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# It's Not About the Rice: Naming the Work of Extension Education

BY MARGO HITTLEMAN AND SCOTT J. PETERS

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**THIS BOOK IS A COLLECTION OF CONVERSATIONS, STORIES TOLD BY EXTENSION EDUCATORS AT CORNELL UNIVERSITY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION IN NEW YORK CITY (CUCE-NYC) THAT SEEK TO CAPTURE THE ESSENCE OF THEIR WORK. IT SEEMS ONLY FITTING, THEREFORE, THAT WE BEGIN THE COLLECTION WITH OUR OWN STORY ABOUT HOW THESE CONVERSATIONS CAME TO BE AND WHY WE THOUGHT THEY MIGHT BE OF INTEREST TO A WIDER AUDIENCE.**

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**W**e begin our story on a summer afternoon several years back, in the courtyard of a large public housing project in the Bronx, a small fenced garden off to one side. On the fence was a sign naming the gardening project, followed by the words, “Technical assistance provided by Cornell University Cooperative Extension-NYC.” Scott, who had been invited to New York City to learn about CUCE-NYC’s work, had spent the day driving with Gretchen Ferenz, Environmental Revitalization and Management issues area leader, through Bronx neighborhoods, visiting community projects in which CUCE had been involved: a thrift shop, a recycling center, a teen hydroponics program, community gardens. He had heard story after story about the extension educators’ connections with community organizations, a web of relationships built and nurtured over many years.

Struck by the stark contrast between the flat, rather uninspiring description on the sign in front of him and

the rich, human-centered stories that had infused the day, Scott turned to Gretchen with a question: “Does that sign — ‘providing technical assistance’ — capture what you really do?”

Her answer surprised him. “Pretty much,” she responded.

Already concerned that little serious research existed on extension practice, particularly the civic dimensions of that practice<sup>1</sup>, Scott decided to offer an experimental course that would bring together Cornell graduate students and CUCE-NYC extension educators to both study and critically reflect on that work. The course, “Community-University Partnerships in Urban Extension Work,” had several agendas: to provide an opportunity for extension educators to reflect on, and thus, enhance, their civic work outside of the hectic pace of the day-to-day delivery of educational programs, to enable graduate students interested in community education to learn directly from experienced practitioners, and to contribute to broader, research-based understandings of extension’s civic mission and work in a way that might enhance the social impact of the system as a whole.

Thus, in February 2001, we — a group of thirteen Cornell graduate students and one professor — found ourselves in New York City, this time in the community center of the Grant Houses, a housing project in Harlem.

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# We Grow People

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About a dozen CUCE-NYC staff members waited to greet us enthusiastically. For weeks now, the two of us had repeatedly asked ourselves a series of questions with a sense of both anxiety and anticipation: Would this experiment in a collaborative class work? Could we simultaneously meet the learning needs of university graduate students and community practitioners? What would we learn about the work of extension education, and how? Would this work have any real value to extension educators — on campus or in the field? Would the answer to the question: “Does ‘technical assistance’ capture what you really do?” turn out to be “pretty much” after all?

We would continue to wrestle with many of these questions throughout the semester. But an answer to the last question began to take shape almost immediately.

A few minutes into the introductions, Madie McLean, a community nutrition educator with more than thirty years of cooperative extension experience, stood up to take her turn. After telling us a bit about her life and how she came to work with extension, she launched into a story about a young woman in one of her basic nutrition classes who didn’t know how to cook rice. She recounted how they practiced together — two cups water, one cup rice; two cups water; one cup rice. The following week, the young woman came back to class beaming with a new-found pride and confidence; she had made rice for her family’s dinner. At this point, Madie stopped and looked at us pointedly: “If you want to understand what we do here,” she said, “you have to understand, it’s not about the rice.”

It was a refrain we were to hear again and again — in the introductions, over lunch, throughout our class sessions, and in the profiles we have collected here. Extension education is not about the rice — or the resume, or the

garden. Or at least, not completely. “Food is a vehicle ...,” the nutrition educators told us. “Agriculture and horticulture was the entrée,” Gretchen said.

