice. They are drawn by deep motivations, because “we are seeing that it is working . . . and [the faculty] see the transformation of their seminars.” More students become passionate, active, and successful learners with a sense of civic agency than is typical in non-ARTs courses. “I think more faculty are seeing this as a means of empowerment and as a space for their creative practice and for their passions to surface,” said one colleague. Others noted how democratic pedagogy and shared experiential learning activities (e.g., field trips to the Arizona-Mexico border, farmers markets, and joining together at potlucks to share “public narratives,”) created valuable opportunities to erode barriers that are often highly recalcitrant aspects of the relationship (“unproductive formalities, stand-offishness”) between professors and students—especially first-year students. These pedagogies, in turn, facilitate participation and engagement in the classroom. Moreover, as another faculty member notes, the ARTs pedagogy helps students “to get grounded in who they are and what they care about,” by sharing public narratives in which students excavate and cultivate their own biographical stories to discern the sources and values, and also visions of their sense of self, community, and the urgency of now. The ARTs pedagogy also helps students to become “grounded in the physical place of Flagstaff” through the various issues and community partners with whom they become involved.

One of our colleagues with a background in political theory offers a profound interpretation of how and why students experience something akin to a passionate



awakening through civic engagement and democratic pedagogy. She maintains that there is “an existential need for all human beings” to experience empowered democratic citizenship by having “an active, shaping voice in community concerns and one’s public world.” She maintains, “I do think it’s a very, very central need we have to fulfill and, when we don’t have those opportunities, something is missing. I think there can be profound distortions and bad things take its place in people’s lives. . . . When we are able to be in relationships with others, which are relationships of power . . . where we can . . . contribute to shaping the world we live in, it’s a rebirth for people. I really think about it as birth and rebirth. . . . And, if it’s working well, it’s very moving; it’s very powerful for people. So I see, when I think about these first year students, . . . [coming from] many communities [which] are very impoverished spaces for people to find their voice and to work collaboratively together. . . . I think this is a very moving experience and a powerful experience that the ARTs can offer students . . . coming from no experience whatever in their home communities, themselves, or adults in their lives, of people collaboratively working on public issues. . . . Coming into the ARTs, there is a kind of rebirth that happens.” The theme of rebirth is something many students, faculty, and community members discuss as a consequence of developing powerful democratic relationships, engagements, and agency. Creating spaces that midwife such experiences is thus a profound way to help facilitate vibrant forms of learning that awaken and engage the head, the hand, and the heart. Like good community organizers, nearly all ARTs faculty seek to elicit and engage students’ feelings—their emotions, not just their ideas—as they begin to awaken to the sometimes overwhelming challenges of our times, as well as their own unexpectedly powerful capacities, aspirations, public work, and political action. The capacity to engage and generate democratic knowledge and imagination hinges on a degree of hope and our sense that we have significant abilities to make a difference in a world that can otherwise feel like it is running on automatic.

Numerous faculty mention how such work often facilitates “community building,” which more quickly erodes the isolation of these new first-year students and amplifies emergent senses of democratic capacity. Often, even relatively small exercises of power for students awaken a tremendous spill-over effect and allows them to tangibly experience the more abstract ideas being developed in their seminars. As one colleague

said, “I think the experiential part of it has been so invaluable, the whole field trip thing . . . has just become central to [her classes]. . . . There is just no substitute for being outdoors, being in the desert, talking to farm workers themselves, talking to a grower and seeing they’re not a bad guy, and smelling all that celery! I think especially because . . . I think it can get dry and heavy for people sometimes [reading all of the theory] and that the field trip just completely counterbalances that and I think that it allows them to absorb some of the heavier social analysis stuff because they’ve got that time in the world.”

We touch on these issues here in order to illuminate ways that the ARTs and FYSeminar facilitate students’ awakening in ways that greatly enhance *faculty* members agency and efficacy in a mission that they take to be central to their professional work, namely teaching in ways that animate students’ academic desires, learning, and success. Along with a supportive institutional context, it is the powerful and resonant synergies between democratic pedagogies and civic engagement, on the one hand, and student academic passion, inquiry, and learning, on the other, that leads nearly all faculty who enter such work to continue with it in ways that often grow more—not less—committed and passionate. As a colleague who has taught repeatedly in the FYSeminar-ARTs told us regarding his experience of student presentations at the large ARTs Symposium that happened at the end of the semester: “when I went to the presentations . . . of the various ARTs . . . I was blown away . . . but I felt like, and I still feel like that these were the most powerful experiences that could be done at a university.” On his experiences teaching several seminars where he traveled with students to listen to and witness the full range of people on the Arizona-Mexico border, he said: “It’s changed everything. I basically feel like I never taught anything, until I took this trip.” The public aspect touches a nerve because it is *real*—it awakens desire. “You need to engage with the real world to have the desire. That’s the thing—in teaching you have to awaken the students’ desire to learn.” A faculty member, who is relatively new to FYSeminar-ARTs, concurs: “Engaged pedagogy is mind-blowing to me!—how powerful it is.” Yet another colleague notes, with satisfaction, “There are now quite a few [undergraduate and graduate students] . . . [that] I know, whose life trajectory has shifted because this thing was here.”

When one of the deans we interviewed said, “What gets me up in the morning is that I’m one of these people that really does believe that education is transformative,” she

was expressing a sentiment shared by most faculty who are involved. When our colleagues spoke of their deepest passions for this work, their language was teeming with rich metaphorical expressions. They do what they do “when I see [the student’s] world just lighting up”; when I have “ah-ha moments with my students”; “as one person, I can only do one thing—and then I have all these students and all these TAs, and they are all like little sparks, and then they can do something . . . the ability to have such a larger impact”; and “I guess what motivates me, mostly, is I just went [being] from one person, having one person’s impact, to being 200 people that can have much more impact on society. . . . Ultimately, I see myself as somebody whose responsibility it is to plant seeds.” For many faculty, the efficacy of the FYSeminar-ARTs stems from and powerfully nourishes these aspirations precisely as faculty and students become active citizens seeking paths that facilitate public knowledge, work, and action for the commonwealth of our communities. The two appear to be less in tension, than reciprocally empowering.

## Creating Narratives of Personal Transformation through Democratic Practice

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Many of the faculty interviewed gave voice to important narratives that trace a path that unites formerly disparate elements of their research, professional life, teaching, and personal values and beliefs about the public world as they began working with the ARTs. For many, too, ongoing work in the ARTs was the catalyst for a personal transformation that saw an increasingly integrated sense of democratic practice, personal values, and professional work and research. Like action research, itself, which holds forth the promise to fundamentally change the academy and the commonwealth through creating common spaces of cooperation among students, faculty, and community toward mutually generated ends, the transformative experiences of faculty working in the ARTs provoked important shifts in their narratives. These personal narratives tell stories that unite threads of people's lives, research, and democratic practice and also open space to imagine what else may be possible and conceive ways to act to bring it about.

