IT TAKES HEART: BUILDING PEER-DRIVEN TRAINING INITIATIVES THROUGH WORKERS' STORIES

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ABSTRACT

IT TAKES HEART: BUILDING PEER-DRIVEN TRAINING INITIATIVES THROUGH WORKERS' STORIES

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My research inquiry is centered on the larger project of building a transformational, empowerment model of worker voice in workplaces. The purpose of my research is to explore/illuminate the question, "How can I use workers' stories to center and advance collaborative worker voice on the job through peer-driven training initiatives?" I frame this general research inquiry around two key questions: (a) How do I create authentic spaces for workers' stories to emerge from the heart? (b) How do I use workers' stories to create the environment needed for workers to become peer teachers/leaders of their own training initiatives? This study's intended audience is any practitioner who seeks to center workers' experiences/stories as the fulcrum for transformational workplace change. My research method is Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN). SPN is a sustained exploration of one's own narrative experiences of dealing with a particular question, problem, or dynamic that has broader social significance. It entails analyzing that experience through the lens of relevant research and theory. I have chosen a hybrid video/written format for my SPN, to create a first-person storytelling experience for the viewer/reader that replicates my methodology with workers at their worksites. The video segments of this dissertation can be found at http://debmoy.weebly.com/. My findings document the key elements needed to be an effective change agent supporting organic leadership in organizations through workers' stories. My dissertation can influence the effectiveness of

California Transit Works (CTW), the statewide consortium bringing my approach to scale nationally. My dissertation can bring academic recognition to key roles that third-party neutrals, or "intermediaries," can play in building worker voice empowerment within labor/management partnerships. Finally, I hope this dissertation inspires and guides workers and change agents to take a holistic view of what it means to have our own voices and be our own best allies in transforming our communities. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (https://aura.antioch.edu) and OhioLINK ETD Center (https://etd.ohiolink.edu).

Keywords: worker stories, worker voice, participatory action research, community based participatory research, labor-management partnerships, psychological safety, centering, peer driven change, peer mentoring, digital storytelling, workforce development, positive organizational change, organic leadership, scholarly personal narrative

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Michael Raffanti, EdD, EdD Program Director and Dean of the Antioch School of Education, was much more than a member of my committee. Throughout this three-year program, Michael's skillful leadership created the safe spaces I needed to explore my ever-changing role as a scholar-practitioner. With his timely support, I navigated through not only the academic development of the first cohort, but also unprecedented national social unrest, pandemic conditions, and personal challenges.

Laura Dresser, PhD, associate director of the Center on Wisconsin Strategy (COWS) at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, has lifted up my work through her astute research for more than 30 years. As a committee member, Laura enthusiastically agreed to be part of developing my/Antioch's inaugural SPN dissertation in the EdD program, even though the

methodology was completely new to her. I deeply appreciated her ability to view my work through the lens of its implications for the broader field of social change agents.

Lesley Jackson, PhD, founding faculty member of the Antioch EdD program, served as my faculty advisor extraordinaire. Lesley has a unique approach to the personal challenges faced by doctoral students, especially students of color. Her unwavering support and sharp insights helped me transcend several major societal upheavals, numerous bouts of imposter syndrome, and personal challenges that threatened to derail my studies from start to finish.

This dissertation and my life's work would not be possible without the enthusiastic participation of frontline workers and management leaders, who bravely shared their stories and allowed me to be an integral part of their groundbreaking work in transforming their workplaces. Tom Fink, Michael Hursh, Susan Yates, Russell Anderson, and Jamaine Gibson, in particular, are pioneers who demonstrate unwavering commitment and the true heart it takes to always center the voices of frontline workers in their workplaces. They continue to inspire thousands of people across the country, demonstrating that positive change is not only possible, but achievable.

To my family and friends, you are all part of my true ohana on this dissertation journey. Thank you for patiently understanding my frequent absences and less than full participation in our collective lives these past few years—I am back now! Finally, to my service dog Bodhi—I love and miss you constantly. Even though my hand still reaches down to empty air where your head used to press into my leg as I worked through this program, your unwavering love and loyalty will always sustain me.

