This chapter presents a case study of collaboration between the Lawndale Christian Development Corporation and the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education.

The Arts as an Occasion for Collective Adult Learning as Authentic Community Development

Arnold Aprill, Richard Townsell

All too often, a community undergoing a community development process is relegated to the role of audience to outsiders’ expertise. Community members are asked to furnish token “representation” of the residents’ point of view and once they’ve been represented are asked to approve what the outsiders say is in their best interest. This dynamic is reinforced by whatever power struggles and multiplicity of points of view actually exist inside the community itself, inviting outside experts to create oversimplified, monolithic characterization of the community’s wants and needs as a way of responding to the overwhelming number of apparently competing agendas represented by the individual community members themselves. So how is consensus built across differences in age, class, ethnic identity, gender, lifestyles, religion, mobility, language, and values? This chapter presents a case study of the arts as an occasion for collective adult learning as authentic community development, as seen in a collaboration between the Lawndale Christian Development Corporation (LCDC) and the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE).

Community Development as a Process of Collective Adult Learning

One way to build consensus across difference is to see the community development process as a collective adult learning process itself.

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new housing is not just about bricks and mortar but also about developing new collective understanding of where and how we live. School improvement is not just about hiring and firing principals but also about developing new collective understanding of the community's relationship to its schools. Economic development is not just about jobs and businesses but also about developing new collective understanding of the intentional design of a neighborhood's cultural ecology. Parks and recreation are not just about planting trees and building a movie theater but also about developing new collective understanding of our relationship to the natural world in urban settings, and to our needs for relaxation, pleasure, and entertainment.

A collective adult learning framework is meaningful and useful in this context, because collective adult learning actually invites and benefits from the dialectical nature of differing opinions and experiences. A learning process that can tolerate and encourage opposing subjectivities affords the kind of respect and listening that is a precondition for reflection and dialogue (Mezirow, 1991, 2000; Daloz, 2000)—which are also the preconditions for developing consensus, for planning, and for collective action (Marsick, Bitterman, and van der Veen, 2000).

A collective adult learning framework moves participants involved with community development planning from individuals defending a position to learners reframing ideas by hearing interesting ideas that challenge their assumptions in a generative way. There are significant parallels here to the adult learning literature on team learning, where there is movement from fragmented individual learning to pooled and synergistic learning (Kasl, Marsick, and Dechant, 1997). Individuals enter a conversation regarding their community as individuals and leave with a common understanding of an issue. They leave with a fundamentally different interpretation of the situation; they have contributed to reframing the issues, and they have also reframed it for themselves.

A collective adult learning framework addresses issues of scale by including significant and diverse portions of the community (Daloz, 2000). When a large number of community residents see themselves as deepening their learning about themselves and their community by working in a learning context with others, they can move much more quickly into a collective problem-solving mode that is respectful of others and that does not reduce their experiential knowledge to tokenism. Challenging ideas that expand rather than discount lived experience are gratifying in themselves. This becomes an engine for building consensus. A collective adult learning framework recognizes both young adults and elders, two constituencies who are often patronized and discounted in the community development process as less than full contributors to collective knowledge.
How the Arts Assist the Collective Adult Learning Process

For collective adult learning to become reflective and generative, experience, knowledge, intuition, and insights of all participating learners need to be revealed both to the learners themselves and to other learners. The arts, as especially rich and varied media for revealing experience, knowledge, intuition, and insight, have special power for accelerating the reflective dialogue at the heart of collective adult learning (Davis-Manigaulte, Yorks, and Kasl, 2006; Yorks and Kasl, 2006). Our collaboration was facilitated by our participation in a cooperative inquiry that was part of the Leadership for a Changing World awardees program funded by the Ford Foundation and the Advocacy Institute and was administered through the Research Center for Leadership in Action at NYU’s Wagner School (Aprill and others, 2006). During our inquiry, we discussed the radical epistemology of John Heron and Peter Reason (Heron, 1992; Heron and Reason, 1997, 2001). Heron and Reason’s epistemological framework involves four ways of knowing: experiential (involving “direct face-to-face encounter with person, place, or thing... knowing through the immediacy of perceiving through empathy and resonance”), presentational (“the first form of expressing meaning and significance through drawing on expressive forms of imagery through... music drawing, painting, ... story, ... and so on”), propositional (knowing “about something through ... theories, expressed in informative statements”), and practical (“how to do something ... expressed through skill, knack, or competence” (2001, p. 183). At the level of individual learning, presentational or expressive learning is a pathway between experiential knowing and structured propositional knowing. As such it opens a connection between emotion and feeling and critical reflection. At the interpersonal and group level presentational, or expressive, knowing permits an empathic connection between individuals and is a pathway for critical discourse (Yorks and Kasl, 2006; see Figure 5.1). This empathic connection is the basis for learning-within-relationship amid diversity (Yorks and Kasl, 2002).