As one colleague said, by working in the ARTs we “challenge ourselves.” For another colleague, “The deep sense comes out of: I really am dedicated and want to understand how groups of people can challenge authority in such a way that transforms a situation into a freer space, in the most basic level. . . . And I think that both the ARTs and engaged pedagogy as concepts then connect to that very directly, because I think that underlying those concepts—regardless of how they are being used—or how they are being described in academic circles is really about transformation. But it is really about change, really about how to figure out how to leverage different kinds of resources and ideas to try to shift something, you know. And the ARTs, in particular, [become] multiple things in allowing people . . . the space to begin to experiment and to think about that in a very serious way.”

Many colleagues also discussed how the experience of working in the ARTs goes much further in that it connects deeply with their passions and is a personally transformative experience. Recall the reflections that one colleague offered in relation to the transformations many students undergo as they engage in the ARTs: “when we are able to be in relationships with others—which are relationships of power—where we can,

however messily (and it's always messy, right?) contribute to shaping the world that we live in, it's a rebirth for people, I think. I really think about it as birth and rebirth—right? Something new, as Arendt talks about it, happens in our experience—something comes into the world between people that wasn't there before and, if it's working well, it's very moving—it's very powerful for people.” This is an incredibly important statement that surfaces fundamental, human metaphors—birth and rebirth—and it clearly pertains not only to transformations in student narratives, but also to transformations in the lives and narratives of faculty, including her own, as the volume of her direct engagement in public matters has increased. These images of birth, rebirth, and even public *birthing* is evocative of the rich and dynamic intertwinement and interplay between the internal and the worldly. As democratic practices have enlivening and transformative effects upon the internal sense of purposes and motivations of faculty working in the ARTs, these practices have allowed and even provoked faculty to build upon previously created existential narratives of action, orientation, and possibility that were previously characterized simply as their values or a social-justice orientation. The desire to act is fed and enabled by the existence of these powerful personal narratives. In a circular hermeneutic process, when this political work is going well it appears to gather, reconfigure, and intensify memories and fragments of how one thought or acted. These proto-narratives are sufficient to allow the (re)construction of a narrative that casts meaning onto the past and provides new meaning, energy, urgency, and insight as one moves forward.

To give texture to this theme, it is helpful to consider in more detail the story of our colleague who came to the ARTs from his home department in modern languages. For him, the ARTs “have changed everything.”

I basically feel like I never taught anything until I took this trip [with his First-Year Seminar students to the Arizona-Mexico border]. If you were to compare the impact that my classes had before this trip, you know, it's miniscule . . . in comparison with the change that I have seen . . . students undergo on this trip, I just feel that it is so important. And also my own moral compass—I knew what was going on from an intellectual point of

view and I had been writing about this stuff for decades . . . —but I felt like when I saw [what is going on the border] that I could no longer turn my back on it. I feel like it's the same as the people, who, during the Holocaust became aware of what was going on, or if you were in Chile and you were aware of what was going on, you had the choice of looking the other way and going about your life, or doing something. And I feel that, when I realize that . . . thousands of people have died on the border in recent years, essentially since I have been [at] NAU, since when this crisis has gotten really bad. . . . I feel that this is happening in our back yard. And I, as a human being, cannot look the other way. So, I am sort of dedicating my life to getting people to wake up and see what's going on. In terms of my teaching, for one thing—I work it into all of my classes. . . . So now, I look for any opportunity to get students out of the classroom.

He tells the powerful story of transformation; one where he connects his intellectual work with his “moral compass,” united in the resolve to act.

During the five-day trip to the Arizona-Mexican border, he and his FYSeminar-ARTs students visited with recently deported people. One woman told the story of how she had left her five children with a neighbor in Oaxaca:

She had been running in the desert for four days, and was detained by Border Patrol, and on the wall there was a sign in the cell that said, “If you are hungry, or thirsty, or you need medical attention, or [if you need] help in any way to tell an agent and you will be provided for,” but she said that it wasn't true. That they only gave her two packages of crackers and a cup of juice—and that she couldn't walk, but [they told her] that she could get help in Mexico. And I looked up and all of my students were crying. There were tears streaming down every student's face and it was just a very intense experience. One of the kids came up to me a little later and said [that] he had a hundred dollars in his pocket and he wanted to give it to this woman to help her get home to her children—that he thought that he

was brought there for a reason. And it was just not the kind of thing that you normally experience in a class. And it was just one day.

His work with the ARTs powerfully unites this colleague's own sense of social justice surfaced by his trips to the border with students, his own writings, and the transformative democratic pedagogy that he pursues. He recalled a long-forgotten incident that tells the story of taking a job interview when he was younger to become a translator for detainees—the same people that he and his students now visit on the border.

I did have an experience which I had forgotten all about until, at least, after the first trip [with FYSeminar-ARTs students to the border]. . . . After I graduated from college, I had a roommate whose boyfriend worked for the US Department of Immigration Review. And she told me—that he told her—that there was a job opening up as a court interpreter. And I thought, “Wow, this would be really cool. I can get a job, because my Spanish was pretty good, and speak Spanish and be paid, and it would be great. . . .” And they finally called me in for an interview, . . . and the guy that was interviewing me said, “We are very fortunate, because we have detained an illegal alien, and as part of your interview, you are going to interpret the interrogation.” And I looked over and saw this pudgy, sad, detained Mexican guy who looked at me—and everything in me wanted to say, “I am not with these [Immigration Review] people—I got nothing to do with these people.” And I didn't have the courage to walk out at the time. I did the interview and I interpreted it as best I could, which was kind of crazy. There were a few details of it that, sort of, I still remember. One [question], they asked him was where he was from and he said, . . . “I'm from a little town called Leave If You Can.” There are towns in Mexico called . . . [Leave If You Can], so I have no idea to this day whether he was kinda being consciously sarcastic, or if that's where he was from. But then as the interview went on, they started asking how he came and he said, . . . “Through the water.” And they said, “What do you

mean—Through the water? —Did you come on some commercial maritime, transportation agency?” And he said, “I came through the water like everybody else,” and then he started to clam up and said, “I don’t remember—I don’t remember.” And the guy got kind of annoyed and said that, “you seem to have a lot of difficulty remembering today. Have you ever been treated by a psychiatrist for memory difficulties?” And I just felt so ashamed to be part of this. And there was somebody in the back listening to me—and I just did it and then I went home. And I don’t know if it was a week later or what, but they called me up and said, “You did fantastic. We are going to offer you this job. All we need now is for you to give us a list of your friends and family members so that we can do an FBI check on you.” And I said, “Actually, I no longer want to be considered for the job.” And he said, “Why not?” And I said, “Because my personal job objectives and the objectives of the Department of Immigration Review are not compatible.” And we had been through months of dialogue—and he said, “Any elaboration on that?” [And I said,] “I think what you guys do is immoral.” And I walked away from that and I forgot all about it until after this first trip. So, if you look back—in the big picture—there’s sort of a narrative there, but I wasn’t aware of it.

