

COUNTING CARING: ACCOUNTABILITY, PERFORMANCE AND LEARNING
AT THE GREATER ITHACA ACTIVITIES CENTER

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Margo J. Hittleman

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Margo J. Hittleman, Ph.D.

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This dissertation – incorporating action research, global ethnography, narrative inquiry, and critical race perspectives – examines an agency-wide staff and organizational development process at the Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC), an African-American-led, multicultural community center in Ithaca, New York, while contextualizing this local work within an examination of global structural forces shaping the work of the community-service sector as a whole in the United States.

Through this research project, we explored how a sustained collective, critically reflective educational process linked to concrete action could help GIAC and its staff respond simultaneously to external demands for improved accountability and internal desires to improve programming. In this dissertation, which draws upon that research, I suggest that an unarticulated tension between two fundamentally different conceptual frameworks – a dominant “professional public management” frame and a contesting “personal relations” frame – reflects and shapes how people understand, and thus, attempt to account for, learn about and improve “community service” work. I examine the ways these contesting frameworks played out *in practice*, demonstrating how seemingly “objective” approaches to accountability and evaluation – e.g., the now nearly ubiquitous outcome measurement model – actually marginalize important kinds of work and reproduce entrenched social (dis)advantage. I explore the challenges and possibilities faced by an agency that centralizes a “personal relations” perspective in a

world dominated by norms of “professional public management,” and I examine practitioners’ efforts to not only *reflect on*, but collectively *respond to* contesting perspectives on their work within social environments shaped by institutionalized relations of power. Finally, I argue that taking a “personal relations” perspective seriously is needed to (a) understand GIAC and organizations like it on their own terms; (b) re-imagine accountability and evaluation as dynamic, dialogic, collective processes that can enable people to learn about and improve their work in the course of learning about what matters; and (c) revitalize a weakened public commitment to nurturing human potential and embracing diversity, thus reinvigorating our community-service system as a whole. From a methodological perspective, this dissertation also exemplifies action research strategies for collaborative knowledge creation and draws lessons from this work for the further development of action research praxis.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Margo J. Hittleman was born May 28, 1959. Growing up in suburban Long Island’s middle-class suburbs in the 1960s and 1970s, she and her friends lived in a world of upward mobility and material comfort, two – and sometimes three – generations removed from their primarily Eastern European Jewish immigrant ancestors. It was a world in which they were imbued with a sense of expectation, entitlement, and a belief in their own efficacy. As the oldest child of two educators, she was told repeatedly, “If you can read, you can do anything.” And she was expected to put that, literally, into practice.

It was also a world in which she was infused early with a sense of vulnerability and “otherness” and an awareness of injustice. At ten, she first tried to make sense of the German footage from the death camps, incomprehensible black-and-white images of immense, meticulously sorted piles of shoes and eyeglasses and of skeletal corpses being bulldozed into a mass grave. At twelve, she read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, engaging in drawn-out imaginary experiments in an attempt to determine whether she would have had the mental stamina, intellectual astuteness and courage to save her family and herself.

And it was a world to which she and her friends brought a full measure of righteousness to question. Her adolescence was inspired by the teachings of the Biblical prophets with their stinging critiques of social injustice and resounding calls for change (“Justice, justice shall you pursue,” intoned Isaiah) and softened by the Jewish mystics, with their stories of a shattered world, divine particles scattered; the essence of humanity, the mystics taught, was to participate in *tikkun olam*, the repair or the healing of that shattered world. She and her friends turned to these sources, as well as to secular social analyses, to develop their own systemic critiques and guide their expanding forays into social action.

Margo moved to Ithaca, New York in 1977 to attend Cornell University where she was fortunate to find the multidisciplinary “Biology & Society” program. There she learned the necessity and rewards of exploring complex social problems from multiple vantage points and was dissuaded from ever fitting comfortably into any single academic “discipline.” She also spent a year (1979-1980) living on an Israeli *kibbutz*, discovering first-hand the promises and challenges of a socialist-inspired, collective community, as well as learning the practical skills of milking cows. After receiving her bachelors’ degree, *magna cum laude*, from Cornell in January 1982, she remained in the Ithaca area, working in and with a variety of community-service, educational and grassroots social change organizations. During this period, she was deeply influenced by the teachings and practices of Re-evaluation Counseling, with its commitment to a world-wide liberation project for *all* people and its recognition that individual and social transformation can not be separated nor proceed very far independently of each other.

In August 2000, she entered the doctoral program in Adult and Extension Education at Cornell seeking the opportunity to reflect on and gain confidence in what she knew, to look for answers to what she didn’t, and to find ever more effective ways to promote the work of creating inclusive communities that foster human flourishing. She continues to find the question of how to create that world – the just world that the prophets envisioned, the world made whole that the mystics foresaw – the most intellectually interesting and practically challenging proposition there is.

I dedicate this dissertation to Ms. Julia Diann Sams
Nov. 9, 1947 – Oct. 28, 2005

Who, over a cup of tea in her kitchen, welcomed my interest in GIAC
and encouraged me to join the GIAC Board of Directors;

And who, through word and deed, insisted that injustice must be fought
with every resource we could muster, that those who are not being
listened to must be heard, and that the daily work of improving human
life and human lives must never, ever be held hostage to bureaucratic
formulations.

I learned from her more than I had the chance to say.

I hope this work, in some small way, will help to carry on the struggles
to which she devoted her life.

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Like raising a child, intellectual work takes a village. Although my name appears alone on the front cover, I am indebted to the many friends and colleagues who participated in the work this dissertation describes. They shared ideas, taught me, learned with me, listened to me, encouraged me and kept me company. I am able to thank only some of them by name here.

First, I am deeply grateful to the staff, Board and other members of the Greater Ithaca Activities Center. My life is incredibly enriched by being a member of the GIAC family. They have taught me a deeper understanding of community, solidarity, inclusion and respect for all. I appreciate their willingness to allow me to learn with and from them, and to write about our work in this way. Although my appreciations are individual, I can only thank them here collectively, with one exception. Marcia Fort is teacher, colleague and most importantly, friend. She has encouraged me, trusted me, supported me, made me laugh, listened to me cry, and fed me chocolate. She brings the tenets of a “personal relations” perspective to all who cross her path; I am fortunate to be among them.

My teachers and colleagues at Cornell University made my years as a graduate student fruitful and enjoyable. My committee – Professors Scott Peters, Davydd Greenwood, William Sonnenstuhl, and Arthur Wilson – supported and guided my learning and added to this work in numerous ways. I am particularly indebted to Davydd, who not only supervised my dissertation research and writing, but who first became my teacher and mentor twenty-five years ago, when I was an undergraduate at Cornell. His wide-ranging intellectual curiosity; his commitment to rigorous, meaningful scholarship in service of a more democratic, just world; his dedication to teaching and his great generosity to his students will remain an inspiration for me, always. Scott Peters, my committee chair, warmly welcomed me as a colleague,

invited me to participate in and learn from his own research projects, modeled for me the possibilities for the “critically hopeful” scholar, and repeatedly ensured that I had the funding to complete this work; I am glad for the chance to work together with him. Finally, although her role was publicly unrecognized, Ann Martin generously served as a “shadow” member of my committee. Our numerous conversations helped guide my work and deepened my understanding of action research, writing, and organizational development and change processes. They also sustained my enthusiasm, bolstered flagging confidence, and offered great pleasure.

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Professor John Forester offered me intellectual conversation and personal support at critical junctures in my graduate career. Cornell’s Department of Education and its chair, Professor Rosemary Caffarella, provided crucial financial support for a portion of this work. April Kampney, the department’s administrative manager, is an angel disguised as a human; her assistance will never be forgotten.

For the past four years, Richard Lansdowne has engaged with my daily musings, reports, insights, worries and developing theories far more often than he probably

would have chosen; he has done so with kindness, intelligence and humor. He talked through my evolving ideas, challenged me, encouraged me, and helped me place aspects of this work within larger philosophical traditions. When all else failed, he took me dancing. My life is far better for his partnership in it. Finally, I thank my parents for a lifetime of support; in this context, they deserve particular thanks for nurturing my intellectual curiosity and love of learning and for their unfailing interest in my work.

I am not of course proposing an end to science and other intellectual disciplines, but rather a change of standards and goals. ... Suppose that the ultimate standard of our work were to be, not professionalism and profitability, but the health and durability of human and natural communities. Suppose that we learned to ask of any proposed innovation ...: What will this do to our community? Suppose we attempted the authentic multiculturalism of adapting our ways of life to the nature of the places where we live. Suppose, in short, that we should take seriously the proposition that our arts and sciences have the power to help us adapt and survive. What then? ... And how might this come about?

-- Wendell Berry, *Life is a Miracle*

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PREFACE

Although the work that led to this dissertation was collaborative, this representation of it is mine. Thus, not all of the Greater Ithaca Activity Center (GIAC) staff members – current or employed during the time of this project – agree with all of the interpretations I make here. However, the overall story I tell is told with the permission of the staff still employed at GIAC in June 2006. The real names of the people involved in this project and all quotes attributed to them are used with their permission.

One point of disagreement, however, is significant enough to mention immediately. I describe GIAC as a “community-service agency.” Many of the GIAC staff would not. When I presented an outline of my overall argument to the GIAC staff in June 2006, several staff members objected that they were not a “community-service agency,” preferring to reserve that term for agencies that operate under what I describe as the dominant “professional public management” model. When I asked what a more accurate description of their agency would be, they replied “a community center” or even just “GIAC.”

Naming is an act of power. Whether we name ourselves or are named (against our own perceptions) by another matters. As I understand some of the staff members’ objections, emphasizing GIAC’s distance from other community-based agencies highlights their perception that they understand their work differently and that this difference is vital to them. They want to emphasize the difference between being a “community **center**” and providing “community **service**.” These are vitally important distinctions, central to the arguments I make in this work. So I have wavered about whether to change the language throughout this piece.

At the same time, I lack a straightforward language to use instead. Further, I believe there are also important reasons for challenging dominant claims on how we

define important institutions and sectors in our communal life. Asserting an alternative claim for what “community service” means is one way to challenge and begin to change how this work is perceived in the larger society. Thus, I have chosen to refer to GIAC as a “community-service” organization. Some GIAC staff concur with this decision; others likely do not. Another writer undoubtedly would have chosen otherwise.

Had I more time, I might have found a more elegant solution.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

It was a Friday evening in late October 2003. Sixty people sat on metal folding chairs around long brown tables in the Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC) gym, the remains of a catered dinner – Caribbean chicken, rice and beans, tossed salad, macaroni and cheese, chocolate cake – in front of us. We were about to embark on a two-day participatory planning process known as a Search Conference, a process unfamiliar to most in the room.¹ The conference had been organized around two questions: “What is our vision for GIAC in the year 2013 – ten years from now?” and “What will we – parents, program participants, staff, Board and community members – have to do to make that vision a reality?” Robert Rich, a senior extension associate from Cornell University skilled in organizational development work, and Schelley Michel-Nunn, director of human resources for the City of Ithaca, had agreed to volunteer as the conference facilitators. Introductions were the first item on the agenda. Robert began, asking: “Who are you and what’s your connection to GIAC?”

A woman in her mid-fifties, a long white braid hanging down her back, stood first. Taking the microphone, she said, “I’m Audrey Cooper. I’ve been part of GIAC for thirty years. I worked here. I’m on the Board. My kids were raised at GIAC. Now my grandkids are being raised at GIAC. And Michael Thomas, over there, I raised him.” A few minutes later, Michael stood and took the mike: “I’m Michael Thomas. I work at GIAC. Audrey Cooper may have raised me, but I raised *her* kids.” And so it went on....

¹ Search Conferences were first developed as a participatory strategic planning design by Fred Emery and Eric Trist and further developed by Fred Emery and Merrelyn Emery, among others (see, for example, Emery and Purser 1996).

“I’m Diane Thomas², and I’m here because Marcia Fort is my hero.”

“I’m Nancy Lee. GIAC gave me my first ‘adult job.’ And Marcia is my hero, too.”

“I’m T.J. Fields and Audrey Cooper is my ‘shero.’ When I was an undergraduate, she came to talk to my class. I literally chased her down the hill and begged her to let me come work here. That was thirty years ago. And now my sons are at GIAC.”

For close to an hour, each person, in turn, took the mike and answered the question “What’s your connection to GIAC?” These were agency Board and staff, the parents of program participants, and other community members, but only a few talked about their connections to a program or an organization. Rather, they talked about their relationship to a community of people – people who had raised them, their children, their grandchildren, and who they had raised. They talked about it as the place where they made important life transitions, where they got their first “adult” job or took their first steps toward community involvement. And they looked around the room and pointed to people they called their “heroes.”

During the two days of the Search Conference, participants created a “shared history” for the center and a collective “ideal future” which included incorporating more family and adult programming and the building of a much-needed new facility that would contain a well-equipped public access computer lab, recording studio and media lab, a kitchen large enough to hold cooking classes, a dark room, a larger gym, a fitness center and indoor pool, a theater for performances, room for a food pantry, good lighting and storage space, ventilation, and a safe drop-off area for children,

² The name of the speaker in this and the following two quotes are pseudonyms.

away from traffic. The tone of this discussion was ambitious and optimistic. But when Robert Rich tried to engage people in a “probable future” exercise – the next step of a Search Conference, designed to help people consider the future that will come if no action is taken – the group resisted repeatedly. After a few minutes, T.J. Fields stood in exasperation. “I can’t stand this any more,” he said. “GIAC never does nothing. That’s not who we are. We always eventually do whatever we decide to do.”

The Search Conference introductions echoed in my head for months. In particular, I was struck by the way in which the participants answered the introductory question. Although they were asked to identify their connection to an organization, they instead pointed to their connections to each other. In doing so, they used language that emphasized long-term, care-taking relationships and human development. They talked about the raising of children, being raised up oneself, and sharing important life transitions, activities that, in the United States, are most frequently relegated to the private, family sphere. Further, the relationships that they pointed to spanned generations. They criss-crossed families. And they were fluid: people moved from staff member to Board member, from program volunteer to the parent of program participant, from program participant to staff member. Soon after the conference, I wrote, “There’s something important to be understood about the meaning of this kind of ‘community center’ in a world of service provision, a center defined not by its programs, but by its relationships” (research memo, Nov. 7, 2003).

Seven months later, I participated in another gathering, this one significantly smaller. Four of us – GIAC director Marcia Fort; a staff member and an allocations committee volunteer from the United Way, GIAC’s second largest funder; and I – crowded around the small round conference table in Marcia’s office at 9 am on a Thursday morning. Numerous small photographs, mostly school portraits with their stark blue backgrounds; yellowing newspaper clippings; children’s drawings, awards

and other memorabilia spanning nearly two decades covered every available inch of the walls. A long built-in desk, mounted shelves above it, a computer table and a small refrigerator competed for the remaining space. After a few minutes of chatting, Marcia turned the conversation to the purpose of the meeting. GIAC had recently received a review letter from the United Way's volunteer allocations team noting several concerns, including the "inconsistent quality" of the agency's "logic" (or outcome measurement) models, and requesting a new application the following year, outside the standard biannual application process. For Marcia, this letter was the "final straw." She was disturbed that the United Way, one of the partner agencies that had originally created GIAC, was now judging their work solely according to an "outcome measurement" model without taking into account the "big picture of their work in the community and its value." She wanted to know what the "real issues" and dissatisfactions were.

In this meeting, the visitors talked about "substantial progress" in GIAC's logic models the previous year, but a "step back" in the most recent year, and about missed distinctions between "outputs" and "outcomes" in those models. They expressed concern that "all non-profits are doing more and more with less and less" and stressed that agencies "may need to prioritize, focus and narrow," "to contract and constrain." They talked about the reluctance they saw among some agencies' Board of Directors to "make choices," to "de-emphasize" some of what they were doing and pay more attention to "those areas with the greatest impact," and they noted that those agencies who did not make such choices were "doing mediocre across the board." Their suggestion: GIAC focus on its largest program – youth services – and cut other initiatives such as the significantly smaller program for senior citizens.

In this meeting, I was once again struck by the language and focus. In contrast to the Search Conference's emphasis on relationships and human development, here the

language was mechanistic. Although I knew that the United Way visitors cared deeply about the well-being of people, abstract operational processes (“inputs,” “outputs,” “prioritizing,” “contracting,” “logic models,” “measurement,” impact”) and programs took center stage; the relationship between *people* was nowhere to be found.

In a simple reading, the differences in language and focus between these two meetings could be seen simply as an inherent, even expected, difference between an inclusive community-wide gathering for envisioning a desired future and a small meeting with funders who have a public responsibility to ensure accountability. They could be interpreted as a difference between those envisioning broad community services within a single agency and those seeking focus and specialization. Or they could even be disregarded as accidental or an anomaly. I find these interpretations inadequate.

Instead, I believe these two anecdotes direct attention to a fundamental dilemma facing the community-service system in the United States.³ This is a dilemma about how to understand and, thus, to account for, learn about and improve the work of our community-based organizations. I believe that these two anecdotes point to two very different frameworks – conceptual models – that differently reflect and shape how people understand “community service” work. One framework, what I call here the “professional public management” frame, directs attention to rational, technically sophisticated, management-based operational processes and expert-driven programming as the foundation for a well-run organization. The second framework, what I call the “personal relations” frame, directs attention differently, placing

³ I use the term “community-service system” to refer to both public and nonprofit community-based organizations and the entities – again, both public and private – that fund and regulate them. Sometimes these same organizations are referred to as providing “human services.”

familial, care-taking relationships – the “raising up” of people and communities – at the center of this work.

Of course, in practice, these two frameworks are not mutually exclusive; nor do they exist separately from each other. The desire to promote human flourishing exists throughout the community service system. So, too, does the desire to manage public resources and public organizations wisely and effectively. But, as I will argue in this dissertation, understanding these contesting frameworks and exploring how they co-exist in an uneasy tension has profound implications for not just how we think about community service work, but for how that work is done. These frameworks differently shape what activities community-service workers pay attention to most, what is considered “work” – and thus, attended to, planned for and improved – and what is considered “extraneous.” They shape what we expect from community service organizations, how we think they should operate, how we go about building the capacities of the organizations and their staff to meet those expectations, how we evaluate their performance and impact, and how we institutionalize processes for internal and external accountability. They reflect very different ideas about what kind of work is to be valued (and thus funded), and they determine what values will shape the kind of work to be done and how, what goals we are to seek, and how we determine what constitutes “success.”

Finally, the implications of these two frameworks extend beyond the community-service sector, connecting to larger questions plaguing contemporary society as a whole: questions that relate to a contested search for the purpose and meaning of the work people do. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, people – across many sectors of American society – are engaged in a profound search for meaning in their work, their family life, their political processes, their civic associations, and so on. This search is pulled in one direction by an increasingly articulated yearning for

human connection and fulfillment, for public, as well as private, relationships that are meaningful in human, personal ways. This yearning is reflected by the rise in books and workshops promising guidance for “soulful” and “joyous” work across business, politics, and community engagement (see, for example, Whyte 1994; Lerner 1996, 2002; Loeb 1999; Bakke 2005).

It is pulled, simultaneously, in a second direction by a long-standing Western love affair with a technical, highly rational world view that promises that well-executed social planning and control will give rise to a better world. Adopted and used by a constellation of political and economic interests in advanced capitalist societies that have come to be termed “neoliberalism” or the increasing application of a market-like, economically driven “production” framework and individualized, instrumental “consumer” mentality, this logic has insinuated itself into nearly every aspect of our lives. In the community services sector, it has been translated into an increasingly insistent demand to enhance “service delivery,” “performance,” and “accountability” – and to do so in particular ways. The stakes for those working in this sector are high: their ability to compete for shrinking resources is tied to how well they can deliver on those demands.

The tension between these two contesting searches takes its toll. It has been difficult for many in the community-service sector, both as individuals and organizations, to reconcile what often seem like conflicting demands: to aim for predictable outcomes and to innovate, to demonstrate short-term gains in the lives of those they “serve” while promoting long-term human development and systemic change, to devote limited time and resources to meeting community needs for help and support while responding to demands for information and accountability, to centralize

“caring” while also proving “efficiency” and “cost-effectiveness.”⁴ As the country’s financial resources are increasingly diverted to corporate profit and concentration in the hands of the few, community-service organizations are being asked to do all this (and more) with less.

In this dissertation, I explore the possibilities and challenges that one community center faced as they sought to respond to these contesting demands. I examine the ways these contesting frameworks played out in practice – between the center and its funders, and within the center itself. I explore the frameworks’ historical, cultural and political roots, the implications for the differential valuing (in terms of respect, attention and material resources) accorded different kinds of “work,” and the relationship between these contesting frameworks and institutionalized systems of racism, classism and sexism. I investigate the challenges and possibilities faced by an agency that centralizes a “personal relations” perspective in a world dominated by the tenets of “professional public management.” Finally, I explore our efforts to create learning processes that could help the staff critically reflect on how these frameworks related to internal and external expectations for “accountability” and “program improvement” and to use that new knowledge to decide if and how to respond. This work – and their perspective on it – holds important lessons for our community-service system as a whole.

Overview of the research project

This dissertation is based on a three-year action research study with the staff of the Greater Ithaca Activities Center, a multicultural community center in central New

⁴ This phenomenon is not limited to community services, or even to the nonprofit sector. A similar tension – arising from similar contesting desires for meaning and competing demands – exists in many for-profit organizations. However, a discussion of the similarities and differences in how this phenomenon plays out; its implications for for-profit organizations, workers and the larger society; and reflections on what ought to be done about it is beyond the scope of this work.

York State. In this project, I worked with the full-time, permanent members of the GIAC staff – twenty-one people in all, when staff turn-over is taken into account – to address external demands for enhanced accountability and internal demands for improved programming. As noted above, one of GIAC’s largest funders had required that they “improve” and resubmit their outcome measurement models in order to receive the following year’s funding. Marcia Fort, GIAC’s director, wanted to help her staff strengthen their programming. My role, as an adult educator with some experience facilitating participatory organizational processes, was to help them respond to both demands. Together we worked on developing new outcome measurement models for the United Way. Based on the sweeping promises of outcome measurement advocates, Marcia and I hoped that we could then use those models internally to help the GIAC staff strengthen their own programming as well.

Presented as a “staff and organizational development” initiative, this project immediately raised questions about what kind of “development” was to be done. Practical questions about *how* work to enhance accountability and performance is to be done can not easily be separated from normative questions about *why, for whom, toward what ends, and according to whose criteria?* (Wilson and Hayes 2000). These latter questions could not be separated from questions about the particular organizational cultures of this organization, that is, from an attempt to understand the ways that the GIAC staff themselves understood the nature and purposes of their work.⁵

⁵ I refer to “organizational cultures” in the plural here following Davydd Greenwood (1991) who calls for researchers to avoid the tendency to see organizational culture as homogeneous and singular and observes that “we cannot understand systems unless we usefully capture the diversity within them (104). Joanne Martin (1992) makes a similar argument in a more extended form, arguing against an “integration” perspective that suggests unity in organizational culture, experiences and perspectives. Instead, she proposes that researchers must pay attention to inconsistency, ambiguity, complexity of relationships and a multiplicity of interpretations, arguing that “No static, totalizing organization-wide interpretation is possible” (157).

To claim that all these questions are intrinsically interrelated is not a given. For many, both practitioners and scholars, such “development” activities are solely practical matters, with practical – that is, prescribed – solutions. I make the case for the intrinsic relationship among these questions in the course of this dissertation. But because I believe that there is a relationship, that the questions about *why* profoundly shape the questions about *how*, I paid particular attention in this project to trying to understand GIAC’s organizational cultures: to deciphering not just what people did, but why they chose one course of action over another. I sought to understand the meanings the GIAC staff made of their work and how they conceptualized the purpose and place of their organization in relationship to the larger community.

But I didn’t begin this work in a vacuum. In fact, I chose to conduct research at GIAC because, although I couldn’t name them at the time, I believed there were lessons to be learned here that could strengthen the work of the community service system as a whole. I had joined the GIAC Board of Directors four years earlier because I knew of GIAC as an agency whose name was consistently attached to important efforts to improve the lives of people who, in the language of the community-service sector, might be called “under-represented,” “disenfranchised,” or “at risk” – in short, people of color and people who were working class or poor; I wanted to learn what they knew. I came to this project after working for many years with a variety of grassroots community service organizations to create a more inclusive, just society. And I had returned to graduate school, in large measure, to explore how such systemic social change might be fostered more effectively. There, I had become intrigued by action research as a collaborative process that engaged a professional researcher and members of an organization or community in iterative cycles of reflection and action to create new knowledge about pressing social concerns. It offered a solution to what I had seen as a rigid separation between those

who studied social problems, without taking action to change them, and those who acted but, in the midst of overwork, had little time to systematically reflect on what could be learned.

I chose an action research approach for this project because I believe that useful knowledge – both practical and theoretical – can be developed from studying attempts to change complex systems. I also believe that action research is well-suited to an organizational development process as it engages the actors in that system in learning about their own attempts to change it. As the project unfolded, I came to draw from several other research methodologies – narrative inquiry, global ethnography and critical race perspectives – to deepen the knowledge that might be created from this work.

Thus, as the GIAC staff and I worked together, I found myself increasingly paying attention to the stories that the staff told about themselves and others, to the stories that others told about GIAC, in particular, and about community service organizations in general, and to the stories I was creating to explain to myself and others how these phenomenon might be understood. Ethnographically based narrative inquiry is well suited to capture the complexity, messiness and conceptual richness that characterizes real people's attempts to solve real problems in their every day lives. It provides an essential counterpoint to more abstract examinations of large systems and disembodied global forces; while those latter studies can help us make meaning of large structures, they offer little real help in guiding practice. At the same time, however, when locally-oriented case studies are severed from the larger social-historical-political systems in which they are imbedded, the result is a rather idiosyncratic, even if charming, story devoid of larger meaning. I sought, instead, a balance that would enable me to embed my analysis of this local organizational development work within an analysis of the global structural forces shaping and

shaped by that work. Thus, as the project continued to evolve, I turned to “global ethnography” (Burawoy 1998, 2000) and critical race perspectives to help me write a story “anchored in concrete, individual life circumstances and [one that exemplifies] the lived experiences of complex, multilayered social and economic forces” (Hart 2002: 2). In adopting this kind of methodological “composite position,” I borrow from Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldbberg’s (2000) call for a “reflexive methodology” that incorporates multiple empirical methods and moves repeatedly between forms and levels of analysis without allowing any one to dominate. (A more detailed discussion of the research design and the rationale for my methodological choices appears in Chapter 2.)

The Two Frameworks in Practice

In the course of this project, I came to a number of conclusions. First, as I noted above, the different ways of talking about community-service organizations captured in the opening anecdotes reflect more than a choice of language. Rather, they reflect an underlying logic that guides behavior and makes people’s choice of one set of actions (as opposed to other possible actions) make sense. I have characterized these logics in terms of two contesting conceptual frameworks that both reflect and shape people’s understanding of their work.

One framework – what I call the “professional public management” frame – dominates the understanding of community service work; it is accepted by many, without question, as a description of “the way things are.” But grounded in the logic of a technical-rational world view, it is actually a particular perspective on the world with specific historical, cultural and social moorings. The intellectual ideas underlying this framework – passionately and clearly articulated in the early years of the 20th century in the “scientific management” efforts of Frederick Taylor and enthusiastically applied

by Henry Ford, to the production lines at the Ford Motor Company – quickly became popular with the Progressive Era social reformers seeking to “build a new and better world.” With few exceptions, they have had decided staying power as the dominant frame shaping community-service work ever since.

As applied to the community-service sector, this “scientific management” logic gives rise to the ideals of “professional service” and “public management.” It conceives of “performance” as “service delivery” and measures it in terms of “efficiency” and “cost-effectiveness.” It argues that those providing those services should be “professionals” rather than untrained “do-gooders,” bringing particular kinds of “expertise” to those they “serve”; relationships are shaped by these “professional-client” roles. It suggests that there is a “best way” to do this work that can be identified and documented and that others can be taught how to carry it out (so, for example, the current fascination with “best practices” and “what works”). It promises that if community service workers are better trained in expert-created, scientifically validated and objectively verified “best practices,” if they are forced to do more planning and exert more control, they will succeed where until now they have failed. This logic also has particular implications for what “accountability” means and how it is to be practiced, giving rise to the now nearly ubiquitous “outcome measurement” or “logic” models. It suggests that social and individual change is a (relatively) linear process of “inputs,” “outputs,” and “outcomes” that can be planned for, controlled, measured and audited. There is a great appeal to this logic.

However, although this framework is typically taken for granted as the normative description of what a community-service agency *is* and *ought to be*, it is not the only way to understand this work. As the opening anecdote to this chapter suggests, there is another conceptual framework, with another logic, that I found shaping how many of the GIAC staff understood their work. I call this framework the “personal relations”

frame because its underlying logic is more frequently expressed in the language of personal – and specifically familial – relations.⁶ Oriented toward the development of a “human family” – especially the development of the most vulnerable and disenfranchised members of that family, it emphasizes a communal ethic of care (e.g., the “raising up” of people and communities). It disavows a stark separation between “public” and “private” and between building “individual” and “communal” capacities, instead supporting the creation of public “homeplaces” (Belenky et. al. 1997) where those whose full value as human beings is dismissed in the wider society can be themselves. In the logic of this frame, those working with communities are more likely to see themselves, and be seen by others, as fostering long-term, permanent relationships as “friends” and “neighbors,” members *of* the community, rather than as outside “professionals” coming in to serve the community. Like every frame, this framework, too, has particular historical, cultural and political moorings. As I discuss in Chapter 4, a body of scholarly work about female activists, particularly activists of color, points to its cultural and gendered roots. But while the *expression* of this understanding community work appears more frequently in organizations led by women, and particularly women of color, it is certainly not limited to these groups. In fact, as we will see, versions of this framework also guided the work of the early Progressive Era reformers and others who followed.

Making these contesting logics visible is one of my goals in this dissertation. But as I suggested earlier, frameworks do more than reflect and shape understandings; they have profound implications for how work is done, and even, for what is defined as “work.” Through this project, the GIAC staff created new logic models that delighted their funder. From that perspective, our “organizational development” process might

⁶ I borrow the term “personal relations” from the mid-twentieth century Scottish philosopher John Macmurray. I discuss his work, and its contributions to my understanding of this framework, in Chapter 5.

be declared a “success.” Yet, while these “improved” models highlighted certain aspects of their work, they left other aspects – aspects that the GIAC staff had identified as central to who they were and what they did – in the shadows. Advocates of outcome measurement argue that these models will enable organizations to better clarify, learn about and, thus, improve their work, to stay on track toward their goals. Yet, in spite of the GIAC staff’s increasing competency with the outcome measurement models, as the work proceeded, it became apparent that the logic of these “logic” models *inevitably* marginalized much that the GIAC staff saw as essential to their work. This “shadowed” work remained not only unaccounted for and misunderstood by outsiders, but outside internal discussions about program improvement.

Thus, a second goal in this dissertation is to explore the way in which seeming “objective” approaches to accountability and evaluation actually reproduce entrenched social divisions, privileging some and disadvantaging others. The term “contesting logics” implies seemingly neutral alternatives; it suggests that these are merely “different” ways that people might make meaning. In fact, these differing logics are imbedded within the power dynamics of the larger society, where the dominant, normative “professional public management” logic is privileged as an objective description of “the way things are,” and other logics are denigrated as aberrant, deficient or lacking.

This differential privileging has many practical implications. The “accepted” processes for accounting for, learning about and improving community-service work – outcome measurement models and performance evaluation – arise from the logic of the dominant “professional public management” frame. Like the frame, itself, they direct attention to certain kinds of actions rather than others. These actions are rewarded with status, funding and other resources; other actions are devalued or

ignored. Organizations and their staff who operate according to the dominant logic are privileged; organizations like GIAC, operating according to the tenets of a contesting logic, are seen by outsiders as “deficient,” in need of “improvement” or “change.” Funding and other material resources are reduced or denied.

The “superiority” of this hegemonic logic is shored up by entrenched, if often unintentional, racism and classism that leaves white, middle-class professionals characterizing those operating from the tenets of another framework as lacking in knowledge, skills and/or “professionalism.” Certain of the “rightness” of their own way of thinking, these professionals do not think to explore what they might learn from the experiences and perspectives of people of color and those who are poor. The wisdom and knowledge of those in these latter groups are ignored, enforcing homogeneity and thwarting any real “multiculturalism” or “diversity.”

But this research points to one further complication. To suggest merely that these are oppositional frameworks – one dominant, one subjugated – oversimplifies and misleads. For these different logics not only contested between GIAC and its funders; they served as conflicting meaning-making logics for the GIAC staff themselves. In particular, the GIAC staff’s efforts throughout this project shows that the intersection of these conceptual frameworks – as they play out in people’s minds and practices – are dynamic and complex. Different frameworks were used, variously, in different circumstances, in response to different prompts. Thus, for example, the values, assumptions, logics and practices of the “personal relations” frame were part of the stories staff told each other day-to-day. But when the focus turned to “accountability” or “program improvement,” the logic of the “professional public management” frame dominated how meaning was made. Thus, in doing this work, I have continually attempted to “tunnel under” (Tilly 2003) and contextualize the different ways that the GIAC staff talked about their work, identifying the social situations in which certain

kinds of narratives arise and tracing the consequences of adopting one framework rather than others that are available. I look at the ways in which these frameworks and narratives shape what people do – and don't do, and how they conform – or not – to larger social-historical-political systems.

Efforts to create collective, critically reflective inquiry processes to bring the work that the GIAC staff valued into the center of conversations about accountability, evaluation and program improvement generated both enthusiasm and resistance, insight and confusion. Thus, illuminating the challenges that must be faced when people try to craft a coherent practice in the face of contesting conceptual frameworks is a third goal of this work. Those of us who are serious about promoting a critically reflective praxis oriented toward individual, organizational and social development, learning and change must better understand the nature of those challenges.⁷

⁷ “Critical reflection” is a contested term, used in different ways by scholars drawing from different, and often conflicting, intellectual traditions. For an excellent discussion, see Stephen Brookfield (2000a) who identifies four such intellectual traditions: ideology critique (associated with the Frankfurt School of Critical Social Theory), a psychoanalytically/ psychotherapeutically-inclined tradition (emphasizing the identification and reappraisal of inhibitions acquired in childhood), analytic philosophy and argument (e.g., “critical thinking,” unpacking the multiple means and uses of language) and pragmatist constructivism. In line with Brookfield, I distinguish between “*reflection*” or “*reflective practice*” in which a practitioner may uncover and question taken-for-granted assumptions and “commonsense” wisdom, and “*critical reflection*,” which adds the practice of “ideology critique” or “the attempt to unearth and challenge dominant ideology and the power relations it justifies” (38). In the latter approach, individuals come to see that their “unique” experience is actually embedded in larger social systems and that “what strikes [them] as the normal order of life becomes revealed as a constructed reality that serves to protect the interests of the powerful” (38). Further, while my own understanding of critical reflection draws elements from all these traditions, I particularly align myself with the critically reflective praxis of Paulo Freire and Myles Horton (Freire 1970, 1992, 1997; Horton and Freire 1990, Horton 1998) who, Brookfield notes, blend elements of pragmatist and constructivist thought with a philosophical grounding in the tradition of ideology critique. This position rejects the idea of an *a priori*, universal truth waiting to be discovered and, instead, emphasizes the role that people play in collaboratively constructing and deconstructing experiences and meanings. Further, it positions the educator’s task as helping people to collectively articulate their experiences, re-view those experiences through a process of “problematizing” taken-for-granted assumptions and understandings, identify and take new actions informed by this new perspective and finally, submit these new experiences to further critical analysis. I refer to this educative process of iterative cycles of critically-informed reflection and action as a “*critically reflective praxis*.”

“Framing” organizations: creating new ways to see old problems

This work takes an interpretivist stance. I discuss the ontological and epistemological foundations for that approach in Chapter 2. Here, let me simply note that this study doesn’t purport to “mirror reality” or provide the one “correct” or “true” view of community service agencies in general or this agency in particular. As Joanne Martin (and other postmodern scholars) remind us, organizations are complex and multifaceted, and all attempts to “frame” and define them are partial and potentially misleading, bringing

some aspects of culture into focus while inevitably blurring others, not because of researcher carelessness, but because of the inherent limitations of any one perspective (1992: 170).

In introducing these contesting frameworks, I am not arguing that they offer the “correct” perspective on this organization. In fact, all mental frames inherently filter what we see, drawing our attention to some aspects of reality and throwing other aspects into the shadows. As a result, the way we frame a situation or problem – even if this process is unconscious – exerts enormous control over the options we recognize and the solutions we choose. For example, a particular frame’s “boundaries” may leave some options so far in the shadows, we miss them altogether. Alternately, a well-chosen frame can help us create new ways to understand and tackle persistent organizational problems (Russo and Schoemaker, with Hittleman 2002).⁸ As Gareth Morgan (1997) demonstrates, when understood as not a description *of* reality, but as a way to construct meaning *about* reality, well-chosen mental frames enable us “to find

⁸ The terms “frame” and “framing” originated in the fields of cognitive science and artificial intelligence to describe the mental constructs people seem to use to organize understanding and function in an otherwise overly complex and chaotic world. Many broad thinking frames are internalized through years of socialization and then applied to a wide range of situations; others are adopted through training and occupational experience, e.g., learning how to think like an educator, social worker, etc. For a management perspective on the role of frames in promoting or limiting organizational decision making, see Russo and Schoemaker, with Hittleman (2002). The authors argue that decision makers would do well to “adopt a framing perspective”: learning to look “at” rather than “through” mental frames, evaluating the frames they use, and extending, changing or even constructing new frames to find new options for future action.

fresh ways of seeing, understanding and shaping the situations that we want to organize and manage” (6). As Morgan elaborates, some perspectives

may be extremely powerful, because they connect and resonate with the reality being observed. Other perspectives may prove weak or irrelevant, having little evocative or substantial power. Scientists have generated powerful insights by studying light as a wave or a particle. But not as a grapefruit!” (1997: 350).⁹

In presenting these two contesting frameworks for understanding community-service work, I propose that they can help us understand the challenges and possibilities faced by community-service organizations in a way that “extends [our] horizons of insight and creates new possibilities” (Morgan 1997: 351). At the same time, I must note, as Morgan never does explicitly, that the variety of potential frameworks that can help us understand an organization do not compete equally for our attention. Powerful frameworks are not powerful *merely* because they “connect and resonate with the reality being observed.” As I noted above, dominant frameworks are typically so pervasive as to seem the “only way” to understand things. Contesting frameworks can be so muted and marginalized that they are essentially invisible to all but those who advocate for them.