Building on these ideas, we used art as a core component of collaborative community development work on certain principles of collective adult learning:

- **Revealing the learner’s knowledge to the learner.** All learners are full of images, ideas, impulses, and intuitions that are preverbal and emergent but unformed. The structures of the several arts disciplines give expressive shape to these messages, so that the learner can know what he or she knows but has not yet expressed and bring this knowledge to consciousness as well as out into the world.
- **Revealing the learner’s knowledge to others.** The arts literally present an image of another person’s consciousness that other learners can respond
to in their own way, allowing a multifaceted entry point into another learner’s thinking—expanding, reframing, and enriching everyone’s thinking. Once revealed, this knowledge needs enough “independence” from the learner from whom it was generated to become shared knowledge, to become a “proposition” owned and considered by all the members of the learning team. Arts products establish this distance by first emerging as expression of their individual creators, but then also having independent “lives” of their own that resonate with and evoke new experience and expression from others. The richness and variation in response that arts products stimulate in a group of learners both bonds the group and generates new thinking among individuals and the collective. Concrete examples of this process are given in the case study of this chapter.

**LCDC Disengages Itself from the Horns of a Dilemma**

Leadership of the Lawndale Christian Development Corporation (LCDC) was in the process of figuring out how to work with LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation) Chicago, a nationally known community development intermediary. LISC had chosen sixteen Chicago neighborhoods to work on a ten-year planning and implementation process for creation of quality-of-life plans for those neighborhoods. This work was largely funded by the MacArthur Foundation. LISC and LCDC were both struggling to clarify their roles in the Lawndale community development planning process. The LCDC leadership thought that CAPE (a network of schools and arts organizations that codesign and coimplement innovative school improvement strategies) might be useful in destabilizing some of the competition for the platform in planning with the Lawndale community.
CAPE introduced a lateral intervention: an art-based community visioning process that was helpful in reinforcing some of LCDC’s core principles while leaving LISC an opportunity to bring its assets to the table without discounting LCDC’s history and practice.

**CAPE as a Collective Adult Education Network**

All of CAPE’s work in schools and communities is based on a collective adult education model (www.capeweb.org). Many arts education organizations deliver arts services to the classroom, in which visiting artists offer a short-term series of arts activities for students while the teacher is often relegated to the role of disciplinarian. Many teachers choose to “walk” while visiting artists carry out lessons, grading papers at the back of the room or slipping out to smoke a cigarette. Teachers are not engaged in the arts learning in their classrooms because they are not engaged as learners themselves. The visiting artists often fall into the trap of presenting charming but superficial lessons that expose children to art but do not engage the students as complex thinkers making their own decisions about problems that matter. This is sometimes referred to as “art as inoculation.” The artists are also not engaged as learners, coming into the school community as experts rather than colearners.

CAPE challenges this delivery model by positing a capacity-building, colearning model, gathering teachers and artists into an adult learning community that codesigns innovative programming in schools and investigates and documents effective teaching, learning, and art making across schools. The Collaborative Cut-Paper Mural Process described here embodies CAPE’s values of shared learning through collective work.

**The Collaborative Cut-Paper Mural Process.** The noted African American artist Bernard Williams (http://cuip.uchicago.edu/ac/Artists/BWilliams/) developed the visioning process that CAPE introduced to the Lawndale community.

Williams’s work grows from his continuing investigation of American and world history and culture. As the artist notes, “In many of my works, signs and symbols are collected and arranged in order to speak about the complexities of history and human development and movement through the ages. I attempt to speak about America as a place of conflict, sharing, fragmentation, and convergence. America is seen as a place constructed by multiple cultures, including Anglos, Hispanics, Blacks, Asians, and others. The viewer is urged to consider his or her place in the forceful flow of culture and events.”