This is a powerful story and one that, rightly, attests to a long-held sense of social justice by our colleague and his willingness to act on his values. At the same time, it allows him to crystallize a powerful narrative that is a coherent and consistent story of action throughout his life. It is also a narrative frame that others can listen to, be moved by, see themselves in, and become motivated by to act. Through hearing this narrative, others can subsequently structure personal and group narratives that help them continue on and that will bring still others into a widening circle of democratic action. Like action research, itself—which holds the potential to increasingly weave broader collaborations among students, faculty, and community into active ownership of what has been traditionally called the academy—these narratives of action gather together and help expand the space that enables collaborative action in the first place.



## Emergent Faculty Collective

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Many faculty at NAU feel disempowered, teaching in this nonunionized university in a right-to-work state. As elsewhere, those who feel the most vulnerable and who believe that their positions are the most fragile and continually in jeopardy are the most ephemeral of faculty—full-time faculty on year-to-year contracts and part-time faculty hired by the course. As one colleague said, “If you’re tenure-track and have a little bit more job security, that’s one thing—but if you are an instructor or lecturer,<sup>5</sup> and someone catches wind that you said the wrong thing, or push too hard against the grain, then . . . you could lose your job, and your livelihood, and your ability to work. So, there’s a lot of disempowerment with that.” He goes on to say, “I do think it would be great to re-create a sense of agency.”

In the face of this all, FYSeminar-ARTs faculty have recently come together to bring about three important changes in the conditions under which faculty work and in how decisions are made in the program. The ARTs initiative in FYSeminar has seen explosive growth and increases in resources to hire faculty. Within this context of rapid expansion and growth, faculty are now applying the methods and lessons gained from the democratic pedagogy that they use with their students to improve working conditions. We see this as an important and very hopeful sign that serves to move beyond the often impotent and simply reactive responses of many colleagues in the academy. This nascent awakening of faculty power serves as a meaningful way to push beyond faculty cultures of isolated complaint that rarely even gesture toward possibilities for generating transformative power, work, and action.

These lessons learned here by our faculty—echoed by a few stories of faculty coming together in other departments at other institutions—have resulted in a changed sense of collective agency and a movement narrative that has generated the reality of new possibilities. Action research that brings together students, faculty, and community members can also help to push back against the rising tide of neoliberal practices and

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<sup>5</sup> At NAU, the rank of instructor is a full-time, benefit-eligible, one-year appointment that may be renewed, and whose assignment is focused on teaching with no expectations for research. The rank of lecturer is a full-time, benefit-eligible, one- or multi-year appointment that is regularly renewed, and whose assignment is focused on teaching with some expectations for research.

paradigms that now dominate the academy. While the results of these faculty victories at NAU may merely replicate what other colleagues have had on other campuses for decades (though they are under pressure nearly everywhere), what is most important here are the details of coming together, imagining alternatives, exercising collective agency and accomplishment, and, most important, then generating a narrative imagining of what else can be. This story of faculty coming together, practicing the democratic pedagogy that we teach, and generating actions that further intensify and extend narratives of creative, catalytic imagination provides one of the most important lessons that can be learned from our experience here at NAU.

The first exercise of collective agency that emerged among faculty focused on building a sense of community, trust, mentoring, sharing our successes and challenges in our FYSeminar and the ARTs, and increasing our capacities to collaborate and coordinate among different units that had operated autonomously (especially the Program for Community, Culture, and Environment [CC&E], the Masters of Arts in Sustainable Communities Program [MSUS], and the FYSeminar Program). To some extent this agency began to emerge organically, as when for example, two years into this effort a group of about half a dozen faculty in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences (with modest funding from the dean) came together to design syllabi with civic-engagement themes and link them to the ARTs, community partners, and Residential Learning Communities. Subgroups of faculty and graduate students emerged informally around particular aspects of this rapidly expanding movement, such as those between CC&E and FYSeminar, faculty and community partners working on specific issues, and the MSUS faculty steering committee.

The democracy movement at NAU would have to be characterized as an evolving combination of grassroots democracy and social entrepreneurship. There was a strong sense among several of the leaders (including the authors) that successfully launching this movement required that we catalyze and unleash the dynamic and co-creative capacities of myriad pools of collaboration among faculty in different units; faculty, graduate students, undergraduates, and community partners working around different issues, problems, and opportunities; faculty, students, and staff working to create initiatives on campus that involved coordinating across different sectors, such as Campus Grounds

Keeping or Residential Life; faculty, community partners, and students working around opportunities provided by several different grants; and more. We sought to avoid forming a governing body that would strive to become the agentic center for the whole and instead catalyzed myriad pools of collaborative energy and action that were democratic, yet frequently maintained only loose tendrils of connectivity with the other pools.

The advantage of this process was that we unleashed whirlwinds of co-creative activity that very rapidly initiated all sorts of energetic processes, collaborations, and good work that quickly became visible, unexpectedly exemplary, and magnetically drew more and more people into the process. We believe that generating the “escape velocity” necessary to break free of the antidemocratic gravitational field formed by stagnant unimaginative habits; administrative caution; cultures of timidity, risk aversity, and deference; pervasive senses of impossibility; and widespread yearnings for bureaucratic modes of control all requires vibrant and decentered modes of dynamism. To employ yet another metaphor from the physical sciences, we believe that there is something analogous to an “energy of activation” needed to initiate democratic movements that is similar to that which is necessary to surpass the “energy barrier” required to initiate chemical reactions.