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PREFACE: USER'S GUIDE TO THIS HYBRID VIDEO/WRITTEN DISSERTATION

The structure of this dissertation mirrors the process I describe in the dissertation itself—how do I listen deeply to workers' stories, identify themes, and gradually gain understanding of the deeper issues highlighted through these stories? In this dissertation, the "workers' stories" I am using are my own stories, through a methodology that supports storytelling—Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN). As explained in Chapter II: Methodology, an SPN utilizes one's own experiences as the data being researched.

I chose to relate my experiences by telling stories on video. I wanted to create, as closely as possible, a first-person experience for the viewer of what it's like to really listen to another person's stories. As you view these videos of my personal experiences in centering workers' stories as a fulcrum for transformational workplace change, you will have the simultaneous opportunity to observe your own listening processes. My goal was to create a learning environment for the viewer that mirrors the learning environments I create for workers to share their stories with each other.

How did I decide which stories to tell? This identification process began early in my dissertation studies. Dr. Stephen Brookfield gave me an assignment: write a three-to-four-page memo to my imaginary work successor. This memo would capture the most important lessons and insights I wish I had known when I started my work. I would not be able to speak directly with this successor; but if I could meet with the person, the memo would capture valuable information to share. This written assignment could become a mini précis of a bigger SPN study (my dissertation).

To my surprise, the prompt for this beginning SPN assignment created an outpouring of words onto paper, quite unlike previous assignments from other courses. I had no trouble

identifying key lessons I would like to pass along to a work successor, easily filling seven pages of single-spaced type. Subsequently, I used the logic of this assignment to select the stories for this dissertation. This dissertation is a summary of key insights I have learned from my work in centering workers' stories, told through the lens of a change agent.

The video stories in this dissertation were *not* scripted, nor were they read off a teleprompter. Instead, I used the thematic research inquiry questions of Chapters III and IV as my prompt, and allowed the stories to flow naturally as the video was rolling. This is the same process I use in focus groups and meetings with workers. (While I had a few stories best told in writing, most stories are told on video.)

While a classic SPN dissertation intersperses discussion of key literature or theories with one's personal experiences, I discovered that approach did not work well with my video stories. I wanted this dissertation to be useful to current and future change agents. Yet, when I showed a test video segment that integrated story with literature to a few colleagues, they felt the literature references interrupted the natural flow of the story and broke the learning process. Based on their feedback, I omitted a discussion of the literature from almost all video segments.

Just as I do in my longitudinal work with workers and their experiences/stories, I have organized this dissertation in a manner that best suits the learning processes of my research inquiry. I utilized both written and video storytelling, as appropriate. I then identified key themes underlying these stories, integrated with discussion of a few key pieces of literature which are especially meaningful to me.

I strived to make this SPN-style integrated discussion of the literature as accessible as possible, to assist others on their own scholar-practitioner paths if they so choose. Throughout this dissertation, deep reflection on my extensive field experience led me to discover relevant

literature, rather than first reading the theoretical literature and then applying it in the field. This process—using my lived experiences as the lens through which to examine and understand various theories and academic literature—is an element of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) which makes academia less intimidating and more relevant to my life and work.

Similarly, there is a wealth of literature within each chapter's themes. In the Scholarly Reflections section of each chapter, I have chosen particular books and articles from this body of literature that were especially meaningful or crucial to my research inquiry.

I suggest the following approach to "reading" this hybrid video/written dissertation:

1. Read the Synopsis section at the beginning of each chapter.
2. View the video segments by chapter, roughly in order, as they build on each other. The first video listed in Chapters I, III, IV, and V are "context" videos for each chapter's themes, featuring frontline workers and managers in their own voices. Each subsequent video segment is a personal story, organically developed in the same manner as the workers' stories that are the subject of this dissertation. (There is a bulleted description of each video segment in each chapter for ease of navigation.)
3. Read the Scholarly Reflections section at the end of each chapter to gain more understanding of my personal journey through Scholarly Personal Narrative methodology. I have organized my scholarly reflections into specific themes underlying the video segments of each chapter. The key pieces of literature in each theme have particularly guided, framed, or informed my dissertation.