At the same time, the CUCE-NYC educators told us something else. “We have a hard time explaining what we do,” they said. As Gretchen notes in her profile in this collection, “My son hasn’t figured out what I do because I

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haven’t been able to tell him. I’m being honest here. I am seriously looking for help finding concise words in English that says what it is we do. We say our work is rewarding. We say we help people through non-formal education strategies or approaches or something to address critical needs. It just sounds like jargon. ... No one [else] has a clue because we are not able to articulate what it is we do.” Carol Parker-Duncanson, regional coordinator for CUCE’s nutrition programs, put it this way in our meeting at the Grant Houses: “We are not just doing education, we are doing something else ... [People] want to know, what is it? ... It’s hard to define. We are building people, families, communities.”

## Learning from stories

Thus, two related questions — the CUCE-NYC educators’ question: how do we define what we do? and our question: how do we create an organized space for reflection that will surface for discussion the richer civic practice we believed was embedded in many extension educators’ work—became the fo-

cus of the class. Together, we set out to try to answer them. To do so, we created a series of practitioner profiles.<sup>2</sup> These profiles, which constitute the bulk of this book, are written in the voices of the educators themselves. They were constructed in collaboration with Cornell graduate students who asked questions, recorded and transcribed the interviews, and edited the conversations into the profiles collected

here. In those interviews, the students asked the educators to tell us about a specific project, focusing on the challenges that they faced and what they did as they responded to them. We specifically encouraged the educators to tell the stories informally, as they would to

a friend, rather than in their “professional” voices. This presents a storytelling voice that is rich in human detail, but can sound unexpected to those used to more formal descriptions of educational programs. (We provide a more detailed description of how we created practitioners profiles, along with a list of the kinds of questions we asked, in Appendix A).

We chose the profile approach because we believe that stories are an excellent tool for helping people learn and that people’s lived experience is an excellent starting point for reflection. Stories about those experiences, in their specific particularity, do something that a summary, job description, bulleted list of themes or competencies, and abstracted theory can never do. These profiles are complex, nuanced. They allow readers to learn not just what people say (usually in vague generalizations) about their work, but to draw an even richer picture from people’s tales of what they actually do. They contain the mix of insight and ambivalence, frustration and hope that most experienced practitioners, in any field,

bring to their work. They draw attention to the values, skills, strategies, and roles that educators employ everyday. As Rosalyn McMullin, a CUCE-NYC educator who currently works in the environmental issues unit told us: “The profiles ... reflect like a mirror. When I look at the profiles ... I’m not just looking at it as a profile about a specific place or a specific program. You can always find something in anybody’s profile that can be you. I take it very personally.”

### **If it’s not about rice, then what?**

What is reflected in a mirror depends on the one who is looking into the glass. So, too, with these profiles. In this section, we want to share with you part of the reflection that we saw, a reflection arising from conversations with the CUCE-NYC educators, with the Cornell graduate students who participated in the class, and with each other — about how to more fully describe what extension educators do. If extension education is “not about the rice,” then what is it about? We believe that many answers to that question can be found in the profiles collected here. In this section, we want to discuss some of the answers that we found.

We do not present these as research “findings,” at least not in the way that academic publications are often expected to do, some sort of final “truth” about what Cornell researchers have found to be the essence of extension education. Rather, we see this as the continuation of a conversation in which we have been trying to construct a richer way to understand this work. We hope it will spark further conversations, helping those invested in extension education — in New York State communities, on the Cornell University campus, and through the extension system nationwide — to reflect on this work in ways that are both familiar and fresh, and, in doing so, to deepen not only the understanding of what exten-

sion education is, but the potential for what it can be as well.

To begin to answer the question of the elusive “something else” to which Carol Parker-Duncanson alluded, let us turn to the profiles themselves, to the NYC extension educators’ description of their work, day-to-day. We start with John Ameroso, an agronomist working in the Community and Economic Development issue area. John tells of his work with the New Farmers/New Markets urban agriculture program in which he assisted community organizations to start new farmers markets and helped people, often immigrants who had once farmed in their home communities, to access land in the areas just outside New York City to grow produce which would then be sold in the urban markets. He says:

**The profiles ... reflect like a mirror. ... You can always find something in anybody’s profile that can be you.**

*[People in the community] rely on me for the whole technical piece, stuff like, “What are we going to plant? How is it going to be planted? What is the time frame? Where do we get the stuff?” I’m doing site visits all the time ... I don’t see myself as organizing. I leave that up to other groups. They do the organizing and then I come in as a technician — the why and what: what can work and can’t work.*