The underside of this somewhat wild decentered dynamism is that the needs and aspirations of different participants—faculty, graduate students, undergraduates students, community partners, and staff—are often different and sometimes partly in tension with each other. Also amid a lot of coordination among the various activities, there were still degrees of creative chaos that made some feel uncomfortable, or out of control. As more and more loci of initiative were fomented and unleashed, the need for coordination, overall designs that better served multiple needs and aspirations, and processes of democratic governance and accountability all became greater. In other words, the disadvantages of what Jo Freeman famously called the “tyranny of structurelessness” increased as the process grew, and this began to create tensions.<sup>6</sup>

Very quickly, all involved began to deliberate about how to modulate our democratic processes in ways that would enable us to better negotiate the inherent tensions between the goods of highly dynamic decentered co-creative initiatives, on the

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<sup>6</sup> See, Jo Freeman, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness,” <http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>.

one hand, and the goods of synoptic democratic coordination, integration, governance, and accountability, on the other. Soon a coordinating group formed, consisting of key faculty leaders of the campus units and constituencies most involved. Another coordinating group of graduate and undergraduate student ARTs facilitators formed as well, and the two bodies collaborate well together. In any dynamic and evolving process, issues and tensions repeatedly emerge that need to be addressed—this is part of the life of democracy. Yet, most involved agree that these groups have become increasingly good at creatively learning from and negotiating our differences in ways that continue to energize, inform, and empower the movement for democracy’s education.

At the beginning of the fall semester of 2013, as a result of numerous conversations, core faculty teaching in the ARTs decided to form a community of practice that would meet monthly. In this community of practice we would build community and trust by sharing our public narratives and doing one-on-one meetings; share our teaching experiences and practices and discuss what was working, exciting, challenging, as well as our visions of new possibilities; read and discuss articles on democratic and experiential pedagogy, civic engagement, and community organizing; share each others’ burgeoning scholarship on teaching, learning, and catalyzing change; and better coordinate and support our various efforts. The faculty involved view this ongoing community of practice as an overwhelming success. As one colleague put it, in the community of practice, “we are starting to envision a different future. And in that future, are these webs of community members and partners, and NAU students, and faculty, and colleagues, and they’re all coming together to work together towards a common goal. . . . And then, you’re also mentoring each other. . . . So, the process of mentoring and fostering others in their creative endeavors is shaping a whole new way of teaching and learning . . . [and] it allows faculty to start talking to each other in a different way. And once faculty start talking to each other, they start sharing ideas, they start gathering information, and they start visioning what their working environment can look like, as well.” Another faculty member noted how strategically important it was for all faculty to be “having a chance to learn from everyone. . . . I would love also to be able to support new faculty as they come in—in the vision for the program—and I think [that] the less that we’re working in the silos of our individual classes, and the more that we’re

sharing ideas and strategically thinking about the program and sharing ownership, that the stronger that we're going to become and the more we share responsibility and work." She also remarked how new faculty really appreciated the mentoring. One of our newest faculty collaborators concurred, "I've learned a lot. . . . What I really like the most is that when we get together for the community of practice meetings, because that lets me learn from others and ask questions of others who are doing things, and be inspired by others."

The community of practice exemplifies the extent to which faculty can begin to exercise collective agency among themselves in important ways, in spite of the hierarchical structures and neoliberal pressures that often impede our work. There remains a remarkable amount of space within most institutions of higher education in which we can constitute practices of democratic collaboration and co-creativity that make a huge difference in our working lives, our relationships, our pedagogy, our scholarship, and our engagements with broader communities. Experience at NAU suggests that it is possible to inhabit these spaces, expand them, and generate energies and new vision for broader transformation. When democratic practices are carefully nurtured, they tend to spill beyond their spaces of birth.

While the community of practice was emerging, full-time FYSeminar-ARTs faculty at the rank of lecturer had been locked into teaching four courses each semester, since this was the default teaching load for lecturers across campus. While many found the work incredibly fulfilling and rewarding, the robust time commitments were exhausting and, increasingly, many colleagues were suffering from burnout. In the fall semester of 2013, FYSeminar-ARTs faculty began discussions in our faculty community of practice about documenting the quantity and scope of extra work required to effectively teach ARTs courses compared with non-ARTs courses, and then to seek a reduction in the ARTs teaching workload from four courses (a 4-4 workload) to teaching three courses (a 3-3 workload) each semester.

Conversations among the faculty in community of practice meetings crystallized into a position paper that carefully documented faculty time commitments teaching in the ARTs, sought some sort of redress for the workload inequity taken on by ARTs faculty, and outlined their effectiveness in creating powerful pedagogies and practices aligned with institutional priorities. The paper was presented to the leadership of the FYSeminar

Program and University College, of which the program is a part. NAU, like many state comprehensive universities, has seen enormous retrenchment in state funding support (60 percent reduction over just a few years for NAU), resulting in severe budget pressures and fast rising tuition costs. Given these conditions, any change in faculty workload for a program is problematic. However using the example of another academic unit on campus, a differential workload policy proposal was drafted, which gave faculty teaching in the ARTs more workload credit than the actual course units (credits) taught. Under this proposed differential workload, ARTs faculty teaching a 3-unit course would receive 4 units of workload credit. A lecturer, needing to teach 12 units each semester (4 courses x 3 units each) could now teach 3 courses, rather than 4 (3 courses x 4 units of workload each) to fulfill their 12 units of teaching each semester. It was additionally proposed that this formula would also apply to part-time faculty hires, who would be paid for 4 units of work to teach a 3-unit FYSeminar-ARTs course. The 3-3 differential workload fulfilled both the requirements of FYSeminar-ARTs faculty for a meaningful load reduction, while it fulfilled the university's requirement to not have lecturers' workload be less than 12 units each semester. The increase in salary costs for part-time faculty was also sought as part of the differential workload proposal.

To many faculty members' surprise and deep satisfaction, the proposal was quickly embraced by the University College leadership and then promptly approved by the provost in the spring semester of 2013. The new differential workload policy was implemented in fall 2014 and additional funding was provided to pay part-time faculty the fourth unit of salary to teach an ARTs course in the FYSeminar-ARTs FY15 budget. All are appreciative of the immediate support for and the rapid adoption of the 3-3 differential workload and budget increases by the college leadership and the provost.

Most colleagues have viewed this workload victory as being "very empowering" and "a very hopeful sign." As one colleague said, "It was a huge win. That was huge." For many, too, there was relief in believing that there was a sense of recognition by the institution that this work is important, that it does take a huge personal investment of time and energy by faculty, and that there have been tangible results brought about through collective faculty action. Most now recognized that they explicitly take the democratic practices that they teach their students in the ARTs and use them to collectively build

faculty democratic agency. As one colleague said, “About changing the 3-3 workload, I think that’s going to have a huge impact on faculty’s—well, just being able to get that, I think that there is some power here . . . but also that it’s going to give the faculty the ability to, first of all, just do the work well . . . and also, maybe then, to have a broader impact on the university because I think that there’s just no way, timewise, to do that [if you are still teaching a 4-4 workload].”