As you scan the bullet point descriptions of the video segments, there may be certain topics that you would like to explore before others. It is fine to skip around, while keeping in mind that some videos build upon an understanding of content presented in earlier video

segments. Similarly, many of the themes and key literature explored in Chapters III and IV are contained in multiple video segments. As mentioned above, I strongly suggest viewing the first video clips listed in Chapters I, III, IV, and V for context before skipping to individual video segments. These videos feature frontline workers (and managers), as relates to the chapter themes. Above all, my intent through this dissertation is to honor frontline workers in their own voices.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION—IT TAKES HEART

1.1 Synopsis

> I used to be a cargo truck driver. When I first applied for this job, I thought 'How hard can this job be? The cargo walks on and off by itself!' What I didn't realize when I started work as a bus driver, was how hard it the work was going to be—the 'cargo' talks back! For my first few years as a driver, I hated passengers. I truly believed that the best bus was an empty bus. Gradually I realized that the reason I was so unhappy at work stemmed from my attitude towards passengers. When I started seeing passengers as human beings, I realized the important role that public transit played in their lives. I became more patient and compassionate; gradually, passengers became friends instead of adversaries who disrupted my day. (Fink, 2008)

The storyteller was Tom Fink, the visionary founder of what would become the leading public transit labor/management training partnership in North America. Yet, Tom did not tell this story when I first met him. The reason behind his reticence goes to the heart of my research inquiry.

It all started in 2005 with a phone call from Enrique Fernandez, a longtime colleague and business manager of UNITE HERE Local 19 representing hospitality workers in San Jose, California, and surrounding areas. "Deborah? This is Enrique. I have in my office here my good friend Tom Fink. We've been talking about the training programs you do for our hotel workers. I told him you would help him with training programs he wants to do for ATU Local 265 workers at VTA. OK? Thank you!" Um . . . ok! Sure thing Enrique, I can do that.

Thus, a retired bus operator/union official named Tom Fink came to my office and posed an intriguing question. What would it take to create a training program for bus operators that would both (a) enhance operator/passenger relations as an important factor in maintaining and improving ridership levels at a mid-sized public transit agency (thereby increasing both public service and job security); and (b) improve operator well-being by addressing the overwhelming

stress of the job that is a function of the inherent nature of navigating a large vehicle through traffic on tight schedules, passenger interactions, and inner coping strategies?

After Tom gave me the first of many orientations to the public transit industry, I agreed to take on the challenge. At the time, I had my own scholar-practitioner practice as a "third-party neutral" consultant, focused on creating human and organizational change through labor-management partnership training programs at unionized firms like Local 19's hoteliers in San Jose. I agreed to take on Tom's "project," little realizing that eighteen years later, the "solution"—creating authentic spaces for workers' stories to emerge from the heart and become the fulcrum for transformational workplace change—would become a national model, the major focus of my practice, and the subject of my doctoral studies.

The "academic" description for what I did over these 18 years is that I empowered worker voice through a participatory, action-based research approach to building a labor-management partnership and programs. This research resulted in a significant culture change within this transit agency's operations division and is now a national model. Frontline operators and maintenance technicians, serving as peer mentors, now have a major voice and self-designed organizational structure to work directly with new hires and incumbent workers on workplace solutions, career development, public service, and health and wellness.

However, what's missing from this description is my fundamental approach to the work—asking open-ended questions, listening deeply, and, most importantly, creating authentic spaces where workers can safely tell their stories and build their collective strength and leadership. Creating an environment that supports collaborative storytelling leads to workers creating "meta-narratives"—workers finding their collective truths from each other's stories and acting upon them. Even a veteran worker and union leader like Tom Fink did not feel safe

sharing stories like the one above; the common practice during his time as a coach operator was to complain about the work as a way to vent frustration about the passengers, the equipment, and management (Fink, 2015).

As a scholar-practitioner change agent, I have dedicated my life's work to empowering worker voice on the job, using a variety of participatory action research and community organizing methods. Over the years, based on my actual experiences, I have discovered the most effective way for me to both learn from and support worker voice on the job is to listen deeply to workers' stories and take action based on their insights. I use storytelling as the litmus test to determine how/if something is actually working in real life. At the end of the day, keeping things real/authentic is important to me as a core value. In this way, workers' stories (truth-telling) become the vehicle for change. Workers' stories, told from the heart, are the "North Star" that guide us in building the authentic relationships needed to transform the workplace.