Multiple stories; multiple relationships

This manuscript moves continuously between multiple stories and levels of analysis, using the juxtaposition to point to a richer whole. It is partially an institutional ethnography, the story of an African-American-led, multicultural community center and its staff, trying, like many public and nonprofit organizations, to deal with external demands for “better” accountability and internal demands for “improved” programming. As an ethnography, it portrays an organization that is not

⁹ For a classic treatment of the pervasive influence of metaphors in mental frames, see Lakoff and Johnson 1980.

well represented in the academic literature – an organization that understands its work and identity according to the tenets of a “personal relations” frame, operating within a social-political environment dominated by a “professional public management” perspective.

Second, this dissertation is also the story of our work together over several years – a study of an agency-wide, collective, reflective process oriented toward staff and organizational development and change and an illumination of some of the possibilities and challenges that arise when the theory of critical reflection is put to work in practice. Third, it is my story, an “insider-outsider” to this work, with ideas about a particular kind of organizational and community development, a particular approach to social research for social change, and a dissertation to produce, who chose to collaborate with the staff at this particular community center.

Fourth, this dissertation breaks loose from these particular, local stories to present a more global account. For while I tell stories about a particular constellation of people in a particular organization in a particular locale engaged in a particular research project, this is also a more universal story set in a time of increased – and increasing – application of a market-driven, “managerial” framework for delivering and accounting for a “professional” human service program; the accelerated diversion of resources for individual profit rather than communal gain; the dominance of a systemic understanding of “professional development” as instrumentally focused, individualized skill-building; in a nation plagued by long-entrenched practices that generate and maintain racial inequality combined with an emerging popular myth of a now “color-blind” society.

Last, this is a story about the relationships within and between these stories. It is a story about the kind of relationships that let us carry on work the work of building communities that recognize, care for, and actively include all their members. It is also

about the kind of relationships that influence how we learn about that work and how we learn about ourselves, and that shape how we account for that work – to ourselves and to each other. It is about relationships between individuals as individuals and as members of communities that must continually define, nurture, question and maintain their communal identities. And it is about the relationships between ideas: between theory and practice, and between individual, organizational and social change. Finally, it is about the relationship between “what is” and “what might be.”

Taking “personal relations” seriously: the significance of this work

I believe this work has lessons for those seeking new ways to both theorize about and practice accountability, program improvement and staff and organizational development in the public and nonprofit sectors. As increasing numbers of people search for “connection” and deeper, more human, meanings in their work, I believe that we would do well to take a “personal relations” perspective seriously. In doing so, I am not suggesting that we abandon entirely the insights of the “professional public management” frame. But given its hegemonic status, the tenets of that frame are positioned as normative, shaping and limiting – usually without conscious consideration – how community-service work is and might be understood. Taking seriously a contesting frame can “extend our horizons of sight.” It can help provide the intellectual constructs and language to consider and challenge the assumptions, values and logics of taken-for-granted, hegemonic frames. And it can reorient our attention, leading to fresh ways to understand and solve persistent problems.

In calling for more serious attention to a “personal relations” perspective, I make three separate, but related arguments. First, I argue that doing so is required if others are to understand GIAC (and agencies like it) on their own terms. Refusing to do so reproduces entrenched racism and classism and stymies well-intentioned efforts at

diversity. Second, I argue that a mandate to account for, evaluate and seek to improve public activities is not incompatible with fostering human flourishing and solidarity. But if we are to hold people accountable for the things that matter, then we need additional approaches to accountability and program improvement that can incorporate the assumptions, values and perspectives of a “personal-relations” frame. I argue that conceived of this way, accountability and evaluation can become dynamic, collective, critically reflective processes that can help people to learn about their work in the course of learning about what matters.

Finally, I believe that in the search for “new,” more human meanings than the individualized, instrumental, market-based logic of the “professional public management” frame allows, there is much to be learned from an organization like GIAC where the logic of the “personal relations” frame so strongly shapes how they understand and carry out their work. Doing so could help reinvigorate our community-service system as a whole, assisting us to move beyond narrow “productive” measures as the sole standards of judgment and opening other possible standards including the kind and quality of relations, the building of communities that value all their members as active subjects, not objects, and attention to human flourishing as an end in itself.

I am not so naïve to believe that simply offering a powerful reframing for how a social practice, such as community-service work, *can* be conceptualized will change, in any widespread way, how it *is* conceptualized. People have deep emotional, social and political attachments to dominant frames, and the social, historical and economic forces promoting the status quo are powerful. But I do believe that many people who work in and with the community-service sector are troubled by the continued

imposition of a neoliberal, managerialist mentality and have a deep desire to centralize the human in their work. This work is addressed primarily to them.¹⁰

Critiquing systems, not people

This study critiques the dominance of the “professional public management” frame in shaping the community-service system in the U.S. and challenges the logic of technical-rationality in which it is embedded. It is not, however, a critique of the people who work within the community-service system. I have spent more than two decades working in community-service organizations. In that time, I have found that they are almost uniformly comprised of deeply caring people, people who have committed their hearts and minds to improving human lives; who work long hours for relatively low pay to craft creative responses to complex social needs; who sustain a passion for their goals in spite of the slow, uneven progress of change, far too few resources, and a status not close to commensurate with those who work in the private sector; who see themselves as working in the “public interest” and thus, as answerable to the larger communities in which they operate; and who are determined to demonstrate responsible stewardship of public funds and public trust.¹¹ Finally, as human service workers and human service organizations, they face the same systemic inequities – racism, classism, sexism, and so on – that they are seeking to address. All this is true of both those who work in community service agencies and those who

¹⁰ Given the expectations for an academic dissertation, this particular document is written primarily for those within the academy who are seeking new ways to think about the work of providing, improving and accounting for community service work. A shorter, more accessible version – written specifically for community-based practitioners – will be published in early 2007 at <www.cardi.cornell.edu/community_capacity/index.php>.

¹¹ As with many totalizing claims, the idea that there is a single, homogenized “public interest” has been rightly challenged. Just what constitutes the “public interest” is highly contested, with scholars pointing to various “publics” with their own particular, diverse interests (e.g., Lindblom and Cohen 1979). However, in spite of these critiques, many working in the public or nonprofit sector do *perceive* themselves as working in pursuit of some sort of overarching, generalized “public interest” and it shapes their identity as workers.

work for the organizations that fund them. They deserve far more respect for the complexity of their work than they typically receive. I hope this research can support them in their efforts.

This work focuses on the United States, the context I know best. I believe the issues, dilemmas, challenges and potential solutions have relevance elsewhere; however I leave it to others to draw those connections.

Chapter outline

In Chapter 2, I present an overview of the research project and its relationship to this dissertation. I lay out the ontological and epistemological positions underlying my work and discuss my choice of a research design that draws upon not only action research, but also upon global ethnography, narrative inquiry, and critical race theory. I also discuss the standards by which this work might be judged. Finally I explore three “stances” – learning from the “inside” out, looking first for strengths rather than failure, and “pivoting the center” (Brown 1989) – that shaped this work in important ways.

In Chapter 3, I introduce GIAC and its staff and describe the initial stages of our work as we sought to develop the stronger outcome measurement models their funders desired and to use these models to strengthen program planning and implementation, as GIAC’s administrators wanted. Through this narrative, I begin to show the contesting logics operating in the ways that the GIAC staff talked about the purpose and meaning of their work, and I highlight the constraints that we faced as we tried to adequately account for that work within the outcome measurement model format.

In chapters 4 and 5, I analyze these contesting logics theoretically, presenting two conceptual frameworks through which we might understand the work of the GIAC staff. In Chapter 4, I examine the “professional public management” frame, the

dominant way people think and talk about our community-service system today. I explore its roots in the early 20th century Progressive Era and track the rise and eventual dominance of the “professionalization” and “scientific management” movements from the 1930s to the present. After presenting this analysis, I examine the work described in Chapter 3 through the prism of this dominant frame and show that much of what the GIAC staff and its community value about its work – elements that are at the *core* of how they understand the work of a community-service agency – were lost in the shadows of this dominant frame. Thus, they were never accounted for; nor did they become the focus of discussions about how to improve the organization’s work.

In Chapter 5, I attempt to shine some light on this “shadowed” work by presenting a contesting “personal relations” framework for understanding community-service agencies. In exploring this frame, I draw from two bodies of scholarship: (1) feminist and Afro-centric studies of the grassroots activism and leadership of women of color and (2) Scottish philosopher John Macmurray’s construction of “personal” versus “functional” social relations and British educational philosopher Michael Fielding’s application of Macmurray’s work to contemporary organizations. Returning to the work described in Chapter 3, this time through this alternative frame, I explore what is differently highlighted and shadowed and discuss the implications for how we consider accountability and performance. I also examine the ways these contesting frameworks are embedded in relations structured by race, class and gender and cannot be considered separately from them.

In Chapter 6, I return to a description of the staff and organizational development process, focusing on the second half of our work together. In this period, we turned our attention more directly to program improvement and the possibilities of “inquiry evaluation.” I describe the work we did and examine it in the context of existing

scholarship on critically reflective learning. In doing so, I complicate the discussion of contesting frameworks. While the dichotomy presented in the earlier chapters helps to highlight the conceptual frames that shape understandings of “reality,” in practice the intersection of these frameworks is dynamic and complex. In this chapter, I explore the staff’s efforts to craft a coherent practice in the face of these contesting logics and show that the challenges they faced were *at once* practical, epistemological *and* structural. I suggest that those seeking to support staff and organizational learning, development and change must develop a stronger praxis that can simultaneously address the changes that need to occur both within people’s own minds and within social systems and that recognizes that those spheres and changes are dynamically interconnected.

In Chapter 7, I take a more prescriptive stance, calling for a “personal relations” perspective to be taken more seriously in our community-service system, and indeed, in our society as a whole. I argue that the lessons offered by GIAC and its staff could help our community-service system as a whole challenge the shift to construing community service as yet one more commodity in a market-based system, in the process, revitalizing a weakened public commitment to nurturing human potential and helping us more honestly embrace multiculturalism and diversity. I argue that a “personal relations” perspective can help us re-imagine accountability and evaluation as dynamic, dialogic, collective critically reflective processes that can enable people to learn about and improve their work in the course of learning about what matters and how to achieve it. And I argue that taking such a perspective seriously is needed to understand GIAC and organizations like it on their own terms. Not doing so reproduces institutionalized racism and classism, stymies well-intentioned efforts at “diversity,” and leaves the entire community-service system weaker as a result.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I take a reflexive stance on this work, exploring more deeply three significant issues for action research: participation, representation and the nature of the “ends” attained. I also consider how well this work holds up to the criteria for soundness proposed in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE: INQUIRY PARADIGM, METHODS, AGENDAS AND STANDARDS

This project wasn't conducted in a vacuum: it emerged in the context of ongoing collaborations with the staff of the Greater Ithaca Activities Center, and it was shaped by a variety of practical needs, agendas, goals along with some beliefs about how those ought to be achieved. As does every researcher, I made numerous choices throughout this project, from what I chose to study to how I went about constructing that study, from what captured my attention to the conclusions I reached. Some of these choices were based my beliefs about how credible social knowledge is, and ought to be, constructed. Others were influenced my pre-existing relationships with this organization. Still others were shaped by the realities of attempting to conduct a collaborative research project within a very busy, hierarchically organized workplace.

I say this aware that academic research is still dominated by a positivist epistemology built upon notions of "objectivity," researcher "disinterest" and procedures for methodological rigor that promise, when properly implemented, to yield universal laws and generalizable "truths." Although this positivist stance – both as a philosophy of science and as a practice of "technical rationality" built upon it – has been soundly critiqued (see, for example, Berry 2000; Cervero and Wilson 2001; Greenwood and Levin 2005, 2006; Flyvgjerg 2001; Lather 1991; Maguire 1987; and Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997, to name but a few) and the "legitimacy" of "alternative" paradigms "well established" (Lincoln and Guba 2000:164), expectations for at least a veneer of objectivist protocol in written research reports reigns. Thus, for a researcher to begin by openly admitting, as I did in Chapter One, to ongoing

subjective relationships and active engagement in the system she studied requires some defense.¹

I submit such defense without complaint. In fact, all researchers should be called upon to defend the belief systems underlying their chosen research approach. As Patti Lather (1991) has observed: “Research approaches *inherently* reflect our beliefs about the world we live in and want to live in” (51, emphasis added). Guba and Lincoln (1989), too, note the impact of ontological and epistemological beliefs on methodological choices, arguing that they have significant consequences for the ways in which research methods (i.e., “tools”) are used. They continue:

[I]t may not be possible to tell whether an individual holding a hammer is a carpenter, an electrician, or a plumber, but the person holding the hammer knows, and that intention will lead to the hammer being used in very different ways (158).

In this chapter, I seek to make my key beliefs and choices transparent to my readers so that they may understand not only the tools that I used, but the intentions that led to how I used them. Of course, *striving for* transparency is in no way the same as *being* transparent. Constraints on what is feasible to present (given both researcher and readers’ finite time and interest) and limits to a researcher’s own insightfulness (even when reflexive processes are taken seriously) make complete transparency impossible. However, a substantive effort to honestly lay out key beliefs and choices, while not a simple matter, is still an essential obligation for every researcher. I do so here to the best of my ability.

I begin by discussing action research (the inquiry strategy that guided my work) and the epistemological, normative and practical reasons for that choice; this approach provided the foundations for how I used my “hammers.” Next, I discuss my adoption

¹ Although I argue here for the credibility of a “subjective” stance and note the critiques of notions of “objectivity” and researcher “disinterest,” some scholars have instead attempted to retrieve the concept of “objectivity” from its positivist moorings. Sandra Harding (1991) offers a thoughtful argument for this latter position.

of a “composite” methodological position, drawing from narrative inquiry, global ethnography and critical race theory to deepen the knowledge created through this project. Third, I outline the research project and relate it to the re-presentation of that work in this dissertation. Finally, I turn to several additional beliefs that affected how I looked, what I looked at, and how I began to think about and conceptualize what I was seeing.

Inquiry paradigm

Action research encompasses a set of epistemological beliefs, values, and approaches to the creation of credible social knowledge.² In an oft-cited definition, Peter Reason and Hillary Bradbury define action research as

... a participatory, democratic process [that] seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (2001: 1).

Similarly, Davydd Greenwood and Morten Levin describe action research as an approach to social research that brings together a professional researcher and members of an organization or community to collaboratively seek answers to real-life problems. In the process, the collaborators create new knowledge about those problems, generate concrete solutions that can be put into action to improve the situation being studied

² There are many traditions or “schools” within “action research” with distinct histories and emphases; the distinctions among them can matter a great deal to those who work within these traditions. Unfortunately, attempts to define the distinctions between labels such as “co-operative inquiry,” “collaborative inquiry,” “action research,” “participatory action research,” and so on are inconsistent and contested, meaning that the use of a term *alone* can’t assure readers that they know what the person using the term actually means. In this particular discussion, I use the term “action research” to encompass an approach to knowledge creation sharing a set of characteristics that are *generally* agreed upon (albeit with varying degrees of emphasis). As an overall descriptor of my research process, I have chosen to use the most general of the terms available – “action research” – and to rely on the surrounding narrative to communicate my own beliefs about knowledge creation and the ways in which the characteristics I mention apply in this project.

and increase the ability of those involved “to control their own destinies more effectively” (Greenwood and Levin 1998: 6).

More recently, Greenwood and Levin (2006) have argued for understanding action research as a

research *strategy* that uses many conventional social science techniques [as well as some particular methods and work forms] but that orchestrates the overall research process in a distinctive way (89, emphasis added).

This distinctive orchestration is grounded in a particular set of ontological, epistemological and normative positions. Most notably, an action research strategy:

- insists that meaningful social knowledge is subjective and context dependent, and that it is most reliably created, tested and validated through iterative cycles of reflection and action, removing the separation between “knowing” and “doing” imposed by the dominant Western positivist tradition;
- alters the traditional rigid separation between academic researchers and those they “study,” arguing that people ought to be involved in research as subjects rather than objects, to be researched *with*, rather than *on* or *for*, and that they ought to share control of the research processes and products;
- calls for an extended epistemology that validates experiential, practical and presentational, as well as propositional knowing (Heron 1996, Heron and Reason 2001); and
- affirms a practice of “co-generative inquiry” (Greenwood and Levin 2006) that weaves together both “local” and “professional” knowledge in the belief that integrating a diverse set of perspectives on research problems generates more creative solutions to complex problems and better validates them through the application of collective social judgment.

Further, action research posits that creating the knowledge to solve complex, dynamic, historically situated social problems requires a research process that *maintains*, rather than seeks to *reduce*, that complexity, dynamism and historicity. The conventional research paradigm, by its very nature, attempts to reduce complex human situations into manageable, decontextualized, generalizable “variables” or universal laws. Action research, on the other hand, recognizes that the world is “a complex, interacting array of systems and system processes ... [and that rather than simplifying the system under consideration, the] only hope of understanding any particular thing is by placing it in the appropriate system context and following the processes by which it acts” (Greenwood and Levin 1998:70).³

Put more bluntly, action research acknowledges that, in Kurt Lewin’s words, “the best way to understand something is to try to change it” (quoted in Greenwood and Levin 1998:19). Or, as Sandra Harding has more poetically observed:

Knowledge is produced through “craft” procedures, much as a sculptor comes to understand the real nature of the block of marble only as she begins to work on it. The strengths and weaknesses of the marble – its unsuspected cracks or surprising interior quality – are not visible until the sculptor tries to give it a shape she has in mind. Similarly, we can come to understand hidden aspects of social relations ... only through struggles to change them (1991: 127).

But my reasons for choosing an action research approach extended beyond the epistemological to encompass the normative and pragmatic. Research is a social practice, with social consequences (e.g., Cervero and Wilson 2001; Greenwood and Levin 2005, 2006; Guba and Lincoln 1989; Lather 1991; Maguire 1987, 1993; Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997). In that sense, all research is “political,” whether researchers are willing to admit to the values driving their work or not. It either alters

³ For general discussions of action research, see Greenwood and Levin 2005, 2006; Heron 1996; Heron and Reason 2001; Kemmis and McTaggart 2000; Lather 1991; Maguire 1987; Reason 1994, 2006; Reason and Bradbury 2001; and Wadsworth 1998. For discussions of feminist informed action research, see Maguire 2000 and Brydon-Miller, Maguire and McIntyre 2004.

or maintains the status quo, reproduces relationships that are oppressive or recreates them along more liberatory lines, brings us closer to sustaining life or distances us from it. Recognizing that such values inform every research choice, I did not want to disassociate my academic pursuits (including my dissertation) from my life values. In working with GIAC, I hoped to produce knowledge that, in addition to contributing to the scholarly literature, would also be directly useful to both the GIAC staff and to others working in community services. Second, I hoped that participating in this project would help the GIAC staff to re-construct their own knowledge about their work in ways that would enable them to strengthen that work and more fully account for it to others, in ways that were meaningful to them. Third, I hoped that this work would, in some way, contribute to the larger human task of transforming social structures and/or relationships so as to create a more just, life-sustaining world.

Finally, my commitment to action research was also pragmatic: organizational development projects require that the people who make up that organization – in this case, the GIAC staff – must learn and change. In considering the question of research approaches within an organizational change context, William Foote Whyte (1984) distinguishes between three types of applied social research: the researcher as professional expert (ASR-1), research in an organization development framework (ASR-2), and participatory action research (ASR-3). Max Elden, corresponding with Whyte about this typology, notes,

I have found that describing different research approaches from the point of view of ‘who learns’ is a useful way to distinguish between ASR-1-2 and 3” (in Whyte 1984: 190).

When applied researchers serve as *advocates* for people seeking change (as is sometimes the case in ASR-1 and typical in ASR-2), opportunities for other people’s learning and change are limited. As Whyte (1984) observes,

The more successful I was [at interpreting findings to management in a ways that would help management, workers and union leaders solve problems in mutually satisfying ways], the more the parties became dependent upon me. My successes could deprive them of opportunities to learn how to solve problems themselves (166).

Action research (alone among the spectrum of research paradigms) not only enables people to learn about problems, but also to mobilize to change them. Solving complex social problems requires that people have the opportunity not only to acquire some new fact or skill, but to change their ways of knowing – about the world, about complex social systems and about themselves. Such a transformative process can not be passive. Rather, it requires engagement in the process of discovery and creation – that is, in research – itself. Research paradigms and procedures that reserve such transformative activities to a small group of professional researchers must inevitably fail. In initiating this project, I hoped to foster a process of knowledge creation that engaged the GIAC staff in not only learning about their work, but in developing ways to more fully realize it.⁴

A “Composite” Methodological Position

In developing the knowledge that might be created from this work, I turned to several research methodologies – narrative inquiry, global ethnography and critical race theory. As Greenwood and Levin (2006) argue,

In [action research] projects, all known social science methods are applicable as long as they are set in a context that aligns them with the values of participative and democratic knowledge construction. ... Technical social science methods are used to inform the choices made in [constructing learning arenas] and analytical research methods are used to make sense of the learning emerging from the concrete change activity and to support the meaning construction process. This dialectical process between change and reflection based on social science methodology is a core dynamic of the AR research strategy (92).

⁴ For a description of the historical and current overlaps between “action research” and “organizational development,” see Reason and McArdle (2006).

In adopting this kind of mixed-method approach, I also borrow from Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldberg (2000). These scholars call for a “composite position” they name “reflexive interpretation.” Such a position requires researchers to move repeatedly between the empirical material, interpretation, critical interpretation (including reflections on language, authority and representation), and a self-critical stance. In doing so, a researcher borrows elements from a number of analytical approaches that “pay serious attention to the constructed, political, gendered, linguistic nature of social research,” without allowing any one to dominate, drawing upon each methodology’s strengths while compensating for the limitations of each used alone.⁵ I found that such an approach – neither inductive nor deductive, but rather, reflexive – fit well with the cyclical, dialogical, reflexive nature of an action research strategy.

In choosing which research methods to adopt, I considered the all-too-frequent critique of action research as “merely” a single case and action research reports as “merely stories.” Such critiques are neither reason to abandon case studies or narrative inquiry nor to accede to such a limited view of their merits. But neither should the critics be ignored. In defending case studies against the claim that they “cannot provide reliable information about the broader class,” (*Dictionary of Sociology*, in Flyvbjerg 2001: 66), Bent Flyvbjerg argues for the “irreducible quality of good case narratives” and the “power of the good example.” Thoroughly executed case studies offer a wealth of detail and a closeness to “real life situations” that no large sample or examination of disembodied variables can match. Flyvbjerg further argues that the concrete, context-dependent knowledge that such cases provide is “more valuable in the study of human affairs” than the “vain search for predictive theories and universals” that “cannot be found in the study of human affairs” (73) Finally, he notes

⁵ Alvesson and Sköldberg’s “composite position” consists of grounded theory, hermeneutics, critical theory and postmodernism. But their overall argument is not limited to the adoption of these approaches.

that, critics' claims aside, one can often generalize on the basis of a well-chosen case study and that both large samples (offering breadth) and case studies (offering depth) are "necessary for a sound development of social science" (87).

Scholars make similar claims for narrative inquiry. Noting that people "live storied lives on storied landscapes" (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 24), they argue that narrative is central to how humans make meaning. As historian William Cronin observes:

We constantly tell ourselves stories to remind ourselves who we are, how we got to be that person, and what we want to become. The same is true not just of individuals, but of communities and societies: we use our histories to remember ourselves, just as we use our prophecies as tools for exploring what we do or do not wish to become. ... [T]o recover the narratives people tell themselves about the meanings of their lives is to learn a great deal about their past actions and about the way they *understand* those actions. Stripped of the story, we lose track of understanding itself (1992: 1369).

A narrative approach to social research also can help social researchers capture the "complexity and aesthetic of human experience" and avoid the pitfalls of careless of abstraction (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997: 4). It provides an essential antidote to generalized descriptions of disembodied "forces" and "structural systems" and efforts that reduce social phenomenon to discrete, decontextualized variables, dissociated from the concrete messiness and excitement of everyday life.

At the same time, critics are correct to observe that case studies and narrative inquiry have their limitations and that the researcher who relies on them risks being left at the end of the project with an idiosyncratic, if charming, story. But such limitations are not reason to abandon that which narrative inquiry and case studies do well. Rather, it is a signal to employ additional methodologies to do that which the local case can not.

To retain the richness of a well-chosen case while contextualizing it within larger social forces, I drew upon sociologist Michael Burawoy's (1998, 2000) formulation of

“global ethnography.” Such “extended case studies,” he argues, enable “the exploration of broad historical patterns and macrostructures *without* relinquishing ... ethnography [They] uncover local processes in a relation of mutual determination with external social forces” (1998: 6, 16). In moving repeatedly between the “local” and the “global,” I sought to develop a picture of real people as we live and work in a specific time and place, simultaneously and intimately connected to the larger structural forces shaping our world. At the same time, I sought to better understand often abstract systemic forces by seeing the ways they played out in the day-to-day lives of real people, shaping our dreams and our dilemmas and, in turn, being shaped by the choices we make.

Finally, I turned to critical race scholars who, through their own examples of merging lived experience with rigorous analysis, have forged new possibilities for “deconstructing oppressive structures and discourses, reconstructing human agency and constructing equitable and socially just relations of power” (Ladson-Billings 1999: 10). As social constructs, race (and class) – and the social power relations in which they are embedded – are central to the identity and meaning-making schema of many of the GIAC staff and to the organization as a whole. Thus, drawing upon this work enabled me to bring a particular kind of critical and self-critical stance to this work. (I say more about this in the section on “Researcher Stances” below). Here, let me note the contribution of critical race perspectives to constructing a critical interpretation of the contesting narratives I heard and the underlying conceptual frameworks I posit. As Richard Delgado argues:

[For those] whose voice and perspective – whose consciousness—has been suppressed, devalued and abnormalized ... the principal instrument of their subordination is the prevailing *mindset* by means of which members of the dominant group justify the world as it is ... Stories, parables, chronicles and narratives are powerful means for destroying mindset – the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understanding against a background of which legal and

political discourse takes place. ... As Derrick Bell, Bruno Bettelheim, and others show, stories can shatter complacency and challenge the status quo They can show that what we believe is ridiculous, self-serving, or cruel. They can show us the way out of the trap of unjustified exclusion. They can help us understand when it is time to reallocate power. They are the other half – the destructive half – of the creative dialectic (2000: 60-61, emphasis in original).

In offering contesting narratives – and in particular, in centralizing the narratives of those who have been “devalued and abnormalized, narratives that challenge “the prevailing mindset by which members of the dominant group justify the world as it is,” I seek for these stories to do just that.

Research Design

Outline of the collaborative project

As with many qualitative research projects, the research design for this project was emergent and eclectic. The project’s focus developed over time, in response to continuing conversations with Marcia about her interests, my interests and the agency’s needs. In this section, I provide a brief overview of the project as it unfolded chronologically. I describe the actual work and the insights drawn from it more fully in the remainder of this dissertation.

I began thinking about conducting my dissertation research with GIAC in the fall of 2003, during the planning of the Search Conference mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 1. When I approached Marcia and the GIAC Board of Directors in December 2003 and January 2004, respectively, we agreed that I would work with Marcia on creating a formal staff development program for GIAC and that I would also continue to work on the Board’s organizational planning and development process.

While my involvement with the Board’s planning and development work continued (and complimented the work described here), for practical reasons, I soon narrowed the research project to my work with the staff. However, the initial staff

development plan that Marcia and I created – directed toward the supervisory staff – was put on hold throughout the first half of 2004 as Marcia waited to hire a new deputy director whom she wanted to involve in this work. That hiring process that wound up taking significantly longer than either of us expected.

The result was an extended nine-month period of “social exploration” (Whyte 1984) during which I learned much more deeply about GIAC and its staff, their programs, organizational culture, and the larger communities in which they worked. I spent time “hanging out” in GIAC’s main office, a gathering area for the staff prior to the youth’s arrival after school, getting to know people and trying to understand how the agency worked and what its strengths and challenges were. I helped out by answering the phone (the receptionist position was also vacant) and doing other tasks that needed to be done. In the late spring, I planned and facilitated several reflective sessions on program evaluation with the Teen Program staff. In doing so, I learned a great deal about their work, the challenges they faced, how they thought about issues related to evaluation, and their own hopes for their programs and for the teens with whom they worked. Throughout this time, I had numerous conversations with Marcia about her perspectives on GIAC, the challenges they faced, and the hopes that she had for her staff and their work.

In defending such an relatively unstructured research approach, Whyte argues that in not being “fixated on a previously prepared and detailed research design,” a researcher can establish a base from which to later study some part of the organization more systematically, while remaining open to opportunities to learn about problems beyond the “frontiers of ...[one’s] knowledge” (1984: 63) He elaborates:

“Like the explorer of physical terrain, you run the risk of getting lost and never coming out with a coherent map of the territory. On the other hand, the flexibility of the methods offer the possibility of making discoveries far more valuable than you could have anticipated” (1984: 35).

By June 2004, soon after the meeting with the United Way described in the Introduction, the research focus for this project became clear. Marcia wanted to help her staff learn to write the outcome measurement models their funders wanted and to improve their programming so as to more fully meet GIAC's mission in ways that she wanted. I was curious about how a sustained collective and critically reflective educational process, one linked to concrete action, could help community-service organizations and their staff respond to demands for both enhanced accountability and performance in ways that would be meaningful to them. I also wanted to know more about the impact of this kind of process on both individual and organizational learning and to explore what I saw as a dynamic relationship between individual, organizational and social change.

Through our discussions, both Marcia and I became interested in whether we could help the GIAC staff use the outcome measurement or "logic" models internally, as a way to reflect on and enhance their program planning, rather than merely an annual exercise in reporting to funders. The promises for such an approach were sweeping. The W. K. Kellogg Foundation's "Logic Model Development Guide" provides a typical illustration.

Learning and using tools like logic models can serve to increase the practitioner's voice in the domain of planning, design, implementation, analysis and knowledge generation. The process of developing the model is an opportunity to chart the course. It is a conscious process that creates an explicit understanding of the challenges ahead, the resources available, and the timetable in which to hit the target ... Developing and using logic models is an important step in building community capacity and strengthening community voice. The ability to identify outcomes and anticipate ways to measure them provides all program participants with a clear map of the road ahead. Map in hand, participants are more confident of their place in the scheme of things, and hence, more likely to actively engage and less likely to stray from the course... Because it is particularly amenable to visual depictions, program logic modeling can be a strong tool in communicating with diverse audiences – those who have varying world views and different levels of experience with program development and evaluation (2001: III).

Further, recent research (Benjamin 2004) indicated that at least some funders of community development agencies wished that the logic models would be used in this way. Conversations with staff at the local United Way confirmed this view.

Marcia and my interests, then, became our initial research questions. We agreed that I would facilitate a series of staff development sessions toward these ends, and I engaged the help of Robert Rich, then in the Program on Employment and Workplace Systems (PEWS) at Cornell.

Marcia, Robert and I designed the first “All-Staff” session for GIAC’s “roster” staff (those with regular, full-time appointments). Robert and I facilitated this session, as well as a second session with the same group in October. I met in smaller groups with the Youth and Teen programs’ staff in November and December. In January 2005, the work shifted abruptly to helping the program supervisors complete the new outcome measurement models and their accompanying program narratives for the United Way, due in mid-February, a month earlier than expected.

In March, the supervisors expressed an interest in learning more about the “measurement” of outcomes. After some discussion (and a preliminary session with outside facilitator skilled in quantitative measurement), Marcia and I decided to expand this focus to considering program evaluation more generally. I planned and facilitated another three “All-Staff” sessions in May and June. Although we had hoped that the staff would create pilot evaluation activities to be carried out the following fall, several major unanticipated events intervened, and that work was put on hold. This dissertation, then, considers the work we did together through June 2005.

Knowledge-building processes

The chronology above is deceptively linear and dry. In actuality, the project developed – as do all action research inquiries – through iterative cycles of action,

reflection on those actions, the creation of new actions, further reflection, and on and on. Such an approach holistically integrates what are otherwise usually represented as discrete processes of “data production” and “analysis.”⁶ Instead, together, what we did and what we thought about what we did constituted an emergent learning process that generated various kinds of knowledge-building. The recognition of diversity in the kinds of knowledge built through such a process is best reflected in John Heron’s “extended epistemology.” In this typology, Heron (1996) includes the development of *practical knowledge* (knowledge associated with specific skills and problem-solving), *experiential knowledge* (knowledge generated from and about one’s own experience), and *presentational knowledge* (the representation or articulation of one’s knowledge) in addition to the *propositional knowledge* (“intellectual” knowledge claims) typically associated with research initiatives.

The methods that we used to support the knowledge-building process were similarly diverse. Initially, the practices of participant-observation shaped my personal knowledge-building. As the GIAC staff and I began to work together on the “staff development” project, the knowledge-building process became practical, dialogic and reflective. This occurred both in formal group settings (e.g., the All-Staff and program group sessions and one-to-one meetings) and in informal, often spontaneous, conversations in the main office or hallways.

The staff worked at the outcome measurement models both in our collaborative sessions and in the course of their daily work. The supervisory staff developed new models to describe their programs overall; the rest of the staff developed smaller-scale models to represent the particular activities that they planned and led. Their learning

⁶ I choose the term “data production” over the more common “data collection” to emphasize the constructed, rather than inherent, character of those artifacts, phenomena and experiences that social researchers call “data.” As Tim May observes: “...data are produced, not collected, and it is the process of production that is fundamentally related to the product” (2002: 1).

progressed through hands-on practice using the models and focused dialogue about the models and about their work.

I used the recognizable tools of the academic researcher, filling several large notebooks with chronologically filed “field texts”: handwritten notes made during meetings, typed field notes, reflections on those field notes, journal entries, process memos, transcripts, responses to theoretical readings, and reflective memos with evolving insights. I also kept notebooks with background material about the organization (e.g., organizational charts, job descriptions, historical materials, minutes of Board meetings, newspaper articles, etc), and with materials produced during our work together. Formal sessions and some of the one-to-one meetings were digitally recorded and selectively transcribed.

Seeking ways to elicit insights that might not surface spontaneously in group conversation, but that would help me, as well as the group as a whole, to reflect on the processes in which we were engaged, I created “critical incident questionnaires” (Brookfield 1995). These short “feedback forms” were completed by each staff member, anonymously, after each of the four spring All-Staff sessions. Each form contained three or four open-ended questions, such as “What surprised me today was _____,” “Something that excites or frustrates me about all this is _____,” “The most interesting thing about today was _____,” “Something that confuses me is _____,” as well as a space for additional comments. A summary of the responses was shared with the staff during the subsequent session and discussed.

In various forums (e.g., All-Staff sessions and one-on-one conversations), I shared with the staff what I heard them saying, presented some of my developing interpretations of our work, and asked for their responses, a process that correlates with the practice of “member checks” (Guba and Lincoln 1989). In June 2006, as the arguments in this dissertation evolved, I held an hour-long session with the staff in

which I presented an outline of my arguments and listened extensively to their responses. I also had numerous conversations with a consistent group of academic colleagues and practitioners knowledgeable about action research and organizational/staff development (“peer debriefing,” Guba and Lincoln 1989) throughout the entire project. They helped me think through numerous questions, both theoretical and practical.

Finally, I read widely during this period. Patti Lather (1991) describes well the “dialectical” and “reciprocal” relationship between theory and data in some empirical research. In these cases, theory neither precedes data, as is purported in hypothetical-deductive research, nor follows data, as is purported in “grounded research.” Rather, there is a “give and take” which acknowledges that researchers use “a priori theoretical frameworks,” but “which keep a particular framework from being the contained in which the data must be poured” (Lather 1991: 62).

My hope to conduct this work fully as *participatory* action research was only partially realized. Choosing a participatory inquiry paradigm for a dissertation project imposes particular challenges on the research process itself. As Macguire (1993) has noted, “collective work is messy and time-consuming [and change will not occur] on our schedules” (176). Organizational constraints, the reality of multiple (and often unanticipated) demands on people’s time, reactions to “research” as an unfamiliar activity, the time constraints on doctoral research, and my own timidities as a novice researcher all played a part. The challenges I faced have much to teach about the larger issues I set out to explore. I explore this issue of participation and its impact on the research process in greater depth in Chapter 7.