Another colleague, reflecting on the process of collective work and decision making experienced in the faculty community of practice that led to the 3-3 differential workload policy said: “There is a process and a transparency that comes from this [kind of work]. And so the transparency is— ‘Here are our thoughts, here’s where we are moving forward with this, and we are now asking for a democratic approach’—that’s unique, I think, in some ways.” It becomes a way to move from teaching democratic pedagogy to collectively exercising democratic faculty agency. “It’s also a way . . . [that involves dialogue among] numerous voices—versus saying, ‘Here’s what we’ve decided and then we all [have to] follow it together’—[to bring about change] and that’s a really beautiful thing that we’re seeing happen. The other thing . . . is that it’s not one faculty voice, alone, and so if something is occurring that is going to affect our program or our fellow programs, as a faculty community of practice—or as a faculty steering committee, as a team—there is a . . . [collective] approach to [resist] policy change, or creating resistance against something.” As she wryly observed, “And, you know, we teach about collective action. And we’re also practicing collective action.”

Based on a renewed sense of faculty agency at NAU gained from the 3-3 differential workload victory, the faculty deliberated together in the ARTs community of practice in the spring semester of 2014 and decided to self-constitute themselves as a faculty steering committee for the FYSeminar-ARTs Program. “It is very exciting,” said one colleague. “It is a great vision. . . . This is an important move,” said another. This colleague went on to say, “The rosy picture is that faculty governance of the ARTs . . . and First-Year Seminar . . . I see that as a very important move and, if it’s working right . . . , it has the opportunity to impact a wider culture, particularly because First-Year Seminar pulls on a lot of different faculty who do come in and out and, you know. That group of faculty could become a very powerful kind of culture shifters beyond First-Year



Seminar over time and we certainly need that. . . . I think that it's really critical. I see that larger kind of picture as a goal—as the implications of becoming a department that is not functioning in a quasi-hierarchical way, but is really trying to practice what we teach to students and that's re-teaching themselves all the time—and that's [also us] re-teaching ourselves.” Another colleague said, “I'm starting to see what kind of decision making can be more spread out.” However, as she observed, “What didn't happen at that meeting [in which faculty established the steering committee] was that power mapping—and just really understanding who [in the administration] is making the decisions about this . . . and I feel that we have all got to understand this and be able to advocate [for ourselves].” Other faculty cautioned that there is still a deep vulnerability with the steering committee, since all faculty are still contingent hires; all faculty being lecturers as opposed to tenured faculty. Another colleague asked more explicitly, “Can we create enough power with that group where we don't feel, like myself and others, [that we] are replaceable? . . . If I said, ‘no,’ and someone else [up the hierarchy] said, ‘yes,’ then I would be gone and that would be it—even if y'all spoke up for me.”

We see that, while many cast a hard and wary eye toward the institution's potential ability to exercise power against them, there is—nevertheless—hope in the important opening and emerging of faculty agency shown by these collective efforts to seek a 3-3 workload and self-organize into a faculty steering committee for FYSeminar-ARTs. This latter development, as many see, holds the potential for becoming a locus of power that will allow faculty to continue to exercise the democratic agency that they foster with their students through the democratic pedagogy of action research. Time will tell.



## Faculty Agency and Visions of Future Campus Change

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We have traced how a spiraling thread of faculty agency has moved from deep public motivations into democratic pedagogy, which in turn has led faculty to explore and enact democratic practices among themselves, including forming a community of practice, successfully collaborating to establish a 3-3 workload and adjusted compensation, and self-constituting a FYSeminar-ARTs faculty steering committee. From the beginning, this evolution has been a lively emergent process and it will likely continue to be so, for every new set of relationships, practices, dialogues, and powers tends to generate new visions for how we might deepen and extend this movement for democratization. Of course, such dreams are always precarious and inhabit a world with many countervailing tendencies. Nevertheless, imaginative visions of better futures are a very *real* part of what animates and orients this process. They are arguably at the heart of democratization itself, so we believe it is important to present some of the future horizons that were expressed in these interviews.

Most faculty involved would echo the sentiments of one colleague we interviewed, who said that she would like to see the democratic pedagogy movement grow dramatically over the next 10 years, so “then there would be a group of us, like 30 more people, also who are just doing that. And then, [with] all of the other people coming in . . . we would just be huge. And we would be going beyond just First-Year Seminar and we would take this idea, of this method of teaching, into these other places. . . Then, it would just spread through the university.” Several faculty see much promise in the ARTs and civic engagement spreading into the sciences, since civic stewardship is already a strong thematic among numerous scientists at NAU working in the fields of climate change, forestry, biology, botany, health sciences, ecology, engineering, and others. Similarly, many see great potential to expand in the social sciences, where a majority of faculty members already have significant commitments to scholarship and teaching on social justice. Some of the administrators whom we interviewed noted that they thought a “public research” frame might be a better approach for NAU’s College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, insofar as many “Republican donors” and some departments were wary of characterizing their work as social justice. Extending civic

engagement into NAU's W.A. Franke College of Business, especially with the support of a dean who is an advocate for socially responsible entrepreneurship, was also mentioned. And, indeed, this process has already begun with funding committed for a tenure-track line for 2015-2016 seeking an engaged scholar working on community-based approaches to economic sustainability.

The processes faculty members envision for "spreading across the university,"—and even "flipping the university" toward democratic pedagogy and civic engagement in a pervasive way, as one person we interviewed put it—have numerous dimensions. Because faculty members who are involved in this movement come from numerous departments around the university and, as they teach in the FYSeminar-ARTs program and get involved in the faculty community of practice and steering committee, they tend to take their experiences back to their home departments. Through dialogue with their colleagues, a knowledge of and an enthusiasm for the rich possibilities and powers associated with democratic pedagogy and civic engagement is disseminated. In this way faculty serve as informal ambassadors in growing networks across campus. In one colleague's words, they can become "very powerful culture shifters."

"Leadership by exemplification" appears to be another important way in which democratic pedagogy and civic engagement are proliferating at NAU. One administrator said of the ARTs: "It's obviously very important—I'm impressed by how many students you have involved in [the ARTs] across the university." He went on to say, "It's very important and, in a way, it's helping us [in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences (SBS)]—I think it's stretching us to say, 'Wow, you guys are doing it and so maybe . . . it's possible, maybe we should be doing more of it.'" Numerous departments and programs in SBS alone have begun to ramp up civic-engagement initiatives in their units in the past few years, including anthropology, politics and international affairs, ethnic studies, and women and gender studies. Similarly, as the ARTs have demonstrated success in increasing student retention, creating visible and vibrant projects on and off campus, animating countless enthusiastic students, as well as garnering the attention of outside observers from organizations in the community to the White House, numerous existing networks on campus, such as the Environmental Caucus, have shown increasing

interest and new campus networks have formed in response to the ARTs, such as the Consortium for Civic Engagement.<sup>7</sup>

Further evidence for the power of “leadership by exemplification” comes from a faculty member we interviewed with a rich history of civic engagement scholarship, teaching, and service at Mesa Community College in Arizona. For years the department in which she worked was regularly torn apart from heated conflicts around selecting who would be the next chair, teaching schedules, and everything imaginable. She and others in the department exercised democratic agency by creating a noncompetitive rotating chair, as well as processes for deliberation, collaboration, and building trust. The result has been many years of comparatively harmonious governance and cooperation that “gets us to solutions a lot faster.” Witnessing this, other units across the campus were impressed and now want to institutionalize the process more broadly.