As the garden sign said, “Technical assistance provided by CUCE-NYC.” And yet, John immediately follows that comment by noting: “A lot of times, I put myself in the role of cheerleader. I always have an up attitude toward things.” And, in describing what makes him effective at what he does, he says:

*You keep yourself looking at people, go visiting, keep yourself out there, know what’s*

*going on ... I could never have developed the Urban Agriculture Program in the office. I couldn’t sit here and write down that we were going to do urban agriculture — this is what we are going to do; we’re going to invite these groups over and we are going to tell them exactly how they are going to do this. It doesn’t work that way.*

*You have to really just work with people for a long period of time ... You’ve got to be out talking to people, attending other people’s meetings, making yourself known, doing workshops for people. Basically, you have to be always responding to people, attend a lot of different things that are revolving around what you are doing, like going to conferences for community gardens or anything that has to do with growing stuff. This is basically what I’ve done for the last twenty-five years...*

*My role has been to do the training and, basically, the schmoozing for many years.*

*Schmoozing means always being out there, not looking at something and asking, “Is this meeting going to be important for me and my program, or is this going to be a waste of time?” ... [You have to be] always talking to people, always being there. ...*

*You can not formulate programs to do out there; everything comes from out there*

And so, clearly, technical assistance, while a component of John’s work, will not suffice to describe what it is he does. He does not just go on site visits, answering people’s questions about what and when to plant. Nor, he tells us, was developing the Urban Agriculture Program a technical proposition, based on transferring research-based expertise, something that could be written in the office and then handed to community members who needed it. As he says, “You can not formulate programs to do out there; everything comes from out there.” To do that work, he “schmoozes,” visiting people, talking to people, making himself known.

To further develop this picture, let’s turn our mirror to Linda Nessel,

issue area leader for Workforce Development, who describes the work of developing Youth-to-Youth Literacy, a summer program matching Cornell students with young people in New York City. Linda was initially approached by Scott McMillan, a faculty member in Cornell's English department who had received a small grant from the university to create a community service project for his students. Together with Bill Saunders, director of the Grant Houses, they developed what is now a well-established program. She says:

*I do not see myself as a teacher in this program. I see myself more as the strategic planner, pulling the pieces together and bringing resources together. ... I would call myself more of an organizer. ...*

*This program ... confirms part of why I came to extension, which was to bring university resources to the city. ... I'm not even sure if extension has put any resources into this [program]. But it's the faculty fellows. It's the work-study students. It's the Public Service Center. And it is access to people who provided funding for us, who we never would have come into contact with. ... I see my work as brokering, bringing together people who wouldn't typically come together. My colleague, John Nettleton, often talks about our approach to Cornell being like a scavenger hunt. We go up there and see if there's anyone interesting who wants to work with us, even though it's not in their job description. I do think what extension does best is the brokering, especially if we bring together people who normally wouldn't come in contact with each other. Bringing together the usual people is fine, but it doesn't seem like it's going to produce anything but the usual programs.*

Whereas John Ameroso describes himself as a schmoozer and cheerleader, Linda says she works as a broker, organizer, strategic planner, partner, and scavenger. These words describe relationships far more complex than that of the technical expert responding to those in need of assistance. They describe relationships that are long-term,

familiar and reciprocal; relationships that involve talking and listening to the expressed needs of the community; relationships that involve bringing people together to do things that they could not do on their own; relationships that require finding and accessing resources and negotiating interests; relationships that cheer people on to try new things. There is much more that could be gleaned from John and Linda's stories. But for the moment, let us turn to another profile.

Lucinda Randolph Benjamin, an extension educator with workforce and 4-H youth development created the 4-H College Interview Program following a conversation with teenagers about their interests and unmet needs. Again, there is clearly a technical component to Lucinda's work. She teaches the young people to write stronger college application essays and resumes, conducts mock interviews, and arranges for information sessions on college life, financial aid, etc. But to limit Lucinda's work to the transfer of technical knowledge misses much of what is most important in what she does. As she says:

*Living in the community where we work has given CUCE-NYC and our staff validity in the community we serve. It definitely gives you commitment. You go beyond just your job title, or what your job description says. We're bound to the community because we also want to see a change in the neighborhoods we've been in. People know us. We have name identification and credibility. The people trust us. It takes a long time to develop that trust. You have to keep showing up, keep going back, and prove what you say you're going to deliver. You have to deliver.*