What kinds of workers' stories do I hear? Stories of struggle, of being frustrated, of making mistakes—above all, of coping, reflection, resilience, and transcendence. Workers' stories will emerge gradually, bit by bit, according to how safe they feel to share with you and others. I gently introduce processes that allow for reflection and are oriented towards positive change. At the very minimum, these processes are transformative as they affirm what workers go through on a basic human level.

My fascination with the power of workers' stories on the job began with my own life experiences as both an Asian American woman and a worker. I will never forget the whispered family stories of my childhood—stories which I later discovered were part of the larger story of the Chinese diaspora in the United States. The Third World Strikes at San Francisco State and UC Berkeley in 1968-69 had a ripple effect throughout educational institutions in the US,

including at my high school. For the first time, we were given space during school instructional time to discuss our personal and community stories of discrimination, struggle, and resilience.

I have never forgotten those feelings of validation that slowly emerged during this period. I had similar experiences whenever I joined a new workplace—it was workers' stories (often whispered) and not official "training," that helped me survive and learn the ropes. The process of personal and community transformation, driven by and sustained through sharing stories, has profoundly shaped my life's work. It is only fitting that I use Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) methodology to address my dissertation topic: *It Takes Heart: Building Peer-Driven Training Initiatives through Workers' Stories.* I describe this methodology in Chapter II.

"It's not what you do, it's how you do it." This dissertation is based on my approach for centering the "how" in my change agent work. Using both video and written stories, I give an overview of two fundamental and interrelated elements of centering worker voice through story. It is the interplay of these elements over long periods of time, what some call the "Dance of Change" (Senge et al., 1999), that makes this ongoing work endlessly challenging and rewarding as a scholar/practitioner. Again, this is where the "heart" comes in—without heart, a passion for this work and deep belief in people and peer-driven change and community, there's no way anyone can learn to do this work from a book and successfully apply it.

This work will test your personal beliefs and fortitude. "Centering" techniques are essential—not just for workers, but for me as well. I will discuss the personal challenges of doing this work throughout the chapters. This is another reason I chose Scholarly Personal Narrative as a methodology—it's not an easy journey. I hope others can learn from my own (narrative) experience and mistakes and take heart from how to move forward.

1.2 In Our Own Voices: Tom's Story

https://vimeo.com/831261472/1365bd3295 Run time 5:00

- Tom's Story: The inherent difficulties of being a coach operator
- Is it possible for labor and management to work together?
- Gaining new tools, building public credibility, building solidarity

1.3 Scholarly Reflections

Worker Voice

This dissertation is tightly focused on my experiences in centering workers' experiences/stories as the fulcrum for transformational workplace change. While there are multiple subjects relevant to my work, including labor-management partnerships, organizational change methodologies, workforce development design, pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship initiatives, and community college career technical education models, I will not be discussing these subjects in depth in this dissertation.

However, there is one theme that runs through both my inquiry as well as the subjects listed above: worker voice. There is a considerable body of longitudinal research on worker voice conducted by Dr. Thomas Kochan at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). A representative example is Kochan et al. (2019), which I have used to get a broad picture of the term "worker voice" and how it relates to my current inquiry. I appreciate the researchers' two primary questions: (a) Do US workers currently face a "voice gap" between what and how much say they expect to have on the job versus what they actually have? (b) Has the voice gap changed over time? Other researchers (Ng & Feldman, 2011) examine worker voice behavior through the framework of conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which posits that individuals have limited personal resources (e.g., time, physical energy, emotional energy, attention) and are highly motivated to protect those limited resources.

I was particularly drawn to Kochan's 2020 research brief, "Worker voice, representation, and implications for public policies," prepared for the MIT Task Force on Work of the Future. This brief states, "There is growing evidence that shaping work of the future to achieve a more broadly shared prosperity will require rebuilding worker voice and representation, rebalancing power in employment relations, and making fundamental changes in American labor and employment policies" (p. 1). It defines worker voice as "Individual or collective efforts of workers to have a say or influence on workplace issues of interest to them and/or to their employer(s)" (p. 2).