In addition to the work of “informal ambassadors” and “leadership by exemplification,” likely the most significant way that the democracy movement at NAU has and can continue to proliferate is through intentional and artful organizing. This process has developed through countless one-on-one relational meetings, cultivating collective agency among the faculty, evolving processes of faculty mentoring, broadening strategy sessions that involve networking and power mapping, unceasing efforts to translate what we are doing in ways that may enable others to find aspects of their own interest in this work, and carefully articulating and framing our work in part so that it resonates—or at least connects—with people in power who may not share our more radically democratic interests. Additionally, we must repeatedly discern how and how far we might push and pull this process without crossing lines in ways that might undermine it. One person we interviewed said that there is need for the ability to work in different contexts with different audiences, to be translators, facilitators, create a web gathering the wider range of interests in the organization. She said that the ARTs create “a space in which [faculty] can work in a collaborative way that integrates . . . multiple frames of practice, so that a student ends up having an integrated learning experience and this is

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<sup>7</sup> The Environmental Caucus is a broad-based campus advocacy group of students, faculty, and staff seeking to make NAU more sustainable. The Consortium for Civic Engagement is an information-sharing and loose collaborative of several deans and program leaders around activities at NAU related to service and civic engagement.

happening in your program in the very first year. Typically, we think of integrative learning as something that comes later and I am excited by the idea that, even if it's not deliberate in the minds of our faculty, and I imagine it's not for every one of them . . . but it inherently is." She went on to say that there is "the opportunity for a lot of creativity, there is a great deal of degrees of freedom . . . , and potential to adapt, such that as long there is responsiveness—and, again, your program has done that very well—to what are . . . the imperatives, the box, that we are operating in. And you can demonstrate value in other ways . . . which does open the space to invoke other kinds values or goals for our educational project, whether or not they are shared by our Board [of Regents], or even by our president for that matter, . . . that there is a space in which to do that." It involves weaving delicate webs, catalyzing small initiatives to test the waters, taking a radically nonpossessive relationship to our work, and co-creating autonomous spaces for the agency of others. Even as enthusiastic passions, intransigent hopes, and a sense of fierce urgency have all been integral to NAU's democracy education movement, just as surely, "a wild patience has taken us this far"—to slightly paraphrase Adrienne Rich.<sup>8</sup> Keeping a level head in the face of disappointments, frustrations, and setbacks is indispensable when working in contexts that have many pressures, priorities, and embedded patterns that are—to put it bluntly—ignorant of, indifferent to, or even against democracy.

With and beyond proliferating democratic pedagogy and civic engagement at NAU, quite a few faculty envision that some of the most profound transformation must occur in registers that pertain to the *cultural identity* of the institution. Depending upon the context, some faculty and administrators also speak of what "distinguishes" the institution, NAU's "branding," and our "mission." For us, the idea that the more we are able to articulate how democratic pedagogy and civic engagement are importantly aligned with key aspects of the university's public sense and projection of itself, the more the movement will garner not only support, but also resilience. The movement then comes to be understood as profoundly integral to the "good of the whole," rather than one unit or another. This not only garners advocates and defenders, but also deeply connects our work to the ground of elemental collective meaning—similar to the way it has for

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<sup>8</sup> *A Wild Patience has Taken Me This Far: Poems 1978 - 1981* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993).

many individual faculty members in the ARTs. This cultural work, it seems to us, is where much of the richest democratic work is done—across years, decades, and generations.

To what heights does such democratic extension and transformation aspire in NAU's democracy education movement? One of the most powerful images of this vision was expressed by a colleague when he said, NAU "is challenging to work in, but it is also a great opportunity. . . . It's an exciting opportunity" in which to advance a vision where there are more and more universities "that are kind of out on the ground with an ear out to what local democracies and local movements [are doing]. . . . So, maybe universities are, perhaps, the mechanism of adaptability for this uncertain future that we are facing." They are problem-based universities; "they are *nodes of receptivity*." Numerous faculty members saw this already beginning, as many initiatives in the ARTs—e.g., Kinsey Elementary School Public Achievement, a community economics project called *Mercado de los Suenos* (Market of Dreams)—have developed as people in the ARTs movement have responded to calls from the community. As another member of the faculty, who also does a lot of community organizing put it, "I think that [the ARTs have] created a place at NAU that community groups understand that they can connect with."

Our lives are embedded in a highly complex and dynamic set of systems that are increasingly thrown into disequilibria. Transforming institutions of higher education into a vast matrix of "nodes of receptivity" that generate collaborative public work and political action for commonwealth across multiple issues and scales seems like a noble vision for the 21st century. It is one that we believe that the American Democracy Project, the American Commonwealth Partnership, Kettering Foundation, Imagining America, and other national networks are striving to achieve.

Ultimately, however, a deep vision of cultural change such as this requires—and goes hand in hand with—profound institutional change. As long as universities are driven by hierarchical—and even antidemocratic and neoliberal—processes and imperatives, it is extremely difficult to imagine how higher education can become a network of nodes of receptivity that dialogically imagine and investigate possible futures for collaborative work and action *with* broader publics. Even within our own working groups, we continually reexamine and democratize our processes and practices in order to maintain

and enhance our receptive capacities and dynamic responsiveness to new members, constituencies, ideas, initiatives, and the like. As we have engaged in the movement described above, almost all of us find that our hunger for more democracy grows and reorients itself as we feed it. Many imagine democratizing other university committees, the faculty senate, chairs and directors council, and more. On the distant horizon of our vision, many seek to investigate how far we might move both institutional processes and the governance of institutions of higher education in directions that are responsive to the challenges and aspirations of a diverse, complex, and dynamic democratic commonwealth. This is to rekindle the dream of a polity and planet beyond the relentless logics of enclosure. As such, it is the dream of more democratic relationships across multiple sectors and scales of our political, economic, and social life, as well as in our institutions of higher education.