*When you're working with people — and this is the key — you can't come in heavy-handed as if "We're Cornell, we're the end-all-be-all." Because when you look at our mission statement, it's take the learning from campus, all the research, and then apply it to the community. But CUCE-NYC*

*can't come off that way, because when you look at all the other colleges here in NYC — CUNY, Columbia, NYU, etc. — people ask, "Why Cornell?" Cornell has to come in more as a community friend. We're helping enhance your knowledge and skills and advance you to another level. We're not coming in saying, "This is how you should do it." We're saying is "These are things you seem to be doing right. Let's build on that." That's a different spin. ...*

*You need people skills. You have to be a people person. You have to have some tenacity about you. ... Initially, they see me as the 4-H lady or the Cornell lady. By the end, they see me as Lucinda, Sister Lucinda, whatever they want to see me as. I think all extension people go through that. It depends on who you are and who you are talking to. Some people wonder if they are buying into you or buying into Cornell. It depends. I think initially I go out and I represent Cornell, but when you look at the time you put in, eventually your spirit pours out and then they buy into you. That's when the trust comes in. ...*

*I'm an excellent motivator. People seem to do positive things when I'm with them. ... I raise the bar of expectation and what they're capable of. ... I listen, but I also highlight the things that you have done well and then show you where you can do that and move it to something else. I'm very into showing you options. I'm helping you discover. And I'm a person you can trust to share your dream with. I won't laugh at your dream. A lot of communities are like that too. They have dreams and hopes, but they shoot themselves in the foot even before they get started by telling themselves, "No, I can not." No! Don't tell yourself that. Try it, do it, do something. I think the saying goes, "If you shoot for the moon and fail, at least you'll fall among the stars. But if you never shoot for it, you never reach anything." I'm like Jesse: "Keep hope alive. I keep hope alive; that's it. I want folks to dream, and I'm trying to tell them, "Baby, you can do this!"*

Lucinda's story enriches the conversation further, adding to our growing list community friend, motivator,

the Cornell lady, Sister Lucinda, and encourager of dreams. She tells us about long-term relationships that involve deep listening, massive doses of encouragement, and an unwavering belief in people's knowledge, skills and strengths. She describes extension educators as a bridge — they are of the community, and they are Cornell. But it is not a bridge across which educators simply transport technical knowledge. "When you look at our mission statement," Lucinda notes, "it's take the learning from campus ... and then apply it to the community. But we can't come off that way... We ... come in more as a community friend. We're not coming in saying, 'This is how you should do it.' What we're saying is 'There are the things you seem to be doing right. Let's build on that.' But that's a different spin." Through her work, she shows us a particular kind of community building, one which focuses not just on bringing knowledge to the community, but on standing with the community, as a "community friend," where "your spirit pours out and then they buy into you." It's an educator's job, she says, to encourage people to dream and "keep hope alive."

Finally, we turn to two profiles of community nutrition educators. Madie McLean began working with cooperative extension in 1971, when the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) first began in East Harlem, where she lived. Like the other extension educators, Madie describes the technical, research-based component of her work:

*We were well-trained to do the group. We would go to Cornell for the workshops, and they would come down here to us. ... We still get information from Cornell that helps us do our jobs. ... [The last workshop] we had, he talked about the [new] dietary guidelines, and he was fantastic. ... We will incorporate that with the food guide pyramid and other lessons.*

Further, she notes:

*[In my classes], I will present research information as it relates to the health problems of high blood pressure, heart diseases, and cancer. ... The nutrition and health sessions promote and help motivate people to learn and make changes that will benefit them and their families.*

But once again, the transfer of technical knowledge paints only a partial picture of the work. As Madie continues:

*The more people know about us, the longer we can continue helping build and change families and communities. The things we do — eating, playing, being together —*

**In these profiles, we have educators describing their work as organizers and brokers; schmoozers and scavengers; cheerleaders and encouragers of dreams; strategic planners and community builders; partners, friends and mothers.**

*it's a combination. Food, by itself, is not going to get it — it's a combination of things. When people ... feel nothing is going right, nutrition and health isn't as important to them as "how do I get out of this rut? How do I get some shoes for the kids? How do I get a coat or jacket or whatever that child needs? How about me? How do I get the help that I need? And you have to know the difference at that point about whether you are going to talk about nutrition or listen to whatever it is that is on their mind at the moment. That is part of building families, because they will think, "She cares about me as an individual."*