Relating the research project to the dissertation: re-presenting the work

As I noted above, dissertation research – like social research in general – is most often set out in advance. The researcher is expected to enter the “field” with a set of fairly well defined questions and research methods, and the dissertation documents the answers to those questions. An action research project, however, is not just emergent, but, like social life itself, dynamic, complex and uncontrolled. There are multiple research projects and agendas – and multiple questions. The result of this complexity is that the action research dissertation writer is presented with numerous possible dissertation topics.⁷ Further, while some action researchers hope that their partners will engage as collaborators in the process of analysis and writing, it rarely happens. Theorizing and reporting on the work we did in a manner appropriate to a dissertation was not of particular interest to the GIAC staff. Nor should it have been. They had their own jobs to do, and neither the time, inclination nor the rewards for this kind of extended academic work. They were, however, willing to have me use our collaborative work in this way if I wished.

Thus, although this dissertation has been informed and shaped in dialogue with my collaborators, academic colleagues and the literature, this presentation of our collaborative work is mine, and I take responsibility for the final interpretation that I make and its representation. In turning three years of complex, lived experience into a single dissertation, I made many choices, deciding where to focus my attention, which insights to centralize, and which academic conversations to embed our work in. Throughout this project, I continuously faced the question, “which part of this story do I want to tell, and to whom?” This question was both theoretical and practical; it was

⁷ I thank Susan Boser for pointing this out to me early in my research project when I was struggling to answer the casual question often asked of doctoral students: What’s your research (or dissertation) topic? I also drew from her dissertation (Boser 2001) the organizational solution I use here: a specific section relating the research project to the dissertation.

also ethical as well. Given that I had conducted this project in my own community, I couldn't offer either GIAC or its staff true anonymity; I faced the question, "which parts of this story *can* I tell publicly, without harm to either the organization or the people who make it up?" And I considered, "which parts of this story are important to tell publicly?" Others would have undoubtedly made different choices, emphasized different elements, and offered different interpretations and conclusions. Still, the story that is told here is told with the knowledge and permission of those who worked with me.

I have chosen to re-present this research in a form that mixes "lively narrative and rigorous analysis" (Nayaran 1993). Such a choice is not unproblematic. As the postmodernist assault on narrative correctly admonishes, stories and plots convey a unity and linearity that life doesn't possess (Linde 1993). In fact, some social researchers have intentionally "fractured" or fictionalized their research representations so as to force their readers to continually confront and question a complacent acceptance of "reality" (see, for example, Lather and Smithies 1997 and Taussig 1997). Their approach offers important lessons. Narrative structures, on the other hand, offer other kinds of lessons. Because stories are fundamental to the way in which humans organize experience, gain understanding and convey it to others (e.g., Clandinin and Connelly 2000, Cronin 1992), narrative enables social researchers to portray lived experience in ways that are accessible and familiar. It can enable readers to understand communities different from their own, make connections between the familiar and the "strange," and try out new ways to understand what is and what might be.

As science fiction writer and essayist Ursula LeGuin has observed:

What other people, real or imaginary, do and think and feel – or have done and thought and felt, or might do and think and feel – is an essential guide to our understanding of what we ourselves are and may

become. ... [A] person who had never listened to nor read a tale or myth or parable or story, would remain ignorant of his own emotional and spiritual heights and depths, would not know quite fully what it is to be human. ... There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories (LeGuin 1970: 111-112).

Or, as Clandinin and Connelly, writing for a more academic audience, note:

... many narrative studies are judged to be important when they become literary texts to be read by others ... for the vicarious testing of life possibilities by readers of the research that they permit. ... [T]hese literary uses of narrative ... are the narrative inquirer's counterpart of generalization. The narrative inquirer does not prescribe general applications and uses but creates texts that, when well done, offer readers a place to imagine their own uses and applications (2000: 41-2).

But as Delgado reminds us, stories do more than create bonds, build shared understandings and promote empathy and community-building. "Stories and counterstories can serve an equally important destructive function" (Delgado 2000:61). As Delgado elaborates,

Adopting one story over another, in effect, creates social reality, and leads us to reject "alternative visions of reality ... as extreme or implausible; counterstorytelling can subvert these "patterns of perception (2000: 62).

I hope this text does all that, not only providing insight into the possibilities and challenges that one organization encountered as its staff grappled with how to account for and improve their work, but also both "subverting patterns of [dominant] perception" and enabling readers "to imagine their own uses and applications" for this work. (I explore issues of "author-ity" more fully in Chapter 7).

Researcher "Stances"

In this section, I turn to three stances that organized my attention in this process, shaping how I looked and what I looked at, as well as orienting how I began to think about what I saw.

Learning from the “inside” “out”

It is not uncommon for researchers – particularly ethnographers – to seek total immersion in the organizations and communities they study. Whyte (1984) argues that “Some of the most valuable studies of organizational behavior have been made by participant observers.” In choosing to research an organization in which I was *already* a participant, I took this immersion one step further. Such “insider” research offers particular advantages, but simultaneously poses particular challenges. My prior four-year history as a member of GIAC’s Board of Directors offered prolonged engagement, making it possible to get to know this organization and the people who make it up in ways that most doctoral students can’t afford. I had a role, a position and some status within the organization. I was known by agency administrators and the Board of Directors as someone who could be counted on to understand their mission and work.

At the same time, that very familiarity can pose its own challenges. All researchers must face – and in some way, compensate for – the possibility of “rampant subjectivity” where “one finds only what one is predisposed to look for” (Lather 1986: 259). The risk of seeing what one expects to see is not unique to “insider” research, but the potential dangers are heightened by a tendency with the familiar to assume that one already knows what is going on.

As a result, I made a continuous effort to step back and look afresh. Fortunately, my “insider” status was still relatively new and emerging. Like most Board members in most organizations, I had only limited knowledge about the ways the organization worked and few relationships with the majority of the staff. So my initial extended period of “social exploration” enabled me to obtain a much fuller picture of the day-to-day life at GIAC. Throughout the research process, I used both journaling and dialogue with others to create systematic reflexivity. I regularly required myself to

question “certainty” and closure by examining multiple interpretations, reading alternative theories, critically reflecting upon issues of power, authority and voice (including my own social conditioning and resultant “expectations” as a white, middle-class, Jewish woman), and examining the assumptions and beliefs behind my pedagogical and methodological choices. Further, writing about people and organizations with whom I expected to continue long-term, valued relationships, in itself, held me to a rigorous standard.

A second challenge to “insider” research arises from the multiplicity of relationships that must be juggled. William Foote Whyte (1984) describes action researchers as “participant-observers.” Patricia Maguire (1993) acknowledges the difficulties of juggling the action researcher’s “triple roles of organizer, educator and researcher.” In this case, my role as participant-educator-organizer-observer-researcher was further complicated by the additional roles as agency Board member, long-time community member, and, in some cases, friend. On the one hand, they frequently provided access to situations or confidences that “outsiders” would never have had. On the other hand, juggling these roles was not always easy. Doing requires “stepping forward” and observing “stepping back”; more than once, I noted in my journal that I wished that I could “participate less and observe more.” And yet, it was the very act of doing – or trying to do – that led to some of this project’s most important insights. I found the wisdom of Lewin’s counsel about understanding something by trying to change it.

“Pivoting the center”

Many feminist scholars and scholars of color have described the challenges facing Western, white, middle/owning class scholars writing about those who are non-white, non-Western, and poor or working class. One of the key challenges, as described by

Elsa Barkley Brown (1989) is how to “center our work ... in the lives of the people about whom we are ... writing” (921). She continues:

I have come to understand that this is not merely an intellectual process. It is not merely a question of whether or not we have learned to analyze in particular kinds of ways, or whether people are able to intellectualize about a variety of experiences. It is also about coming to believe in the possibility of a variety of experiences, a variety of ways of understanding the world, a variety of frameworks of operation, without imposing consciously or unconsciously a notion of the norm. ... I believe that all people can learn to center in another experience, validate it, and judge it by its own standards without need of comparison or need to adopt that framework as their own. Thus, one has no need to “decenter” anyone in order to center someone else; one has only to constantly, appropriately, “pivot the center.” (921).

A conscious critically reflexive stance, in concert with critical race perspectives, helped provide this pivoting fulcrum. Numerous writers have observed the difficulty for members of socially privileged groups to see that privilege. In asking ourselves to believe, as Brown proposes, in “the possibility of ... a variety of ways of understanding the world ... without imposing ... a notion of the norm,” researchers in positions of social privilege can adopt – at least temporarily, and with greater or less degrees of success – a different vantage point that can help us more easily explore the ways that our previous perceptions of “reality” privilege some, but not others. As Stephanie Wildman (1996) notes, seeing systems of power and privilege does not, by itself, solve complex social problems, but it does make it possible to discuss those problems in a more useful fashion.

Looking for “what is good here”

In addition to pivoting the center, I took another, related stance in beginning this research: that of first seeking to understand the strengths of the people, organization and community I was studying. As Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) has noted, the

one “who asks first ‘what is good here?’ is likely to absorb a very different reality than the one who is on a mission to discover the sources of failure” (8). She elaborates:

The relentless scrutiny of failure has many unfortunate and distorting results. First, we begin to get a view of our social world that magnifies what is wrong and neglects evidence of promise and potential. Second, this focus on failure can often lead to a kind of cynicism and inaction. If things are really this bad and there is no hope for change, then why try to do anything about it? Third, the documentation of pathology often bleeds into a blaming of the victim. Rather than a complicated analysis of the coexistence of strengths and vulnerabilities (usually evident in any person, institution, or society), the locus of blame tends to rest on the shoulders of those most victimized and least powerful in defining their identity or shaping their fate. Fourth, the focus on pathology seems to encourage facile inquiry. It is, after all, much easier to identify an disease and count its victims than it is to characterize and document health” (8-9).

I made my decision to focus first on documenting strength not in a desire to gloss over challenges or present an idealized view of GIAC and its staff, but in a belief that a focus on “promise and potential” could lead to a deeper understanding of what is wrong with our community service systems and why, in spite of the best intentions, we often fall short and sometimes fail. Like Lawrence-Lightfoot, I believe that choice has led me to a “more complicated analysis” than I would otherwise have reached. In order to effect sustained change, we need more than a critical accounting of what is wrong; we need to be able to characterize “health” and to understand how social systems *can* work, as well as how they can’t. This choice – in concert with my commitment to “pivot the center” – also helped me to continually stand guard against one of the dangers inherent in coming to this work as a middle-class, white woman: failing to notice what I didn’t know that I didn’t know. Social conditioning sets up those in dominant groups to assume that what we know is “normal” and “right,” and to judge all else against familiar standards. Looking for strength, rather than failure, builds in a helpful counter-balance.

Criteria for Judging Research Quality

Positivist science measures the quality and soundness of research knowledge by the application of detailed procedures and methodological rules to determine “reliability,” “validity” and “rigor.” This approach – as the sole determinant of research quality – has come under increasing critical scrutiny (e.g., Guba and Lincoln 1989, Lather 1991, Lincoln 1997, Reason 2006, Greenwood and Levin 2005, 2006). However, as Alvesson and Sköldböck point out, challenging the “empirical strait jacket” of fixed procedures for replicability, generalizability, and so on

does not mean ... that sloppiness is allowed or that ‘anything goes.’ ... Other demands, different from the traditional ones – and to some extent more exacting – should be made (2000: 277).

Further, as Greenwood and Levin (2006) note:

[T]oo often people engaged in meaningful participatory and democratizing change processes claim they are doing [action research] but one looks in vain for the “research” element in their projects. Participation and collaboration are often there but there are no definable research objectives beyond data gathering and mobilization efforts. ... [Research] involves a transparent process of data analysis that eventually lead to credible knowledge. The research process must be convincing for the persons that access the communications from the research (99).

Much has been written about alternative criteria for judging quality research, both by those cited above and others. Foremost among these “other demands” are requirements for “trustworthiness,” “authenticity,” “credibility” and “transparency.” Considered collectively, these scholars suggest that the soundness of research can be ascertained by asking questions such as:

- Is the research *process* – including the agendas and choices of the researcher – transparent, trackable and documentable? Have “significant choice points” and their consequences – at each stage of the inquiry – been offered up “to our own scrutiny, to the mutual scrutiny of our co-

researchers, to the wider community of inquirers, and to the interested public at large” (Reason 2006: 34)?

- Has the researcher incorporated “triangulation,” not just of multiple data measures but of “multiple data sources, methods and theoretical schemes” (Lather 1991)?
- Are the knowledge claims internally logical and consistent among different forms of knowing? Are they congruent with the lived experience of participants (Heron 1996)?
- Is the knowledge, as tested in real-life situations, “workable,” that is, capable of resolving real problems? Are the people whose lives are dependent on the outcome willing to act upon this knowledge (Greenwood and Levin, 2006)?
- Are the empirical arguments credible and interpretively rich? Do they challenge the reader to rethink and imagine afresh? (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000)? Is there counterfactual analysis; have the “workable outcomes” been contrasted with other possible interpretations in the literature and known case (Greenwood and Levin 2006)?
- Does it have “transcontextual credibility” (Greenwood and Levin 2006) to other organizations and other places?
- Has the researcher systematized opportunities for reflexivity to help “protect research from the researcher’s own enthusiasms” (Lather 1991: 64) and place the “assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors of the researcher her/himself ... within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint” (Harding 1987: 11)?
- Do the local participants have more information, a greater understanding of the constructions of others, and a greater ability to act? (what Guba and

Lincoln [1989] have called ontological, educative, and tactical authenticity; Lather [1991] refers to the last as catalytic validity).

Finally, because there is a normative component to the epistemological soundness of research findings, we can take a reflexive stance to both process and content, and ask:

- Does the research contribute to “confronting and overcoming irrationality, injustice, alienation, and suffering” (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000: 593) or in Wendell Berry’s words, does it have “the power to help us adapt and survive” (2000: 134).

As readers move through the account that follows, I encourage them to judge for themselves the answers to the questions above. I return in Chapter 8 to a discussion of how well I think this research holds up in light of these criteria.

Research Agendas

Let me close with a discussion of “agendas.” As I have argued throughout this chapter, research is a social practice with social consequences. *All* researchers come to their work with personal hunches and hopes, assumptions and beliefs. *All* research serves a particular political agenda, either justifying the status quo or promoting alternatives, reproducing relationships that are de-humanizing or recreating them along more liberatory lines, bringing us closer to sustaining life or distancing us from it (e.g., Maguire 1987; Lather 1991; Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997; Berry 2000; Greenwood and Levin 2005, 2006; Cervero and Wilson 2001). Some researchers hide these agendas, assumptions and hopes (sometimes even from themselves) behind notions of “scientific objectivity,” distance, codified methods, rules of rigor, and so on. Their agendas exist none-the-less, all the more distorting for their lack of transparency.

I prefer to state my agenda upfront: As I have already noted, I came to my work with a commitment to using research as “one tool in the multifaceted struggles for a more just, loving world” (Patricia Maguire, quoted in Reason and Bradbury 2001: 1). I sought to add to knowledge that would enable ever larger groups of people to promote human flourishing for all, understanding the ways that embracing diversity contributes to our collective survival and joining together in collective action to transform our institutions and societies toward these ends.

Second, in societies where the instrumental values and needs of a capitalist market economy rule nearly all social arrangements, I believe that we need to study the people, places and organizations where alternative understandings and practices have strong roots; we need to learn from them how they function and how they continue to survive. They have much to teach us. I came to this work with GIAC uncertain of what I would learn, but reasonably certain that I would learn something that could help in these transformative tasks. I leave it having learned not only about interesting possibilities for revitalizing our community-service system as a whole, but having learned more about institutional racism and classism than I ever expected. I did not consider myself naïve about the power relations that structure our social relations; yet through this work, I was forced to learn again and again, with increasing clarity, how our dominant social systems keep important perspectives and conversations muted and how unexamined and unarticulated frames can repeatedly trip up even those who consider ourselves aware and well-intentioned, myself among them.

Finally, I believe that academic researchers must foster a new turn within the academy, that of using our analytical capacity to offer perspectives of “critical hope.” It is not enough merely to critique existing social arrangements. Although thoughtful critique is essential, alone it can lead to a deadening fatalism and despair. To affect change, people also need theoretical *and* practical perspectives on alternatives, and

they need the hope that implementing such alternatives is, indeed, possible. I believe that academic researchers have an obligation to hold out the possibilities of new realities not from naïve optimism, but in the context of authentic portrayals that can help us bring new realities into being. In saying this, I borrow from the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who wrote:

I do not understand human existence, and the struggle needed to improve it, apart from hope and dream. Hope is an ontological need. Hopelessness is but hope that has lost its bearings, and become a distortion of that ontological need. When it becomes a program, hopelessness paralyzes us, immobilizes us. We succumb to fatalism, and then it becomes impossible to muster the strength we absolutely need for a fierce struggle that will recreate the world. I am hopeful, not out of mere stubbornness, but out of an existential, concrete imperative. I do not mean that, because I am hopeful, I attribute to this hope of mine the power to transform reality all by itself, so that I set out for the fray without taking account of concrete, material data, declaring ‘my hope is enough!’ No, my hope is necessary, but it is not enough. Alone, it does not win. But without it, my struggle will be weak and wobbly. We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water (1992: 8).

I hope this work will open up new, critically hopeful conversations and spark new action – at GIAC, in the wider community-service system, in the academy and beyond. It is in this spirit that I have written the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER 3

GIAC: “A PLACE TO BE ME”

If you arrive at GIAC on a hot summer day, the first thing you may notice is the swimming pool – the sun shining on the water, the laughter and calls of the children, the splash as someone reaches the bottom of the slide. When I arrive at 11 o'clock on one July Tuesday in 2004, there are about forty children in the pool area with their teen-age counselors. Most are probably participants in GIAC's six-week summer day camp, but the 25 x 75 foot pool, the only one within the city, is also open to the public.

Today, my eye is drawn to six youngsters in bathing suits gathered near the chain-link fence that divides the pool from the street. They look to be about six years old: a dark-skinned boy, the color of black coffee; a second boy, small and caramel-colored; a third, a pale-skinned red-head with freckles, and three girls, one her blond hair pulled back in a ponytail; the other two, their many tightly-woven braids dotted with colorful beads. Their counselor, a slender brown-skinned teenager in a blue bikini, is leading them in stretches. They raise their arms and bend to the left, then to the right, mimicking her movements.

Just up the street from the pool is a basketball court. The blacktop is cracked, but usable, and there is a game in progress. It is mostly being played by a group of pre-teen boys, but a small white girl seems to be holding her own. At the far end of the street, two blocks away, workers in four dirty yellow construction trucks are digging up the pavement. They are involved in a “remediation” effort, digging up toxic coal tar, a by-product released by a former gas manufacturing plant operating in the neighborhood. One can't tell by looking, but the underground coal tar plume extends the length of the street, almost to the pool. Also invisible to the eye is the possibility that the remediation work, which will reach the street in front of the pool and

basketball court the following summer, may render them both unusable for the entire season, a prospect that has the GIAC staff and Board worried.

GIAC proper sits across the street, a two-story, red brick building that looks like the aging elementary school it once was. Two windows on the first floor hold small air conditioning units fending off the summer heat; the rest are open wide. Half of the north wall of the building is covered by a colorful peeling mural that depicts people engaged in a wide variety of activities. At the top of the mural, in large letters easily visible from the street, are the words: “GIAC: A Place To Be Me.” On the corner, a newer-looking hand-painted sign depicts simply drawn people of varying ages – black, brown, yellow, white – and the “GIAC: A Place To Be Me” slogan. The main entrance is around the corner. Four concrete steps, flanked by two relatively new-looking wooden benches and a small white sign with black letters: “Drug free zone. Keep our children safe, keep our community safe,” lead to the brick-red doors. A white banner with black lettering hangs above it: “GIAC 1972 – 2002. Thirty Years of Unity through Diversity.” And taped to the glass window of the main door, a photocopied sign announces several upcoming teen trips.

Once inside the doors, you will find the wide hallways characteristic of school buildings. Immediately to your left, a large piece of marked newsprint – the “shared history” created at the Search Conference last October – is taped to the wall. Just a bit further, in Conference Room #1, approximately a dozen adults – Asian, Latino, African, and white – sit in a circle on metal folding chairs practicing basic conversational phrases. BOCES rents space here for their English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes; they maintain an office on the second floor.

To your right is GIAC’s “main” office. Large, framed black-and-white photos of GIAC children and staff line the walls, a gift from an Ithaca College student who took them as part of a class project. Brochures cover the counter: a calendar of upcoming

trips for GIAC's senior adult program, pamphlets advertising a variety of community services. GIAC's director, deputy director, office manager and financial coordinator all have their offices here. The deputy director's position has been vacant for months; it will hopefully be filled by the fall. You are likely to find either Lana Milton, the office manager or Richard Lansdowne, the financial administrator, at the receptionist's desk, greeting visitors or answering phones. The funding for the receptionist was sacrificed to protect program staff from budget cuts.

Back out in the main corridor, bulletin boards line the wall. On one side are children's recent drawings. Across the corridor hang "official" announcements: job openings, upcoming community events, and the like. The last bulletin board, a small rectangle surrounded by a border of blue and white six-pointed stars announces upcoming events for the religious school of Tikkun V'Or, Ithaca's Reform Jewish congregation which rents space in GIAC for its Sunday morning religious school program. Around the corner, to your right, is the main programming room for the 5- and 6-year olds, and a small gymnasium with an equally small raised platform that serves as a performance stage. To your left is the Peewee room, where the pre-schoolers meet. An extraordinary mural of animals and marine creatures – created by Carlos Rodriguez, a Cornell fine arts major – extends across all four walls.

Although the majority of visitors to GIAC have never left the first floor, there are two more floors to the building. The Pre-Teen and Teen staff have their offices and program lounges upstairs. The basement – dark and damp as basements in old buildings tend to be – houses the art room, a small kitchen where the staff prepare snacks, and a boxing ring, along with the utility rooms for the building.

According to its mission statement, GIAC is

a center for all ages, particularly youth and teens. We serve the immediate neighborhood and the greater Ithaca area by

providing multicultural, educational, and recreational programs focused on social and individual development.

Our programs include services dedicated to improving the quality of life for the people we serve; advocating for the rights and needs of youth, families, underrepresented and disenfranchised populations; providing structured employment training opportunities for at-risk youth and adults; and fighting against oppression and intimidation in our community.

Our center executes this mission through its own programming and by drawing on the resources of other community agencies and individuals (revised Nov. 16, 2000).

Although advocacy has always been an essential part of the center's work, the middle paragraph is a recent addition. It was added at the suggestion of the then-mayor to ensure that no future city administration could question the expenditure of public funds for that purpose. The issue points to GIAC's unusual structure: it is both a department of the City of Ithaca and a nonprofit agency with a Board of Directors; GIAC's director reports to both the mayor and the Board. According to the founding partnership agreement, written into the city's charter, the city is the staff employer of record; GIAC staff members are civil service employees. The city also operates and maintains the physical facilities. The nonprofit Board, which includes appointed representatives from the city and some of the other original public partners, is responsible for advising on policy making and programming, seeking additional funding to supplement the city budget, and partnering with the mayor to select the agency's director. It also functions as a public advocacy voice for the center and its constituents.

Because of the bias that attaches to any venture that is led by people of color and centralizes their experience, GIAC is often seen as a "Black" community center by the larger (white) Ithaca community. Yet insiders pride themselves on GIAC's multicultural, multiracial, multiethnic, inclusive focus. In 2002, just under half of the youth and pre-teens in the After-School program (48 percent) were African-American;

19 percent were bi-racial, 21 percent were Caucasian, and 5 percent were Asian, 3.5 percent were Hispanic and 3 percent were “other.” In the adult summer basketball league, 42 percent of the participants were African-American, 39 percent were Caucasian, 17 percent were bi-racial, 12 percent were Latino, and 2 percent were Asian. And in the senior citizens’ recreational program, 80 percent of the participants were white, 18 percent were African-American, and 2 percent were Asian. Finally, GIAC’s annual community events – among them the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day breakfast, a Halloween Party, and the Harvest Dinner near Thanksgiving – draw a diverse cross-section of the greater Ithaca community. The GIAC staff and Board reflect a similar diversity. Still, many white Ithacans are surprised when they learn of the racial and cultural diversity among the GIAC Board, staff and participants.

Regardless of race, however, most GIAC participants and their families are low- or moderate-income. Two-thirds of the youth in the After-School program, for example, came from families with incomes less than \$20,000 and eighty-four percent came from families with incomes less than \$30,000, both well below Ithaca’s median family income of just over \$42,000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). And yet, even here there is some (generally unrecognized externally) diversity: eleven percent of the youth in the program in 2002 came from families with incomes between \$35,000 and \$50,000, and one came from a family with income above \$70,000.¹

Situating GIAC socially and geographically

Though officially designated as an “emerging metropolitan area” in 2000 when the county’s population topped the 100,000 mark, Ithaca might be better characterized as a mid-sized college town located in a still partly rural and agricultural region of central

¹ GIAC participant demographics and family income figures come from GIAC’s 2003 United Way narrative.

New York State. It has a population of just over 29,000, three-quarters of whom are white. Only 6.7 percent (or just under 2,000 people) identify themselves as Black or African-American; 5.3 percent (about 550 people) identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino; 13.8 percent (just under 4,000 people) as Asian, and .3 percent (or just over 100 people) as American Indian (U.S. Census Bureau 2000).² With three colleges and universities in Tompkins County – Cornell, Ithaca College, and Tompkins-Cortland Community College – higher education is by far the dominant “industry.” Fifty-eight percent of city residents hold at least a bachelor’s degree; nearly a third have a graduate or professional degree (U.S. Census Bureau 2000).

In 1997, the *Utne Reader* declared Ithaca to be the “Most Enlightened City” in the United States (Walljasper 1997). This distinction confirmed the pride that many residents, mostly white and middle-class, have in local traditions of activism and progressive politics. In 2004, the authors of “Cities Ranked and Rated,” designated Ithaca as No. 1 among the best “emerging metropolitan areas” due to its local beauty, plentiful activities and the “high educational attainment” of its residents (Sperling and Sander 2004).

But the pride in these distinctions is not universally shared; a local bumper sticker, proclaiming “Ithaca: 5 square miles surrounded by reality” captures one of the dissenting perspectives. The *Utne* distinction, in particular, drew cynical responses from many local activists of color, who pointed, once again, to the huge disparities based on race and class that divide the experiences of city residents. According to the Appalachian Regional Commission, the county poverty rate in 2000 was 17.6 percent. 142 percent of the U.S. average. African-American, Hispanic and low socioeconomic

² The census figures for Ithaca include both permanent residents and full-time students. The latter constitute close to half of the city’s population and one-third of the county’s population. This makes it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions about the correlation of household income, race, class, educational achievement, employment stats, etc. without dissecting the data by neighborhood (Shinagawa and Eversley-Bradwell 2006).

status white students consistently score significantly lower on state tests, drop out of school at significantly higher rates, and graduate from high school at significantly lower rates than their peers (Village at Ithaca, personal communication, July 28, 2006).³ In August 2002, the Ithaca City School District Board of Education set a priority on eliminating race and class as predictors for academic achievement; however little observable progress can be demonstrated. Immense disparities can also be found in the small number of minority-owned businesses and in planning and development processes. A process of gentrification within the city and the associated rise in housing costs has led to dramatically rising assessment rates; anecdotal reports circulate of low-income families being pushed outside the city to the surrounding rural towns, villages and hamlets.

GIAC is one of two remaining community centers in the city. The other, the Southside Community Center, is older, smaller, and neighborhood-based, with a mission rooted in preserving and enhancing the Southside's African-American heritage. During the period of this project, there was talk about potentially closing the latter center for "lack of funds." The downtown YMCA, which burned down in the 1970s, decided to rebuild in a suburban area nearby. The city's other community centers – the Northside House and the Westside House – founded in the 1930s – were both closed in the 1960s. One can still find older residents who remember playing basketball at these neighborhood centers, but in general, they are largely forgotten, rarely mentioned in either public or private conversations about community services.

In this context, it's not surprising that those involved with GIAC see it as occupying a special place in the community. Just how the GIAC staff conceive of that

³ Although comparative data across race and class are available in the NYS Department of Education "report cards," specific percentages have not been used here because of continuing questions about the miscoding or inconsistent coding of data across several years.

special place was the focus of the first All-Staff session conducted in this project. I turn to this official beginning of our work together in the next section.

“People can count on us for life”

Marcia, Robert Rich and I met several times during the summer to talk about various approaches to helping the staff develop logic models that not only would be “stronger” according to the United Way’s criteria, but that would more fully capture GIAC’s work, helping outsiders better understand the agency’s work and the GIAC staff to improve their programming at the same time. As I noted in Chapter 2 when I quoted from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation’s “Logic Model Development Guide,” the promises for organizations using such models for these ends are great.

At the same time, Robert and I believed that a more open, conversational approach (as compared to merely filling in boxes on a form) might make it easier for the GIAC staff to think broadly about what their work was about. Marcia agreed, and so we suggested to her that we structure the first session as an “appreciative inquiry.” Such an approach engages people in asking questions about what is best about a system, examining its

achievements, assets, unexplored potentials, innovations, strengths ...
opportunities ... lived values, traditions, strategic competencies ...
expressions of wisdom ... [and] untapped and rich and inspiring
accounts of the positive [as a way to] ignite the collective imagination”
and strengthen the capacity for positive change (Cooperrider and
Whitney 2005).

Marcia also liked our offer to bring the staff up to a conference room at Cornell University for the added import it would bring to this project.

So on a Tuesday morning in late-September, the GIAC staff drove up the hill together in several vans, arriving promptly at 9 o’clock. Marcia arrived separately with bags containing the standard fare for a GIAC breakfast gathering: bagels, flavored and

plain cream cheese, hummus, chips, salsa, grapes, coffee, orange juice, and bottles of water.

After introductions, Robert and I asked the staff the central question for the day: “What is GIAC all about? What is it that you are trying to make happen in the community?” We asked people to meet first in small groups, by program areas, to discuss these questions, then reconvened as a large group. “What stands out in your mind about what your group focused on?” Robert asked.

Bob Skates, one of the Teen Program staff, spoke first. “We were talking about GIAC as a place where we identify injustices in the community, and we speak about those injustices. ... A lot of people who are oppressed tend to become silent because of their oppression, because they figure it may get worse if they speak out. So ...they come to us and we, in turn, voice those injustices within the community.”

“My group saw GIAC as like a crisis center,” said Jenna Cooper, part of the Youth Program. “People come in and say ‘this is my problem,’ and [they] know we will help them. ... What it [comes] down [is] the compassionate staff that we have that maintains that commitment above and beyond.”

As the conversation continued, the list grew:

“GIAC is a place for giving second chances, where most places are not willing to give people second chances.” ...

“GIAC provides opportunities for people to have experiences they might not have otherwise” ...

“We are role models for all of our participants the community as a whole. ... People can see more than one person of color employed in an organization. People can see that white people and Black people and Latino people can work together well. ... We live that everyday: from somebody who has almost got a PhD in philosophy to somebody who is a graffiti artist to somebody who is in school – the whole gamut. ...

“We meet people where they’re at ... We’re not out there to set a goal for a Regents exam; we’re there to meet their needs.”

“Our job is longer than 9 to 5. They come to our houses.” “...call us on the phone,” added another person. “...find us at the store,” chimed in a third.

We talked about safety and feeling safe. I think that the public that doesn't know us and how we do our work; [they see GIAC as a place that's] not safe. But [for the people who come to GIAC], that's why they keep coming back. They trust us and feel safe.”

“[For] a lot of parents, this is a refuge. ... I know a lot of parents who have been referred to this place and that place and the other place, but they say, ‘I know if come to GIAC first, you guys are going to help me. Over there, they are going to give me the run-around and say I've got to this first...’ The community that we serve holds us in high regard because coming to GIAC, they're going to get help.”

They can talk to the right person at the right time ... That's what happens once you get under the umbrella at GIAC You're there for life.

A question from Robert about this aspect of GIAC's advocacy – providing life-long support, across a wide range of needs – sparked a flurry of comments.

“[Other agencies] may advocate for some people, but not for the people we advocate for,” Lana Milton, executive assistant, observed.

... “and they don't do it from beginning to end. It has to be within what they advocate for,” Vivian Sierra, Teen program leader, added.

“[Here] if they come to you with an issue, regardless of what it is, you go to bat,” Michael Thomas, recreation supervisor, put in.

“A lot of our kids are kids that other agencies have given up on, They just push them to the side because they haven't shown up or followed through on certain things, and [those agencies] say they can't waste any more time,” observed Cassandra Nelson, Teen program coordinator.

Bob Skates returned to the “under the umbrella for life” assessment:

“As far as the Teen Program: for some strange reason, we can't get rid of them. ... Even though they're out of the program, graduated, maybe going to school, maybe working ... they still come to us ... for guidance, for assistance, ... a myriad of different things. Even though they're not part of the program in the true sense of the word, they still feel connected to the program and to GIAC. Some of them have been GIAC-raised all their lives. So they feel all the way through that this is a place they can come back to and make that connection. Even though they are no longer part of our program and they are years removed, they still look back to GIAC in some ... fashion in times of need. We don't get recognized for that, because people don't see us as being that type of extended organization.”

These depictions of GIAC's work were typical; I heard them repeated again and again – in public speeches, in Board of Directors' retreats, in policy discussions at Board meetings, and in spontaneous conversations among staff members. In a discussion at a Board retreat about "what we cherish about GIAC and its culture that we don't want to lose," Board members generated the following list:

- Multiculturalism – respect and work with diverse groups
- Advocacy – help people who can't advocate for themselves effectively
- A community center whose base is children
- A willingness to be first at the scene at community crises
- Improving the quality of life clients, staff, Board
- Board members' long-term commitment and how well the Board gets along
- Intergenerational span of participants, from PeeWees to senior citizens
- Truly for everyone – not just in terms of the programs, but who uses the building
- The safe place in the community
- Putting people first; making relationships a priority
- An opening/welcoming/inclusive environment
- Being both a not-for-profit and a city department (fieldnotes, October 16, 2004)

In GIAC's 2005 Annual Report, Marcia describes GIAC foremost as

a home away from home for so many people...[a place] to watch children grow up, to see families develop, to know when someone has bought their first house, or gotten an A on their report card, or been accepted into college.

These descriptions are not just rhetoric. Again and again, I saw them as norms that guided behavior and organizational decision making. Such an understanding of GIAC's work was openly celebrated. At GIAC's 2006 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day community breakfast, Marcia opened her talk with a detailed story of "three angels," a GIAC Board member who met a young man standing on a cashier's line at four p.m. on Christmas Eve; as they talked, she learned he had just lost his job and didn't have the money to buy presents for his young children. Other agencies had told him it was too late to help. Calling Marcia – then doing her own last-minute shopping at the supermarket – by cell phone, they figured out how to provide him with a small grant

from one of GIAC's assistance funds. Two GIAC staff members then stopped their own holiday preparations, got to the bank, withdrew the money in cash, tracked down the young man, and gave him a ride to the stores and back home.

Every staff member and long-time Board member has similar stories. When these norms were challenged, as when a relatively new Board member suggested that the Board institute term-limits or when other Board members suggested following stricter interpretations of "professionalism" in decision making, the conflict was immediate and intense.

"GIAC has to prove ourselves ten times better"

In the middle of the staff's discussion, as in many discussions at GIAC, the talk turned to the (mis)perception of GIAC in wider community, to racism and classism, and to the challenges of being treated disrespectfully, misunderstood, or accorded to differential treatment. A comment about the need to promote a "more positive image" in the community sparked this exchange:

Certainly there are times when [we drop the ball in working with other agencies], but those actions don't happen very often. But the impact is often greater for us than if it were a different organization who had done the same thing. In terms of improving our image in the community, sometimes I'm not sure we're going to be able to do that ... The number of questions, comments that I've heard from white people who think that GIAC is only for Black people. *[Tells a story about a recent incident.]* We were laughing and having a good time, and people wanted to know: were we smoking pot and getting high?

"The perception of GIAC outside of GIAC is that it's a low-functioning situation that will never obtain – or that they will never allow us to obtain – a standard that is equal to other organizations that help the community. They always want to keep us below."

Robert: Is there a higher bar for GIAC?

"GIAC has to prove ourselves ten times better than everyone else. We have to show fifteen minutes before our scheduled time, so that somebody will believe we're on time. How we can get those organizations out there to have more positive interactions and have a

more positive image of GIAC? Somebody needs to do some work with those organizations, and it's not us."

"You can't address [that image] because you can't change people's perceptions. All you can do is stay consistent with what you do; people have to change [their perceptions] on their own. From the time I was a little boy, I was told "You're a Black boy, and you're going to have to work ten times harder than any white boy in your school to get half of what they got. That's 32 years ago. I can't change that perception. I'm not going to dress like I'm not a Black man. I'm not going to talk how other people talk. ... in order for people to think, "he's not dangerous." He's OK. He'll fit in. We're a city organization [but] we don't get the same respect ... We're seen as a step-child of the city."

"It's amazing that we're seen as some type of outcast, but for those individuals that want to have meetings in our building, one of the reasons that they say they want to meet in our building is that we're centrally located and it's easy for everyone to find GIAC. We have this physical plant that's accessible and easy for everyone to get to, but the organization itself doesn't get that image [that] we are central. [Some people from outside GIAC are concerned that we allow AA and NA to meet here]. We had to say to those individuals, 'this is why we're here. This is why we exist.' We're not going to turn them away and say 'we're afraid to have you here.' But when we do those things, as a community organization, we're viewed as 'this is not a safe place to be' because we invite those folks in to have meetings. ... They can't go anywhere else.