Kochan's 2020 brief builds upon extensive national surveys of representative samples of the US workforce conducted in 2017 and 2019. The surveys identify a "voice gap" (the percentage of workers who report having less influence than they believe they ought to have) beyond what would typically be expected (the top four gaps identified as benefits, wages, promotion, job security). Of particular relevance to my research inquiry was the percentage of workers who identified voice gaps in employee respect, which ranked 5th (54%), abuse protections (52%), discrimination protections (49%), training (49%), ways to improve how to do work (48%), quality of product (47%), safety (45%), and resolving problems or conflicts (43%). These national survey findings give context to the specific outcomes of the worker stories that are central to my research inquiry.

The broader field of worker voice was addressed at the 2022 annual meeting of the Labor and Employment Research Association (LERA), "Elevating Voice and New Voices in the Workplace and Beyond" (https://lera.memberclicks.net/lera-74th-am). I was so excited when I saw the call for proposals—finally, someplace where my focus on worker voice through workers' stories could fit in! I was approved for both a best paper presentation and a workshop

featuring some of our workers/leaders as presenters. The final program had an astonishing array of topics and panelists from many countries (including Dr. Kochan as a former LERA president), reflecting LERA's role in providing "a unique forum where the views of representatives of labor, management, government and academics, advocates and neutrals are welcome." However, my excitement diminished upon closer inspection of each workshop and plenary. If the theme was worker voice, where were the worker presenters? Were we the only workshop that had workers speaking in their own voices?

The 2022 LERA meeting drove home the primary difference between my definition and application of the construct "centering worker voice" in my scholar-practitioner work, and the typical way "centering worker voice" is commonly defined and applied in the fields of labor relations, organizational and management studies, government, and education. My definition and application of centering worker voice means frontline workers speaking in their own voices, as equals at the table—not others speaking on behalf of frontline workers. Fundamentally, how do workers gain respect, agency, and power if they are not directly involved and speaking on their own behalf, both at these types of conferences and more importantly in the daily operations of their workplaces?

There was one notable storytelling session by frontline workers besides ours—that of a key group of BIPOC frontline academics, who held a private session (a "safe/brave space") that unfortunately coincided with our session, so I could not attend. Subsequently, LERA published these BIPOC academic organizers' edited volume featuring frontline worker voices entitled *A racial reckoning in industrial relations: Storytelling as revolution from within* (Lee et al., 2022). Ironically, this volume's advocacy for BIPOC worker voice in the industrial relations field in

2022 parallels the Third World Strikes and demands for ethnic studies in the all-white academies of California universities in late 1960s.

It is no coincidence that storytelling by people on the frontlines is prominently utilized as a transformational tool across these broad movements for equity and inclusion. I place my research inquiry on centering workers' stories within this context.

In SPN style, I have highlighted above several pieces of literature that especially stood out to me in my research inquiry on the fundamental nature of worker voice on the job. In addition, there are two approaches to worker voice that I found relevant to my dissertation—employee voice behavior, and high road partnerships.

Employee Voice Behavior

When do workers feel safe to speak up (use their voices) at work about issues directly related to organizational performance? The following three articles helped me understand some of the research done in this area. Detert and Burris (2007) examine the relationship between organizational leadership styles and employee willingness to speak up, mediated by perceptions of psychological safety (p. 869). Morrison (2011) discusses the issue of whether workers will choose to speak up or not (i.e., voice) when they have potentially useful information or ideas (p. 373). Ng and Feldman (2011) find a negative relationship between workplace stress and voice and a positive relationship between voice behavior and performance outcomes (p. 216). Collectively, these articles provided insight into the issue of psychologically safe workplaces as championed by Amy Edmondson, Novartis professor of Leadership and Management at the Harvard Business School. I discuss Dr. Edmondson's work in Chapter III.

High Road Partnerships

How do partnerships between labor and management support frontline employee worker voice on the job? The AFL-CIO Working for America Institute (WAI) examines the characteristics of 14 high road partnerships in an undated research paper (n.d.) on its website, www.workingforamerica.org. This paper is from the early 2000s, based on my knowledge of partnerships described and the people listed as contacts (pp. 39–40). It defines the common, broad goal of high road partnerships as follows: "to build an economy based on skills, innovation, opportunity, sustainability and equitably shared prosperity rather than on low-road practices that lower living and working standards and weaken communities" (p. 7). In a graphic summarizing the activities of these 14 partnerships (p. 13), WAI identifies "broaden worker voice in workplace" as one of four sectoral (industry) partnership activities and "broaden worker/community voice) as one of four regional partnership activities. Thus, worker voice is placed in the context of a larger, structural approach to changing the US labor market.