*In terms of community building ... I am meeting people who were the children in the home-based families [I worked with twenty years ago]. These children are now twenty-five, twenty-eight, and they remember me. And they remember their moms are still doing the things that they learned from*

*the program than twenty-five years ago. That is amazing feedback. It's always surprising to me because I don't remember, but they do. ... I met somebody at the manicure place, and she leaned over and said, "I know you, I remember you." That happens often because I am still in the same community, and I do often run into people who say, "I remember you at my Mom's house." ... So we must have made some big impression on them...*

*I think EFNEP is all about sharing, sharing information that is relevant to the audience that we are working with, building community, making them stronger, giving them the tools to do things for themselves — simple, everyday things that they can relate to that are going to make their life a little easier and a little better. It is about doing that through people they can relate to and respect, who can say, "Yeah, I've been there, that happened to me and look, I came from there to here." ... It's about encouraging, building people up, helping people to succeed, helping people to just think, "I can do it," to be independent and not dependent.*

Madie describes herself not only as an educator, but as a listener, and perhaps more importantly, as a community-builder. Such community-building, she tells, us is rooted in a particular kind of education. It is carried out by teachers with a life-long passion for learning, whose lives are embedded in the communities in which they work, and whose intent is not just to transfer technical information, but to build capacity — to foster both confidence and competency — in the people with whom they work. It is "all about sharing information" but also about "building people up ... helping people to think, 'I can do it' ..."

Marilyn Waters, another CUCE nutrition educator, opens the window

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on this kind of education even further. On one hand, she talks about the different techniques and lesson plans that she uses when she teaches — how to shop most cost effectively, how to prepare a plate of food that looks enticing, how to give children serving sizes that are appropriate, how to prepare salads and low-fat meals. At the same time, she says:

*I'm just like their mother. I'm the mother of all of them because I cry for all of them when they graduate. When you first go in [to a new group of teen mothers], it's "I don't want a nutrition class. I don't need that. I don't need that parenting. I know how to raise my child." They get very arrogant and irritable when they first come in. But you talk to them on their level, like you don't know it all. You understand. You're willing to listen to them. You're going to listen to their problems. Sometimes when you walk in, this isn't the time that they want to hear about nutrition. They want somebody to give them some good advice. Or they just want to know that I care about them, that I care what they're going to do with their life. ... They become your children.*

*I think the most important thing about being a community educator is loving people and being compassionate. ... If you're not compassionate — "No, no no. You need to know this right now!" — if it's all about teaching this at that moment, you will turn them off. ... It's a whole lot of love and compassion. ... You have to be willing to give of yourself. People say, "No, your job is not that. But your job is that. You have to give of yourself. It gets personal to me. It really does.*

At this point, we've come a long way from that stark, dry, uninspiring phrase on the Bronx community garden fence, "Technical assistance provided by Cornell University Cooperative Extension." We have educators describing their work as organizers and brokers; schmoozers and scavengers; cheerleaders and encouragers of dreams; strategic planners and community builders;

partners, friends and mothers. We have Lucinda telling us that "your spirit pours out and then they buy into you" and Marilyn insisting that the work is "a whole lot of love and compassion."

## **A developmental leadership tradition**

After reading these profiles and listening to the stories, we brought to the CUCE educators excerpts from a wonderful book by Mary Belenky, Lynne Bond, and Jacqueline Weinstock, called *A Tradition That Has No Name: Nurturing the Development of People, Families, and Communities*. We thought it might provide a lens that could help focus this "hard-to-define" practice. Belenky and her colleagues studied successful organizations that helped people, particularly people who previously hadn't taken active roles in the life of their community, to exercise leadership and come to have a real say in the way their lives, families and communities are run. Through their research, they identified a tradition they call "developmental leadership."