Similar observations at the Search Conference led to an extended, and at times, heated discussion in the context of a "force field" analysis to identify driving forces and restraints. Several participants suggested that outsiders' perceptions were a restraining force on GIAC reaching its goal. As one person said:

people look at GIAC and the people who work here as maybe not as well (hesitation)-educated or certified as other people in the ... system. And that we want to be to change. That would be something ... to work on. ... Because there is a sense of not having enough respect for what people do here and how...

Others jumped in to respond:

... The level of quality of expertise is not what educational levels an individual has. There's expertise that comes with experience ... and in a lot of cases, that's more important than someone with a Ph.D. in terms of the impact in achieving a goal.

That's exactly what I wanted to speak to, so thank you for raising that. I would just want to be cautious that ... it's not necessarily that *we* need do the work about that. ... Based on my experience being in this ...

community, ... if every single one of us in here had a PhD, it wouldn't make a difference because of the color of our skin and because of who we serve. So when we talk about restraints, you're absolutely right. I would agree that that's a restraint, but that's a restraint that other people have. ... Only those of us who work here, and those people closely involved with us would even have a clue about the educational background of people that work here. So you see, it's the perception of other people, the perception *from* other people, but it's about racism, it's about classism.

At least the way I see it for myself is that it's a driving force. It's not a restraining force. It's one of the things that makes us strong. It's one of the things that makes our program better. ... There are all these things we want to do to achieve *because* of all the limits that have been placed on us, because of the perceptions *about* us. I think that makes us stronger ... as an agency, as a group of people.

“We provide social, educational and cultural programs”

This passion for justice, commitment to advocacy, sense of belonging to the community they serve, and pride in a unique mission that comes through in the staff's depiction of “their work” pervades most conversations at GIAC about who they are and what they do – from informal conversation among staff members in the GIAC office, to discussions about policy decisions at Board of Directors' meetings, to the executive director's report at GIAC's many community events. So, too, does the acute pain and indignation about the never-ending racism and classism – both individual and institutional – that is an ever-present reality for the GIAC staff and the people they serve.

But this is not the only way the GIAC staff talk about their work. In April 2004, five months prior to the session described above, I facilitated a session on program evaluation for the Teen Program's three staff members. I began the discussion by asking the staff what they were trying to do in their work. Their response came directly from the first part of GIAC's mission statement: “We provide social, educational, and cultural programs for teens.” I was particularly struck by this extremely narrow, bland response because two of these staff members – Cassandra

and Vivian – had just spent thirty minutes while we were waiting for the session to begin describing the challenges of helping teens who have been thrown out of their homes find a place to sleep at 5 pm on a Friday evening. The impetus for the conversation was a memo with a request from the United Way for more information about the “informal teen drop-out rate” – teens who were officially enrolled in high school, but didn’t attend – mentioned in the agency’s last submitted program narrative. Cassandra and Vivian talked about the difficulties of helping these young people to find apartments and jobs and still keep up with their school work. Bob arrived late because he had been called to the high school to help deal with ongoing fights between a large group of white rural and Black urban teens. Yet, here they were describing their work – the work that I had been asked to help them evaluate – as simply providing “social, educational and cultural programs.”

“It seems to me that your work is more complicated than that,” I said.

“Things just come up; they come up all the time,” responded Vivian. The others nodded in agreement.

As my meeting with the Teen staff went on, and I continued to insist on the apparent complexity of their work, they began to expand their description of what they were trying to do. Yes, they offered “fun” social, recreational and educational programs. But they began to talk about purposes that were developmental: giving the teens the opportunity to develop life skills, expanding their horizons beyond Ithaca, and changing their perspectives on what was possible for them and their lives. Further, they acknowledged that advocacy was a central part of their work each day. But, countered Vivian, “We care about those things, and we think about that. But the only ones who care about that is us. [The logic models] are not geared to carry that info. ... “The things that we’re excited about [don’t interest the funders] ... With the logic model, it doesn’t seem like they care about *how* we get things done.”

So although the staff saw these non-programmatic activities as central to their work and the work of the organization, they not only doubted whether these less tangible developmental aspects of their work could be integrated into an outcome model, they further questioned whether these activities were even relevant to their funders. Similar concerns were raised prior to and at the first all-staff session. From the beginning of this project, Marcia asked how we might capture GIAC's advocacy work in the logic models; she was concerned that funders didn't realize the extent of those activities and the demands they made on staff time. But, as we planned for the first All-Staff session, questions arose about whether the "main office" staff – officially, administrative "support" positions to the "program" staff – ought to be included. In the course of these conversations, Marcia began to talk about the "main office" as a program area; these staff members answer phone calls, make referrals, advocate on behalf of participants, help people obtain other needed services. They are often the first point-of-contact when people come to GIAC. But as the project continued, the ambivalence about whether these were "program" staff remained.

Translating the logic models into "plain speak"

As with the two anecdotes at the beginning of the Introduction, these two sessions present two very different ways of thinking and talking about what the work of this community service agency is. In the September All-Staff gathering, people described GIAC as a "refuge," "crisis center," "an umbrella for life," and a place where people are given "second chance." They talked about their work as "voicing injustice" and "advocating for people's needs." They emphasized doing their work as part of a community in which they live rather than as a "9 to 5" job and having life-long relationships with GIAC program participants. This stands in stark contrast to the initial response from the Teen Staff, descriptive of only a small part of what happens

at GIAC day-to-day, emphasizing the language of service provision and describing their work as offering “social, educational and recreational activities”

Of course, it is not unusual for an organization to have very different ways of talking about its work. In every organization, there are the “official” descriptions (mission statements, job descriptions) written in a formulaic, “institutional” language; there are the internal narratives about what an organization is and does, and there are the unofficial, often unspoken ideas held by each member of that organization. Often, when the context is framed as reporting to funders or administrators, evaluating programs (accountability) or enhancing program planning (performance), the official, bureaucratic language tends to dominate. This phenomenon is not unique to GIAC.⁴

Further, people, in all kinds of organizations, tend to oversimplify their work. As Marcia suggested, introducing the first staff session in September:

... Sometimes we find when we are talking to people – whether its funders or caregivers or amongst ourselves – we define very narrowly the program we provide, and we don’t necessarily take into account the other, what I think sometimes is viewed as “extra” pieces of the job. So we don’t recognize that they are, in fact, part of our program. So the [different kinds of] advocacy work that we do ... are all part of the program we provide and part of our mission. (transcript, Sept. 28, 2004).

But as I said in the Introduction, I believe these two very different narratives describing GIAC’s work are more than merely oversight or simplification. I return to this point shortly. First, let me continue with a description of the sessions that followed during the fall and early winter.

⁴ Scott Peters and I found a similar pattern in our work with extension educators at Cornell University Cooperative Extension in New York City. For a fuller analysis of the gap between the flat institutionalized language the educators initially offered to describe their work and the rich, varied characterizations that emerged through the development of “practitioner profiles,” dialogue and collective reflection, see Hittleman and Peters, 2003. In the final staff development session we facilitated about the “essence” of their work, participants told us that it was the first time they had publicly discussed what many had privately known. The ubiquity of this phenomenon speaks to the need for creative approaches to “staff development” that help people reflect on and find language to talk about the richness, complexity and “heart” of their work.

Robert and I intentionally structured the September All-Staff session as an “appreciative inquiry” to elicit these richer narratives and to counteract the tendency for bland, “official” statements about an organization’s work to dominate. As the contrast between the two sessions shows, that happened. And yet, the staff responses to the September All-Staff session – as reported by the supervisors – were decidedly lukewarm. One supervisor expressed uncertainty about the point of the training, finding it too intangible. Others expressed fears about having to do two logic models – one for use internally and a second for the United Way, uncertainty about what the GIAC administration and the United Way wanted, and a desire to have the training content tied more concretely to completing new logic models. Finally, the supervisors were concerned that this session was not necessarily relevant to most staff members’ day-to-day activity planning work; they questioned whether their staff should be thinking about the “big picture” at all, rather than focusing on how to incorporate key components of the mission into their program plans (field notes, Oct. 6, 2004)

In response to their requests, Robert and I developed the second All-Staff session, held a month later, to focus specifically on writing logic models related to particular program components. We met in the same conference room at Cornell. As a group, we worked through filling in the boxes and creating links for the Homework Spot, one of the Youth Program’s activities. Drawing a large logic model on the white board at the front of the room, we asked the staff to brainstorm the various “inputs,” “outputs,” and “outcomes” for this activity, and then helped them find the links from the specific things they did to what they hoped would happen in the short-, intermediate- and long-terms. Then each staff member spent time creating a similar model for one of their own activities.

The supervisors response to this second training was much more positive. They found it “practical” and “informative,” liked the concrete exercise carried out in “plain

“speak,” and thought that it had helped “clear up some of the questions that people had.”⁵ Cassandra affirmed that “changing the words, break it down into simpler terms was helpful ... clarifying. That made it a lot easier to understand what they were supposed to be putting down.” Marcia noted that

we had a good discussion when we went on our break outside, over lunch, and people just sort of [went] ‘aha, I have it now. ... One of the things that I would like to see come out of this is a form, a user-friendly form ... we’ll take ... the United Way format but [put] some working on there that’s user-friendly so people will understand what is an indicator, what is an activity, what is an output, what is an outcome measurement, and then have a period of time to pilot it, with staff using it to do program planning, before we decide when we’re going to implement utilizing that format to do program planning across the board.

And Leslyn McBean, a former GIAC Board member who had recently been hired as GIAC’s deputy director, added:

I think this time around, people felt listened to. I think the first time around, I was hearing more grumblings that they weren’t being heard. But they felt listened to: ‘well, wait a minute. I’m not getting this.’

Still uncertainty remained. Several of the program supervisors raised questions about what was wanted in each component of the model, how outcomes were to be measured, and how the models were going to be used internally to support program planning. And while the staff as a whole liked this session better than the first one, many were still confused about what these models were asking for and how this related to their work. They found the language alienating, and conceptualizing their work in this way strange. A recurrent question among their staff, they said, was “does this mean we have to do a logic model for every activity that we do?”

In response to Marcia’s request, I created a new, “translated” activity planning logic model, supplementing terms like “inputs,” “outputs,” “outcomes” with more everyday language. The new headings asked: what do you need to do this activity?

⁵ This and the following quotes are transcribed from November 4, 2004 supervisory staff meeting.

What will you do? (What activities, events, services will you provide?). What are the direct products of the program activity? (How much programming will you deliver?) How will the participants benefit and change from taking part in this activity? Each column had additional prompts for specific information.

Further, assuming that the staff could talk more fully about “inputs,” “outputs,” “outcomes,” by telling stories about their work, rather than by filling in boxes in a logic model, I set up several sessions in November and December in which I “interviewed” the staff in small program groups.⁶ I asked each staff member in turn to tell me about a program they had led that they were proud of. I asked them to tell me how they decided to plan this program, what they did, what happened, what was hard, what they did in response to the challenges, what happened to the participants as a result of that program, how they knew that happened, and whether this story was typical of their work. I recorded the conversation, typed up excerpts in their own words (edited slightly for readability), and then used those transcripts as a basis for discussion about the things they needed to plan programs (inputs), what they did in the programs (outputs) and what they expected to happen as a result (outcomes).

Some of the staff found this “translated” model more user-friendly. As we continued to meet and talk about their work and what they were trying to achieve, an increasing number reported that they were beginning to understand how to write a logic model. They also began to realize that they did not have to write a new model for every activity that they did, which dramatically reduced resistance, but rather, for every *kind* of activity. Several began to note the ways in which preparing these models helped them think through what they needed to do and could be useful to the program

⁶ Cheryl Mattingly (1987) writes persuasively about the ways that storytelling can facilitate reflection in organizational contexts. Her essay influenced my thinking about this approach.

as a whole (e.g., observations that now they had records on file that could be used by new staff members that came after them; not having to start from scratch).

But both the staff and I were aware that important components of their work still didn't appear in their logic models, and there was still a sense that the GIAC's work was not well understood by "outsiders." In the midst of reviewing a draft of the new Youth Program outcome measurement model, I asked Youth Program supervisor Travis Brooks what others in the human service community don't understand about GIAC. His response:

It's people looking at GIAC as a youth program and then, within that, people looking at the youth program as a day care center or a drop-off center, and not looking at it as a community center or a community ... And that's a struggle.

The difference to me between GIAC's after-school program and [other programs] ... Over the years, there are a lot of kids who have been unsuccessful in other places they've been: day care centers, after school programs, school itself. And over the years, those same kids, over a period of time, have experienced a tremendous amount of success at GIAC. ... I hate to use his [George Bush's] words, but it's kind of like a "leave no kid behind" type of policy. Because there are a lot of kids that are here now that are in fifth grade or pre-teens that were kicked out of whatever schools they were in at one time, other facilities, other places.

For me, every kid needs to experience opportunities for success, and so it's our goal and our responsibility to provide those for the kids, no matter how small [those opportunities for success] are, no matter how far between [the moments are that] the kids grasp that concept. But over a period of time, they get one. It takes a little while, they get another one. ... [T]hose opportunities are created. That's the policy. That's my policy (transcript, January 14, 2005).

I asked other staff members this question as well. The following interchange, taken from a discussion with the Youth Program staff in December 2004, raises similar concerns. Toward the end of a session in which each person described a program that

he or she was proud of, the conversation turned to what they saw as both most important and least understood about the work they did.

Jenna: Having that relationship with kids and being supportive, connected ... It's like ... you have a bond with the kids. Because once they leave your program, it's "I want to be in Ms. Cooper's class. [other staff: yeah]. I want to come back to where you are. And I remember ... and I want to do that again and I want to be a part of that again." That's a connection that they not have not only with that program, but the staff that are running that program. So you continue on with it.

Jodie: And I use [those relationships]. I use the kids that were in my program last year – the Teens that just came of the Pre-teens [program to help out]. I still go to them. And they come right down to [my] room too ... just for snacks. They come down there. They know where I'm at.

Margo: So it seems like there's something about an impact on the kids that doesn't get talked about a lot. How would you talk about that?

Jodie: It's so hard to measure.

Jenna: It's really, like we were just saying ... depending individually on those bonds that you created.

*Alison*⁷: Definitely. Sometimes it's bonds that they'll never ever make with anyone else. You know what I mean? Like I have bonds with one of my participants who has been bounced around from different foster homes, who isn't popular, who doesn't really have the best clothes, hair that isn't really well kept. But me and him have bonded. And I think that's the first real relationship that he's ever had, that he's ever experienced...

Jodie: ... to be open. To know that he can come to Alison and be like, "This and this is going on" and [she] can ask him, "What's going on. I notice something different in you" and he explains to her. Nobody else could get that far. He wouldn't open up like that. So that's just the things that we do

....
Jodie: I wish you guys understand how hard it is to sit here and talk about our jobs. Because it's like a day-to-day thing for us. ... For instance, I'm way upstairs in the Pre-Teen program. It's automatic for me to come down here everyday and go give the Pee Wees five. Every last Pee Wee: "Give me five. Five." That's just what we do. Jenna comes upstairs, even if it's just to use the microwave, she's got a little conversation with the Pre-Teens, one of them, two of them.

⁷ A pseudonym is used here.

Alison: And that's the stuff that doesn't get talked about. We're not there to talk about it. We're not asked. I think this is the first time we've ever been able to talk about the love we have for our jobs. And it feels good to sit here and say, "Wow, I do have an impact." Because you get fed, "We're not doing this right. How come this isn't being done? How come that didn't happen?" But it shows in the participants that we are doing something right because they keep coming back. We're able to make connections with particular participants. We're able to reach out to them and they're able to reach out to us. ... But that's the stuff that doesn't get mentioned (transcript, Dec. 14, 2004).

The importance of these kinds of relationships, while perhaps not discussed overtly, are reflected in organizational decision making. In discussing hiring decisions, Marcia explained to me that if she had to choose between hiring a staff member with formal programming experience or one who understood and could communicate with GIAC's participants, their families and the community, she would always choose the latter. There are organizational consequences to this decision: some GIAC staff do not have the kind of "professional" program planning and evaluation background expected by other agencies. But Marcia finds it more feasible to teach staff members these instrumental skills than to teach someone how to build the kind of relationships she sees as central to their work. In this way, too, I was told, a certain kind of relationship takes precedence.

Troubling questions: a failure of the models or the users

By February 2005, the GIAC staff had new logic models to submit to the United Way. They had clearly distinguished between "outputs" and "outcomes." And they included a fuller range of outcomes than ever before.

The response from the United Way was overwhelmingly positive. Thus, from one perspective, our work over these five months might be deemed a tremendous success. The program staff were preparing more detailed plans each month, thinking through the mix of activities they would offer and preparing lists of what "inputs" were

required to carry those activities out. Most of the staff – particularly the program supervisors – had clearer understandings of what an “outcome” was and were able to describe a fuller range of outcomes for their work. And some program staff, although decidedly resistant at first, were beginning to decide that the logic models might actually be useful to their program planning.

More dramatically, from an outside perspective, the United Way went from “concerned” by the previous year’s submission to “blown away” by the revised outcome measurement models submitted in March 2005 (personal communication, April 5, 2005). In fact, a year later, the director of another local human service agency reported that the United Way was holding up GIAC’s submission as a model for other organizations in the community.

And yet, numerous questions remained. First, writing clear outcomes was still difficult for many staff members, including some of the supervisors; and while having to fill out model components might help staff think about what materials they needed for upcoming activities, these models still seemed separate from their “real work.” Second, Alison’s “stuff that doesn’t get mentioned” and Travis’ reference to the continued struggle to get people to understand GIAC were extremely troubling to me. If this “stuff” was central to what the staff understood their work – and impact – to be, it ought to be accounted for.

Finally, in spite of the conversations about wanting to capture GIAC’s advocacy, community development and social change activities in the agency’s logic models, this work was still completely invisible in the new models. One could suggest that the staff didn’t really want to publicly announce their advocacy and social change activities, “flying under the radar” with this work instead. And yet, the organization had recently rewritten their mission statement to explicitly include such work. And

references to this work regularly arose as part of expressed desires to have the logic models help funders better understand GIAC and what they did.

Was the continued absence of these elements of GIAC's programs a failure of the models or the users? Had we simply not adequately described a full enough range of outcomes so as to capture these components in the logic models? Or were there important things that the models *couldn't* capture? Troubled by these questions, I wrote at the time:

There are some aspects in which the program as a whole is greater than the sum of its individual activities – and that seems particularly difficult to capture in these models. There's something about the value of certain kinds of long-term, supportive relationships and about the values underlying decisions that are important, but not reflected in the models. Can they be? Are [those limitations] inherent to the models? Or [do the constraints come from] how the models are typically used? (Journaling notes, Feb. 16, 2005).

I knew that this dilemma was not unique to GIAC. Lehn Benjamin (2004) found that a social change-oriented community development agency struggled with the way that important components of their work were shadowed and misrepresented by these models. This agency, which she called "Sojourner Truth," had joined with similar agencies and their funder to try to reconstruct the model so as to include room for social change strategies directed toward addressing long-term, structurally defined problems, as well as to reconceptualize outcomes to include both "concrete results" and "organizing/capacity building."

But how were we to respond? In particular, what might I suggest to the GIAC staff to help us better represent (and account for) GIAC's work publicly? Whether these limitations were inherent to the models or the constraints came from how we were using these models had profoundly different implications for how we might proceed. In seeking answers to these questions, I sought out literature that I hoped could help me think about these questions in new ways. Given my sense that there was something

about these missing outcomes that “emerged” out of the whole of GIAC, not out of the activities or even the overall programs, I turned to scholars trying to apply insights from “chaos theory” to organizations (Morgan 1997, Byrne 1998, Wheatley 1992). But the explanation didn’t fully account for what I was seeing. I then found the work of Michael Fielding and his resurrection of the ideas of John Macmurray.⁸ As I read, I began to see that these different ways of talking about what GIAC’s work *was* corresponded to two very different ways of thinking – two different conceptual frameworks – about what the work of a community-service agency *should be*. The difference between them had important implications for how we approached accountability and performance.

As Michael Fielding has observed:

Frameworks are not neutral either in their construction, their operation or their impact on those who are required to submit to their requirements (Power 1994, 1997) ... [If we conceive different purposes for an activity] then the frameworks designed to audit their effectiveness will also differ in their intentions, their language, their processes and their approaches to the making of meaning and the commitment to subsequent action (2001: 969).

In the next two chapters, I turn to these conceptual frameworks, exploring how each framework shapes people’s understanding of the purpose of community-service organizations and how this, in turn, affects the approaches they use to assess, account for and improve their effectiveness. I examine the assumptions and values animating those ideas, and I contextualize them historically. I begin, in Chapter 4, with the dominant conceptual framework shaping how community-based work is generally understood. In Chapter 5, I turn to an alternative framework that re-organizes our attention in important ways.

⁸ I am indebted to Lehn Benjamin for pointing me to Fielding and Macmurray’s work.

CHAPTER 4

NOT JUST “DO-GOODERS”: PROFESSIONALIZING COMMUNITY SERVICE

In this chapter, I sketch what I see as the dominant conceptual framework guiding community service work today. As I argued in Chapter 1, organizations are complex and multifaceted, and all attempts to “frame” them partial, drawing our attention to some aspects of “reality,” while shadowing others. Further, organizations are multifaceted, characterized by diversity rather than homogeneity, and maintaining that diversity is essential for understanding the complexity of organizational life (Greenwood 1991, Martin 1992). For that reason, I “re-complicate” the picture I am painting in Chapter 6. However, in practice, seeing the conceptual frames that simplify and shape our understanding of complex realities can be a helpful step in considering the ways these frames organize our attention and contribute to – or limit – our ability to tackle persistent problems.

Again, as I observed in Chapter 1, conceptual frameworks are not just an *intellectual* concern (shaping how people understand themselves and their work), they are also *practical* (drawing attention to some kinds of work – activities, outcomes, etc. – rather than others, shaping the ways in which organizations operate) and *moral* (shaping how we define “success,” the values we are prioritizing, the kinds of relationships and communities we are building, the ends we are committed to). Further, these frameworks do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, they have a complex social history, imbedded in ideas that are intimately tied to wider social movements and competing conceptions, assumptions and value judgments about the society in which we live. Bertha Reynolds, associate director of the Smith College School for Social Work in the late 1920s and 1930s argued:

“The philosophy of social work cannot be separated from the prevailing philosophy of a nation, as to how it values people and what importance it sets upon their welfare. ... Practice is always shaped by the needs of the times, the problems they present, the fears they generate, the solutions that appeal, and the knowledge and skill available” (Ehrenreich 1985: 13).

So, too, for the practice of education, science, management, community-service and every other human endeavor. Our contemporary ideas about social welfare, public service, program planning, accountability, and staff and organizational development can not be understood without understanding the social and intellectual forces that have shaped the twentieth century. Further, these ideas are animated by and promote a particular set of values, whether or not those values are ever clearly articulated. To understand the challenges of a project to help the GIAC staff enhance performance and accountability, we must ask where those ideas, assumptions and values came from, and place them in context as “historically and human situated account[s] of how we should act” (Wilson and Cervero 1997: 104). And when we talk about questions of value, we must also ask, valuable to whom? And for what ends? (Forester 1989, Wilson & Hayes 2000).

For these reasons, in tracing now-dominant conceptualizations, I begin in the early years of the twentieth century with the Progressive Era “reformers” whose efforts were eventually institutionalized in today’s public welfare and public-service sector (Ehrenreich 1985; Kirschner, 1986). I move through the professionalization and bureaucratization movements of the 1930s-1950s; and then consider the turn toward “management” in the last decades of the twentieth century. I argue that there is a shared set of emphases, values and assumptions underlying the various manifestations of what is actually a rather unchanging dominant framework – and an accompanying narrative – for conceptualizing work conducted in the “public service.” This framework does not stand alone; it has been contested continuously throughout the past century. However, as we will see, the dominant framework guiding community-

service practice appears to have decided staying power. With only a brief exception in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it has remained dominant.

In the final section of this chapter, I return to the initiatives described in Ch. 3. Through the prism afforded by this dominant frame, I examine what aspects of GIAC's work are highlighted and what gets lost in the shadows. In particular, I will show that many of the elements that are shadowed in this dominant frame lie at the core of how the GIAC staff and its community understand and value its work. To truly account for and improve this work requires a framework that can shine some light on these shadows. In Chapter 5, I turn to several contesting perspectives on community-service organizations that do just that.

From neighborhood organizing to professional service

In today's community-service sector, both public and not-for-profit organizations operate within widely shared norms of "professionalism," with clearly defined expectations for training, program planning, reporting and accountability; accepted (and "acceptable") approaches to practice; and narrow definitions of "appropriate" relationships between those providing service and those being served. But these norms were not always in place. In fact, the professionalization of community-service work began only in second decade of the twentieth century, in the context of the "modernization" movement and the rise of notions about "scientific management." To understand this movement, we need to step back even further, to the closing years of the nineteenth century. At that time, industrialization had transformed what was a rural and small town society at the end of the American Civil War into an increasingly urban culture. Economic and political power had become concentrated and centralized. The excesses of unbridled capitalism in this "Gilded Age" – the dangers of the new industrial jobs, the rise of corporate monopolies, the increasing

concentration of wealth and political power in the hands of a few and the increasing poverty and disenfranchisement for many – were giving rise to intense labor struggles, unionism, and the spread of radical ideas. At the same time, large-scale immigration brought enormous numbers of “new” Americans, and many “old” Americans, motivated by a mix of racism, classism, xenophobia, and “charitable” intent, sought to help them to conform to “American” culture, norms and behavior (Ehrenreich 1985, Kirschner 1986).

In this context, a vigorous reform movement – or, more accurately, reform movements, plural – arose in the first two decades of the new century. The settlement house movement – and, in particular, Jane Addams’ Hull House in Chicago – is the most widely known of these neighborhood-based organizing initiatives. But the settlements were followed, in short order, by the school/community center movements, the “City Beautiful” and “Organic Cities” movements, and the National Forum (deliberative democracy) movement. These were also years of vigorous labor organizing and cooperatives, and of experiments such as the Cincinnati Social Unit experiment and the Chicago Area Project.¹

Historians disagree on the extent to which these Progressive Era reformers sought progressive social change versus social control, as well as on whether the movements exemplified in practice the rhetorical commitments and principles that were so fervently expressed.² In fact, any sweeping generalization about the reformers’

¹ For histories of the various Progressive Era community organizing movements, see Dillick (1953), Betten and Austin (1990) and Mattson (1998). For a particularly robust presentation of the ideals of the school/community center movements, see Ward (1914). For discussions of the Organic Cities movements, see Melvin (1987); of the Cincinnati Social Unit experiment, see Phillips (1940) and Melvin (1987); and of the Chicago Area Project, see Dillick (1953). For insights into Progressive Era neighborhood-based organizing linked to Afrocentric values, see Rouse (1989), Ross-Gordon and Gyant (1993) and Harris (1994). For an historical treatment of differing neighborhood organizing traditions from the Progressive Era through the 1970s, see Fisher (1994).

² Mattson (1998) for example, argues that “Although short-lived and transformed by World War I, the social centers movement was clearly the most important attempt to create a democratic public during the Progressive Era, and its relevance lies not only in the institutional reform it accomplished but in the

motivation and impact is near impossible. In my own study of the period, I find a variety of different organizing traditions, with contesting conceptual frameworks, aims and assumptions, beliefs and convictions. Some emphasized delivering social services; others focused on reviving neighborhood life and creating a “real democracy” with an active, self-governing public. Still others sought to paternalistically “Americanize” the new immigrants and bring “culture” to the lower classes. A more radical strain fought to fundamentally restructure American social and political institutions. Many variously combined elements of each of these views.

The differences between these traditions were significant, and in no way do I mean to minimize the radically different consequences they intended and incurred. Nor do I seek to homogenize them for the sake of simplicity. Across these differences, however, there was a shared belief in these early years of the twentieth century in the ideals of neighborhood organizing, of citizen participation and democratic deliberation, of organizations run by the people who used them, and on cross-class alliances that engaged people as “neighbors.” This perspective – even if that of an unfulfilled ideal – was perhaps most clearly captured in the following, not atypical description of what a community center was:

“A community center was not defined as a building or as a set of activities, but rather as an organizing center for the life of the neighborhood. . . . The community center worker was regarded as a neighborhood leader; he was on the job continuously; he stimulated the community to develop its own activities, and he showed how they could pay their way. (Dillick 1953: 61).

At the same time, these were also the years of “modernization,” and a great popular love affair with “science” was spreading throughout American society. Like large numbers of their contemporaries, many progressive reformers were captivated by

democratic ideals it generated . . . [It] became one of the most interesting political experiments in the early twentieth century and the truest expression of a democratic public” (48). Others (e.g., Dillick 1953) argue that the centers fell far short of their democratic goals. Still others (e.g., Fisher 1994) are even more critical, labeling the centers as “elitist” and controlling, and focusing on their demise.

the intellectual ideas of modernism with its rational orientation toward social planning and promise that technology would help solve every social ill (Banta 1993; Ehrenreich 1985; Kirschner, 1986). But again, their views on *how* science was to be integrated into community-based work reflected their different social/political stances. Some, like Eduard Lindeman, John Dewey, and Mary Parker Follett – fiercely democratic – wanted to develop the intellectual, emotional, and social capacities of *every* individual to embody a scientific stance toward life. In an essay challenging the notion that experts are “the revealers of truth,” Follett, for example, wrote:

I wish we could understand the word expert as expressing an attitude of mind which we can all acquire, rather than the collecting of information by a special caste. While appreciating fully the necessity of more scientific observation, what we chiefly need I believe is not so much to increase the expertness of the expert in the hope that thereby we shall automatically increase the consensus of the consent, but for all of us to acquire the scientific attitude of mind, to base our life on actual experience, of my own plus that of others, rather than on preconceived notions. . . . Many of us are calling for experts because, acutely conscious of the mess we are in, we want someone to pull us out. What we really wish for is a “beneficent” despot, but we are ashamed to call him that and so we say scientific investigator, social engineer, etc. Many of us are like the little girl who goes to her mother with her tangled knitting: she goes, often, not to learn to knit, but to be got out of a scrape (1924/1930: 29-30).

Other reformers, however, turned to industry to help them find solutions to society’s “scrapes.” They found solace in the logic and language of the new “scientific management” and its promises that expert knowledge would provide the blueprint for building the better world they sought. One of the era’s most passionate and articulate proponents of scientific management was engineer-turned-management expert Frederick Taylor. Stressing the efficient management of time and matter, Taylor promised adherents more productivity, at less cost, with greater profits, if they would eliminate the “rule-of-thumb methods” and “traditional knowledge” that created inefficiency, and instead discover and employ the “one method and one implement which is quicker and better than any of the rest” (Taylor 1911: 25). It was up to highly

trained experts to scientifically determine this “one method” that could efficiently organize each work process and then to scientifically select and train workers who were to carry out – precisely, step by step – the predetermined tasks.

But Taylor’s goal – and that of those who enthusiastically adopted his cause – went far beyond the instrumental desire for greater productivity and profit. Taylor described it as nothing less than “a complete mental revolution.” Noting that sweeping conceptual character, Martha Banta calls Taylorism “an extended narrative structure and discourse system, one that extends far beyond the factory floor to encompass every aspect of cultural existence” (1993: 4). To Taylor and his adherents, “waste” was the enemy; “efficiency,” the good means to a good end. Striving for efficiency was a moral, as much as an economic, cause: such discipline, they argued, would lead to better character, better health and greater happiness. Armed with great faith in the logic of these ideas, these new “managers” set out to commandeer and control every aspect of American life, from the workplace to the family. With the majority of the reformers among the new adherents, sound management was also to be applied to combat social disarray in the belief “that all of life’s ills might be solved through an inspired application of industrial, business, and human engineering” (Banta 1993: 35).

Banta continues:

If the practical visionaries of the late capitalist era initially set out to determine “the one best way” to increase industrial productivity or to clarify the vagaries of human behavior by means of the newly institutionalized social sciences, they quickly took upon themselves a far greater aim: that of bringing order, rationality, and efficiency out of the disorder, the irrationality, and the wastefulness of the times. Not devoid of conceit, they believed that *their* theory-making would resolve whatever was generally ungovernable in government procedures, business enterprises, household arrangements, and the workplace (which was always unruly, but increasingly so with the influx of all the new “others”), as well as (why stop before tidying up *everything?*) the conduct of everyday life. ... (Banta 1993: ix).

Determining this “one best way” to manage social life required – and fostered – the creation of new cadres of scientifically trained experts, offering attractive, new roles for the reformers themselves. Drawn not only by the prospect of solving, once and for all, perplexing social problems, but by the promise to transform themselves from “do-gooders” and volunteers to “experts” and “professionals” in the process, the reformers enthusiastically set out to arm themselves with scientifically-derived knowledge and specialized tools. Emulating the “established professions” of medicine, law and theology, they created new educational programs in which future professionals – teachers, journalists, social workers, engineers, managers and administrators – could be educated in specialized knowledge and techniques; “competency” was to be validated by certification and degrees, credibility to be reflected in rigorous “standards,” and social needs established through scientific surveys.³

Like Taylorism, this new professionalism had technical, moral and political aspects. It promised the new professionals greater acceptance, authority and social (as well as economic) status in return for the competent performance of skilled, specialized work based on scientific knowledge in pursuit of important social ends (Brint 1994).⁴ As Kirschner observes:

³ There was much discussion – and much angst – about what was required to turn community work into a profession. In this context, Abraham Flexner, who had helped establish the high standards of modern medical education, was invited to address the National Conference on Social Work as an expert on professionalism. He laid down six criteria for determining a “profession”: it must be intellectual, rather than mechanical or routine, in character; be centered on knowledge derived from “science and learning”; have definite, specific and practical ends; have techniques that were communicable only through a highly specialized education; express its self-awareness in an organization; and have a “professional spirit” that appealed to the “humanitarian and spiritual element” in contrast to mercenary trades in which one might seek “comfort, glory [or] money” (Flexner 1915).

⁴ For detailed histories of the rise of professionalism in the United States, see Steven Brint (1994) and William Sullivan (2005). Both Brint and Sullivan describe this sense of a special public responsibility as a core characteristic of professionalism and lament its steady erosion. Brint, for example, distinguishes between what he calls “social trustee professionalism” and a growing notion of “expert professionalism” that privileges specialized skills and knowledge as individual commercial capital while discounting any sense of broader social responsibility. He does, however, note that the notion of

[These new social workers] worked to cultivate both the image and the reality of professionalism. ... [M]any of them pictured the professional essentially as they pictured the scientist – rational, objective, dispassionate, and generally disengaged socially [T]hey wanted to be *seen* striving for higher professional standards because that was the high road to public acceptance. To social workers, these standards offered a way to shed the label of ‘do-gooder’ ... [a word that] evoked the image of a person who was perhaps well intentioned, but was otherwise muddle-headed, impractical, ineffective, and generally wrong. People did not pay much attention to a do-gooder. The professional, on the other hand, was not only well intentioned, but was also clear-minded, practical, detached, scientific and generally right. People listened to the professional” (1986: 53-55).

Social workers were not the only ones to reframe their work according to the priorities and dictates of this new frame. Parallel shifts occurred across community-based endeavors as that work became divided into new, discrete professions such as adult education (Wilson and Cervero 1997), planning (Friedmann 1987), and public administration (Behn 2001); these shifts extended as well as to the academic social sciences that related to work in these fields (Greenwood and Levin 2005). Arthur Wilson and Ronald Cervero (1997), for example, document the emergence of the professionalization movement in adult education in the writing and thinking of adult educators in the 1920s and 1930s and trace the new profession’s attempts to “disassociate itself from its movement heritage.” The emerging logic, in adult education, as across all the emerging fields, promised that special training and knowledge would distinguish the professional from the amateur, enabling the former to improve programs by following technical and “scientifically-based” planning procedures. It elevated standards, surveys and experimentation (the “scientific method) as the sole approach to guide and improve practice. And it limited and managed what was considered “appropriate” ways of thinking about accountability

“social trustee professionalism” has been retained by those working in the public and nonprofit sector; in fact, he argues, it has become associated more or less exclusively with these sectors. Drawing a similar distinction, Sullivan argues that the civic mandate for doing “good work,” that is, work that contributes to “public value,” is actually a defining dimension of professionalism; he points to its loss as underlying the loss of public trust and the current “crisis” in many professions.

and performance. By 1950, this understanding was codified, and it has remained the dominant tradition, with little variation since (Wilson and Cervero 1997).

Similarly, Behn (2001) traces how, in the public sphere, Woodrow Wilson and Max Weber constructed rationales for public administration based on a similarly rationalist, technical outlook. Distinguishing between politics and public administration, for example, Wilson argued that “the field of administration is a field of business” and an “eminently practical science”; the “objective of administrative study,” he wrote, “is to rescue executive methods from the confusion and costliness of empirical experiment and set them upon foundations laid deep in stable principle (Wilson 1887; quoted in Behn 2001). Applying similar ideas to the organization of public work, Weber argued that informal, *personal* organizations needed to be replaced by bureaucracies, hierarchical organizations staffed by experts with credentials who could *impersonally* (and thus fairly and efficiently) apply impersonal, rational rules. Action – and accountability for that action – was to be directed “according to calculable rules and ‘without regard for persons’ ... eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational and emotional elements which escape calculation” (Gerth and Mills 1946: 215-6).