## The ARTs, Faculty Agency, and Community Change

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As part of the ARTs and the movement for democratic pedagogy, many faculty collaborate closely with students and community members in ways that have begun to have a substantial impact upon the community. Public Achievement is an established program that has emerged in close collaboration with 3 Flagstaff schools and involves dozens of NAU students coaching hundreds of K-12 students in the craft of grassroots democracy and community stewardship. Several faculty have participated in the Immigration ART, working with humanitarian groups, such as No More Deaths; broad-based community organizations, such as Northern Arizona Interfaith Council in their human rights workshops, racial profiling, and neighborhood organizing; as well as with groups like the Repeal Coalition that fight all discriminatory legislation and practices against immigrants. They also host speakers, art events, civil-deliberation events, and street protests on related issues throughout the community as well as on campus. The team for sustainable energy has collaborated with NGOs, green businesses, and city and county governments to advance residential home energy retrofits, solar energy, and more. At the state level, this group collaborated with the Sustainable Economic Development Initiative and the statewide Industrial Areas Foundation network to push the Arizona Corporation Commission into passing a revolving loan fund for residential energy efficiency retrofits. The Sustainable and Cooperative Economics ART has helped initiate a composting cooperative, collaborated with the Sunnyside Neighborhood Association and two dozen community partners to establish the Mercado de los Suenos, which advances micro and cooperative enterprise, grassroots democratic empowerment, community marketing, youth development, and neighborhood beautification in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Flagstaff. The Community and School Gardens ARTs have collaborated with a nonprofit, called Foodlink, that works on myriad food-related issues to facilitate the development and cultivation of alternative gardens, school curricula, and more in schools and neighborhoods. Numerous ARTs have cooperated to ramp up voting and civic engagement on campus and in the broader community. An ART called ATAM (Art through All Mediums) regularly holds art events in the community in collaboration with a local café. The ART working on sexuality and gender issues testified at Flagstaff

city council meetings in a process that led to the adoption of a human-rights ordinance. Growing numbers of students attend Flagstaff city council meetings with increasing regularity. The list of democratic collaborations and admirable public work is long and rapidly expanding.

As one colleague put it: “I think that it’s fair to say, that there are few spaces—that are political spaces of interaction or contention . . . —where decisions that are being made [in Flagstaff], there are few of those kinds of spaces where somebody from the ARTs is not connected to . . . and listing all of the stuff would be really long . . . so, there is very few places that are important political struggles that somehow the ARTs doesn’t have a little bit of a foot into. This can be water issues, this can be queer issues, this can be diversity issues and the city council, it can be mobilizing citizens around immigration, it can be things to do with composting . . . there are just so many.” And he also tells of a colleague, who is a well-respected political scientist, who was initially skeptical and cynical about the ARTs, after two years suddenly tell him, ““Wow! This thing has done an enormous amount! It has shifted and changed things.”” Another colleague we interviewed noted that students are involved in everything in the community—“I just think that those student leaders [of the ARTs] would not have made those connections [with community groups] without the ARTs. And they wouldn’t be taken seriously in the way that they are by the community.” Faculty have noticed that members of the city council and several candidates running for office have a “fire that [they] might not have before—gained energy from [their relationship with the ARTs].” People that we interviewed consistently saw this shift in the political ecology of the community as “promising.”

Nearly all those who are fired up about democracy have debts in multiple directions. If community members are fired up by students, we have repeatedly seen that the reverse is at least as true. Moreover, many of the faculty who have been key catalysts of this movement have themselves been further fired up by the democratic engagements of community members and students. Our colleague from modern languages whose personal-public narrative was profoundly impacted by his work in the ARTs is emblematic here. As a result of his engagement with community organizations and students, his scholarship has become more publically oriented—including his writing, his



work at art exhibits, musical performances, community organizing, and more. “My whole moral compass has changed. I’m dedicating my life to it,” he proclaims.

As we noted above, one of the most profound ways NAU’s relationship to the community is beginning to shift is that growing numbers in the democratization movement are increasingly *receptive* to members of the community when they raise issues. For example, in the spring semester of 2014, a large developer launched a full court press to construct a massive five-story student-housing complex in a poor Hispanic neighborhood. The project would have displaced many people who are among the most vulnerable members of our community, created horrendous traffic problems, and more. Many felt that the neighborhood was never seriously consulted. In response to this problem, students (as well as several faculty) from numerous ARTs spontaneously got involved, collaboratively organized with a large number of organizations and political leaders, showed up regularly and spoke compellingly at city council meetings, and, ultimately, contributed to stopping the project. Some have continued to work with members of the community and a group called Friends of Flagstaff’s Future to amend the Regional Plan to include a well-considered set of policy guidelines for developing much needed student housing in the future in ways that are equitable, deliberative, sustainable, and fairly compensate vulnerable people who are displaced.

This example illustrates well how the NAU ARTs movement is indeed becoming a node of receptivity and a collaborative force for democratic action in the Flagstaff community. As one faculty member observed about the ARTs, “You know that the way that [the ARTs] are starting to think of themselves as dealing with issues . . . more broadly, is now connected with the local [community], and . . . who is kind of everywhere.” We believe that, as we ask what ought to be the relationship between the university and the community, we begin to broach questions concerning the very meaning of the *publicness* itself of public institutions of higher education. Many faculty in this initiative are, in a radically democratic way, beginning to imagine a university “owned” by the public in ways that far exceed the taxes they pay to support such institutions. We are beginning to imagine institutions that are “public” and “owned” by the public in the sense that higher education would, by virtue of co-creating nodes of receptivity, conduct responsive dialogues, public work, and political action *with*

communities on problems that are co-identified by both. In this scenario, higher education and its partner communities would co-produce knowledge, work, and action for the commonwealth. Our institutions would in this way become genuinely by, with, and for the people. This is a normative horizon that we explore in great detail in a chapter of our forthcoming book, but it is important to note that the *question*, as well as emergent responses to it, were born here, in the thickets of collaboration among faculty, students, and members of the broader community.

Ultimately, we believe this reformed and enriched understanding of the publicness of higher education that emerges at reciprocally receptive intersections among broader communities has implications that far exceed the normative. As we have traveled and discussed our work in numerous settings across the United States (and in several other countries as well), we have been repeatedly asked the question: how have you managed to build such a large and deeply democratic initiative so quickly? Indeed, to our knowledge, the movement for democracy's education at NAU is distinctive within the context of numerous initiatives emerging on US campuses in the past several years. There are likely several reasons for this, but perhaps the most important is that the theory and practice of nodes of receptivity for democratic commonwealth has provided *not only a normative political horizon, but a frame that is profoundly useful for generating strategic power to advance public work and political action as well*. In our classrooms, among faculty, and in our relations with the broader polity, we have been seeking to hone the fine arts of listening well and becoming responsive to other voices, narratives, interests, passions, perspectives, positions, and visions. When we succeed at doing this, we tap into myriad energies and aspirations that often disclose far more expansive and richer possibilities and power than any of us had imagined at the outset. This, in turn, generates examples that draw more and more people actively into the mix, and the process appears to take on characteristics that theorists of complex dynamical systems call "autocatalytic." We find that the process, then, catalyzes a series of outcomes (e.g., talents, interest, involvement, enthusiasm, and achievements) that, in turn, feed back into

the process in ways that further catalyze and proliferate the process itself.<sup>9</sup> We believe that in democratizing system dynamics, radical receptivity is not only ethically compelling but, strategically, one of the most powerful modes of action available.