Williams’s rich and varied works often contain simple, iconographic, silhouetted images forming symbols that resonate with multiple meanings beyond their simple outlines (Figure 5.2). His process includes:

1. Collecting lots of information about complex subjects that matter to people’s lives (acknowledging complexity)
2. Developing simple images that stand for complex ideas (representing complexity)
3. Arranging these simple images into patterns (exploring complexity)
4. Reflecting on the patterns in the arrangement (analyzing complexity)

Under Williams’s guidance, CAPE has used this process as a teaching methodology to allow groups to develop collective understanding of complex subjects. In CAPE projects using this technique, groups write down a list of important ideas and images from a subject that matters to them, individuals draw simple images representing these ideas on construction paper and cut them out, the images are arranged into a mural and taped to a wall or large sheet of paper for all to see, and then the group analyzes patterns they see in the arrangement. The results are consistently beautiful, are inclusive of multiple points of view, and produce lively discussion and analysis among all the participants. It is literally a visioning process because it translates ideas into images one can see, allowing viewers some distance on
the ideas and the opportunity to consider how the ideas interact with each other to suggest new options. CAPE first used this process as part of its Great Migration Project, in which CAPE teachers and artists traveled to the Mississippi Delta to meet with teachers and artists from Mississippi to collectively grapple with the complex history of African American migration from Mississippi to Chicago.

A Light Bulb Goes on for Richard Townsell. The initial experience of the arts during one of Arnie’s activities in the Leadership for a Changing World (LCW) program initially created a disorienting dilemma for Richard that through reflection led to a new insight regarding the potential of the arts for his work in community development.

At the start of the LCW meeting, Arnold Aprill led us in the cut-paper mural process. I was skeptical, along with other hard-scrabble community organizers from around the country. We are going to cut out paper and make a mural, I thought. What have I gotten myself into? Arnold asked us to cut out pictures or words that described our hopes and our fears about leadership. People were self-conscious about their art, and Arnold assured us that we were not going to put it up in a museum.

Slowly we began to stick up our work up on the wall. I had a lot of fun doing the pieces that I put up. I immediately thought that this process could be used in the community, as we were engaging in a comprehensive planning process for the next ten years for our neighborhood. I saw the arts as an invaluable tool in helping the community create a vision about its future. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that the arts could serve as a democratizing tool to level the playing field between experts and novices [Richard Townsell, in Aprill and others, 2006].

Richard came to the realization that although LCDC had created award-winning housing and even produced some murals, the arts could become more than an afterthought, a decoration after the fact in Lawndale’s development process. The arts could become part of his community’s learning process. He saw that the role of the arts in community development has been largely relegated to art activities and products such as mosaics, sculptures, and single performances. Those activities are useful, but he began to wonder how the arts could be instrumental in the methodology of community development planning, rather than just ancillary products to community development. He decided to try it out.

Making Cut-Paper Murals in Lawndale. Richard invited Arnold to introduce the cut-paper mural process into Lawndale’s first large planning meeting. The LISC team was very skeptical, requesting repeated phone meetings in which Arnold patiently repeated the same information each time, understanding that the process sounded ridiculous until it was experienced.
Richard’s team intentionally invited a large group of participants (two hundred people), recognizing that the process, by going back and forth among individual work, small group work, and whole group work, could effectively engage large groups. Rather than winnowing this group down to a small set of decision makers, LCDC values inclusion of a broad base of community members in every aspect of the community development process. LCDC also consistently and persistently goes back to dropouts and nonparticipants to investigate what the obstacles are to their authentic inclusion.

The steps in the collaborative cut-paper mural development process (writing down important ideas in small groups, creating individual images, arranging the individual images into collective images, and discussing the patterns that emerge) work together to form a positive dynamic between individual expression and collective decision making, and they are concrete demonstrations of relationship building.