These newly evolving professionals not only recreated themselves in this new rational, professional image, they recreated the organizations in which they worked and the nature of that work as well. Across the board – in the span of less than a decade – community service organizations were transformed from informal, primarily voluntary, personal initiatives to bureaucratically (impersonally) structured agencies employing professionals, and from broad and neighborhood-based to specialized and focused. “Community” came to be seen as “the aggregation of socially important *functions*, not as some more general kinship with members of one’s country or nation” (Brint 1994: 7). New MSWs, for example, shifted their relationship to the community,

helping people “on the basis of professional expertise through a professional, not a personal or neighborly, relationship” (Trollander 1987: 32). “Friendly visitors” became “caseworkers”; “neighbors” became “clients”; interactions shifted from a “normal” to “problem” orientation; and help was provided not through spontaneous interactions, but through appointments and “treatment plans.” While retaining their former sense of social mission, they detached themselves – both physically and psychologically – from the neighborhoods in which they worked; Professional careers were constructed separate from the new professionals’ “personal lives.” They developed new impersonal, rationalistic procedures for program planning and accountability, and new, technically-oriented training approaches to professional education and “staff development.”

By 1920, then, elected representatives from neighborhood organizations had been replaced by a coordinating board of appointed professionals from local service organizations and city bureaus, and the emphasis for their work had shifted from “helping neighbors” to a preoccupation with bureaucratic organizations emphasizing “professional, efficient service delivery (Fisher 1994). By 1929, the neighborhood centers had disappeared altogether or modified their activities, focusing largely on recreational activities and almost ignoring civic, cultural and economic ones. The “community” ideal had weakened, and activities were divided among separate, increasingly specialized agencies. Dillick’s “organizing center for the life of the neighborhood” had become a building and a set of programmatic activities, a specialized, functionally oriented unit operating within a larger, increasingly bureaucratic social welfare system. The focus of this larger system shifted to administratively coordinating the work of various local social agencies (often through a professionally led federation or council), developing professional work standards,

eliminating duplication of effort, coordinating funding and acting as a community clearinghouse.

Two caveats: first, to claim that these massive changes in organizational structure, focus and work processes were brought about only by a love affair with all things scientific, technical and rational, the growing value placed on “efficiency,” and the new middle-class’s desire for professional status would oversimplify matters. In fact, the outcome was overdetermined, with economic and political factors playing supporting roles. During this same period, neighborhood-based initiatives faced growing competition from increasingly attractive commercial forms of leisure-time activity, weakening their hold on people’s attention. Further, the period’s economic surplus was increasingly collected and concentrated in private foundations and the public sector and, for the first time, made available for use in regulating and managing civil society. Local governments increased their revenues and expenditures five-fold between 1902 and 1922 (Ehrenreich 1985), but those expenditures – in public education, public health, and other social services -- were made in line with the ideals of social engineering and public management. Finally, politicians and business elites, threatened by the possibility and, sometimes, the fact, of broader participation in policy making and demands for substantive social change, branded neighborhood organizing efforts as “Communist” and “subversive” and withdrew funding and support, effectively shutting down the most democratic of the initiatives (Ward 1914).

My second caveat: at no time was this dominant frame uniformly accepted. As I noted above, there were those who argued – forcefully and well – for different understanding of community-based work. But as the professional public management framework took hold, their voices became increasingly muted and then ignored. Little surprise then, that the writings of Lindeman, Follett and others have only been

rediscovered in the past two decades, and their names and work remain far from well-known.

By the beginning of the century's third decade, the professional public management framework had become "the prevailing philosophy of [the] nation." Driven simultaneously by political and economic desires for status and intellectual beliefs in scientific management, community-service professionals built upon the logic of this framework, heartened by the promise that a set of scientific, value-neutral, objective rules and standards could lead them to the best way to solve society's ills and build a rational, stable, efficient social order. As I will argue in the following section, except for a brief return in the late 1960s and early 1970s to the neighborhood-based, participatory, democratic framework of the early twentieth century, this "professional public management" framework, and its underlying logic, continue – essentially unchanged – to shape the dominant conceptualization of community-service work today.⁵

From "modernization" to "public management"

Weber's efficient, "superior" bureaucratic organization dominated community life – across the now established arenas of public administration, education, social/welfare services, etc. – for decades. Granted, the rhetoric of management periodically changed, and particular management practices along with it. Stephen Barley and Gideon Kunda (1992), for example, offer a compelling argument for seeing alternating

⁵ I find the question about why the 1960s and 1970s allowed for a break in the nearly absolute dominance of the "professional management" frame interesting. It is one for which I have not found a satisfactory answer. A partial answer, however, can be found in the more audible voices of formerly disenfranchised groups such as African-Americans (through the Civil Rights movement) and women (through the second wave women's liberation movement) in the wider society during this period of heightened social unrest, cascading social movements, and widespread change. As I argue in Chapter 5, an alternative framework more consistent with the one that achieved some prominence during this period is more often held by those in these groups.

surges of rationalist and normative rhetorics in American managerial discourse from the 1870s to the present.⁶ Yet, even with the ascendancy of the “human relations” movement in the 1940s and 1950s, the dominant application of this normative, social-psychologically oriented practice remained professionalized, expert-driven experimentally based social planning and control.⁷

But in spite of great expectations for the “new society” that would arise from the scientifically directed and professionally managed expenditure of public funds, vexing social problems refused to disappear. By the 1980s, disillusionment had set in. The public and nonprofit programs that were supposed to have solved these problems were criticized as inefficient, ineffective and unresponsive. Beginning with the public sector, increasingly insistent calls came for “new” public management and the “reinvention” of government (e.g., Osborne and Gaebler 1992), once again turning to the business world for solutions to social “scrapes.” In this newly reinvented world, a Tayloristic (cum Weber) following of bureaucratic rules (“the one best way) was deemed outmoded, and measures of services provided were to be replaced by attention to performance and demonstrated results (“outcomes”).

It was not long before these same ideas and private sector “solutions” found their way to the community service sector and to the private philanthropic foundations that funded this work. In this context, management “guru” Peter Drucker’s continuation of the Progressive Era battle to distinguish the well-run, responsible “service

⁶ In particular, Barley and Kunda examine what they categorize as five distinct rhetorics: industrial betterment (1870-1900), scientific management (1900-1923), welfare capitalism/human relations (1925-1955), systems rationalism (1955-1980), and organizational culture/quality (1980-present); they argue that the timing of each “new wave” parallels broad cycles of economic expansion and contraction.

⁷ As with every other movement I have discussed, there were always contesting perspectives. Among those for whom the human relations approach promised a return to more democratic, participatory practices of human-centered development, Kurt Lewin, first at the Research Center for Group Dynamics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and later Cornell University, remains notable. But again, this position never became dominant, and dissenting voices were soon marginalized in both their own fields and beyond.

organization” from the efforts of mere “do-gooders” is telling. In his widely-read text, *Managing the Nonprofit Organization*, he warns:

In the nonprofit sector there is a temptation to say: we are serving a good cause ... we are doing something to make life a little better for people and that’s a result in and of itself. That is not enough. ... Service organizations are accountable to donors, accountable for putting the money where the results are and for performance. ... Good intentions only pave the way to hell (1990:139).

The increased concern with accountability in both the public and nonprofit sectors led to the “growing prevalence of one particular response: outcome measurement” (Benjamin 2004: 1). As the Kellogg Foundation’s description of logic model development, quoted in Chapter 3, so clearly showed, the promises for this “new” tool were broad – from providing a clear “map” and thus, increasing participants’ confidence “of their place in the scheme of things” and reducing likelihood that they would “stray from the course,” to communicating with those who “have diverse world views.” These models were to offer an objective “distance” that eliminated “emotion,” “subjectivity” and “favoritism” from decision making. As one of the United Way volunteers in Benjamin’s study observed:

You can’t really have your emotions come into play with funding ... The outcome objectives really help with that. [They] get you off the emotional bandwagon ... It helps you to see facts.” (2004: 146).

But the ultimate promise for this “one best solution” comes a few pages later in the Kellogg guide: “Many evaluation experts agree that use of the logic model is an effective way to ensure program success.” (Kellogg Foundation 2001: 5, emphasis added).

The borrowing from the “prevailing philosophy of the nation” didn’t end with an outcome orientation. Other rationalistic market-based management ideals shaped this newest version of the community service narrative. Foundations began to talk about themselves as “investors” in the community. “Social entrepreneurship” (e.g., Dees

1998) entered the lexicon, with promises of greater innovation and creativity. Thus, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (not alone among foundations) began to hire consultants to assist non-profit organizations to write

a business plan ... that lays out how it will achieve its growth objectives. ... Business planning introduces the organization to concepts more familiar to a for-profit business, but just as relevant to its work: how to forecast costs and revenues under different assumptions, identifying strengths and weaknesses in current operations, gauging trends in the external environment and how to adapt to them, and how to achieve productivity gains and maintain quality service. The final plan, including the performance goals, provide the basis for structuring the Foundation's investment in the organization (Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, n.d.).

And Benjamin (2004) found that in the United Way agency she studied, “with this new outcome measurement framework, allocations volunteers were considered community investors purchasing a portfolio of goods” (144).

In tracing the shift from the old “public administration” (with its reliance on hierarchical bureaucracies, rule-based decision making, and attention to units of service delivered) to the new “public management” (with its emphasis on flexible performance, innovation and results), Robert Behn (2001) claims a “paradigm” change. The distinctions in practice that Behn points to matter, and I return to his call for a new understanding of accountability based on these distinctions in Chapter 7. However, his claim for a paradigm shift must be viewed with skepticism, for these supposedly new practices for improving planning, performance and accountability sound remarkably familiar. Objectivity, rationality, and efficiency continue to be reified. “New” practices for planning and accountability continue to promote supposedly neutral, objective, rational processes, based on scientifically-derived expertise, distinct from personal subjectivity or, even worse, emotion. Although people are faced with complex, human and social dilemmas, the sought after “outcomes” are typically reduced to changes in discrete behaviors or attitudes,

elevating what is short-term, readily visible and easily measurable, and marginalizing what is complex, unpredictable and hard to measure. Relationships are functional, defined in terms of people's "roles," and subject to the norms of "professionalism. And the functionally-defined, market-based orientation remains (now categorizing people as "consumers"), as does the mandate to apply ideas about the production of better goods and services to the production of better humans and better communities.

As Martha Banta notes:

We ...discover eerily instructive resemblances [between Taylorism and] ... those enterprises by which we, today, try to make some sense of the buzzing, booming chaos of our times (1993: ix).

In short, the guiding logic for managing "productive, efficient" organizations remains remarkably the same: good management = expert-guided, objective, impersonal control and rational, linear, planned change.

Examining GIAC through the "professional management" prism

With this dominant "professional public management" framework and its accompanying narrative in mind, I return to the staff sessions as presented in Chapter 3. Viewed within this dominant framework, it makes sense that GIAC's new outcome measurement models – along with the "staff development" trainings which taught staff members to create those models – were touted as a great success. Staff members gained new technical skills and put them to use in crafting more "professional" presentations. They were able to speak about the anticipated "outcomes" of their work in the required language, an impersonal language of efficiency and cost-effectiveness, of linear inputs and outputs and outcomes, of programs and activities, of focus and scope. In short, they were able to present the expected narrative about their work, in the expected language and form. Their funders were "blown away."

But Alison’s “stuff that doesn’t get mentioned,” Vivian’s “things [that] just come up,” remained unaddressed. The kind of long-term, reciprocal, nurturing relationships emphasized in the Search Conference introductions and the GIAC staff descriptions of their work are eclipsed in these models, converted into “inputs” or “outputs,” means to another more measurable end, such as teaching young people new knowledge or helping them develop new pre-employment skills. But “raising up” each others’ children and being “raised up” themselves are certainly not ends in themselves. Of course, few who work in community services would argue that fostering caring relationships is unimportant. But according to the logic of the outcome measurement model, these relationships are necessary to help people learn socially valued skills and behaviors, to acquire socially sanctioned knowledge. The depth, breadth and quality of those relationships, however, are not “outcomes” themselves.

And yet, among the GIAC staff and Board members, the depth, breadth and quality of these relationships are a recurring theme. It is not that a discussion of activities and programs is absent from the GIAC staff’s conversations. In fact, they do talk about those activities – a lot. They describe their work in terms of offering fun, interesting, educational activities, activities that the children will want to come back for. And they are proud of the activities that do just that. But they also talk about something else, something that they see as *central* to not just who they are, but what they do and why they are successful. That something is the kind and quality of relationships that their work fosters. It is the work that is done not only through programs, but in the spaces *between* programs. And it is typically couched in terms of “family” and “community.”

As became apparent in Chapter 3, this is what arises in spontaneous talk among staff members and when they respond to questions about what “outsiders” don’t understand. “Having that relationships with kids and being supportive, connected” is

what Jenna Cooper pointed to first when I asked the Youth staff in December 2004 what they saw as “most important and least understood” about their work. Alison pointed to the “bonds” with a youth who had bounced between foster homes, what was probably “the first real relationship that he’s ever had.” Jodie described this focus on these ongoing relationships as “automatic.” It is what the Board and staff members separately pointed to as “what GIAC is all about”: a refuge, a safe space, a “home away from home,” an “umbrella for life,” a place where people feel welcomed, respected and cared about, a place where they know someone will “go to bat” for them. A place that “puts people first [and] makes relationship a priority.” Finally, it is what Audrey Cooper, Michael Thomas and others referred to when they introduced their relationship to GIAC in terms of raising each other or each others’ children and grandchildren.

This sense that outcome measurement models miss something important is not limited to the GIAC staff or to this project. An ambivalence can be found amongst funders such as the United Way as well. In interviews with staff and volunteers at one United Way, Benjamin (2004) found that some long-time allocations team volunteers remained skeptical of the logic model and its promises; others were more enthusiastic. The skeptics feared that the models did not accurately reflect the work some people do. They noted that, in a small town, they could see the “disjuncture between the outcome measurement model and the work of [some agencies]” (193), and they continued to factor “doing good work” into their allocation decisions.

In Ithaca, too, the United Way adopted and soon abandoned a logic model-only submission, instead encouraging agencies to submit a supplemental narrative that would capture aspects of their work that didn’t fit in the outcome measurement framework. But such a solution begs the question of accountability. For if “accountability” is to be more than an exercise in speaking the language of the

funders, if in fact, organizations ought to be accountable for what it is that they think they do, for what they believe they *ought* to do, for what they consider most valuable in their work, then we need a framework that can include, rather than exclude, the important work that was left out of these models.

As Wilson and Cervero (1997) remind us, hegemonic frameworks serve to “selectively organize our attention, excluding other ways of imaging possibilities” (104) The dominant “professional public management” framework selectively organizes attention to certain aspects of community-service work, and to certain kinds of relationships. It elevates and privileges that which it highlights. And it makes invisible or, more frequently, actively denigrates other aspects of community-service work and other kinds of relationships.

And yet, as I noted in Chapter 2, for every narrative, there exists one or more counter-narratives that can “challenge the status quo” and offer “alternative visions of reality” (Delgado 2000: 6). Like all frameworks, the “counter-narratives” and the frameworks they articulate offer only a partial description of the phenomenon they describe. And yet, because they organize attention in different ways, these counter-narratives can both shed light on dominant patterns of perception, helping us see the outlines of taken-for-granted assumptions, and they can simultaneously subvert them, offering another “vision of reality” and new ways of “imagining possibilities.” I suggest that the language of family and community that appears so centrally in the conversations of the GIAC staff and Board is one such counter-narrative, part of an “alternative vision of reality” that offers a contesting conceptual framework for how community-service work might be understood and carried. This logic of this framework highlights different aspects of GIAC’s work, centralizing different values and norms for what is important and what ought to be accounted for, and leads to different possibilities for how accountability and performance might be conceptualized

and carried out. Seeing contesting frameworks and hearing counter-narratives requires that we consciously re-organize our attention. In Chapter 5, I invite readers to do just that.

CHAPTER 5

WE ARE FAMILY: A PERSONAL-RELATIONS PERSPECTIVE

Each year, on the last day of the summer-camp program in late August, the GIAC staff organize a talent show and awards ceremony for the young people, their parents and the broader community. As I was standing in the back of the GIAC gym, watching a parade of pre-teen boys receive trophies for their participation in the summer basketball program, a young mother approached Marcia, also watching from the back. She thanked Marcia profusely for giving her son a trophy, even though “problems” meant that he hadn’t finished the program. “It will mean so much to him,” she said. “Of course,” Marcia answered. “Family takes care of each other.”

To those who listen to GIAC’s talk of “family” and “home” from within the conceptual logic of the “professional public management” frame, it can seem metaphorical or sentimental at best; to others, inclined to more severe judgment, it’s downright “unprofessional.” And since, within this dominant frame, professionalism gives community-service agencies their stature and credibility, such language – and more importantly, the organizational behavior and policy constructed in accordance with it – can call into question the fundamental competency of the GIAC staff and the quality of the GIAC programs. The intersection of these hegemonic ideas with entrenched, if unintentional, racism and classism leads many who are white or middle-class to doubt the full intelligence or competency of people of color and those who are poor. The result is the daily assault of disrespectful, differential, patronizing or even simply unaware treatment described by the GIAC staff in Chapter 3.

However, as I have been arguing, this “professional public management” frame – although pervasive and widely accepted as a “given” – is but one way to construct our understanding of community service work, one vision of “reality.” The understandings

that gave rise to this frame were created in a particular time and place. They are based on particular assumptions, and they derive from and foster a particular set of values. It is quite possible to construct our understanding of community service work around a different set of assumptions and values, around an “alternative vision of reality.”

In this chapter, I offer an alternative framework for conceptualizing the work of community-service agencies that I believe underlies this language of “family” and “home.” In doing so, I argue that the GIAC staff’s use of “family” language must be understood not just as a metaphor, but rather as a conceptual framework – a meaning-making logic – that shapes how people understand themselves and their work in the world. Once again, I repeat my caveat: organizations and their cultures are multifaceted, and no single frame can be put forth as the “correct” perspective. Nor is a simple dualism – “dominant” frame versus “alternative” frame going to do justice to the complexity of organizational life. As I will show in the next chapter, the intersection of multiple frames *in practice* is dynamic and complex, and it must be considered if organizational and/or staff development initiatives are to generate real learning and change.

And yet, taking time to understand this framework and its underlying logic is important for the new possibilities it enables us to imagine. First, this framework shines light on important components of GIAC’s work that remain shadowed and unaccounted for in the “professional public management frame” and the outcome measurement schema that derives from it, helping both those who work within GIAC and those outside it talk about this work in potentially useful ways. Second, I believe that this conceptual framework – which allows us to follow Elsa Barkley Brown’s call to “pivot the center” – must be taken seriously if the important, but profoundly misunderstood, work of GIAC and organizations like it are to be accorded the respect they deserve within the larger society. Third, taking it seriously leads to new

possibilities for how those who those who work within these organizations might more *meaningfully* account for and improve their work. These would be reason enough for this presentation. However, I have one final reason: I believe this framework holds important lessons for those looking for greater human connection, fulfillment and meaning in the larger community-service sector – and, indeed, in contemporary society as a whole. As such it fits Gareth Morgan’s criteria for a useful mental frame: helping us “extend [our] horizons of insight” and create new possibilities for understanding and solving old problems.

To ground this discussion, I turn to two different kinds of literature that helped me make sense of what I was seeing and hearing at GIAC. First, I consider feminist and Afro-centric studies of grassroots leaders and community organizers, particularly women of color. This ethnographic work provides a window on the language of “family,” “home” and “community” that dominates the GIAC staff’s narratives about their work and hints at the ways in which this language is embedded in an alternative world view. Second, I turn to the work of early 20th century Scottish philosopher John Macmurray, as well as to British educational philosopher Michael Fielding’s expansion of Macmurray’s framework to contemporary organizations. This work – which first helped me capture an underlying frame for what I was observing in practice, and from which I borrow the “personal relations” phrase – provides an intellectual foundation for conceptualizing public relationships and organizations in this way. Both these bodies of scholarship – with their emphasis on understanding public life in terms of personal, rather than professional, relations – re-focus our attention, inviting us to consider other ways of thinking about what the work of a community-service agency is and should be. As in the last chapter, I then apply this alternative frame to the ongoing consideration of the GIAC staff’s initiatives,

exploring what new elements it brings to light and the implications for efforts to enhance accountability and performance.

“Community Othermothers” and “Public Homeplaces”: An Afro-centric & Feminist Accounting

The GIAC staff are not alone in using language that evokes family and home to describe their organizations and work. A body of feminist ethnographies about women activists, particularly women activists of color, documents how these “root metaphors” not only shape how these women speak about their work, but shape “all aspects of the women’s thinking about the institutions they have established” (Belenky, Bond and Weinstock 1997: 260).¹ Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, writing about African-American, Asian-American, Latina and native American women, asserts that they “find their historical role organized around the nurturance and defense and advancement of an oppressed public family” (1994: 241). In her studies of Latina women, Carol Hardy-Fanta (1997) found

a vision of politics that is different from that of traditional political theorists, Latino and non-Latino alike. They seemed to emerge from their families with a view of politics imbued with what feminist theorists call an ‘ethics of care’ ... Politics for them, consists of ‘helping others,’ ‘fulfilling an obligation,’ ‘sharing and giving,’ and providing support’ (226).

In a similar vein, Patricia Hill Collins (1991) writes about “community othermothers, Elsa Barkley Brown (1993) about “community caretaking,” and Mechthild Hart (2002) about “motherwork.” The use of this family language, Hart observes arises because when these women need to find “a language that expresses a communal ethic of care,”

¹ The discussion in this section draws heavily upon literature reviews by Mary Belenky, Lynne Bond and Jacqueline Weinstock (1997) and Mechthild Hart (2002). Their reviews are significantly more extensive than what I can provide here, and I refer interested readers to them.

'Family language' is often the only one that comes close to this orientation, and it is also the only one that is directly available ... [Such language] most directly expresses the values that underlie political actions (2002: 172).

This family and care-giving language is applied not only to how women talk about their work, but to how they conceive of the organizations they create to do this work. Mary Belenky, Lynne Bond and Jacqueline Weinstock (1997), for example, refer to the women's organizations they studied as "public homeplaces" because they functioned in the public sphere much like the "homeplaces" that bell hooks (1990) attributes to generations of black women:

[places] where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside. ... We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy, on the outside; it was there on the inside, in the "homeplace," more often create and kept by black women, that we had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits (42).

In a similar way, the women studied by Belenky and her colleagues described their public organizations as places that nourished a sense of belonging, as safe spaces or refuges in which people could affirm themselves and each other, develop their capacities to think and act, and join together to nurture the development of people and communities.² In doing so, they continuously evoked language of family and home:

"We are like a family." "I am really at home here." "This is where I can be who I am." ... "We think of our center as a public living room" (259)

Like the GIAC staff, they referred to life-long, permanent relationships:

"We're like the kind of family where people can fight fearlessly but no one ever even thinks of leaving – well, hardly ever." ... "People were here for me yesterday; they will be here for me tomorrow, next year, ten years from now, whatever." ... "We are like a family; we have made a lifelong commitment to each other. People who know they are

² Mary Belenky and her colleagues note the similarities of the "public homeplaces" they studied to other "noneducational institutions dedicated to fostering the development of people," including Maxine Greene's (1988) "authentic public spaces," Sara Evans and Harry Boyte's (1986) "free spaces," Aldon Morris' (1984) "movement half-way houses," and William Gamson's (1996) "safe spaces."

going to be together over the long haul can take on something that might take ten years or more to accomplish” (259-260).

“Most of the homeplace women we studied,” report Belenky and her colleagues:

avoided the language of the social services and the helping professions. To them people were neither “patients” to be “treated” or “cured” nor “clients” to be “serviced” or “helped.” Instead, the homeplace women see themselves more like mothers who create nurturing families that support the growth and development of people and communities (261).

These women, they argue, see themselves and everyone else as members of a larger, extended human family. The family’s obligation is to welcome and support all its members, to bring those who have been pushed out back into the “family circle” and to care for those least able to care for themselves. In turn, family members are expected to support the family and the larger community. Borrowing from historian Charles Payne’s identification of a similar phenomenon among grassroots organizers in the American Civil Rights movement (Payne 1995), they name such an approach a “developmental leadership tradition.” And they argue that the women who work within this tradition have created “public spaces that are the moral equivalent of an inclusive, egalitarian, nurturing family” and that keep alive “the possibility of a world where all humanity is well nourished” (Belenky et. al. 1997: 265).

The distinctions between this approach and the dominant professional model is captured by Hildegard Schoos, one of the leaders of the German Mothers’ Center movement that Belenky interviewed:

Professionals here in Germany are very fascinated by us. Try as they might, they can’t seem to replicate the mode. They cannot do it because they keep the public and private separated. We actually try to merge the Mothers’ Centers into one whole cosmos of work *and* private life. That is our secret. Professionals can’t make the model work because they do not integrate what they value in their personal life with their professional offerings (265).

Hart (2002) highlights this blurring of boundaries between public and private from another angle, noting that for many of these women activists

Community work ... crosses the boundaries between “personal troubles” and the economics and politics that are behind troubles, such as water leaks, rats, roaches, and lack of heat. When opening up one’s house for those in need, the lines between community work and family-based labor become blurred (175).

Finally, Belenky and her colleagues note the difficulties that funders and others can have in understanding these kinds of organizations. The United Way’s concerns about GIAC (expressed in the initial meeting described in Chapter 1, p. 4) bear a noticeable resemblance to these observations:

Organizations that are always evolving to meet the new needs of people who are growing and changing can seem vague and uncertain to anyone who does not appreciate a developmental perspective. Program officers from foundations and government agencies often tell the African American cultural workers to narrow their focus and concentrate their efforts on well-defined “target populations.” They do not understand that elevating the whole community is a goal of women’s leadership commonly found throughout the African diaspora (Belenky et. al. 1997: 160).

Before I go any further, let me make three important clarifications. First, this understanding of community work is certainly not exclusive to women, no less to Black women or women of color. Elements of it can be found in the writings and work of progressive adult educators such as Myles Horton (1990, 1998) and Paulo Freire (1970, 1992, 1997) and philosophers such as John Macmurray (to whom I turn in a moment), among others. They can also be found in the writings of some of the Progressive Era reformers, women as well as men. Thus, Edward Ward (1914), a leader in the national Social/Community Center movement, described these centers as “the head-and-heart quarters of the society whose members are the people of that community” (1) and pointed to these “institutions of the common life” as “home-like institutions” that would expand the “home-spirit ... to humanize our relationship to other members of [the wider community]” (106).

However, we can not ignore the fact that the *contemporary expression* of this understanding in public life is far more common in organizations led by women, and

particularly women of color; the powerful racial, cultural and gendered underpinnings of this understanding of community work must not be overlooked. As with the “professional public management” frame I discussed in the last chapter, this framework does not exist in a vacuum. Rather, the values, assumptions and ideas that make up this frame have a long social and cultural history based in both gendered and Afro-centric world views.

Thus, Hart (2002) argues that for many women, “community activism is often seen as an extension of private care-giving” (174).³ Other scholars link the cultural practice of describing the African-American and Latina community as “family” to a strong communal tradition that includes the nurturing of children by extended family networks and treats biologically unrelated people as if they were members of one’s own family. Collins (1991) for example, argues:

By placing family, children, education and community at the center of our political activism, African-American women draw on an Afrocentric conceptualization of mothering, family, community and empowerment (151).

Barbara Omolade (1994), too, points to the roots of this kind of understanding of communal life in African tribal societies organized around democratic and consensus-building processes; she argues that practices based on it have been essential to the survival of people throughout the African diaspora.

Observing the similarities between these feminist and Afro-centric themes, Collins notes:

Values and ideas Africanist scholars identify as characteristically “black” often bear remarkable resemblance to similar ideas claimed by [European American] feminist scholars as characteristically “female.” (1991: 206-7).

And Sandra Harding, calling this similarity “a curious coincidence,” suggests:

³ In addition to the communal ethic of care that Hart emphasizes, another interesting extension of transferring the “private” to the “public” sphere can be found in the writings of Progressive Era reformer Jane Addams who turned to the formulation of “public housekeeping” to shore up her arguments for a greater role for women in public life (see, for example, Addams 1907/1960).

Europeans and men are thought to conceptualize the self as autonomous, individualistic, self-interested, fundamentally isolated from other people and from nature... To Africans and women are attributed a concept of the self as dependent on others, as defined through relationships to others, as perceiving self-interest to lie in the welfare of the relational complex. (1986: 165).

My second clarification: in presenting such a perspective, I do not intend to sentimentalize or homogenize either “family” or the “community.” The latter, in particular, is a contested term with “a host of meanings and associations ... [and] especially within social science discourse ... a social construct that is full of ambivalent, ambiguous, and often contradictory meanings” (Hart 2002: 177). Thus, the mere use of a “family” metaphor does not signify a commitment to centralizing “personal relations” or a “developmental” tradition. For example, in offering “images of organization,” Morgan (1997) discusses only the “patriarchal family” where workers (“followers”) are expected to defer to the authority of their leaders, a sense of duty and fidelity is strong, and “key organizational members also often cultivate fatherly roles by acting as mentors to those in need of help and protection” (227). Further, families are not always loci for nurturing and caring; for too many, “home” is a site of physical and/or emotional violence. Finally, some uses of “organization as family” are decidedly coercive. When used to encourage workers to identify personal allegiance to the needs of the firm, to make a ever-stronger commitment to organizational, rather than personal, ends, the language is co-opted. Attempts to emphasize solidarity and belonging can be used to homogenize groups, erasing conflict and diversity, requiring compliance, denying power differentials, and simplifying problematic questions of who decides who belongs and by what criteria.

Still, as these studies suggest, there is a way of understanding community-based work that – both gendered and/or culturally based – challenges the logic and norms of the “professional public management” frame and re-organizes our attention. It

challenges the stark dichotomy between “public” and “private,” bringing an ethics of care typically associated with private family life into the public sphere. It highlights language and behavior associated with nurturance, solidarity and human development, rather than service, cost-effectiveness and efficiency. It emphasizes gradual long-term processes (more elusive and less easily measured) in contrast to short-term, static events or “outcomes.” It is oriented toward the communal, rather than the individual. And it frames relationships as reciprocal and at least nominally egalitarian, rather than the unilateral, hierarchical professional-client relationships we saw previously.

Third: this framing of “personal relations” and “communal caretaking” – the melding of the norms and logic of “private” and “public” life is not merely “maternal” behavior writ large, an attempt to sentimentalize communal interactions. Rather, it is a decidedly political stance. In crossing the public-private divide, those who operate from this frame recognize and act upon the maxim that “the personal is political,” that, as Hart (2001) observed, “personal troubles” can’t be separated from the economic and political decisions that have led to such troubles. In the face of racism, classism, and other oppressions that systematically disenfranchise, disrespect and discard some people, a stance that consciously respects, welcomes, nurtures, empowers and recognizes the humanity of *all* has decidedly political implications, implications that are always on the minds of those who work from this understanding.

Functional vs. Personal Relations: the work of John Macmurray

These feminist and Afro-centric ethnographies place the language and behavior of the GIAC staff solidly within a larger gendered and culturally shaped understanding of public, community-based work. The analytical writings of John Macmurray and Michael Fielding – grounded within a larger philosophical tradition that explores the

fundamental question of what it means to be human – offer a different, but complementary, perspective on this understanding.

Writing in western Europe between the 1920s and the 1960s, Macmurray challenged *both* the Rationalists’ “mechanical” understanding of the individual and his/her relation to society, in which the whole (society) was to be understood in terms of the sum of its parts (individuals), and the Romantics’ “organic” one, where the whole (society) was viewed as more than the parts, and the parts (individuals) gained their significance from their contributions to the larger whole. In doing so, he built upon a moral position that extends from Aristotle through Marx and beyond: that people – and more specifically, human flourishing and the living of lives that are fully human – should be treated as *ends in themselves*, not as means to achieve other ends. “The most important thing about a man is that he is a man – not that he has a social function,” Macmurray argued (1929: 177).

This position stands in stark contrast to those (from many of the Progressive Era reformers to large numbers of contemporary policy makers, educators and others) who openly or implicitly put forth notions of human development as *a means to another end*. This end was, and is, sometimes economic (e.g., the development of “productive workers”) or political (e.g., the development of “productive citizens”). But in both cases, human beings are constituted as the constituent parts of a greater whole (society, or sometimes, the State – as in the Rationalist view) or they gain their significance from their contributions to these larger wholes (in the Romantics’ “organic” reframing).⁴

⁴ Martha Nussbaum (2000) makes similar distinctions between means and ends in the context of discussing “international development” policy making. She argues persuasively for adopting a “capabilities approach” – one that attends to what people are capable of doing or becoming -- that reconstitutes human development as an end in itself, rather than as a means to economic or political development.

Macmurray's work, while grounded in the Aristotelian-Marxist-humanist tradition that people's humanity ought to be seen as an end in itself, has particular components that are helpful to constructing an alternative conceptual framework for community-service work. He makes several arguments that are important to the discussion here:⁵

- (1) That the self is both *relational* (existing only in dynamic relation with the Other; "I and You" are the unit of the personal) and *communal*. "The human individual – out of relation to all other human individuals – is a myth," he wrote. "Our 'personality' is not something that belongs to us as individuals; it is not in us, but between us (Macmurray 1945: 8, emphasis in original; in Fielding, in press).
- (2) That human development is a move from total dependence on the other (infancy), not to independence, but to the "mutual interdependence of equals" (Macmurray 1961).
- (3) That the purpose of relationships and community is to "be and become human."⁶

Macmurray (1961) observes that people relate to each other in two fundamentally different way: the functional and the personal. He defines *functional relations* as instrumental, transactional encounters which help people to get things done in order to achieve common purposes. People are associated not "as persons, but only in virtue of

⁵ Attempting to summarize small parts of a complex philosophical argument brings with it the immense risk of oversimplifying Macmurray's life work. I do so with trepidation, referring readers to his fuller writings, some of which are cited here. Additional references to and discussions of Macmurray's work can be found in Michael Fielding's work (see "References Cited"). My presentation of Macmurray's ideas draws both from his original writings and from Fielding's synthesis of them. I am indebted to Lehn Benjamin for pointing me to Fielding and Macmurray's writings.

⁶ Macmurray is not alone in making these humanist arguments. Paulo Freire, for example, characterized a similar purpose – that of "becoming more fully human" as humanity's "ontological vocation" (1970: 28) and argued for relational, interdependent understandings of human consciousness (e.g., 1970, 1992, 1997). Readers familiar with Freire's writings will notice a number of additional similarities between Macmurray's and Freire's views as the discussion proceeds, including the ideas that knowledge and human being and becoming is created through only through collective action "in and on the world."

the specific functions they perform in relation to the purpose which constitutes the group.” Such relationships essentially turn people into “objects” or “living tools,” possessing certain capacities which make them useful to get things done. An extreme rendition of this is the master-slave relationship, but it also characterizes most employer-employee relationships. *Personal relations*, on the other hand, have no utilitarian purposes; the relationship, constituted by our care for and interest in each other, is an end in itself, and it is reciprocal. Such relations are both the means and the end of our development as people. While people in personal relationships may do things together, these activities do not *define* the relationship; rather they are *expressive of it*. Such personal relations, argues Macmurray, help us “be and become ourselves.” In fact, our ability to be and become is possible *only* through such relations.

Macmurray’s distinction between the functional and the personal is not particularly unique; rather, it is his observations about the *relation* between them that makes his arguments compelling (Fielding, in press) and relevant to my arguments here. In practice, Macmurray observes, these two types of relations are not only inseparable and necessary in society, but to try to separate them is “one of the greatest mistakes we make” (1945: 11; in Fielding, in press). And yet, while both kinds of relations are inseparable and necessary; they are not of equal importance. While the personal life is *through* the functional life, he argues, the functional life is *for* the personal. Without functional relations – that is, without a grounding in concrete, daily action and engagement in the world – the personal becomes sentimental or ethereal; the personal “only gets hand and feet,” Macmurray argues, “when in our daily work we provide for one another’s needs and rejoice that we are doing so” (1941b: 856). At the same time, when functional relations become primary, they become exploitive. In

radio broadcasts during WWII, Macmurray made clear the totalitarian implications of making the personal subservient to the functional, noting

You will land in Hitler's camp if you hold strictly and ruthlessly to the principle that the thing that gives significance to a man's life is his function in society" (1941a: 759).

For this reason, he insists, *functional relations must be placed in service of personal ones*, in service of relationships that help people "be and become." And understanding the "self" to be relational and communal, Macmurray views such processes of being and becoming human as possible only in "community." He wrote extensively about what such "community" (or "fellowship") meant, distinguishing it from the functional relations that constituted "society." I do not begin to do his explorations of "community" and "society" justice here. For my purposes, I merely note that he suggests that in a society, an "organization of functions," a group may act together, but they

co-operate [merely] to achieve a purpose which each of them, in his own interest, desires to achieve, and which can only be achieved by co-operation. The relations of its members are functional; each plays his allotted part in the achievement of the common end (1961: 157).

His notion of "community," on the other hand, is characterized by what might be called a sense of solidarity and radical inclusiveness; it is a unity that seeks to foster the conditions for human flourishing for *all* – not because it will produce a better society, but because doing so is what makes us human. A community, Macmurray suggests,

is a unity of persons as persons. It cannot be defined in functional terms, by relation to a common purpose. It is not organic in structure, and cannot be constituted or maintained by organization, but only by the motives which sustain the personal relations of its members (1961: 157-8).

Because the mother-child relationship is the original form of the personal relationship and the family the original human community, Macmurray argues that

when the world ... is conceived personally, the conception is most naturally and effectively expressed in terms borrowed from the family unity (1961: 107).