For this approach to democratization, we are profoundly indebted to the legacy of Ella Baker, Bob Moses, and other grassroots leaders in the Civil Rights Movement who—relatively quietly and with extraordinary power—modeled and encouraged a politics that accented listening as a prelude to voice and radical transformation.<sup>10</sup> Our colleague with a background in public art and activist scholarship very powerfully articulated this vision of democracy that so many of us embrace and seek to practice, and it is worth quoting him at some length. Referring to his education in African American studies, he said: “So there is that tension between ‘are you really . . . an insurrectionary pedagogy or are you simply trying to engage people?’ And *simply* is probably not the best word to use. But we thought it was to engage people first, and let them make their own distinctions and ideas.” Thus, when he teaches, he focuses on the specific “history and culture of particular groups. . . . A lot of people don’t want to know the history and culture of particular groups. They want to know race as a floating signifier, gender as a floating signifier, sexuality, etc. And to me that just takes all the human part out of it. It is just an issue you’re looking at as opposed to the real human being before you who is complex and has various history and culture behind him or her. . . . I think that is anathema to really rigorous research. . . .” He says to his students: “There are real communities of change that are out there. You come from one. Here are some others that you can be introduced to in the Flagstaff region.”

In a class, entitled *Social Movements, Culture, and Community Engagement*, that he teaches with a woman who is a community organizer and member of the city council, they “try to walk through 15 weeks [pulling individuals into the class] who are community organizers or activists [to engage with the students]. And then we situate it at

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<sup>9</sup> For more on autocatalysis and transformation in the context of political theory and transformations in higher education and beyond, see Romand Coles, *Visionary Pragmatism: Toward Radical and Ecological Democracy* (Duke University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> For the civil rights and “prophetic receptivity,” see Romand Coles and Stanley Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Christian and a Radical Democrat* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2007). See also the chapter on Ella Baker in Cornel West, *Black Prophetic Fire*, ed. Christa Bouschendorf (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014).

the Murdoch Community Center, which was the [segregated] Paul Dunbar Elementary School. . . . So we were confident that we could bring people who could tell their narrative stories from these different movements. And that they would see them as part of an extension . . . living human beings who engage in different strategies to empower people. . . . And that there was a whole history and culture you could read about and become a better scholar, a better critical thinker, and a better writer. So in each of these classes they had to do the weekly reflections based on [specific individuals they brought in]. These stories are so powerful.” Students often do follow-up interviews with the grassroots leaders who had visited their class, as well as pursue extensive research in oral history archives to get a textured sense of the complexities, contingencies, and choices of people engaged in making change. “Once they have done that then they can say, maybe I can find out who else was involved in these movements other than Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X. . . . And so I find that the narrative experience comes alive when you bring in a live person to talk about their own life [in conjunction with scholarship on social movements]. We want to start with the stories, personal lives. . . . Before . . . you had to do the door knocking . . . and darn it, you had to know that person . . . and not because you had them on a 3x5 card, but because you had tea with them. . . . It is the Ella Baker model; it really is! . . . Until you really engage real people on an issue, you don’t really understand it. . . . And I think that, if nothing else, [students] began to see themselves as a member of this community—NAU and the Southside.”

As with many other faculty, this colleague noted how this sort of pedagogy had a profound impact on him, as well as his students. “What I found was that if I wasn’t approaching it this way it was no longer meaningful or interesting to me either. . . . Until I have actually had to try to say, well you know: you’re in Flagstaff—what is unique and distinctive about this, and then what is similar. . . . For me that’s what is the most interesting and engaging part. . . . What’s interesting to me is to try to find if there are real-world applications for this stuff. There are. And then what can I do as a scholar-activist that has significance for me. And part of that is presenting the history and culture that people should be proud of but is not told through most of our K-12 system.”

Our colleague thoughtfully expresses how modes of pedagogy and democratic engagement develop by engaging students “where they are at” rather than by preaching

one's own truths to them. One key way to do this is to have students learn the arts of listening attentively to the complex narratives of people from the community who—historically or currently—are engaged in real struggles to respond to the problems of this world. It is by tarrying with, gathering, and interweaving myriad stories that students begin to do serious research that co-creates a rich and multifaceted knowledge. On this basis, they begin to gain a sense of the problems and possibilities of a place, and from there they begin to imagine ways they might engage to catalyze significant changes.

Faculty who engage their students and their communities in this way find that they are also cultivating themselves in the process. What is at stake here is cultivating democratic epistemological habits that are adequate to the task of co-creating genuine commonwealth in our complex, dynamic, and diverse communities. If we don't listen well, we have little chance of generating thoughtful *knowledge* about the intricate fabrics of our communities. If we don't engender practices of deep receptivity, we vacate our only hope for forming relationships of *respect and reciprocity* among profoundly complicated and distinctive beings.<sup>11</sup> Eschewing these democratic epistemological and ethical practices, we set aside the most elemental sources of our *power* to catalyze democratic transformation in societies teeming with differences. These are difficult lessons, and we are always in need of relearning them. Yet what is perhaps most hopeful about the movement for democracy's education at NAU, is that it appears that there are profoundly felicitous synergies between democratic epistemology, ethics, and power.

In our urgency to make change, we too often forget all this and leap to monological political strategies that, ironically, undermine our transformative pedagogical and political capacities. In contrast, we have found that if we inform our “fierce urgency of now” with a “wild patience” that calls us to become deeply attentive and dialogically responsive to our students, colleagues, and communities, there are worlds of hitherto unrecognized possibilities for generative change. The ice thaws and democratic currents begin again their hopeful flow.

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<sup>11</sup> Another colleague we interviewed from a different university also stressed that “reciprocity” was the key idea that she learned from her democratic practice.

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## About the Kettering Foundation

The Kettering Foundation is an independent, nonpartisan research organization rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Everything Kettering researches relates to one central question: what does it take for democracy to work as it should? Chartered as an operating corporation, Kettering does not make grants. The foundation's small staff and extensive network of associates collaborate with community organizations, government agencies, researchers scholars, and citizens, all of whom share their experiences with us.

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