• Step one: collecting information, acknowledging complexity. After welcomes and food, the group was introduced to the process and shown slides of cut-paper murals created by other planning groups. During the initial presentation of the mural process to the Lawndale community, a piece of music was played as an exemplar of grassroots art making. It was composed that very morning as an online collaboration between grade school students in Chicago and students in Australia and emailed to CAPE that afternoon. A young man stepped forward in a state of pleased shock. He had made up part of the American end of that transcontinental collaboration. He was transformed, almost before he realized what he had accomplished, into an international artist being held up as a model for his whole community, with his mother as a witness. But that was not all. He was immediately drafted to be the videographer for the evening, and he engaged a buddy of his to become the digital still photographer. The equipment was unfamiliar to them, but they mastered both cameras in a few minutes and fulfilled their new roles with gusto.

The group then broke up into tables by areas of interest in community planning. Table topics included education; arts, recreation, and culture; economic development and jobs; health and safety; affordable housing; and youth development. There, working in small groups, very mixed tables brainstormed images of what they would like to see in the community in their topic area. One elderly lady reported on a long-closed neighborhood bakery she fondly remembered from her youth. “Mostly I remember the smell of fresh baked bread,” she said. “And how I’d love to see a bakery that served good tea and coffee!” One parent spoke of her longing for not just competent schools in the neighborhood but schools of choice for learners from other neighborhoods. A young person spoke of the need for more after-school programs in the neighborhood. At every table, all ideas were recorded, in all their variety.
This brainstorming returns the community planning process to its true purpose, which is planning rather than the competitive distraction of slicing up the fiscal pie of grants.

• **Step two: developing images, representing complexity.** The groups, working at their tables, were then directed to draw and cut out simple images representing their brainstormed ideas, drawing outlines with pencil before cutting. Participants were also encouraged to include key words as images to be cut out. Participants were assured that “talent” was not required, that even very simple images look great. The familiar materials involved in the process (pencils, paper, scissors, masking tape) and the seemingly simple tasks (write some words, draw a simple outline, cut it out, tape it up) made for inviting access to the art-making process.

• **Step three: arranging images into patterns, exploring complexity.** Participants were then directed to arrange their images into a collective mural at each table, attaching images with masking tape so that images can be moved, shifted, and rearranged. Each table negotiated the collective arrangement of individual images. Contradictory images (such as alcohol and healthy food) were both included. Each image was ripe for interpretation as patterns began to emerge from the collective arrangements. Symbols represent complex ideas in simple ways, retaining latent complexity that is revealed through interpretation.

• **Step four: reflecting on patterns, analyzing complexity.** Working at each table, participants identified the themes that emerged from the juxtaposition of diverse images and then chose representatives from each table to present emergent themes to the entire group. In the cut-paper mural process, all people present in the room participate, regardless of age, income, or expertise. The facilitators make certain that everyone has an opportunity to participate, and that no one monopolizes the conversation. In the LCDC planning sessions, children and senior citizens took the floor with equal dignity, both having valuable contributions to make from their own experience about what was needed in their shared community. The democratizing nature of the activity (one artistic vote per person in mural creation) allows nay-sayers to have their nay-say without controlling the conversation with their negativity, as well as for diverse problem solvers to reframe the conversation in useful new ways. For example, under the topic of recreation one Lawndale resident added the image of a bookstore, noting the absence of one in the neighborhood. This was an important new insight that could easily have been left out of community planning.

In the reflection step of the mural process, the community is called on to report how each piece of the mural speaks meaningfully to other pieces and to other people. Everyone appreciates having his or her contribution to the whole acknowledged and valued. Communities grow by realizing the gifts of neighbors.
Step five: Taking time. This gratifying activity helped the group pause for planning. One of the biggest difficulties in community development is setting aside the appropriate time for planning, and for monitoring when time is wasted and when it is well spent. There are two constituencies that tend to accelerate the process: outside planners, who confuse efficiency with effectiveness, and community members, highly skeptical of initiatives that have proven in the past to be time-burners masking a hidden agenda and understandably impatient for results. The impulse is to try to go faster, whether speed is called for or not. The mural process helps concretize the essential time needed for visioning, yielding satisfying public evidence that something has been accomplished even in early planning, and also creating a reference point for looking back on early decisions.

Reflecting on the Process: Values and Principles

Looking back on their collaboration, we reflected on the LCDC values the organizations had held to during the process, and the parallel community arts principles they had enacted.