An organizational application

British educational philosopher Michael Fielding has extended Macmurray's ideas to modern-day educational organizations, seeking to provide an alternative to the persistent "managerialism" with its instrumental imperatives and mechanisms for control. He extends Macmurray's argument by insisting that

not only is the functional for the sake of the personal, and the personal achieved through the functional, but the influence of the personal on the functional is transformative of it: *the functional should be expressive of the personal*. Ends and means must be inextricably linked; the means should themselves be transformed by the ends by which they are inspired and towards which they are aiming. The functional ways in which we work together in schools to achieve personal, communal and educational ends should be transformed by the moral and interpersonal character of what we are trying to do (in press).⁷

Examining the "high-performance learning organization" so popular in today's managerially driven organizations, both public and private, Fielding finds the increasing emphasis on personal forms of human relations to be "the servant of wider functional ambitions and intentions" (in press; see also Fielding 2001b, 2001c). In these contemporary "high-performance" organizations, the quality of work life, personal relationships, inclusion, and even "community" is valued, but primarily as a valuable resource toward achieving organizational ends. People's significance is based on their contribution to organizational performance, rendered in terms of measurable outputs. Such psychologically sophisticated manipulation is exploitive, Fielding

⁷ Although Fielding writes specifically about K-12 schools, his ideas are relevant to other kinds of modern organizations. This characterization of his work is simplified from a four-fold typology: the polar extremes of the "impersonal" organization (the functional eclipses the personal; characteristic of the modern service bureaucracy) and the "affective" community (the personal marginalizes the functional, characteristic of a therapeutic setting), as well as the "high performance learning organization" and the "person-centered learning community" described above.

argues; its purposes intentionally opaque. In a more totalitarian form, the functional and personal collapse into each other, with a fundamental blurring of boundaries, yielding a new form of oppression and control, where, for example, work has to be “fun” so people can perform better, and social relationships become a form of “social capital.”

In contrast, Fielding proposes, the “person-centered learning community” in which functional arrangements are for the sake of/expressive of personal relations and communal aspirations. Such organizations would be places that further human development “in ways which affirm a shaped humanity.” Both the functional and the personal are necessary, but the former both for the sake of and expressive of the latter. Fielding’s prescriptive portrayal of schools as “personal centred learning communities” correlates with how Mary Belenky’s grassroots leaders described (above) their organizations. In such an organization, questions of “effectiveness,” “impact” or “outcomes” do not become irrelevant, he notes. Rather, success is simultaneously instrumental *and* moral. “Effectiveness” still matters; but the key question becomes: effective toward what end?

These two modes, Fielding argues,

At first glance ... seem very similar ... They are worlds apart. ... And yet, it is not always clear which frame is dominant, whose purposes are being served, whether we are the victims of those whose interests are quite other than those we would applaud, or whether we are part of something which is likely to turn out to be fulfilling and worthy of our support” (Fielding, in press).

In both cases, organizations incorporate both the functional and the personal, and acknowledge their interdependence. But the differences are “profound and irreconcilable” (Fielding, in press) and their attitudes toward the relation between these two kinds of relations are diametrically opposed. Thus, Fielding continues:

For the high-performance learning organisation, community is seen as a useful tool to achieve organisational purposes; for the person centred

learning community, organisation exists to promote community (in press).

Examining GIAC through a “personal relations” lens

Together, these scholars point to a different framework for conceptualizing what the work of community services agencies is and ought to be. and it has different implications for the development of processes to carry out, account for and improve this work. The logic of this “personal relations” frame directs attention to a different type of relationship, one constituted around a project of human “being and becoming” – the “raising up” of people and communities. It foregrounds not only nurturance and care, but solidarity and community. Moreover, while it does not ignore functional activities, they are positioned in service of a larger, humanistic project – helping people flourish as members of the human family, to “be and become” human as an end in itself. Finally, these relationships are reciprocal and more-or-less egalitarian – not “service to,” but in “solidarity with.”

Using this framework as a lens, I return again to GIAC and its work as presented in Chapter 3. Before one even figuratively re-enters the GIAC building, the sign on the corner with GIAC’s motto: “A Place to Be Me” suddenly takes on new meaning and importance. So, too, do the Search Conference introductions, with their talk of “raising up” and “being raised”; Marcia’s description of GIAC as “a home away from home for so many people”; and the staff’s characterizations of GIAC as a “refuge” and a “safe space.” This is the language of a “public homeplace,” of a communal ethic of care, of a place where, as bell hooks wrote, people can “strive to be subjects, not objects,” In this context, all sorts of norms, decisions and behavior – from the simple handing of a trophy to a child unable to finish the program to finding money at 4 pm on Christmas eve for a young man to buy presents for his children, from administrative policies to Board deliberations – take on a different meaning; they are

all ways that, as Marcia said in this chapter's opening anecdote, "family takes care of each other."

And just as one does not leave a family, one does not easily leave GIAC. One way GIAC differs from other institutions, the staff says, is that they don't give up on people, even when they fail; GIAC is "a place for giving second chances." Participants continue to return years after they graduate; in Bob Skates' words, "once you get under the [GIAC] umbrella ... you're there for life." It explains why a proposal to establish more traditional two-year Board terms and then rotate Board members off the Board was met with fierce resistance and anger. And when Marcia explains that she will hire staff members who understand, respect and can communicate with the GIAC community, even if it means choosing someone with less experience in program planning and evaluation, she is not offering the position to someone less competent (as is sometimes perceived by outsiders). Rather, she is choosing one kind of competency, a competency central to a "personal-relations" frame, over the competencies centralized by the "professional public management" alternative. The instrumental skills of program planning, she finds, are more easily taught than a "personal relations" perspective.

This notion of "family," however, is not equivalent to homogeneity or sameness. Rather, it draws upon what Chela Sandoval (2000) has identified as the "coalitional consciousness" of U.S. feminists of color – the practice of finding common grounds across profound cultural, racial, class, sex, gender and power differences, grounds on which coalition members could act together for social change. Or, as the banner above GIAC's front door proclaimed, "30 Years of Unity Through Diversity." This is a point often missed by those who are quick to see GIAC as a "Black community center." Thus, when I first joined GIAC's Board of Directors and was welcomed as a member

of the GIAC “family,” as a white, middle-class woman, I, too, was invited to find a “home away from home” and “A Place to Be Me.”

Before concluding this chapter, let me return to the question posed at the end of Chapter 3 about whether the limitations of the outcome measurement models were a failure of the model or the users. With these two frameworks now more clearly in mind, it becomes apparent that it is not just that outcomes of long-term, amorphous processes like “human development” are difficult to measure. One can attempt to find behavioral proxies as did the GIAC staff. Or one can try to “bifurcate” the model to allow for both instrumental and long-term developmental outcomes, as the “Sojourner Truth” participants in Lehn Benjamin’s study did.

But, ultimately, these contesting frameworks help us see that a conflict arises with the very logic of the “logic models” themselves. For outcome measurement models, like the conceptual framework they arise from, tell a story.⁸ As the Kellogg Foundation promised, outcome measurement models *do* narrate an agency’s work and its beliefs about how change occurs. It details what they started with (“inputs”), what they did (“activities” and “outputs”), what they believed would happen (“outcomes), and whether or not those things really happened or not (“measurement”). Done well, this coherent story provides a “road map” for the organization and its members. What the Kellogg Foundation does not say, however, is that outcome measurement models tell a *particular* kind of story, with a particular kind of “story-line.” It is a story-line that arises from and affirms the tenets of the “professional public management” model. It asserts that change is linear and can be/should be controlled. It insists that the most important changes arising from an organization’s work can be defined and measured. It tells a “production line” story: it says that if you take raw materials (inputs) and

⁸ The idea that outcome measurement models are a kind of story narrative about an agency’s work was first suggested to me by Robert Rich.

apply the correct processes (activities, theories of change), you should get the desired improvement (outcomes). Finally, it proposes that what matters can be reduced in some meaningful way to these categories and boxes; neatness – and staying within the lines – counts.

A “personal relations” framework is difficult to reconcile with such a story-line. The story-line consistent with a personal relations frame is a story of human being and becoming. But human development differs in fundamental ways from the production of widgets: it is non-linear, unpredictable, and messy. People succeed, fail and succeed again. Further, it is a storyline that asserts that human beings ought to be cast as “subjects,” not as “objects” or “living tools.” It insists that the nature of the relationship between humans differs in fundamental, moral ways from the nature of the relationship between a person and a thing. While functional relations between people are necessary – as Macmurray insisted, a grounding in concrete daily action and engagement gives personal relations “hands and feet” – this logic of this frame asserts that they should not *define* the relationship, but rather be *expressive* of it.

As we saw, activities and programs (functionally oriented activities) matter to the GIAC staff. They do hope, for example, that the young people in their program learn the skills and attitudes that will enable them to succeed as productive workers or citizens. They want to help children do their homework. They want to help teens to graduate from high school and be able to keep a job. But these activities do not define why the program exists; they are expressive of it. Yet outcome measurement models – even GIAC’s “new, improved” models – force the staff to posit these skills and attitudes as “outcomes,” as the primary ends of their work. In these models, the relationships the staff have with their participants become an “input” or an “outcome,” one more factor that will help achieved desired ends. There is no place in these models for “personal relations” – that is, for neighborly relations, caring, solidarity, the

building of multi-generational communities and public “home places” in which people can “be and become” themselves – to be its own end. There is no way in the models to publicly account for Alison’s “stuff that doesn’t get mentioned,” or Vivian’s “things [that] just come up.” And it is little surprise, then, that no one is quite sure whether the front office staff are “program staff” or not.

This leaves both GIAC and those charged with funding and evaluating their work with a fundamental dilemma. For if, as I have been arguing, the work centralized in a “personal relations” frame matters, then it ought to be accounted for, evaluated and improved upon. But being “accountable” within a “personal relations” framework requires approaches and tools that enable the telling of a different kind of story, one that centralizes personal, reciprocal, ongoing, developmental relationships and human flourishing as their own ends and explores the effectiveness of the functional as means to this end. I return to a discussion of how this kind of accountability might be conceived in Chapter 7. First, however, I want to return to the collaborative project I undertook with the GIAC staff. For it is not enough to argue that the “personal relations” frame provides important insights into how the community-service work is understood at GIAC or how might be fruitfully conceptualized elsewhere. As I warned at the beginning of Chapter 4, organizations are multifaceted and diverse, and maintaining that diversity is essential for understanding the complexity of organizational life. While it is helpful to see more clearly the conceptual frames that shape – or might reshape – what is taken for granted as “reality,” it is time to re-complicate the picture.

In practice, I found that both the “professional public management” and “personal relations” frameworks co-existed in a complex, uneasy tension not only within GIAC as organization, but within the individuals who made it up. As a result, attempts to open up new ways of thinking about accountability and performance improvement –

ways that I believed could help re-organize attention to this “shadowed” work – generated both excitement and resistance, as well no small amount of confusion. In the next chapter, I explore how these contesting, but then still unarticulated, frameworks impacted our work together during the second half of our project. That work provides important clues about what must be included in efforts to help community-service organizations consider how they might more meaningfully integrate a commitment to the “personal” with reasonable expectations that they evaluate, account for, and continually improve their work.

CHAPTER 6

“WHEN DO WE STOP ASKING “WHY?”: CONTESTING FRAMEWORKS IN PRACTICE

Something that surprised me today was: all the information staff had to share and how easy and hard evaluations are (staff member, critical incident questionnaire, May 5, 2005)

The most confusing thing about today: Continuing to work out questions from the discussion. I lost focus ... when do we stop asking “why”? (staff member, critical incident questionnaire, May 5, 2005).

Something that surprised me today was: We still have not talked about what’s essential to us. “Measuring outcomes” – that’s what is pressing (staff member, critical incident questionnaire, May 18, 2005)

I keep waiting for you to tell me what information you want me to get, and you keep handing me a blank sheet of paper (staff member’s comment, in May 18 session).

Something that excites me is: the amount of info and ideas I get from the other staff. *The most interesting thing about today was:* the great ideas I never knew the staff had. *Something that surprised me today was:* I did it (staff member, critical incident questionnaire, June 22, 2005).

In this chapter, I return to the GIAC staff’s and my work together, this time focusing on the four All-Staff sessions held in May and June 2005. If the first part of our work together in fall 2004 was shaped by external demands (GIAC’s need to provide the United Way with “improved” outcome measurement models), this period attempted to more directly address internal demands (Marcia’s desire to improve programming). The ways in which the dictates of the “professional public management” and “personal relations” frames shaped our attempts to improve “performance” provide insights into the decidedly complex, messy, and dynamic processes of staff and organizational learning, development and change.

As I have been arguing throughout this work, conceptual frameworks are not merely intellectual; rather they have profound practical consequences for how community-service work is to be done, accounted for and improved. But the way these consequences play out is not straight-forward. The simple dichotomy between competing frameworks presented in the previous chapters may help people articulate and understand a hidden tension, but in practice, the intersection of these frameworks is dynamic and complex. In this project, the GIAC staff did not merely adopt one framework (that is, one meaning-making scheme) and reject another, enacting processes that are often described in the academic literature as “conformity” or “resistance.” Nor did they merely “move between” frameworks from one situation to the next. Rather, the work we did together generated both enthusiasm and resistance, insight and confusion as these then-still-unarticulated frameworks contested not only between GIAC and its funders, but in the minds and practices of the individuals involved. An examination of this work points to the challenges people face as they struggle to craft a coherent practice that responds to the logics of both dominant and contesting frameworks, often at the same time.

In the first part of this chapter, I describe the work we did, focusing particularly on the staff responses – both in the collaborative sessions and in the “critical incident questionnaires” (Brookfield 1995) that they filled out after each session. In the second part of this chapter, I examine this work in the context of existing scholarship on professional development and organizational learning and change, with particular attention to the “reflective turn” (Schön 1991) in both arenas. This analysis is tentative and exploratory. Processes of development and change – whether individual or organizational – demand an elongated timeline. Dissertation research is severely time-limited. Further, our plans to continue the program planning and evaluation work in the fall of 2005 were side-lined by unexpected

circumstances. Thus, the discussions in this chapter provide a look at our initial steps and some of the insights that might be drawn from them. In presenting them, I suggest ways that the literature – whether on organizational or individual learning and change – is both helpful and limited, and I lay out several considerations that I believe must be addressed by those seeking to develop a stronger praxis for organizationally based learning and change.

Addressing “Performance”

As I noted above, the first six months of the “staff development” project were fundamentally shaped by outside demands: GIAC’s need to provide the United Way with “improved” outcome measurement models. Once those models had been submitted to the United Way, we turned more directly to Marcia’s second goal for the project: to help the staff think about ways to develop their programming to more fully support the agency’s mission. Several of GIAC’s supervisory staff also wanted to know how to “measure” outcomes; we had not had time to adequately explore this final column in the logic model. Presumably, these two agendas were related: in the logic model format, outcome measures document progress toward the desired results (e.g., the identified outcomes) and are supposed to provide a guide for where programs are working satisfactorily and where improvement is needed. As the Kellogg Foundation’s *Logic Model Development Guide* states:

outcomes measures enhance program success by assessing your progress from the beginning and all along the way. The elements (Outputs, Outcomes, and Impact) that comprise *your intended results* give you an outline of what is most important to monitor and gauge to determine the effectiveness of your program. You can correct and revise [your programming] based on your interpretation of the collected data (2001: 16, emphasis in original).

Yet, as the previous chapters demonstrated, extremely important aspects of GIAC’s work remained invisible even in the new, improved models. It was still

unclear whether the models *could* account for that invisible work, but what was clear was that the language of “outcomes” and the process of filling in linear boxes on a page wasn’t helping the GIAC staff capture the elements of their work that they had centralized in the first Appreciative Inquiry session the previous September. Thus, I proposed introducing the GIAC staff to an “open inquiry” model for program evaluation and improvement (Wadsworth 1997). I believed that such an approach could help the GIAC staff strengthen their programming by putting their own language and questions at the center of our discussions. It would foreground their own values and enable them to look at questions that truly mattered to them, without being limited by need to construct “outcomes” that fit neatly into small boxes and that could easily be “measured.” In doing so, I thought that we might be able to more fully capture these elusive “desired outcomes,” and assess and improve programming in accordance with them.

As Yoland Wadsworth (1997) notes, evaluation is an important component of program planning and accountability. It helps agency staff identify what has been achieved, what hasn’t and how they might improve their programs. But she argues, difficulties arise in conflating two different kinds of evaluative needs. One is the need – typical of funding entities – to *audit*, review or “monitor for publicly approved appropriateness and value” (34). Audit or review-type evaluations check current practice against previously articulated expectations (e.g., measuring progress toward proposed outcomes). The second evaluative need is to *know the value* of particular work in order to know how to improve or maintain it. “Open inquiry”-type evaluations, Wadsworth suggests, help people move beyond the constraints of established objectives or targets

to ask the previously unasked, observe the previously unnoticed and consider the value and relevance of ideas and societal developments that may at first appear of no relevance whatsoever. We will, in the

course of exploring what people value and think of things, work out what are our guiding visions, images, intentions and purposes. These in turn will then be made available for further discussion ... and finally constituted into more conscious frameworks for future actions (1997: 44).

A two-year project sponsored by the James Irvine Foundation “to improve the way nonprofits use evaluation to improve performance,” also emphasized the need to “change mindsets” and create “a culture of inquiry” (Hernández and Visher 2001). Although this project worked only with senior staff, the project leaders concluded that success was greatest in organizations that rallied the broadest staff participation; they recommended that future efforts should “involve staff from throughout the organization in the work of changing the culture and systems around performance measurement” (18). They write:

The task of helping nonprofit organizations built their capacity to evaluate their own performance in a systematic manner requires more than just a sharing of techniques and tools. It takes a conscious effort to foster agency-wide shifts in mindset, norms and practices. ... As these cultural shifts take place, it becomes clear that the benefits of organizational development work are as important as the benefits of the performance measurement system itself. One notices a deeper level of communication and trust among staff members. Staff begins to look for ways to improve the quality of their programs. Data becomes *of* and *for* their organization, rather than something that is done *to* them. When these behaviors and attitudes begin to take root in an organization, it becomes just a matter of time before rapid, agency-side changes in practices and norms take place. Only then is the loop of continuous learning and improvement completed (2, emphasis in original).

Such conclusions echo calls by scholars in adult education, management and other professional fields to move beyond sharing expert knowledge and honing technical procedures as the route to professional development, turning instead to processes that promote “reflective” – and increasingly, “critically reflective” learning (e.g., Schön 1983, 1987, 1991; Briton 1996; Reynolds 1998; Wilson and Hayes 2000; Cervero and Wilson 2001; Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997;

Vince 2002).¹ Robert Kegan and Karen Lahey of Harvard's Change Leadership Project complain, for example, that "[people] are already well informed, and it is maddeningly insufficient" (2001: 232). They note

most of what goes under the banner of professional development amounts to helping us develop more skills or capacities to cope, but cope within the world of our assumptive designs. This design itself is never in question, or even visible (2001: 71)

Instead, they call for professional development programs to move from "informational training" (the acquisition of skills within existing meaning-making schemes) to "transformational education" (what Kegan [2000] defines as a "leading out from an established habit of mind"); he considers reflection an important tool in this process.

Similarly, Chris Argyris and Donald Schön argue that organizations must move from "single-loop" learning ("instrumental learning that changes strategies of action or assumptions [but] ... leaves the values of a theory of action unchanged") to "double-loop" learning, in which they explore not only "the observed effects of action" but also question the continued relevance of underlying values, assumptions and beliefs (1996: 21). And they propose that practitioners engage in reflective inquiry processes to support such learning.

Still others add a "critical" component to this process, pointing out that such reflection must not only uncover taken-for-granted assumptions and inquire into values and norms, but analyze and challenge dominant ideologies and structural power relations, what Robert Flood and Norma Romm (1996) have called "triple loop" learning. In contrast to Argyris and Schön, these scholars argue that learning must be understood not as a personal, individual or dyadic process of "introspection," but rather as a socially-situated, relational, political, affective and

¹ I refer readers to Chapter 1, page 17, footnote 7, in which I clarify my use of the terms "reflective" and "critically reflective" learning.

collective one (Greenwood 1991; Brookfield 2000; Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997; Reynolds 1998; Wilson and Hayes 2000; Vince 2002, Reynolds and Vince 2004). Greenwood (1991) goes on to observe that “cultural systems are inherently diverse and diversifying,” and that this feature of organizational life needs to be “attended to explicitly” in reflective processes (106).

This, then, was the theoretical base I brought to my work. At the same time, I was acutely aware that myriad practical attempts to promote reflective and critically reflective organizational learning had produced “mixed results” (Argyris and Schön 1996). Further, both research and practice has tended to focus on reflection as an individual activity, at most, as part of a mentor-apprentice dyad. Much less attention has been paid to theorizing critical reflection at the organizational level, and an understanding of *how* the theory can be put to work in practice at that level remains “poorly developed” (Reynolds and Vince 2004; also Greenwood 1991, Nicolini et. al. 2004). Finally, despite Hernández and Visher’s conclusion (above) that efforts to create an organizational “culture of inquiry” should “involve staff from throughout the organization,” most research on critically reflective processes has focused on *professional* development, ignoring staff members who are not in managerial positions.

“Open Inquiry” Staff Sessions

In May and June 2004, the GIAC staff and I embarked on a series of staff development workshops – four in all – that focused on taking an “open inquiry” approach to program planning and evaluation. My earlier work with Teen staff had made it clear that while they tacitly and continuously observed the impact of their work and adjusted their efforts accordingly, they viewed “evaluation” as something

done solely for someone else – and focused on “*what* did we do,” not “*how* did we do it.” As Bob Skates noted in that context,

“I’m always thinking evaluation isn’t for me. It’s for someone else, to show them [what we’ve done]. ... I’m always evolving in my own self-evaluation. I change my approach to something because I’ve found a better way to do it.”

Cassandra Nelson concurred:

“We do it all the time. ... We have a program and no one shows up. We ask ourselves why, what should we do differently?”

And Vivian Sierra added:

“We’re so used to doing that. It’s not something we need to put down [on paper] because we’re always doing it. ... [Besides], it doesn’t seem to matter to the United Way how we got from point A to point B. No one cares about that except us.”²

So I began the first session in early May by asking the staff to write down (anonymously) the first words or phrases that came to mind when they heard the word “evaluation.” The staff responses split between what Wadsworth had dubbed an “audit approach” and an “inquiry” one. They listed “improving programs” and “learning what we are doing,” along with “proving” and “reports that sit on the shelf.” Drawing upon the list, I gave a short talk about the distinction between these two approaches to evaluation. The staff members then broke into smaller groups to talk about these ideas and how they related to their own assumptions about what “evaluation” meant.

As the large group was reconvening, people continued to talk among themselves. In the context of one of these conversations, youth program staff member Jenna Cooper asked, “Why do we have these good relationships with the kids [that teachers and people from other organizations] don’t?” A spontaneous, animated conversation ensued, as other staff members started to respond. I quietly

² Staff quotes are from the transcript of the March 30, 2004 session.

began jotting excerpts from their answers on the white board: “our expectations of kids,” ... “the environment we offer kids,” ... “kids like being here,” ... “kids don’t fail here,” ... “kids achieve different kinds of success here (beyond doing well on tests),” ... “kids get affection here”

As the conversation continued, different questions began to arise; I jotted them on the white board as well. The staff asked: “Do all of the staff have the same expectations for the kids?” ... “How do we know kids are successful here?” ... “Why do some kids “succeed” here while others don’t?” ... “What do we mean by “success”?” ... “What opportunities do we provide for kids to be successful?” ... “What do kids like about being here?” ... In the process, tentative action steps were proposed, including inviting teachers to come see how children they saw as “problems” in the classroom behaved at GIAC and working more with parents to advocate for their children in the school.

Our subsequent sessions contained this same mix of presentations on evaluation theory and practice, hands-on exercises about how people find answers to questions, and conversations about what the staff, themselves, wanted to learn about how their programs were working, what they thought they already knew about them, how they knew that, and the ways they could imagine finding the answers to their questions with the time and resources they had. In the fourth session, the staff were asked to create a pilot evaluation plan for the summer. Their plan included a question they wanted to answer, what information they were going to gather to answer it, how they were going to get and record that information, and the help they would need to do so. Working in small program groups, they came up with interesting, doable plans about important questions that related to the work they did. These plans were then presented to the group as a whole. The questions included:

- What is the Youth Program doing to meet the needs of participants and their families? What would kids like to see happen within the program? What are their expectations from staff? What do parents expect from the program and the staff? Have their expectations been met in the past?
- What do parents and caregivers see as the most important needs of the preteens and their families? Which of those needs should GIAC address?
- How do we get teens and preteens more vocal about what's going on internally and in the environment around them?
- Is Alex Haley Pool a family place, and if not, how can we make it more of a family environment?
- Why don't parents participate more in the program? Are we meeting the expectations of the parents? If so, how? If not, why and how can we improve?
- How are we making information about GIAC programs available to everyone?
- What role do staff see themselves playing here at GIAC and in the community, with the kids and with their fellow staff? If they don't see a connection between what they do here and how it affects the community, then what do I need to do to get them to see it?

After each session, I asked each participant to fill out a short “feedback” or “evaluation” form to help me learn how these sessions were going. Based on Stephen Brookfield’s “critical incident questionnaire” (1995), these forms contained several open-ended questions about what had surprised, excited, frustrated, interested or confused people that day.³ I summarized the responses after each session and shared them with the staff during the subsequent sessions.

In reviewing these forms, along with my own field notes about what I heard and observed during these sessions, I found four recurring themes: 1) the staff’s interest in listening to and learning from one another, along with their surprise that other

³ Participants had the option to put their names on these forms or complete them anonymously. Different people chose different options in different sessions. For consistency here, I present all the comments anonymously.

GIAC staff were as interested as they were in doing and improving their work; 2) differing responses to our focus on “inquiry” rather than “outcome measurement”; 3) questions and confusions about what was being asked of them; and 4) indications of shifts in the staff’s thinking about accountability and evaluation. I discuss each of these themes below.

(1) Dialogue and collaboration

The first, and strongest, theme to appear was the staff’s appreciation of the chance to talk with other staff members about their work and their surprise at learning that other staff members also cared about their work and improving it. The following responses are all from the critical incident questionnaires from the first session on May 5, 2005.

The most interesting thing about today was:

- the conversations related to youth needs, concerns about school, caregivers.
- Dialogue – open communication/learning environment
- The collaboration between staff to come up with answers regarding the questions posed
- That we are all basically on the same page about the interest in good programs
- Hearing all the feedback from the staff
- Staff dialogue
- The dialogue between all of the staff

Something that surprised me today was:

- The participation by most when we discussed what we see as needs and concerns of and for our participants.
- How we are all pretty much working toward the same goals.
- Questions people had regarding what they would like to see evaluated.
- All the information staff had to share and how easy and hard evaluations are.
- The level of participation among staff compared to the last logic model meeting was higher.

In the space for “other comments/suggestions,” the same theme appeared on other people’s forms:

- Although we know it, it was confirmed that regardless we are all here to do the same thing which is the best we can for our participants.

- I liked the spontaneous conversation that was relevant 2 the training.
- Group discussions are great and very informative.
- Seemed more focused than other outcome workshops.

These themes recurred in subsequent questionnaires.

- *Something that exists or frustrates me about all this is:* excites – I always learn something new about both program and the staff that I am working with. (staff member, critical incident questionnaire, June 1, 2005).
- *Something that excites me is:* the amount of info and ideas I get from the other staff. *The most interesting thing about today was:* the great ideas I never knew the staff had (staff member, critical incident questionnaire, June 22, 2005).

(2) “Inquiry” vs. “measurement”

For some staff members, an “inquiry” approach to program improvement seemed more relevant to their work than the outcome measurement models had:

- *Any other comments?* This was a much better way for us to learn. I also like that you continually remind folks this is a continuous learning process. I hope the next workshop will also allow for in-depth conversation since that seemed to engage people (critical incident questionnaire, May 5, 2005).
- This was more in line with the way I think about things (program staff member comment following May 5, 2005 session).
- *Something that excites or frustrates me about all this is:* That I can do my evaluations with more interest so that when I work on my logic models for Unite Way I am so much more interested in the info I put down, so that I feel I’m not putting down just what they want to hear. *The most interesting thing about today was:* I got a chance to put down on paper some ideas for program improvement without having to wait for United Way to question programming. I question it for myself and can give U. Way a better insight to my logic model. *Something that surprised me today was:* that I can get excited about making more questions and answering for myself about things in my program (program staff member, critical incident questionnaire, June 1, 2005).
- *Something that excites or frustrates me about all this is:* “excites” – is starting something new or just trying to make this program better with different tools (critical incident questionnaire, June 1, 2005).

However, starting in the second session, a series of direct challenges arose from some of the supervisory staff who were concerned about the direction these sessions were taking. These concerns were captured in the critical incident questionnaires as well:

- *Any other comments?* I thought this was a thing for measuring outcomes ... It would be helpful to gear measuring to what we need to measure. (supervisory staff member; critical incident questionnaire, May 5, 2005).
- *Something that surprised me today was:* We still have not talked about what's essential to us. "Measuring outcomes" – that's what is pressing. (same supervisory staff member as above, critical incident questionnaire, May 18, 2005 staff session).
- *Something that excites or frustrates me about all this is:* We seem to be skirting the issue of having quantitative data for logic model indicators and measurements. I get the impression that that area of evaluation will not be addressed (different supervisory staff member, critical incident questionnaire, June 1, 2005).

In part, these concerns related the need to meet external demands. As Travis Brooks, Youth Program supervisor noted:

Figuring out how we get better, or how we are successful and what's not working, is great. But the bottom line is that ... we're going to have to come up with ways to measure all the different outcomes on the logic model so that when we get to the next period, we have some valid data, valid information, valid measurements, rather than [me] coming up with something at the last minute to give as a measurement. For a lot of us, that's what we're really interested in: measuring those things that we're going to be asked to measure ... and report on at the end of the year (transcript, staff session, May 18, 2005).

But the concerns also related to questions about just what constituted "accountability" and "evaluation." A year later, I presented an outline of what I was writing and asked the staff what they thought. As I listened, the conversation turned to the question of what constituted "accountability" and the difficulties of "measuring" many of the things that mattered to them. Several of the staff noted that the things that mattered to them couldn't easily be quantified and thus, they

suggested, they couldn't be measured or accounted for. Trying to broaden the definition of what counted as "accountability," I asked Travis Brooks, Youth Program supervisor, about something that I had heard he was planning to do.

Travis: I was talking about bringing in parents to do a board [panel] to ... make it easier for parents and staff to talk to each other, to find out good and bad experiences parents have had in communicating with staff, what they would prefer, what they would like, what they would see, some of the issues that they deal with at the end of the day.

Me: But that's still a kind of accountability, right?

Travis: Yeah, but how do you measure that? And I really don't want to get into that now, because that's a long conversation.

[I continued, saying I wanted to play "devil's advocate" and asked whether accountability had to be defined by the "management model" of measuring outcomes, or could be thought about in terms of people in personal relationships being accountable to each other. I questioned whether defining accountability in a narrow way as only that which could be measured left us without a way to talk about what matters in this organization. Several other staff members entered the conversation, and then Travis spoke again]

Travis: I don't think we spend a lot of time really caring [about different ways to think about accountability.] [lots of laughter from others, and murmurs of "we don't."] We don't look at it like that. I get the parents together so we can learn some things. But in my mind, I'm not thinking like you just explained it. So if I do it because of what you just said, that's cool. But that's not what I'm thinking about. I'm thinking, [I want to do it] so my staff has a perspective and understanding of how to relate to parents, what parents are looking for. And for the parents [to understand] what the staff are looking for. ... If what I'm doing is exactly what you say, cool. But I don't think of it like that; I don't necessarily look at it like that. So ... we just *do*. ... We just do what we do.

Me: So the United Way comes along and says you have to account for your program. Do you only have their way of accounting for it? Wouldn't it be valuable for us to be able to say, 'well, we actually are accountable for our work, but we do it in all these other ways?'

Travis: Yeah, it would make things a lot easier. If over a period of time, they look [at us] differently and it became more acceptable to them, cool. But for right now, this is how it is done. This is how they want it, so we just do it that way and move on. That's why you hear almost everybody say, after the United Way's done: 'we don't look

at the logic models until the next time they call for them' (transcript, June 15, 2006).

(3) (Re-)defining expectations

The GIAC staff also raised questions, concerns and confusions about what they were being asked to do.

- *Something that excites or frustrates me about all this:* Something that frustrates me is where does this all go from here? What is the ultimate goal of all this? (staff member, critical incident questionnaire, June 1, 2005).
- *Something that confuses me is:* How this will eventually relate 2 our monthly programming. (staff member, critical incident questionnaire, June 1, 2005).
- *The most confusing thing about today was:* Thinking about how to get all of this stuff done/get all of these questions answered within the amount of time I have available. (staff member, critical incident questionnaire, May 5, 2005).

But perhaps the central concern was captured by Jodie Herbert, a Pre-teen program staff member who could be counted on to speak aloud what many of his co-workers were thinking silently. Jodie hadn't been able to attend the first session, and, in the second, he pushed for an explanation of what we were doing. My initial responses were clearly inadequate; he continued to ask questions, and I again tried to respond, by now uncertain about just what the concern was. Finally, he said, with much frustration, "I keep waiting for you to tell me what information you want me to get and you keep handing me a blank sheet of paper." As the conversation went on, he continued:

Where does all this information go? ... Is one person responsible? Is it a committee? ... After all the information gets gathered, do we get back together and come up with a decision? ... And if we need the information, how would we go about getting it a year from now, or six months from now. ... Are we looking for a long, drawn-out process, or are we trying to make it as short and simple as possible? (transcript, May 18, 2005 staff session).

These kinds of questions – from Jodie and others – surfaced again in the third session as staff members tried to figure out what they were being asked to do and what the administration wanted from them. Thus, as Jodie noted:

I don't think we're looking for a supervisor to just say 'here,' but at least come up with a basic format for what you want us to do. And then we could give our inputs with the hunches that we have or how we think things are going, or how much do the caregivers are involved. So if you guys have the format, [if you] decide 'this is what we're going to do...' (transcript, June 1, 2005 staff session).

In response, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, GIAC's deputy director pointed to a theme she had raised in earlier conversations with me – the wish that staff members across the organization would take more ownership of their work within the larger mission of the organization overall. Speaking to Jodie, she said:

There are folks who, like you, are saying 'what do I do?' Partly what we're trying to promote is not just 'what do I do?' but more of the 'how do we all do it?' How do we, as a team, as a group, think about what ways we want to improve GIAC and improve the programs? ... In addition, I think the thing that got me last time, and I heard from some of you, is 'we're actually creating this!' This is not 'Leslyn, Marcia and Margo sat down and decided what the doing is.' [Rather] it is all of us creating what this thing we're trying to work on will look like. (transcript, June 1, 2005 staff session).

(4) Changing perspectives

Finally, many comments attested to the process of change over time. While, some staff members found this new approach helpful from the start, others found these early sessions extremely challenging:

- *The most interesting thing about today was:* The questions that were asked. It seemed as if every question had an underlying question behind it, which really made you think about your thinking. (critical incident questionnaire, May 5, 2005)
- *The most interesting thing about today was:* Getting at all the multiple layers, getting beneath the general question to ask why that question matters. (critical incident questionnaire, May 5, 2005)

- *Something that surprised me about today was:* I'm really already doing evaluations; its just [not] as organized as I would like (critical incident questionnaire, May 5, 2005)
- *The most confusing thing about today was:* All of the different info discussed (critical incident questionnaire, May 5, 2005).
- *The most confusing thing about today was:* Continuing to work out the questions from the discussion. I lost focus and did not know when anything would stop. Is the cycle one of just asking questions ... when do we stop asking "why?" (critical incident questionnaire, May 5, 2005)
- *The most confusing thing about today was:* Looking at different aspects of evaluation (supervisory staff member; critical incident questionnaire, May 5, 2005).
- *Something that excites or frustrates me about all this is:* Something that frustrates me is that I'm not fully understanding the process. (critical incident questionnaire, June 1, 2005).

However, by the third session, comments like the following became more common:

- *The most interesting thing about today was:* getting a different view on this process. *Something that surprised me today was:* How this process is going to fit into GIAC. How many ways [there are] to step back and look at what is really going on w/program ... Now I have a better view on this process and how this will help me look at what I am really doing here (program staff member, critical incident questionnaire, June 1, 2005).
- *The most interesting thing about today was:* Writing out my question. I want to work on thinking it through.
- *The most interesting thing about today was:* actually putting things into action and thinking about what we REALLY want from our program (critical incident questionnaire, June 1, 2005).
- *Something that excites or frustrates me about all this is:* That I can do my evaluations with more interest so that when I work on my logic models for United Way I am so much more interested in the info I put down, so that I feel I'm not putting down just what they want to hear. *The most interesting thing about today was:* I got a chance to put down on paper some ideas for program improvement without having to wait for United Way to question programming. I question it for myself and can give U. Way a better insight to my logic model. *Something that surprised me today was:* that I can get excited about making more questions and answering for myself about things in my program (program staff member, critical incident questionnaire, June 1, 2005).

- *The most interesting thing about today was:* GIAC is looking at a model of employee participation (non-supervisory) in program management (supervisory staff member, critical incident questionnaire, June 1, 2005).
- *Something that confuses me is:* The cobwebs are clearing (program staff member, critical incident questionnaire, June 1, 2005).

By the fourth session, an even larger number of staff members were reporting a growing sense of understanding and comfort.