The language we heard in the stories of some of the NYC extension educators — language evoking nurturing, growth, caring, family ties, and the creating of community — echoes the tradition of "developmental leadership" described by Belenky and her colleagues. Developmental leaders, they write:

*... are intensely interested in the development of each individual, of the group as a whole, and of a more democratic society. These leaders want to know each person, what they care about, and where they are trying to go. They also work to articulate the goals that people in the group have in common. They look for each person's strong points, for the things already in place upon which the people could build. They also look for the strengths in the people's culture as a building foundation for the whole community. They ask good questions and draw out people's thinking. They listen with care. To*

*better understand what they are hearing they try to step into the people's shoes and see the world through their eyes. Then they look for ways to mirror what they have seen, giving people a chance to take a new look at themselves and see the strengths that have not been well recognized or articulated. Because these leaders open themselves so fully to others, we think of them as connected leaders. We also talk about them as midwife leaders because they enable the community to give birth to fledgling ideas and nurture the ideas along until they have become powerful ways of knowing. ... [T]his tradition puts forth a model of public leadership dedicated to "drawing out," "raising up" and "lifting up" people and communities. (Belenky et. al 1997: 14–15, 17).*

It is a model of public leadership that has been most typically (although not exclusively) practiced by women, and that often (although not exclusively) has been rooted in African and African-American communities.

We asked the CUCE educators whether they saw themselves in this description. Many of them answered with a resounding "yes." We then began to ask — both them and ourselves — what would it mean to view the work of the NYC extension educators as part of this tradition of developmental leadership? How might this change our understanding of what extension educators do? How might it change the parts of their work that are seen and valued?

These questions led us to still more questions, most yet unanswered: to what extent is this practice of developmental leadership central to the work of extension educators elsewhere? What can we learn from it that might expand our understanding of the role of extension, in particular, and universities, in general, as we try to more effectively partner with communities? What would it mean to understand the work of community development in terms of the decidedly unflashy, often

mundane, day-to-day work of nurturing people? What can it teach those of us in campus-based positions about the ways we can best support capacity-building in communities? How might it foster stronger, more reciprocal partnerships between campus and community extension offices? What assumptions about “program development,” “outcomes” and measurements of “effectiveness” would need to be questioned and changed?

To view the work of extension educators as part of a developmental leadership tradition is not to view it in some radically new way. Rather, it takes us right back to extension’s historical roots. Seaman A. Knapp, often described as the “father” of the extension movement (Martin 1921/1941; Rasmussen 1989), was known to argue that the real yardstick for measuring the success of extension teaching was contained in the phrase: “And the man grew faster than the crop” (Willard 1929: 413).

We find the same perspective in the following two quotations. The first is taken from a national survey of land-grant institutions, a comprehensive two-volume study published in 1930 by the federal Office of Education:

*The ultimate objective was not more and better food, clothing, and housing. These were merely means and conditions prerequisite to improvement of human relationships, of intellectual and spiritual outlook. Apparent preoccupation with economic interests must be interpreted in terms of the purposes that material welfare is intended to serve. The fundamental function of Smith-Lever extension education is the development of rural people themselves. This is accomplished by fostering attitudes of mind and capacities which will enable them to better meet the individual and civic problems with which they are confronted. Unless economic attainment and independence are regarded chiefly as means for advancing the social and cultural life of those living in the open country, the*

*most important purpose of extension education will not be achieved (Klein 1930, 442).*

The second excerpt is taken from a paper that A. E. Bowman, director of extension in Wyoming, wrote in 1934 in connection with the twentieth anniversary of the Smith-Lever Act, which created the national Cooperative Extension Service:

*The Extension Service, while seeming to deal chiefly with the economic problems involved in helping the producer secure a greater income from his farm, and his wife to manage the home with greater economy and less effort, has contributed to rural soci-*

**To view the work of extension educators as part of a long tradition of developmental leadership is not to try to view it in some radically new way. Rather, it is to view it in the oldest possible way, one that takes us right back to extension’s historical roots.**

*ety something vastly more important than a knowledge of improved practices and greater income. To induce men and women and boys and girls to come together to think collectively, plan collectively, and then act collectively to bring about desired conditions, does something to the individual. It gives opportunity, the greatest boon to mankind, for self-expression and development. It is not the acquisition of more lands or more cattle or more home equipment that brings greater happiness. It is the “finding of one’s self,” the development of leadership, improved skills, increased knowledge, broadened understanding, and greater appreciation attained by the individual taking part in community activities set afoot by the Extension Service that measures its value to rural people. (Bowman 1934: 88–89)*

Both of these passages remind us, in an almost eerily precise way, of the

central lesson we learned from the CUCE-NYC educators: it’s not about the rice.