- **LCDC value**: community development is more about building relationships than it is about building buildings. The arts-as-community-development principle: the person-to-person discourse at the center of the process produces murals that represent groups of people in discussion with each other, rather than murals that represent the vision of a single outside art expert. This parallels LCDC’s commitment to decisions emerging out of community discourse rather than from the thinking of outside experts. Also, the commitment to art as an inclusive process (not a focus on art as attractive artifact) models LCDC’s belief that relationships build buildings better than buildings build relationships.

- **LCDC value**: community development is about diverse participation across barriers of race, class, gender, and age. The arts-as-community-development principle: democratic culture depends on every voice speaking out. The arts quite literally lift every voice.

- **LCDC value**: community development is about inclusive and broad participation. The arts-as-community-development principle: the arts assist democratic discourse across large groups of people.

- **LCDC value**: community development planning processes need to be transparent to the communities involved. The arts-as-community-development principle: art-making processes that invite broad participation support local decision making, reveal process through participation, and thereby demystify expertise.

- **LCDC value**: community development takes the time it takes to develop communities, rather than the time dictated by grant schedules. The arts-as-community-development principle: The arts help focus attention
on key early planning decisions and produce compelling evidence of key decisions to help guide the tempo of and benchmarks for later decision making.

- **LCDC value:** Community development places more value on developing ideas than on dividing up money. *The arts-as-community-development principle:* Community arts practice keeps our eyes on the prize of meaning, not money. The arts can make explicit and visible our true values and deep motivations, which then assists us in prioritizing appropriate and fair use and distribution of dollars and other resources as means to worthy ends.

- **LCDC value:** Community development encourages community members to assume new roles and investigate new capacities. *The arts-as-community-development principle:* Literally put technology and responsibility into the hands of community members, especially those that have not had opportunities to lead. People grow into the challenges afforded them. They grow. Encourage collaborators to shift roles; the documenter becomes the reporter, the student becomes the teacher, the teacher becomes the artist. Comfort with role migration is a strong indicator of successful community development.

- **LCDC value:** Community development recognizes all contributors. *The arts-as-community-development principle:* The arts assist community members in seeing tangibly each other's and one's own contributions to collective tasks.

- **LCDC value:** Community development distributes leadership rather than centralizing it. *The arts-as-community-development principle:* The mural process focuses the community on the beauty of its collective work, rather than on the ego of a few leaders. Community arts practice builds the capacity of all, rather than idealizing the accomplishments of the few. Also, the shared meeting ground of distributed leadership prepares the current generation of leadership to step out of the way and pass leadership on to the next generation, preparing that generation to receive its responsibility and power.

- **LCDC value:** Community development recognizes community members as authors of their own destiny. *The arts-as-community-development principle:* Community arts practice recognizes community members as not just consumers of culture but creators of culture.

- **LCDC value:** Community development deals with harsh realities but is essentially a spiritual practice. *The arts-as-community-development principle:* The mural process, with its shared image making, communal testifying, and reflection, creates communion in community.

**Conclusion**

The arts can build particular capacities among adult learners in the community development process. Communities engaged in community planning are often directed by experts to look at outsiders' plans for building new housing and retail opportunities. Including an artistic point of view in
the planning process itself redirects community members to create their own vision for their community, drawing on their lived knowledge as adult thinkers responsible for their own destinies. This redirected energy leads to activism. The arts encourage all community members to speak out and be heard, and to connect vision to action. Creating artistic products during the planning process contributes to a sense of agency, emboldening citizens to determine new actions for themselves and their community.

Weaving a communal art process into LCDC’s community development planning helped move Lawndale residents into a shared “state of grace” in which they spoke to each other with deepened strength, vision, and commitment and listened to each other with deepened respect, appreciation, and joy. If community-based planning and development is to have any meaningful political power or significant personal value, we need to move ourselves—now—into the spiritual state we want our communities to embody in the future. The arts are a powerful road less taken on this essential journey.

References


**ARNOLD APRILL** is the executive director of the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE), a network of public schools and artists and arts organizations committed to school improvement through arts education partnerships.

**RICHARD TOWNSELL** is one of seventeen national recipients of the 2003 Ford Foundation’s Leadership for a Changing World Award, honoring those who make a difference in their communities by tackling tough social problems.