- *Something that excites me is that:* the staff seems more interested and willing to see how evaluating will be beneficial. ... *Something that surprised me today was:* everyone is so much more interested in evaluating and improving our programs. *Something that confuses me is:* we have so many questions. *Other comments:* These workshops have certainly improved and have been consistent and it has made me more aware of things that need to be done in our program. (staff member, critical incident questionnaire, June 22, 2005)
- *Something that surprised me today was:* I did it. (staff member, critical incident questionnaire, June 22, 2005)
- *Something that surprised me today was:* how easy it was (staff member, critical incident questionnaire, June 22, 2005)
- *Something that excites or frustrates me is:* Helps me to look at my program from a different perspective. Gives me more ideas. A chance to get info from people not working in my program. *Something that confuses me is:* there are so many questions I want answered. *Other comments:* A good time to get us going on gathering information for the fall. We will have a chance to put in place so we can begin implementation in late summer and early fall. (staff member, critical incident questionnaire, June 22, 2005)
- *Something that excites or frustrates me is:* seeing the staff transition from resistance to participating in this process to being more open, understanding, participatory and willing to try. It is also exciting to see them be themselves and introduce fun and laughter to the process and training as opposed to their initial uptightness. *The most interesting thing was:* realizing the difficulty of focusing and writing a single project question. (staff member, critical incident questionnaire, June 22, 2005)
- *Something that excites or frustrates me is:* excites me to learn new things, but it's also frustrating. *Something that surprised me*

was: that I understood it! (staff member, critical incident questionnaire, June 22, 2005)

* * * * *

Marcia had hoped to have the staff embark on the pilot evaluation projects that summer, following immediately upon this series of workshops. However the intensive summer camp schedules – which required most of the staff to be engaged directly in programming from 9 am to 5 pm – made tackling a demanding new task difficult. So part-way through the summer, Marcia revised the plan, proposing that the staff resume this work in the fall.

In August 2005, over a breakfast of omelets and hash brown potatoes at a local restaurant, Marcia, Leslyn and I met to talk about how to focus the upcoming staff sessions. I presented them with Macmurray’s ideas about personal vs. functional relations, along with an early version of the two contesting frameworks. I was curious to see whether it would resonate as strongly with them as it had with me. Marcia listened intently to my explanation, then responded: “That shone a light on what I’ve been thinking and feeling without really understanding why we have such a hard time communicating what we do to other people... It’s validating.” GIAC, she said, was regularly judged by a “standard that we don’t fit into,” a complaint I would hear again in the months to come. It’s “not that we’re doing it wrong and they’re right; it’s a different approach,” she said, but “until the revolution occurs,” the staff need to learn to be “multilingual,” moving more easily between “how we talk when no one’s around” and what GIAC’s funders wanted to hear.

The staff sessions that we were planning at that breakfast never took place. Hurricane Katrina arrived in September, and with it, a raw portrayal of the depths of racism and classism in U.S. society that emotionally flooded the lives of many far from the Gulf Coast and engaged the GIAC community in practical attempts to help. In October, Diann Sams – one of GIAC’s “founding mothers” and Board member

for thirty years, an honored civil rights activist, political leader, and revered “community othermother” – died suddenly from complications of the rheumatoid arthritis she had fought for decades. Emotionally drained by these events, the GIAC staff focused their efforts on the most pressing demands: keeping their program running, organizing community-wide discussions about a rise in gang activity, helping facilitate dialogues at the high school in response to continued race-related violence, organizing to help those displaced by the hurricane and lack of government response. My time became consumed by the demands of developing and teaching an intensive new seminar for Cornell freshmen and beginning to write this dissertation. One thing followed by another – family illnesses, maternity leaves and related staff shortages along with the never-ending call of community crises for the GIAC staff; the time- and attention-consuming demands of dissertation-writing and teaching an intensive, new university course for me. Fall turned to winter and then to spring before we gathered again as a group to talk about this work.

In an ideal world, we would have had the time to follow these pilot evaluation projects through to completion. But action research takes place in the real world, not an idealized one. In any event, development and change – whether of individuals or organizations – is a long-term process. Dissertation research, by design, is a short-term project, and dissertation writers must complete their manuscript while organizational processes – like life – continue. But however preliminary the work covered here, it captures some of the complexities of an organization-wide, collective, critically reflective development process that have not been given sufficient attention in the literature. In particular, I suggest that these sessions – and the GIAC staff’s response to them – help illuminate the messy, difficult, non-linear, real-world struggles to not only hold onto, but integrate two (or more) contesting frameworks, and to do so not just intellectually, but practically, within social

environments shaped by historical and institutionalized relations of power. In the remainder of this chapter, I turn to some of these lessons.

Challenges and Lessons for Practice

The challenges of “multilingualism”

Marcia’s observation that “until the revolution occurs,” her staff need to learn to be “multilingual” points to one of the central dilemmas in this work. But questions about what constitutes multilingualism and how it is to be achieved are not so simply answered. Often in the academic literature, contesting narratives are discussed in terms of the imposition of a hegemonic discourse and people’s compliance with or resistance to that hegemonic discourse. However, this work suggests that it is not so simple. In fact, both the “professional public management” and “personal relations” frames contested for attention not just in interactions *between* GIAC and its funders, nor just *between* individuals within the organization, but also *within* most people’s minds.

As they went about their work, the GIAC staff drew from the logics of the different frameworks in different situations. In informal, everyday conversation, the logic and language of the “personal relations” frame dominated; people talked about “family,” community and relationships. They described GIAC as a “refuge” and an “umbrella for life,” and they talked about their work as “voicing injustice” and “advocating for people’s needs.” And in everyday work, the staff frequently practiced the logic of this frame. They maintained their open-door-without-appointments policy. They were part of the community they served, meeting people as often on the grocery line as in their offices. They knew the people who participated in their programs as friends and neighbors, and they did what they could to help people flourish.

On the other hand, as soon as we began to talk about accountability or program evaluation, the logic and language of the “professional public management” frame took hold. The Teen staff, for example, described their work as “providing social, educational and cultural programs” and accounted for the rest of their activities as “things just come up.” Others defined accountability and evaluation as something to be done for others, and predominantly equated these processes with “measurement” (usually conceived of in quantitative terms). And when the staff as a whole came to these sessions, described as being about “accountability,” “evaluation,” and “program improvement,” they come with the logic of the “professional public management” frame in mind.

The inquiry process we used, however, asked the GIAC staff to do something new. In effect, it asked them to begin to think and talk about accountability, evaluation, and improvement according to the “personal relations” norms and values that shaped their own understanding of their work. The epistemological challenges posed by such a request must not be underestimated. It certainly required learning new technical skills (e.g., how to do formulate questions that can be answered, how to gather information, etc.). And it required questioning assumptions and beliefs about what constituted accountability and evaluation, as well as taken-for-granted assumptions about their own work. But it also required substantial cognitive shifts and made significant political/structural demands.⁴

The staff’s responses to these sessions point to both interest and challenge. On the one hand, they valued the chance to talk with each other about what mattered to them in their work. For many, a dialogic, conversation-based approach was “a better

⁴ Robert Kegan’s work on adult development (1994) provides an useful developmental perspective on the immense cognitive demands of asking people to shift meaning-making structures in this way. He warns those involved in educational and organizational change efforts against underestimating both the intellectual and emotional magnitude of this task.

way to learn.” Through the process, they learned – with wide-spread surprise – that their co-workers, too, cared about doing good work and had good ideas about how to make things go better. They were excited by “the amount of info and ideas I get from the other staff” and interested in “the great ideas I never knew the staff had.” A few realized from the start that, as one staff member noted, they were “already doing evaluation,” even if it was not “as organized as [some] might like.” The staff as a whole held an insightful evaluative conversation almost immediately. Over the course of the four sessions, they all developed interesting evaluative questions that, if pursued, would likely have generated new insights about how they might improve their programs. And they gained confidence in themselves and each others as knowers and thinkers. “Something that surprised me,” several staff members reported at the end of the fourth sessions, was “I did it,” “I understood it,” “how easy it was.”

On the other hand, many of the staff questioned what this process had to do with demands for “accountability” or “program evaluation.” They wondered why we weren’t focusing on “measurement” and why they were being asked questions, rather than told what answers were wanted. “Where does this all go from here?” and “how will this eventually relate 2 our monthly programming,” they asked. And a year later, some still continued to insist that “accountability” equals “measurement.” As Travis said, “we don’t look [at accountability] like that. I get the parents together [with my staff] so we can learn some things. But in my mind, I’m not thinking like you just explained it. ... If what I’m doing is exactly what you say, cool. But I don’t think of it like that. ... We just do what we do.”

The challenges of the “blank piece of paper”

Jodie’s observation – “I keep waiting for you to tell me what information you want me to get and you keep handing me a blank sheet of paper” – points to a second dilemma in this work. When the staff arrived at these sessions, they were prepared to be “trained” to do what their funders and supervisors demanded, or, in Jodie’s rendition, to be told what information they were to collect and how they were to collect it. Such expectations were well-founded. The logic of the “professional public management” framework – with its Tayloristic notions of scientifically derived expertise and the “one best way” – underlies not only most work places, but the entire public education system. It also dominates most instrumentally oriented approaches to staff “training” and “human resource development.”

An inquiry process is based on a different logic. It validates the staff’s tacit knowledge, as well as their capacities to be “knowers,” and it makes knowledge creation a democratic, collective, dialogic process. As the spontaneous conversation in the early May session showed, the staff certainly were already skilled at asking evaluative questions and beginning to hypothesize answers. But consciously seeing these questions as *relevant* to “accountability” and “program improvement” was another matter. Within the framework defining these activities, they were to be “trained” by “experts” in “technical” processes. To the extent that I didn’t do so, many were confused.⁵ Unfortunately, the literature on critical reflection in the workplace, even when it addresses issues of power, context, conflicts of interests,

⁵ In the context of his developmental research on adults’ meaning-making structures, Kegan (1994) also notes the disconnect between “new workplace demands” (e.g., for people to be self-authorizing, self-initiating, and self evaluating) and the cognitive, meaning-making structures that most adults operate within. Meeting these demands, he argues, requires not just new knowledge or skills, but fundamental epistemological shifts in how people make meaning.

and so on, rarely considers the epistemological, psychological and political shifts in how people see their roles as workers that such a process demands.

The challenges of power relations

Finally, the political context in which this work took place cannot be ignored. After all, the demand that the GIAC staff consider integrating notions of “accountability” and “evaluation” with their own conceptions of the meaning of their work can not be separated from their awareness of their funders’ definitions of “accountability” and “evaluation.” This was particularly true for the program supervisors who were the people responsible for preparing GIAC’s logic models for submission to the United Way. They were also the people who had been criticized in previous years for models that were “deficient”; and they faced the additional frustration that the criteria by which that deficiency was defined seemed to change from year to year.

Further, the GIAC staff’s responses can not be adequately understood without understanding them, even if only in part, as a stance against an entrenched history of racism and classism that invalidates people of color and poor people and denigrates their knowledge and experience. Finally, these power relations affected this project in an additional way. This kind of work requires significant human and material resources, in addition to facilitating organizational structures, to sustain them (Maguire 1993). These resources are not evenly distributed. All community-service organizations struggle for material resources. For those organizations led by and for people of color and the poor, the struggle is multiplied many times over. In addition, non-material resources, like the time to devote to these kinds of “learning” efforts, are also unevenly available. Racism and classism wreck havoc on people’s lives, presenting numerous challenges and crises that others do not

need to handle. To give but one example, my final session with the GIAC staff in June 2006 was postponed for several weeks because the building was falling down – literally – after decades of neglect by the city. After a large concrete block from the façade suddenly fell two stories outside an entrance one Sunday night, the GIAC staff had not only programs to run, but programs to relocate. Because they are a state-certified child care facility, this meant complex negotiations with state bureaucrats to obtain new approvals on a shortened time-frame, arrangements for the physical work of restoring the building to code, numerous new approvals to obtain to reoccupy the building, and so on. Engaging in a critical inquiry process was far from their minds.

The intellectual work on which critically reflective approaches to learning and change rest – e.g., the work of uncovering underlying assumptions, beliefs and values and linking those to analyses of structural power relations – can not be examined separately from the social context (and its structural power relations) – in which it takes place. As Joanne Martin (1992) eloquently warns, there are great

dangers of overestimating the importance of such intellectual work and underestimating the impact of material realities, such as the unequal distribution of power and money ... Change recommendations ... [that] assume that society can be changed by changing the perceptions of individuals [tend to be] naïve (161-2).

“Braiding the strands”: the challenge of exploring multi-level change

Creating critically reflective inquiry processes in such an environment is much like swimming upstream. Given the magnitude of all these kinds of challenges, the interest, enthusiasm and understanding that grew over an extremely short period of time provides encouraging evidence of the possibilities for extending critically reflective approaches to accountability, evaluation and program improvement across an entire organization. During this short time, the GIAC staff moved from tacit to

articulated knowing. They valued the creation of social spaces that allowed these kinds of conversations to occur. They began to see themselves and their co-workers as a source of knowledge and expertise, and they moved toward a new conception of accountability and program improvement that was centered on their own interests and goals. People noted that they found it “interesting” and “exciting” to “think through my questions,” to “think about what we REALLY want from our program,” “to see [the staff] be themselves and introduce fun and laughter to the process ... as opposed to their initial uptightness ,” and “to put down on paper some ideas for program improvement without having to wait for the United Way to question programming; I question it for myself ... and I can get excited about making more questions and answering for myself about things in my program.” Finally, they began to put into action learning processes so as to enable them to improve their work. Travis’s panel of parents – whether or not he defined it as a form of “accountability” or “evaluation” – created a way for his staff to learn about the impact and effectiveness of their efforts, and to explore – together with parents – how to do it better.

They did all this in the face of challenges that were, at once, practical, epistemological, *and* structural. The GIAC staff needed to produce new outcome models, a decidedly practical task. They were being asked to change the ways they thought about themselves as community-service workers, becoming “knowers” and “thinkers,” rather than the mere executors of expert-developed procedures. They were also being asked to bring together functionally discrete meaning-making schemes, reconceptualizing how they thought about notions of “accountability” and “evaluation.” These were processes of individual empowerment and transformation. And they were working in a system structured by power relations – both in terms of having to respond to demands from those who controlled a significant portion of the

agency's funding, and in terms of surviving within systems of entrenched racism and classism. Within these systems, they needed – daily – to consider questions about what to challenge, when and how, and when to simply save their time and attention for attending to their own priorities.

These different emphases – instrumental skill-building and the practical desire to “get things done,” individual empowerment and transformation, and reshaping systems and redistributing power – typically appear in the literature as discrete “strands” in adult education.⁶ Self-proclaimed “transformative” or “emancipatory” educators disdain the instrumental and practical. On the other hand, those concerned with “getting things done” see attention to “empowerment” or “transformation” as distracting from the “real work” at hand. And many educators in both camps argue for the “neutrality” of their practice, arguing that attempts to reshape social systems are inappropriate to an educational endeavor.

But as I have shown in this chapter, each of these “strands” was essential to the learning that took place. Further, they intersected in dynamic and complex ways. Thus, I point to one more challenge in this work, a challenge not for community-service staff, but for those who study and assist individual and organizational learning and change processes. This is the challenge of weaving these “three strands” into a braid. In a braid, each strand remains recognizably distinct, but each also has a new, different meaning when constituted as part of a stronger, integrated whole. A braid *requires* that each strand – instrumental skill-building, individual empowerment, and the reshaping of social systems – be considered a *necessary* part of the whole. This work hints at the way in which a project can begin with practical,

⁶ Arthur Wilson and Ronald Cervero (2001) refer to these “three strands” in the adult education literature in the context of exploring the differing ways each “strand” conceives of and acknowledges its relation to the “political” in adult education practice.

pressing demands and use the learning that results to open up avenues that point toward individual transformation and contribute to the reshaping of social systems.

Sketching the image of a braid is not the same, however, as learning how to braid. As anyone who has mastered the art of producing a neat plait knows, it can only be learned through practice. Success comes only after many partial attempts, with uneven, bumpy strands, lost patterns, fly-away locks, and so on. So, too, with my call to braid the strands of organizational and staff learning and change. It is only through actual practice – through practical attempts to do this work, combined with critically reflective analysis of that work – that we can learn how to create spaces for learning that take into account challenges that are, at once, epistemological, organizational and structural, that can recognize both the changes that need to occur within people’s own minds and the changes that need to occur in social systems and that sees those spheres and changes as dynamically interconnected.

In attempting to braid these strands, I echo Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart’s (2000) call for a “reflexive-dialectical” stance toward research on practice. Such a perspective acknowledges that practice is not only realized in the behavior and actions of practitioners, nor is it merely socially and historically constructed. Rather, it recognizes that practice is also “partly preformed” by the history of the larger social setting in which the work occurs and the social relationships that exist within it. From such a perspective, Kemmis and McTaggart propose,

the purpose of research into practice is to change practice, practitioner and practice setting (or, we might say, the work, the worker, and the workplace)—because changing practices requires changing not only behavior or intentional action (including the way the practitioner understands the practice and the practice setting) but also the situation in which the practice is conducted. (2000: 585).

In this chapter, I have focused on efforts to change “practice” and “practitioners” while acknowledge the context of their “practice setting.” In Chapter 7, I turn to questions of changing the larger social context – the “practice setting” – in which GIAC’s work is carried out. In that chapter, more prescriptive in tone, I call for a “personal relations” perspective to be taken seriously. In doing so, I insist that it is not only the GIAC staff who need to become multilingual. Rather, I propose that a wider multilingualism is needed in the broader community-service system and in our society as a whole. In making this proposal, I argue that this change in “practice setting” is needed (a) for the development of a community-service system that truly respects and promotes diversity, inclusion and multiculturalism, (b) in order to create processes for accountability and evaluation that can enable people to learn about their work in the course of learning about what truly matters, and (c) because it offers new possibilities for solving some of the crises of meaning in our community-service system, and in the larger society as a whole.

CHAPTER 7

MULTI-LINGUALISM EXTENDED: TAKING PERSONAL RELATIONS SERIOUSLY

The tension to which I alluded in the Introduction – between a search for greater human meaning in public life and the long-standing Western love affair with a technical, highly rational world view – is not new. Nearly one hundred years ago, John Collier, then president of the National Community Center Association, warned his colleagues that

Human beings are not to be dealt with as if they were passive material, like iron ore or cotton thread, which can be taken and put in a machine and hammered or woven and put through specialized processes and turned out at the end a finished product. Unconsciously, we have modeled our governmental efficiency on the efficiency which has characterized the nineteenth century, which is the efficient production of wealth, of goods; and of course goods have no memories, no hopes, no rights, no soul (Clarke 1918: 14).

Unfortunately, the commodification of the public sphere that Collier decried has continued – and indeed, accelerated – throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.¹ And the expert-driven, technical-rational logic and production-based efficiency that he warned against continues to shape expectations not only for the public services, but for the nonprofit sector as well. Thus far, I have focused primarily on the consequences of these dominant expectations for one particular community center, an agency that operates from the logic of a very different conceptual frame. I have explored how the largely unarticulated tension between these two fundamentally different frameworks for community-based work – what I have called the “professional public management” and “personal relations” frames – hindered efforts

¹ Ironically, while the U.S. economic-political systems have increasingly cast people as commodities, they continue to strengthen the legal status of corporations as “persons.” For an interesting take on the conflation of these realms, see the thought-provoking Canadian documentary, “The Corporation,” which plays off the legal notion of corporation as “person” and suggests that based on psychiatric criteria, many of our modern days corporations closely match the profile of the “sociopath.”

to better account for and improve the GIAC staff's work. And I have explored the challenges and possibilities that the staff faced as they attempted to not only reflect on, but collectively respond to, these contesting perspectives on their work within social environments shaped by institutionalized relations of power.

In this chapter, I take a more prescriptive stance. I suggest that it is not enough for the GIAC staff to become multilingual, as GIAC director Marcia Fort suggested they must. Rather, I argue that this multilingualism must extend to our community-service systems and, indeed, to our society, as a whole. Toward that end, I argue that we would do well to take a "personal relations" frame seriously, and I examine three particular implications of doing so. First, following Elsa Barkley Brown's call to "pivot the center," I argue that taking a "personal relations" perspective seriously is needed to understand GIAC and agencies like it on their own terms. Refusing to do so merely applies dominant frameworks to GIAC's work and finds it "lacking." In the process, it reproduces entrenched racism and classism and stymies well-intentioned efforts at "diversity" and "inclusion." Second, I argue that a mandate to account for, evaluate and seek to improve public activities is not incompatible with fostering human flourishing and solidarity. But it requires different approaches that can enable people to learn about their work in the course of learning about what matters. Third, I suggest that taking a "personal relations" perspective seriously can help solve the crisis of meaning in our community-service sector (and in our society) overall. It can help us build a community-service system (and thus, a society) based on solidarity and inclusiveness, fostering the conditions for human flourishing for all.

Let me be clear: in proposing that a "personal relations" perspective be taken more seriously, I am *not* suggesting that we marginalize or discard the "professional public management" frame. As I noted earlier, while contrasting the "professional public management" frame with the "personal relations" frame helps to clarify their differing

logics, these are not discrete descriptions of the world. Nor, as I have shown, are they even discrete social constructions through which people comprehend and act on the world. As I have been emphasizing throughout, all frames are partial, organizing our attention to some aspects of reality and away from others. But seeing that frames are partial, and in particular, seeing what is bounded out of particular frames, is difficult.

Taking marginalized frameworks seriously can help us consider the shape and boundaries of these taken-for-granted, hegemonic frames. It can help provide the intellectual constructs and language to have conversations about the assumptions, values and logics that shape and are shaped by these frames. This “counterstorytelling, can as Richard Delgado (2000) points out, “subvert [dominant] patterns of perception” (62), destroying prevailing mindsets, shattering complacency, challenging the status quo, and showing that “what we believe is ridiculous, self-serving or cruel” (36-7). In doing so, it can re-orient attention, creating opportunities to re-imagine alternatives, learn from those already living those alternatives and point to new solutions to old problems.

In making these arguments, I extend the notion of multilingualism, for I believe that it is not enough for people to be able to move fluently *between* these differing meaning-making logics applying them alternately in different situations or at different times. Rather, I believe these differing logics ultimately need to be held in a dynamic and dialectical tension that enables people to attend to notions of “efficiency,” “effectiveness” and “service” while *also* attending to the building of personal relationships centered around public care-taking, nurturance, solidarity and human flourishing. At present, however, the “personal relations” frame has been virtually eclipsed by the hegemonic “professional public management” conception. It has been ignored, devalued, and explicitly derided. It is to correct this imbalance that I focus on it so intently here.

Pivoting the center: understanding GIAC on its own terms

This action research project began in response to external demands from funders for “better” outcome measurement models and internal desires for improved programming. The sweeping promises of outcome measurement advocates – both academics and practitioners – led Marcia and I to believe that these models could be used not only as a required tool to satisfy funders, but to help the agency and its staff learn about and improve their own work. But as my work with the GIAC staff demonstrated, in spite of increasing competency with the outcome measurement models, they faced immense difficulties in adequately accounting for the work that mattered to them within the narrative logic of these models. The underlying logic of these “logic models” produces a highly rational, cause-effect story of planning and control, and of linear “progress” and change. The story is impersonal: people are reduced to “inputs” (or alternately, those who act upon those inputs) in controlled processes that subject one group of people (“clients,” “participants”) to specialized “programs” and “activities” and turn them out at the other end “new” and “improved.” The “ends” that can be found in those models – the outcomes – are, by definition, measurable changes in knowledge, skills or behaviors that can be posited as direct effects of those programs and activities.

There was no place in such a narrative for much of much of what the GIAC staff identified as central to who they are and what they do: raising each others’ children and being raised themselves; addressing injustice and advocating for those who are marginalized; offering a “refuge,” a “home away from home,” and a “place to be me”; and building communities based on personal relationships that support human flourishing and offer an “umbrella for life.” If these understandings of community work appeared in the logic models at all, and mostly they didn’t, they had to

positioned as “inputs” or “activities,” something that the staff offered or did as a means to another, more easily measured end.

This led to a disturbing quandary: although United Way was delighted with the GIAC staff’s improved technical prowess, the outcome measurement models told a profoundly limited, distorted, and distorting story of what the GIAC staff actually did and how they thought about what they did. Further, the work that mattered most to the GIAC staff, the ways they thought about that work and the logic that underlay their decisions and actions – in short, the “personal relations” perspective and knowledge woven throughout GIAC and the work of its staff – remained largely misunderstood, devalued and “invisible” to most outside the GIAC community.

But there was another impact, one I have only alluded to thus far. When those outside GIAC looked at the organization according to tenets and logic of the dominant frame, the GIAC staff were frequently seen as “unprofessional,” “inefficient” or “unwilling to collaborate.” They were criticized (both publicly and privately) for attending to the “wrong” (i.e., non-normative) things and behaving in the “wrong” ways. Requests for program “collaboration” from other agencies were often framed solely according to the logic of “professional public management,” and when the GIAC staff declined, often in an attempt to protect their participants from projects in which they would be “objectified,” they were accused of being “gatekeepers” and uncooperative. In short, *they* (and not the models or the underlying framework on which these programs and judgments were based) were found “deficient.”

In saying this, I am not suggesting intentional ill-will or malice. Rather, without critical consideration, people tend to look “through” rather than “at” dominant assumptions and frames, without questioning their “inherent” character or noticing that it is but one way to understand the world. Because of this, *any* dominant understanding appears to be “the way the world is,” and even, more subtly “the way

the world *should be*,” at least to those adhering to the dominant view. In this way, one construction of “reality” is privileged (as are those who adhere to this construction of “reality”). Other ways of understanding “reality” (and those who adhere to them) are marginalized or actively rejected.

Stephanie Wildman offers an example of how this seeming “neutral” privileging process occurs. Discussing conceptualizations of “work,” for example, she writes:

... although “workplace” is an apparently neutral term, descriptive of a place of work, it has a male tilt to it. The notion of “workplace” divides the earth into loci of work and nonwork, defining only what occurs in a workplace as work. This idea of workplace as a neutral ideal permeates our culture’s thinking and obscures the male point of view it embodies” (1996: 27).

Thus, women who care for their children and homes full-time are asked if they “work,” meaning, of course, whether they have paid employment outside the home and implying that raising children or creating a home is something other than “work.” There are many legal, economic, social and political implications arising from this conceptualization that privilege those who “work” in “workplaces” (more often, men). They are paid for their labor and receive a wealth of other social and economic benefits from paid vacation, health care, and retirement contributions to enhanced social status). And yet, as the feminist retort, “Every Mother is a Working Mother,” suggests, there are other ways to conceptualize “work” that would lead to different understandings and different legal, economic, and social policies.

Similarly, community-service “work” is broadly defined as expertly planned, professionally delivered programs and activities. This “ideal” permeates the dominant culture’s thinking and obscures the historical, social and political roots of this framing of reality. Thus, as in the early sessions with the GIAC Teen staff, providing “social, educational and recreational activities” becomes defined as “work.” The myriad aspects of raising up children and communities are “things [that] just come up.”

The powerful position accorded the “professional public management” frame in Western societies is reinforced by its supposed value-neutral, objective, scientific stance. In other words, not only is it deemed “reality,” it is deemed a “*fair*” reality. Thus, not only does this framework shape what counts as “well-managed,” “professional” “work,” it is positioned as normative, and everyone and everything is categorized and judged in relation to its tenets, without those judging even being aware of its *subjective* logic, assumptions, or biases. The seeming “rightness” of such judgments is reinforced by an often unconscious and unintentional, but still ever-present and entrenched racism, classism and sexism that leads the dominant judges to assume these “others” are less intelligent, less competent, less experienced and so on. The knowledge these others hold is overlooked or demeaned; their frameworks – and they, themselves – are trivialized, devalued or ignored. Such judgments are then used to guide the allocation of material resources, and the cycles of institutionalized exclusion are continued.

I need to note here: at the beginning of the twenty-first century, there is a tendency to define “racism,” “classism,” “sexism,” and other “isms” as blatant discrimination or prejudice, that is, as hostile treatment or intentional wrongdoing. There is a dominant belief that racism, defined in this way, has been largely alleviated and is rapidly being replaced by a “color-blind” society (Brown et. al. 2003, also Wildman 1996)). What discrimination remains is seen as an *individualized* behavior. Further, there is a strong attachment to the notion that “fairness” and “equality” derives from treating everyone the same. Based on such understandings, charges of “racism” or “classism” often lead to defensiveness from those in dominant groups who insist on the “fairness” (i.e., the “sameness”) of their expectations and judgements. Less well-understood, however, are the ways that the institutionalized power dynamics of social systems privilege some over others by defining what and who is to be valued and rewarded. Little attention is

paid to the subjective logics guiding the determination of what that “same” (i.e., “fair”) behavior is to be. Even the very language used – in this case, the language used to describe, account for and evaluate “community-service work” – “masks these systems of privilege ... [and] perpetuates the systemic nature of disadvantage (Wildman 1996: 25).

I want to emphasize once again: the framework I am proposing here is not exclusive to particular groups of people. Rather, it is a particular way of conceptualizing the purpose of public relationships and public activities that leads to a different understanding of community-service work and the kinds of organizations that should carry it out. And yet, we can not overlook the fact that it is in organizations led by people of color and women that this contesting frame has most successfully and consistently survived and is mostly fully expressed. And thus, it is organizations led by people of color and women that are most often disadvantaged, misunderstood and deemed “unprofessional” or otherwise “deficient.”

To change these institutionalized systems of privilege and disadvantaging, larger numbers of people in dominant groups must come to see and understand GIAC’s work (and that of similar organizations) as arising from a different framework with a different logic. This requires, as Elsa Barkley Brown proposed, that those who are Western, white, and economically privileged “pivot the center.” Such an act challenges the notion of “neutral” ideals. But as Brown observes, it is not merely an exercise in which people attempt “analyze in particular ways” or “intellectualize about a variety of experiences.” Rather,

It is also about coming to believe in the possibility of a variety of experiences, a variety of ways of understanding the world, a variety of frameworks of operation, *without imposing consciously or unconsciously a notion of the norm.* ... [O]ne has no need to “decenter” anyone in order to center someone else; one has only to constantly, appropriately, “pivot the center.” (1989: 921, emphasis added).

To demonstrate what believing in varied experiences of world might mean, Brown turns to the craft of quilting, highlighting the different aesthetic sensibilities of Euro-American quilt-makers, who value uniformity and regularity, and African-American and Euro-American quilt-makers, whose handiwork is distinguished by asymmetry and diversity. Although Brown's observations are directed toward teaching and writing, they are relevant to this consideration; thus, I quote them at some length. She observes:

A people's cultural aesthetic is not different from their economic or political aesthetic; it is just visible to us in different form. Elements of material culture, such as quilting, are in fact illustrative of a particular way of seeing, of ordering the world. ... *This should be important not merely to the analytical frameworks we imagine but to the structures we create as well.* ... [If this history] is based upon nonlinear, polyrhythmic, and what white Western traditions term 'nonsymmetrical' notions of the world in which individual and community are not competing identities, then one cannot adequately teach [or write about] this history employing the pedagogical assumptions that come out of linear, Western, symmetrical notions of the world. Such assumptions emphasize objectivity, equate fairness with uniformity and sameness, and thus create and bolster individualistic competitive enterprise.

... the essential lessons of the quilt: that people and actions do move in multiple directions at once. If we analyze those people and actions by linear models, we will create dichotomies, ambiguities, cognitive dissonance, disorientation, and confusion in places where none exist." (p. 926, 929, emphasis added).

Applying Brown's observations to this discussion, I return to the dominant analytical frameworks and structures shaping how we understand (and account for, evaluate and improve) community-service work. As I have been arguing, the standards of "professional public management" and its primary accountability tool, outcome measurement, are based on white, Western, male traditions of technical-rationality where linear, cause-effect relationships, technical control and a rigid individualism are prized. In the name of "objectivity" and "fairness," this framework is to be applied "equally" to all organizations. As Wildman observes, its place as a "neutral ideal

permeates our ... thinking and obscures the [particular] point of view it embodies.” When we pivot the center and assume a “personal relations” logic, we find a different way of “seeing [and] of ordering the world” that emphasizes diversity, solidarity, the interconnectedness of individuals and community, that breaks down strict divisions between “public” and “private,” and that promotes non-linear conceptions of human being and becoming.

But, as Brown admonishes, pivoting the center means more than merely a liberal “acceptance” or “tolerance” of alternate perspectives. Rather, it means *valuing* those perspectives when it comes to allocating resources, credibility and respect. It means remembering that alternative frameworks are more likely to be given voice and credence by those who are most marginalized in our current political/economic systems. It also means more extensively learning with and from those in these organizations about their work and how they understand it, and it means recognizing the ways in which frameworks could contribute to the strength, viability and integrity of our community services system as a whole. As we have seen in this study, not doing so re-produces existing systems of selective advantage and disadvantage, perpetuating long-standing inequalities.

Pivoting the center has other implications as well. It also means creating new processes and standards for accounting for and learning about this work, processes and standards that take seriously the logic of “personal relations.” For as the GIAC staff found, notions of “family,” “homes away from home,” and “umbrellas for life” do not easily mesh with the dominant logic of “service provision” and the outcome-driven, auditing orientation of “public accountability.” The result, as Marcia and her staff complained, was that GIAC was “regularly judged by a standard we don’t fit.” But it was not only that essential components of this work remained unaccounted for and misunderstood by outsiders. They remained outside internal discussions about

program improvement as well. As a result, the GIAC staff's ability to learn about this work and to think about how they might improve it became relegated to individualized observation or informal conversation. Like so many agencies, they did what they could to put a set of activities and "outcomes" that resembled part of what they did into boxes, submitted them to their funders, and filed the models away. But when it came to examining *how* they approached their work, to examining the building of "personal relations" so as to create "a place to be me" they concluded, as Travis so well articulated, that "we just do what we do." Without a systematic way to account for and evaluate – and thus, learn about and improve – the work that really matters, the GIAC staff were left in the untenable position of filling in the outcome measurement models as best they can to satisfy funders, and then returning to their real work, to just "doing what we do."

Mary Belenky and her colleagues have written extensively about the implications for "traditions" or frameworks that have been cast aside in this way, unseen and, often, "unnamed." As they have warned:

Without a common language the tradition will not become part of a well-established, ongoing dialogue in the larger society.. Institutional supports to develop and refine the tradition's philosophy and practices will not be developed. Leaders' efforts to pass the tradition on to the next generation will be poorly supported. Existing educational institutions will not hire faculty who are experts in the tradition; appropriate curriculum and apprenticeships will not be developed. This situation is increasingly problematic as more and more of society's caring work is being carried out by professionals who receive all of their professional training within the formal educational system. (1997: 293).

Understanding GIAC on its own terms, then, requires processes that can help people account for, evaluate and improve that which matters. In imagining these processes, we would do well to recognize the "essential lessons" of Brown's quilts: "that people and actions do move in multiple directions at once." As she further observes, if we try to analyze those people and actions by linear models, we create

“dichotomies, ambiguities, cognitive dissonance, disorientation, and confusion in places where none exist” (Brown 1989: 929). These “lessons of the [African-American] quilt,” then, lead me to ask: what might a “non-linear, poly-rhythmic ... nonsymmetrical” approach to accountability and evaluation look like? I turn to this question in the next section.

Accountability and evaluation as opportunities to learn about what matters

Challenging the practice of judging GIAC and organizations like it by the wrong standards does not mean judging by no standards at all. Program planning and the responsible stewardship of public resources matter. Responsiveness and improvement matter. If we are to avoid a sentimental “anything goes” mentality, people need processes that enable them to account for, enhance and learn about and from their work. But if we are to avoid homogenizing that work into a narrow definition of value, people need processes that enable them to account for, learn about and enhance a wider range of what matters. And if we are to retain the notion that human beings differ in fundamental ways from “passive material like iron ore or cotton thread,” then they need processes that maintain, account for, enhance and learn about that which is essentially human.

This problem of adequately accounting for and improving the “human” side of community work is not limited to the GIAC staff, or even just to organizations like them (although organizations that centralize a personal-relations logic are particularly disadvantaged). Rather, it is endemic to the community-service system as a whole. Nearly every agency administrator, for example, openly complains about the “games” they must play to fit their work into the narrow outcome measurement models and language of economic efficiency required by their funders; they “reformulate” their work to fit into the model’s narrowly defined boxes and then file them away, not to be

looked at again until the next year's reports or funding applications are due. Funders, too, worry that something of importance – something related to what makes the work “good” – is being lost in the models. As I noted in Chapter 4, some United Way volunteers and staff that Lehn Benjamin (2004) interviewed were also ambivalent about the outcome measurement models, partially using and partially ignoring them in making funding decisions.

It is small wonder, then, that in spite of promises from outcome measurement proponents that these models will help programs improve and learn, scholars and practitioners alike find that accountability, performance improvement and organizational learning are often at odds with each other (Behn 2001, Ebrahim 2003, 2005). As Alnoor Ebrahim writes:

It appears, at least in theory, that outcome measurement is a means of linking evaluation to learning. Evidence from practice, however, reveals a much more ambiguous relationship (Ebrahim 2003: 2).

Through studies of Third World NGOS (non-governmental organizations) and Western funders, Ebrahim documents the ways that systems of “reporting, monitoring and learning play especially central roles in shaping not only what NGOs do but, more importantly, how they think about what they do” (2005:1). He finds that the dominant systems (particularly the use of an outcome measurement orientation) encourages a focus on short-term results rather than long-term change, promotes the need to exaggerate “success” (and “quick success” at that) while ignoring failure, and chills learning and innovation. He observes:

While funders have enhanced learning by introducing NGOs to new ideas and technologies, they have simultaneously impeded learning by insisting on reporting and monitoring systems designed to meet their own information needs for demonstrating short-term success. ... The resulting emphasis on short-term and easily measuring activities occurs at the expense of longer-term and less certain processes of social and political change (2005: 1, 4).