If a developmental leadership tradition is deeply rooted in extension history, what explains the predominance of the narrow “technical assistance” language used to describe extension’s mission and work? To answer this question, we need to confront the fact that a broad human and community development centered understanding of extension’s mission and work is — and has always been — in tension with a narrower technical understanding. In

part, this tension is rooted in genuine disagreements among educators and administrators about how human and community development can or should be pursued. Some believe that human and community development are by-products of economic development; from this perspective, extension’s main emphasis should be placed on developing and

disseminating the technical skills and knowledge that can help enhance economic efficiency and productivity. Others disagree, believing that human and community development must be prioritized and fostered directly, or risk becoming devalued and lost.

However, the tension extends beyond disagreements about strategy and tactics. The emphasis on a narrow technical view of extension’s mission and work was — and is — also shaped by powerful political and economic forces and actors that have tried to mold universities’ activities, including their extension activities, to a particular set of values and interests. These include prioritizing national economic growth, “competitiveness” and private corporate agendas, without serious regard to what the consequences may be with re-

spect to human and community development (Hightower 1973/1978; Neth 1995; McDowell 2001; Peters 2002).

The profiles contained in this book show us that an understanding of the developmental tradition is alive and well in contemporary extension practice. Many of them provide us with valuable insight into how a group of spirited, creative, and dedicated educators are navigating the tension between human and technical understandings of extension's mission and work in ways that integrate them rather than pit them against each other, while leaving the central focus and emphasis on the human side of the work.

A few months after our collaborative course ended, most of the campus-based class members returned to New York City one more time, this time for a retreat in the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens where we used four of these profiles to reflect with the entire CUCE-NYC staff (eighty people in all) about the essence of their work. It was, some of them told us, the first time they had publicly discussed with each other what many had privately known. At that meeting, Patti Thayer, a resource educator with Workforce Development, put it this way: "We grow people in New York City." And Evalina Irish Spencer, regional coordinator for CUCE's nutrition programs, observed: "You can never give people from here [points to her head] what you can give them from here [points to her heart]. You can give all you want from your head, but unless your heart is there, you've missed it. And you better not be missing it."

As these profiles make abundantly clear, the official institutional language of "technical assistance," and "putting knowledge to work" — by itself —

"misses it." It is far too narrow and flat to capture the rich, varied, nuanced practice of extension education. Yes, there is a technical assistance component to nearly every extension educator's job. And yes, the transfer of research-based knowledge from university to community is embedded in nearly every extension program. But to see only that misses so much of what these educators do. It leaves the "something else" unnamed, vague, undefined, and all too often, misunderstood.

We believe that if this tradition of promoting human and community

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development is not only to survive, but to thrive within extension practice, it is essential to define that "something else." As Mary Belenky and her colleagues note, there is a danger to leaving important traditions unnamed:

*When a tradition has no name people will not have a rich shared language for articulating and reflecting on their experiences with the tradition. Poorly articulated traditions are likely to be fragile. 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 (Belenky et. al 1997: 293–294).*

The work of developing a richer language that better captures the entire tradition of extension education remains. But it can only evolve from continued conversation among those who believe in the power of the extension partnership to help build the capacity of people and communities. So now, we invite you to engage with these profiles yourselves. What does the mirror show you? What do you see that we have not seen? In what way do these

profiles reflect back aspects of your own work? What parts of your experience do you not find here? What language would you use to describe what it is that extension educators do?

Of course, changing an institutional language, while an important step, will not by itself change an institution or its practices. As we noted earlier, institutional priorities and practices have been shaped, in part, by powerful political and economic interests and goals. Thus, to go further, we must also ask why the work of extension education tends to be described in one type of language and not another, and what we might do about it. What would it take to develop an organizational culture that embraced not just a richer language, but supported educators actively putting it into practice? Where do such practices already exist? What supports for them are already in place? What barriers must still be overcome? What role do you want to play? We invite you to join us in helping the conversation continue.



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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The phrase “civic dimensions of practice” is meant to point to those aspects of practice that have to do with community development, leadership development, public deliberation and problem solving, and capacity building in the skills needed for active citizenship.

<sup>2</sup> Practitioner profiles are a research tool developed by John Forester, a professor in Cornell’s Department of City and Regional Planning to illuminate “theory ... through the lived experiences of [practitioners].” They are described in more depth in his book, *The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes*.

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