This “accountability myopia,” Ebrahim argues, precludes both real accountability and organizational learning.

The fact that relational processes and long-term change are harder to “measure” does not justify arguments that we should abandon attempts to try. For what use are measurements if they measure the wrong thing? What use are “accountings” if they don’t account for so much that is valued?

Once again, I suggest that taking a “personal relations” frame seriously can help. Personal relationships, after all, are not without accountability. At least not those relationships that work well over time. Consider well-functioning personal relationships in the private sphere. In these cases, people operate from a different notion of “accountability” than the contractual, unidirectional, highly rational orientation that characterizes accountability in the public sector. Recognizing that the *relationship* matters, people typically turn to processes that are dialogic, reciprocal and evolving. They involve all participants in the relationship in the discussion. And, as relationship counselors advise, they do not “audit” past practice, assign blame or target “deficiencies,” but rather attempt to *learn* about themselves and each other, *centralize* questions of value and values, and *inquire* into how to make things go better in the future.

Addressing the contractual constraints of traditional notions of “accountability,” Michael Fielding argues that we need a new language to move beyond the limitations of Western rationalist thought and the modes of organizing arising from them. He proposes, instead, the notion of “*reciprocal responsibility*,” arguing:

Whereas the discourse of accountability has no real place for enduring mutuality of human engagement, ... the notion of responsibility accords it a central significance. ... Whilst responsibility is as serious as contractually animated arrangements are about getting worthwhile things done, it rejects the psychology of deference and fear, preferring instead a binding desire to achieve shared aspirations and emulate what is worthy of respect and generative of delight. Its response to

failure is not blame, but to require restitution and redoubled commitment within the context of appropriate support willingly given (Fielding 2001b: 700).

Similarly, Robert Behn (2001) proposes that unilateral, upwards accountability emphasizing “forms, rules and punishment” be replaced by the multi-directional concept of “*a compact of mutual collective responsibility*” (125). Differentiating his proposal from that of the increasingly popular “performance contract,” Behn notes that

A “compact” is not a legal document but an ethical commitment. “Responsibility” involves obligations willingly accepted, not punishment imposed. A “mutual” commitment entails a personal sense of duty to others, not a detached debt to some abstract rule. A “collective” duty dramatizes that the members of the compact are accepting responsibility as a team and abandoning the search for individual scapegoats. ... This “responsibility compact” is an understanding in which every member makes a mutually supportive commitment to every other member and to their common purpose. It is a compact under which every member personally assumes some obligations to the group as a whole and to each of the other individuals in the compact (125-6).

Construing responsibility as not only reciprocal, but multidirectional and collective, this rendition highlights that such organizational inquiries need not be – and should not be – limited to agency staff. Travis’s proposed panel engaging parents and staff in a dialogue about how things were going provides an example of how the multi-directional nature of collective inquiry can be expanded, with relatively little effort, to a broader group of stakeholders. A dialogic, inquiry-based discussion among agencies and their funders – although more complex to carry out well – would arise from a similar understanding.

Further, a new approach to accountability must recognize (as I showed in Chapter 6) that multiple frameworks contest not only *between* people, but that individuals simultaneously operate from multiple frameworks. Thus, I propose that these processes would make the tension between contesting understandings and directions the *focus* of learning. Outcome measurement models inherently ask organizations to develop a singular (as well as a linear) model of development and change. In the spirit

of identifying the “one best way,” they exclude competing perspectives and homogenize organizational processes. And yet, it is those competing perspectives that can most help us learn by disrupting complacency, taken-for-granted assumptions and prevailing mindsets. Rather than overemphasizing unity and quality, such conflict could be welcomed and preserved as a component of learning that maintains diversity and complexity (Gadotti 1996). An instructive case study of how maintaining competing perspectives, difference and conflict can lead to learning can be found in the work of Davydd Greenwood (1991) with the Fabor Cooperatives of Mondragón.

Such a re-orientation need not – indeed, should not – ignore the political and structural realities of unequal relations of power or the personal and inter-personal cognitive and emotional challenges of approaching these tasks in profoundly new ways. Taking a personal-relations perspective seriously, and holding it in a dynamic tension with the dominant “professional public management” frame could encourage “triple loop” learning (Flood and Romm 1996), in which people ask not only “what *are* we doing?” but “what ends *should* we achieve?” and “*why*.” It would encourage discussion of ends and means, of whether personal relations ought to be for the sake of functional ones in community work (e.g., whether the end ought to be producing better workers or citizens), or vice versa (e.g., whether human flourishing ought to be conceived as an end in itself).

A personal perspective would add to the reigning standards of “effectiveness” and “efficiency” other standards such as the quality of relationships fostered, the extent to which work builds community that values and includes all its members as active subjects, not objects, and the promotion of human flourishing as an end in itself. It would, in fact, enable people to ask, “*what for* and *for whom* are efficiency, effectiveness and the responsible stewardship of our financial resources for?”

Some considerations of how such a dialogic, reciprocal and evolving learning process might work can be found in the emerging literature on “participatory evaluation.”² Michael Quinn Patton (1997), for example, emphasizes broad participation by stakeholders in shaping the “nature, purpose, content and methods of evaluation” (53) and creating learning processes not only for program staff, but for program clients. Others have taken this idea further, emphasizing “empowerment evaluation” (Fetterman 2001, Fetterman and Wandersman 2005) in which professional evaluators help participants create learning environments in which the latter can learn about themselves, their work and their social environments, with the goal of fostering “improvement and self-determination.” Hallie Preskill and Tessie Tzavaras Catsambas (2006) have proposed re-framing evaluation through the use of appreciative inquiry processes that enable people to “inquire into, identify and further develop the best of ‘what is’ in organizations in order to create a better future” (1). And Yoland Wadsworth (1997) lays out an action-research based process for an “open inquiry evaluation,” advocating the broad participation of all stakeholders (“critical reference groups”) in setting out evaluative questions, designing a process of “finding out,” analyzing data, drawing conclusions and identifying what to do in response to what has been learned.³

Unfortunately, few detailed case studies exist exploring how such processes might work *in practice* in real organizations. This extended case study thus adds to that understanding, illuminating some of the challenges and possibilities of such an approach. It demonstrates that such processes require time and resources (often,

² For a brief discussion of various approaches to participatory evaluation and their differing understandings of and implications for “participation,” see Greenwood and Levin (2006:184-193).

³ Robert Stake’s work on “responsive evaluation” (2004) is also worth mentioning here. While Stake assumes an expert, usually outside, evaluator, his work sheds important light on the theory and practice of a non-standards-based framework for evaluation. He provides many examples of the kinds of questions of quality that can be addressed in this way and discusses methods for data-gathering and analysis, all of which could be fruitfully adapted by those interested in participatory approaches.

outside resources) to organize and sustain them and, it shows, as we saw in Chapter 6, that they require people to think about themselves, each other and their work in new ways. It highlights the dynamic connections between instrumental skill-building and “getting things done,” individual empowerment and transformation, and the task of reshaping social systems and redistributing power. It also points to challenges of doing such work within real, not idealized, social environments (organizational and societal) in which power and material resources are still unequally distributed.

Yet as this study also shows, there are real possibilities. Although limited to only a few sessions, the GIAC initiatives demonstrated that people across an organization, including people who have had ambivalent relationships with formal learning experiences – can find great excitement in opportunities to learn about (and account for) their work in the process of learning about what matters. Such an approach provides a different answer to the staff member who asked in an early sessions: “When do we stop asking, ‘why’?” The answer is captured in part by another staff member who observed later on: “It seemed as if every question had an underlying question behind it, which really made you think about your thinking.” There was an evolving realization that, in fact, asking “why” was at the foundation of a process that could truly link accountability, performance improvement and individual and organizational learning.

Extending “multilingualism”

I began this dissertation by noting the tensions arising from a contested search for meaning across many sectors of contemporary society. I return to them here. Those who have devoted their lives to community service work typically have a deep desire to do what Mechthild Hart (2002) has called “subsistence work,” work that sustains and promotes life, develops human capacities, and builds community. Like the GIAC

staff, they chafe at the invasion of a narrow, economically cast, production logic – built upon notions of social predictability, linearity and control – into every aspect of their work and seek greater human meaning for their labors. But at the same time, the norms, assumptions and practices of the “professional public management” frame operates largely unquestioned in the social sphere.

This leaves the community service system in the United States with a problem that is at once conceptual, practical and moral. As this work has shown, accountability, evaluation, program improvement and staff development are not neutral processes. The logic, assumptions and values underlying the processes and tools we choose both arise from and shape our views about what “community-service work” is and ought to be. They shape what we pay attention to and what we learn about. They shape what is marginalized, devalued or made invisible, and thus, what is difficult to learn about. And they shape how we go about building the capacities of these organizations and their staff to account for, evaluate and improve that which we have defined as “work.”

When outcome measurement approaches cast the work of human and community development in narrow “productive” terms; they make “efficiency” and “cost-effectiveness” (the nonprofit and public sector version of “profitability”) the dominant standards of judgment for community-service work. They marginalize or make “irrelevant” other standards, such as caring, community-building, solidarity, and human being and becoming. And they recast human beings as objects (“passive material”), rather than active subjects with “hopes, rights and souls.”

This has serious consequences for any society, for conceptual frameworks shape not only how we think, and not only what we do, but who we are. As the pragmatist philosopher and psychologist William James observed, what we do, in effect, creates the world we live in:

We need only in cold blood ACT as if the thing in question were real, and keep acting as if it were real, and it will infallibly end by growing in such connection with our life that it will become real (James 1890: 321).

Acting, then, as if people are “passive material” – even if “only” in the implicit logic of our framework for “delivering,” evaluating and accounting for community-service work – will invariably end by stripping people of that which makes them human. Maintaining a language of commodification (of “services” and “investments”) and utilizing processes modeled on notions of the production of goods will invariably distort our perception, turning people into commodities. Incorporating a personal relations perspective, on the other hand, orients our attention to people as *persons*, to reciprocal public relationships based on solidarity, caring and inclusiveness, and to public work as that which fosters human “being and becoming.”

For guidance about what a “community-service” system based on a personal relations perspective might look like, we might turn to those who – because of their gender, race, class, etc. – have most extensively and fiercely had to fight objectification, and who have insisted on creating spaces that enable those most likely to be disregarded to find “a place to be me.” As Chela Sandoval (2000) has observed, the new “ways of thinking, acting and conceptualizing” demanded to maintain humanity in our alienating, highly individualized and consumerized, fragmented societies can be found in the “survival skills” and “oppositional practices” developed by historically oppressed peoples, those who have had to fight alienation and objectification for centuries and survived. Similarly, I believe that some of the solutions to the contemporary search for greater human meaning can be found in the “personal relations” perspective and practices of GIAC and organizations like it. They point to a different way of not only understanding, but of *organizing* and *doing* community work.

Consider but one example. As I noted in the Preface, many of the staff questioned my labeling GIAC as part of the “community-service system,” preferring to call themselves a “community center.” Let me return to that distinction at this point. If we take the “personal relations” perspective seriously, then the GIAC staff’s rendition is actually more correct and serves as a useful guide to how we conceive action, accountability and evaluation. From this perspective, “center” comes to mean not a building or a set of activities or programs – common understandings of what a “community center” is, but *the center of a community*. This is the understanding that underlies the notions of community care-taking and solidarity in many communities of color. It is also the understanding that underlies the Progressive Era ideal of the community center “as an organizing center for the life of the neighborhood” and the community center worker as “a neighborhood leader ... on the job continuously” (Dillick 1953: 61). (Language, after all, does matter.)

Such an understanding offers a profound challenge to the commodification of community-service work. It challenges “prevailing mindsets,” as Delgado said it would, not only encouraging a truer multiculturalism in the ways in which we understand the world, but showing us a different, more human way to organize the work of developing people and communities. It leads us to ask to new questions, for example: What might it mean for “community-service” organizations to rethink themselves and their work in terms of becoming a “center” around which public relationships and community could be built? As I have posed this question to people working in more traditionally conceived community-service organizations, they have been intrigued and challenged by the directions their thoughts have taken.

Certainly, my call here is prescriptive. The issue of how to organize for such change is another matter, a subject worthy of long-term, engaged research and action. I do not underestimate or disregard the strong social, economic and political forces

fostering a neoliberal agenda of commodifying and commercializing all aspects of human social life. And yet, I also see a strong and increasingly urgent call for reclaiming the human meaning and human connectedness of our work and our lives. Finding ways to adequately responds to that call is imperative if we are to survive and thrive. As I quoted from Paulo Freire in the opening chapter, I do not attribute to hope “the power to transform reality all by itself, so that I set out for the fray without taking account of concrete, material data ... [Hope] alone ... does not win. But without it ... [our] struggle will be weak and wobbly” (Freire 1992: 8). And so, this chapter offers a statement of “critical hope” with the anticipation that it may open up new conversations and spark new action.

Future work

I close this chapter with some considerations for future study. First, more study of organizations that centralize a “personal relations” perspective – that is, identifying and learning from those already doing this work – would lead to a better understanding of this conceptual framework and its implications for the organization and practice of “community service” work. Action research studies that engage practitioners working from this perspective in the articulation, theorizing and strengthening of their own practice are likely to be particularly fruitful.

Second, as the work with the GIAC staff demonstrated, there are real challenges – practical, cognitive and emotional, political and structural – to adopting this kind of collective, critically reflective, open inquiry approach to accountability and evaluation in real organizations. Yet, as this work also showed, there are real possibilities. The dynamic, complex ways these different “strands” intersect and might be “braided” into a stronger praxis for organizational development and change must be better understood through in/through practice and studies of practice.

Finally, questions of large-scale systemic change – of how a personal relations perspective might come to be taken more seriously by practitioners, funders and the larger society – ought to be explored. Behn (2001) offers some thoughts on what might be required for a “responsibility compact” to be adopted widely as a convention or norm. But action research studies of such “whole systems” change could better illuminate both the challenges and the possibilities in the process of organizing action to that end. Such large-scale work poses “difficult questions, dilemmas and challenges to [current] practice” (Burns 2003:7) and the praxis of action research on such a scale is not yet well-developed. It would be worthwhile none-the-less.

CHAPTER 8

RE-CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE: A REFLEXIVE REVIEW

How much easier it was to write a defense of my research plans several years ago, before I actually embarked on this project. I turned out a succinct, ten-page statement of beliefs and arguments that, in its “lofty aspirations” (Brydon-Miller 2004a), ambitious agenda and tendency toward purist rhetoric, was not all that different from most of the writing about action research. The ardent beliefs in which that defense was grounded remain. But as I brought together my theoretical stance about knowledge creation with the practical realities of the decidedly messy, busy, uncontrollable social world, I made many pragmatic choices. In doing so, I grappled repeatedly with a variety of epistemological, practical and ethical issues – questions about how to reconcile my theoretical beliefs about how research *should* be done with practical choices I was making about how it *would* be done, concerns about how much compromise was too much, and doubts about whether those compromises were “inevitable,” arising from structural challenges and contradictions of conducting a collaborative research project within the workplace, or imposed by my own limited skills and perceptions. Painfully aware of the ways in which this project was not fully democratic, participatory or “empowering,” I worried whether this was *really* action research after all.

These dilemmas are not unique to action researchers. Feminist, postcolonial and critical race scholars, in particular, also have written about the myriad contradictions and ethical dilemmas faced by any researcher with a serious commitment to examining issues of power and position and a broader notion of research ethics than that mandated by the rather narrow scope of university’s institutional review boards (see, for example, Behar 1993, 1996; Brydon-Miller 2004a, Domínguez 1989; Hart

2002; Lather 1991; Lather and Smithies 1997; Kirsch 1999; Luttrell 1997, 2003; Spivak 1988; Tate 1999). The proposed solution to these dilemmas is typically a commitment to systematic reflexivity, with particular attention to issues of power and privilege. But as Patti Lather (1991) has noted, “the search for ways to operationalize reflexivity ... is a journey into uncharted territory” (62-3). Nevertheless, borrowing from Peter Reason’s suggestion to offer up “significant choice points” at each stage of the inquiry process – not only to our own scrutiny, but to the wider communities in which we work – I have tried to make my key choices and the reasons for them transparent throughout this dissertation. Here, I turn, in greater depth, to three significant issues for any action research endeavor: questions of participation, representation, and the nature of “ends” attained. In addition to offering a check on research quality, making such reflexivity public helps to fill the “gap in research storytelling [that is kept] out of the official record” (Luttrell 1997). I also hope it can contribute to the continued development of action research praxis. Finally, for me, personally, the result of these reflections has been a more nuanced understanding of both the ideals and reality of social research and my own growth as an action researcher.

Revisiting “participation”

With the exception of Marcia Fort, who initially negotiated the purpose and focus of this project with me, the GIAC staff were required to participate in this project. That is, their attendance at – and at least minimal engagement with – the “staff development” sessions we held were required as a condition of their jobs. Further, the overarching focus of our work together was set in response to external demands from a funder for improved outcome measurement models and internal demands from the agency director for improved programming.

Given that much action research seeks to fundamentally alter power relations, action researchers are correct to question the ethical questions and dangers of co-optation that arise when action research is adopted in response to external demands. Exploring action research within the context of managed teacher professional development, Judah and Richardson (2006), for example, point to the “tension between mandated participation and authentic collaboration” that arises in such a “complex and ambiguous ground.” They note:

For us, imposed participation in professional development activities calls into question intended results of action research itself. Considering the epistemological underpinnings of action research where participation is based upon personal choice, we question whether, in such constrained environments, action research can achieve anything like its promise of the transformation of practice (66).

Even when not mandated, however, “participation” is not an unproblematic concept. In one of the strongest critiques of the “participatory turn” as it plays out in economic development projects, Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (2001) highlight the “tyrannical potential” of participatory processes “undertaken ritualistically” – e.g., the potential to override existing legitimate decision-making processes, ignore group dynamics that reinforce the interests of the already powerful, rigidly privilege participatory methods over other approaches which may have advantages, and the tendency to focus on micro-level interventions while ignoring macro-level inequalities and injustice. Their concern is warranted. Examples of the ways social change processes (including research) can be appropriated as management tools aimed at promoting greater efficiency and top-down administratively managed change rather than greater fairness abound (see, for example, Greenwood and Levin 2006, Greenwood 2004). The very fluidity of the advanced capitalist system enables nearly every influential institution based upon it to absorb concepts such as “participation,” “reflection,” and “empowerment” into a neoliberal agenda of “improving practice”

and individualized “growth” and “development” while stripping them of the power to affect any real change. Every action researcher must beware of such tendencies.

And yet, as Davydd Greenwood also notes, nearly all action research begins under less than ideal conditions; waiting for perfect conditions becomes little more than an excuse for moral superiority and inaction. Rather, the test of the process is how it can manage the possibilities inherent within institutional structures and extend the notion of participation in meaningful ways (personal communication, June 20, 2006). Instead, then, of asking whether collaboration was “authentic,” we might more fruitfully ask “who participates in what?” (Maguire 1993). We might also ask: why? Toward what ends? In what ways did that participation change over time? And how might that participation have been extended even more?

Let me begin with the question of “who participates in what?” While most of the GIAC staff were not involved in initiating or defining the overall focus of this research project, they were involved in negotiating the directions that the subsequent sessions took. They also had a role in negotiating how this work was described and interpreted and the meanings that were to be made from it. Further, while the GIAC staff were required to participate in the sessions that constituted this project; they were not required to allow me to present this work publicly. I sought that permission at various stages – when I could tell them what I was proposing to write, and again when I could show them the exact words that I was attributing to them.¹

Could the opportunities for substantive participation have been increased?

Undoubtedly yes. There were many moments when I found myself being drawn into a

¹ Mary Brydon-Miller (n.d.) refers to this question – “May I take the material we have generated as part of this [work together] and use it within a more formal and public research context?” – as “Anna’s Law,” in recognition of the institutional review board member who suggested it to her. Such a formulation, she argues, recognizes that as action researchers, we do not control what people do, but rather, we ought to be concerned about the possible consequences of making such actions public. In response to a request from Cornell’s institutional review board, a log detailing from whom and when these approvals were received is attached as Appendix A.

“training” role, adopting the role of “expert” or seeing myself as “the executor of the transformation” (Freire 1972:46), pulls that shaped portions of my work as profoundly as systemic forces shaped the work of the GIAC staff. At such moments (and there were more of them than I wish), I might have negotiated more successfully for the GIAC staff’s greater involvement and control. I might have been more direct in inviting the *entire* GIAC staff to define the research project from the start, rather than hoping their interest in “research” would emerge over time.² We might have discussed more openly whether the proposed “staff development” was to respond to externally-drive measures of accountability and excellence or to promote fundamental challenges to hierarchy and control.

All of these would have required more extensive conversations sooner about what action research meant and the implications for how we might work together. They would have meant taking greater risks – becoming more vulnerable – earlier in the project. And yet, at the various moments that I chose to proceed as I did, it seemed that the choices I was making were the most appropriate choices at that time. In hindsight, it’s easy to argue that I “could have” or “should have” spoken of research sooner, for example. Yet in practice, at numerous individual moments, the process still seemed too amorphous to present clearly; talk of “research” seemed more likely to alienate, shutting down people’s thinking and *limiting* participation, rather than enhancing it.

This last is a point that is often overlooked in discussions of “participation” and “authentic collaboration.” With it, I turn to several issues that are too rarely discussed openly: first, that participation takes time, and it takes practice, which requires even more time; second, the particular choices and constraints of engaging in action research under intensely hierarchical conditions; and third, the *nature* of participatory

² See Maguire (1993) for a similar observation.

relationships. All are central to the choices action researchers must make; I want to raise them here.

In most organizational contexts, with their long-established, often rigid hierarchies, participation requires dramatic changes, both in mind-set and in organizational practice. Those changes are demanded from both those used to being in positions of control (including academic researchers) and those used to being told what to do. Discussing the difficulties researchers may have in approaching participation “genuinely,” Peter Reason writes:

As soon as we touch upon the question of participation we have to entertain and *work with* issues of power, of oppression, of gender; we are confronted with the limitations of our skill, with the rigidities of our own and others’ behaviour patterns, with the other pressing demands on our limited time, with the hostility or indifference of our organizational contexts. We live out our contradictions, struggling to bridge the gap between our dreams and reality, to realize the values we espouse.” (1994:2)

And Patricia Maguire observes:

we live within the very structures and relationships we seek to transform. It is not a neat intellectual exercise” (1993: 175).

Those in the organizations we work with are similarly challenged. Thus, as I noted in Chapter 5, many staff members initially responded to the invitation to define their own evaluative questions with confusion. As Jodie so succinctly captured the dilemma: “I’m waiting for you to tell me what information you want me to collect, and you keep handing me a blank piece of paper.” Over time, many of the GIAC staff became excited by the possibility of creating their own questions, for their own ends, rather than responding to demands from their supervisors or the United Way. And fledgling discussions about organizational norms and power relations began.

But these changes in mind-set and practice are not a *pre-condition* of an action research initiative; rather, they arise through it. To paraphrase Paulo Freire, we make

a road for participation by walking along it.³ Such changes – in mind-set, organizational norms, and concrete practice – take practice, and they take time to be fully realized, more time than the boundaries of most research projects allow. Nor are these changes a linear process that can be substantively planned and controlled. In fact, as the processes described in Chapter 6 demonstrated, participation might be more usefully understood in terms of Brown’s African-American quilts: “non-linear, poly-rhythmic ... nonsymmetrical.”

Finally, taking seriously the “personal relations” frame I have been discussing, let me turn to the question of “participation toward what ends?” Frequently, action researchers answer that question with “emancipation,” “empowerment,” “self-determination” or some similar term. I find these concepts troubling to the extent that they often presume an (implicit) individualistic stance; participation is valued to the extent that people can control their *own* destinies, rather than have their destinies controlled by others. Further, that “autonomy” is conceptualized (again, often implicitly) as a functional process, an “outcome” that the (good) action researcher or emancipatory activist researcher is supposed to achieve. Given the unilateral, role-defined relationship of such a framing, it is no wonder that some critically oriented researchers find themselves asking how they can promote empowerment without being “impositional” (Lather 1991, Brookfield 2000).

In response, I suggest we more often ask: “what kinds of relationships structured the participatory processes?,” “what kinds of relationships were developed *through* the participatory processes?,” and “to what ends?” If we take seriously Macmurray’s notion of “selves-in-(communal) relation,” then the key question is about the *kinds* of relationships an action researcher and her collaborators build, and the purposes they

³ Freire uses the phrase, “we make the road by walking” in a book that bears the same name (Horton and Freire 1990: 6). He notes that it is an adaptation of a proverb by the Spanish poet Antonio Machado that translates, in part as “you make the way as you go.”

serve. Are personal relations serving instrumental ends (turning *both* the researcher and her collaborators into useful, but exploited, “living tools”), or are the functional activities they may undertake together in service of human being and becoming for *everyone* involved? Do the participatory processes seek, ultimately, to produce a better organization or a better society, or do they foster the conditions for human flourishing because doing so is what makes us *all* human? The answer to these questions will never be simple; human motivations are complex, as are the social worlds within which we work. But they are questions worth asking.

Revisiting representation

While I engaged in numerous conversations about the interpretations I was making and invited the GIAC staff to review, respond, and ultimately to approve (or not) my representations of them, their work, and their words, this particular representation is mine. Further, the form it has taken – shaped by expectations for a doctoral candidate to produce a dissertation typically aimed at an academic audience – is far from accessible to those who collaborated in this work with me. I address these two distinct, but inter-connected, issues in this section. The first relates to the personal and ethical challenges I faced in becoming the sole author of this particular text. The second questions how the knowledge created through this project is to be represented and shared.

Becoming (again) the “author-ity”

Many action researchers wish that those they conducted the research with would join them in writing these formal research representations – whether a dissertation, journal articles, or a book. Some scholars have called explicitly for more active negotiation and joint creation of texts (Reason 1994; for similar calls and experiments

among qualitative researchers, see Lincoln 1997). It rarely happens. After all, most adults outside the academy have demanding jobs that rarely provide sustained blocks of time needed for writing. Further, few outside the academy have chosen to be writers; nor do they receive rewards for doing such work. I did make that choice, and I do gain real rewards (including a prestigious degree) from it.

This writing project – and its attendant challenges – then, was mine. But to call writing about one’s friends and colleagues a “challenge” understates the dilemmas. How to represent social worlds and the “others” that inhabit them without objectifying them has become an obsession for most ethnographers (Domínquez 1989). It is not enough merely to escape the pretences of a “realist” tale (Van Maanen 1988) and acknowledge an interpretive stance. Rather, a myriad of questions must be addressed: how to tell a story, what kind of story to tell, which of many stories to tell; how to acknowledge one’s own place in the story – and the ways in which all these questions intersect with issues of power and privilege, and the scholar’s historic abuse of power and privilege (Behar 1993, Luttrell 2003) . I grappled with all of these questions, not once, but again and again.

Further, social science abounds with off-the-record tales of researchers who are still scorned, decades later, by those they have written about. In this case, I stood to lose not only good will and respect, but friendships and community. After all, my relationships with the GIAC staff and Board matter to me in very personal ways, and I expect those relationships to continue well beyond the duration of this project. In a community with a history of mistrust between “town” and “gown,” and sustained patterns of elitism and arrogance from members of the university community that could not be dismissed, I feared being tainted by my “researcher” role. Finally, I worried about what distortions the limitations of my particular location and

perspectives would introduce, what stories ought to be told that I would not think of telling, what I was missing that I didn't know to look for or ask about.

All non-fiction writers, not just those in the academy, are faced with the question of how to tell a story, as well as with the power that comes with interpretation and representation. I recently attended a play written and performed by a friend of mine; the play told a series of stories about the playwright's family – her grandparents, parents, aunts, husband. During the post-performance “talk back,” a young woman in the audience asked: did you ask permission from your family before performing this piece? ‘No,’ responded the playwright. ‘At the writers’ workshops I’ve attended, we’re told again and again – if you wait for permission, you’ll never write anything; people always want to be represented in the most flattering light.’

And yet, the academy has a particular kind of “authority” accorded by status and a shameful history of abuse that cannot be overlooked. There is a long history of “commodifying” those who participate in our research endeavors, using their stories to further our own careers (Behar 1996). And there’s a long history of “ventriloquism” (Yoland Wadsworth, cited in Brydon-Miller, Maguire and McIntyre 2004c), of those in socially powerful positions speaking on behalf of and in the best interest of others. Doing so, even transparently, while claiming it is a means of bringing about change, is problematic (Brydon-Miller 2004a, 2004b). And yet, as Brydon-Miller also notes, refusing to speak – or to act – offers no real solution. Rather, she asserts, researchers must continuously ask how we might use wield the power we have by our positions of privilege thoughtfully and we must act to promote social change, even at the risk of doing so imperfectly. At the same time, we must continually seek ways others may articulate their own experiences and speak on their own behalves, and we must remain “vigilant [to issues of power and privilege] and open to instruction” (2004b: 16).

In accepting authorship of this manuscript, I have taken several steps. The first, already mentioned, is reviewing and negotiating the text with those who participated in this work. In addition to showing people the specific passages in which they were quoted, I presented the overall arguments orally to the GIAC staff and to the GIAC Board, followed by open discussion. Marcia read all the sections describing GIAC and our collaborative work. Some of those who have given me permission to write about our work together (and to include them in it) were interested in having this story told, although they would certainly tell it differently themselves. Others were merely willing. Some were not sure it was worth bothering trying to change other people's perceptions, but agreed that I could try if I wanted.

Second, I have sought to produce a portrayal that seems authentic and respectful to the friends and colleagues I am portraying, whether or not it is the portrayal that they would have written. I have tried to present them, as much as my skills allow, as complex, intelligent subjects rather than "objects" to be analyzed for others' view. I leave it to them to decide if I have succeeded.

Third, I have held in mind my respect and caring for the work of this agency and the people who make it up, as well as for all those who devote themselves to thinking about and carrying out the work of supporting people and communities. In noting that all texts are created from partial, historically and socially situated perspectives, postmodernist scholars have suggested that we write as "multiple selves," choosing in various situations which "self" to expose (Lincoln 1997). As I was writing, however, I found this conception of "multiple selves" a less accurate description of my experience than John Macmurray's notion of "self-in-relation." How I chose to present this story was deeply shaped by taking seriously my ongoing and multiple relationships with the GIAC staff and my less-known, but continuously imagined,

relationships with my readers, by letting those relationships matter to me in very personal ways.

Multiple relationships; multiple “texts”

Finally, I extend the question of representation beyond this particular text. Yvonna Lincoln (1997), Mary Brydon-Miller (2004a) and others have called for social researchers to ask how our research is used and who has access to it. In doing so, they ask researchers to step beyond the mostly unconscious choice of the research community as our primary – indeed, often, our only – “consumer” of new knowledge and instead think in terms of multiple texts, multiple audiences, and multiple purposes (Lincoln 1997: 45). To return to my assertion that relationships influence the form and purpose of a particular representation, then multiple relationships require multiple “texts.” Who else, Lincoln asks, could benefit from our research? What kinds of “textual strategies” beyond the written – public forums, group discussions, etc. – might make sense for us to produce. To these questions I add, in what ways might the others involved in this work find to tell their stories of this project and to represent this work in different ways? How might I help them find ways to publicly communicate their own knowledge? And to what extent do they want to?

While this may be the first published representation of this collaborative work, I do not expect it to be the only one. One other representation for this work is already under way – a shorter, more accessible document for community-service practitioners, funded by Cornell Cooperative Extension and to be published by the Community and Regional Development Institute (CaRDI) at Cornell.⁴

⁴ That document will be available at www.cardi.cornell.edu/community_capacity/index.php in early 2007.

But published documents and academic presentations are not the only ways to share the knowledge created, and Marcia and I have already begun to talk about how else that might be done, including forums and discussions with others interested in community-service work. I expect those representations to be more collaborative in both design and presentation. But we academics still have narrow conceptions of what it means to publicly communicate knowledge. In our last collective discussion, the GIAC staff offered their own perspective on knowledge-sharing. Jodie articulated it first, in response to a question I asked about whether it would be good if others understood community work the way they did. He said:

That goes without saying ... [But] they would have to come here. It's harder for us to go somewhere and say, "Look, this is what we do at GIAC. But our doors are wide open. You can always come through and hang out with us and see what we do. That's a lot easier for us than to go sit on a panel: "Well, Travis you go ahead and speak about the youth program. Ms Viv, you speak about the Teen program. Mike, you speak about what you do. ... Come through. Come to GIAC. Hang out with us for a day or two."

And Travis put it this way, to a chorus of assents, questioning whether and why it might be worth devoting their time to such activities:

I don't care to fight anybody's perception. All I care is to do what we do, and people will find out sooner or later. And once they find out, then what we do changes their perception. ... I just think that other people need to come to us rather than us always going to them.

Revisiting questions of soundness

As I wrote my way through the initial drafts of this chapter, I came to see that the question of whether this was *really* action research was most definitely the wrong question. In some ways, this research approximated my beliefs in how knowledge ought to be created. For that, I am proud. In many other ways, it fell short of my goals. For that, I am disturbed and humbled.

But I have come to see that the belief that we can conduct action research in some “pure” way – and indeed, even our desire to do so – derives from the positivist notion of methodological rigor as the determinant of validity. Within the positivist paradigm, one’s work is either consistent with this set of rules or not. And from that consistency (or lack thereof), derives the “validity” of one’s work. If, on the other hand, we recognize research as a verb – that is, as a process, not a product – then methodology becomes a set of guidelines and principles that we work within and aim toward. It becomes, as Greenwood and Levin (2006) argue, a “strategy” or even, in Peter Reason’s words, a “utopian adventure” and “an aspiration” (2006: 31). We work with real people and within real social institutions, all shaped to varying degrees by the distorted hierarchical relations that characterize society as a whole, and where the tendencies to reproduce the status quo abound. We imagine a different kind of world, and ask how we might create it. We approximate our ideals. Our efforts are more or less participatory, more or less democratic, more or less liberatory. We reflect and learn and bring our relationships with others ever closer to those ideals. We allow ourselves to be changed. We hope the social worlds we inhabit have changed as well.

Many of the questions about soundness that I posed in Chapter 2 touch in some way on this question of hopes for change, that is, for transformative “ends.” Those questions asked whether the research responded to real questions and concerns, whether the findings were congruent with the lived experience of participants, whether the knowledge, as tested in real-life situations was capable of solving real problems, whether the people whose lives are dependent on the outcome were willing to act upon this knowledge, whether the empirical arguments were “interpretively rich,” challenging the reader to rethink and imagine afresh, whether those in other organizations and places find this knowledge credible and relevant to their own lives,

and whether the knowledge created confronts injustice and has, in Wendell Berry's words, "the power to help us adapt and survive."

It would be lovely to be able to answer each of these questions definitively. Yet as I have already noted, processes of learning and change are long-term; dissertation time-frame are short. But I believe that an initial answer to these questions is "yes." This research responded to real questions and concerns, not just for the GIAC staff, but – as I've discovered in talking about this work with others in the public and nonprofit sectors – for many others as well. The GIAC staff and Board found my analytical framework congruent with their experience. In Marcia's words, it "shone a light on what I've been thinking and feeling without really understanding why we have such a hard time communicating what we do to other people ... It's validating." Marcia has expressed an ongoing interest in what a "personal relations" approach to accountability and program improvement would look like, as well as in expanding this conversation to include others working in community services. There are also initial indications of "transcontextual credibility." Cornell Cooperative Extension leaders, public school administrators and educators, and leaders of other community-service organizations have all taken an interest in this work, finding this interpretative framework helping in thinking about the challenges they face in new ways.

In what ways people will act on this knowledge largely remains to be seen. Clearly, I believe that the knowledge created from this inquiry process has the potential as Berry proposed, "to help us adapt and survive (2000: 134)" or, in Reason's words, to "contribute directly to the flourishing of human persons [and] their communities" (2006: 3). But just how it will do so is a continuing process that has yet to unfold. I ended the first chapter with Freire's admonition to adopt a stance of "critical hope." I end here with a view from another time and place in the world. The Chinese writer Lu Hsun, wrote in 1921:

Hope cannot be said to exist, nor can it be said not to exist.
It is just like the roads across the earth.
For actually there were no roads to begin with,
but when many people pass one way a road is made.

It is my hope that this work will join with that of others to help more people create a new road, a road toward treating human beings – and the work of promoting human flourishing – differently than the work of producing “goods.” Only time will tell whether and how well it has done so.

APPENDIX A
APPROVAL LOG

Name	Date of Approval
Travis Brooks	Dec. 18, 2006
Audrey Cooper	Sept. 20, 2006
Jenna Cooper	Dec. 18, 2006
“T.J. Fields” (with pseudonym only)	Nov. 7, 2006
Marcia Fort	Dec. 13, 2006*
Jodie Herbert	Dec. 8, 2006
Leslyn McBean-Clairborne	Dec. 18, 2006
Lana Milton	Dec. 8, 2006
Cassandra Nelson	Dec. 13, 2006
Robert Rich	Sept. 25, 2006
Bob Skates	Dec. 18, 2006
Michael Thomas	Dec. 8, 2006
Vivian Sierra	Dec. 13, 2006

* Multiple approvals obtained; date of final approval only is given.

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