In two briefing papers, the UC Berkeley Labor Center examines worker voice (2020) and worker wisdom (2020) in the context of high road training partnerships. These two papers locate worker voice in the broader context of the State of California's workforce development initiative, as championed by the California Workforce Development Board (CWDB). While many elements of the CWDB approach to high road partnerships are similar to those defined by WAI, the CWDB promotes those elements as part of a broader approach to workforce development—thus, the term "high road *training* partnership" (emphasis mine), or HRTP. In particular, the CWDB defines its HRTP initiative as "a campaign—to advance a field of practice that simultaneously addresses urgent questions of income inequality, economic competitiveness, and climate change through regional skills strategies designed to support economically and

environmentally resilient communities across the state" (https://cwdb.ca.gov/initiatives/high-road-training-partnerships/).

I have served as a founding project director for high road partnership work as described both by the WAI (at the San Francisco Hotels Partnership Project) and the CWDB (at California Transit Works!). Both of these approaches give context to the "scaffolding" for worker voice that I describe in Chapter IV below.

Throughout my 30 years of labor/management partnership experience, I have always been most intrigued by how frontline workers become energized and empowered (or not) at work. Thus, I have chosen to focus this dissertation specifically on worker voice as manifested through frontline workers' stories.

CHAPTER II: SPN METHODOLOGY

2.1 Synopsis

I searched for a methodology that would center stories—both my own stories as a change agent utilizing a transdisciplinary approach, and the outcomes that occurred when I centered workers' stories on the job. My inquiry is retrospective—I am researching past events, not conducting new research on sources outside my own experiences. Finally, advocacy is deeply embodied in my inquiry. I want my inquiry to be useful to workers and change agents, both as a model and an approach to empowering workers and transforming their workplaces by centering worker voice on the job.

Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend selecting a qualitative research approach by determining the outcome—what is the approach attempting to accomplish? None of the "classic five" qualitative approaches—narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic, case study—are the "right fit" for what I want to accomplish. While I am more comfortable with their description of a storytelling approach such as narrative research or ethnography (Creswell & Poth, 2018), I am not focused on a single person's story (narrative), nor am I focused on describing the workings of a culture-sharing group (ethnography).

The methodology that best fits my research inquiry is Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN). SPN was suggested to me by Dr. Stephen Brookfield at our first meeting, after I stumbled through a disjointed description of the work I do. He asked a series of perceptive questions that helped me tremendously in bringing order to my heretofore chaotic definition of my research inquiry. Deeply impressed, I took his advice and was immediately drawn to a SPN book titled *Our stories matter: Liberating the voices of marginalized students through scholarly personal*

narrative writing (Nash & Viray, 2013). The book itself focuses on how SPN can help individual students find power through their voices and meaning in their lives, in a scholarly way.

The foundation of my life's work rests on how I, a marginalized student, felt when my voice was liberated through Asian American Studies courses at UC Davis. Chinese immigration and history in America were not taught in public schools when I was growing up. Instead, "Yellow Peril" and the constant threat of anti-Asian violence had shaped our communities since the 1800s. On top of that legacy, I grew up in the McCarthy era of redbaiting, where Chinese in America were viewed as the "Fifth Column" of the Chinese Communist Party. Our parents taught us to keep our heads down in public to avoid any possible conflict with "Americans." And while some may wonder why we didn't call ourselves Americans, was it any wonder if you grow up constantly being treated as an "alien"?

The Third World Strike by San Francisco State students changed the narrative, not just at that campus but across the country. Suddenly, not only were our stories not hidden; they were encouraged by my public high school.

I became involved in Asian American Studies (and ethnic studies in general) when I attended UC Davis for undergraduate work. It was here that I realized that my own voice, OUR own voices, were valid and deserved to be centered. Asian American Studies programs on many campuses became our "safe space" to share our stories, build our collective voice, and struggle for respect and recognition from the academy. Narrative stories were a key aspect of building our own movement, especially in the Asian Women's course where I first learned to give voice to what is now commonly accepted as intersectionality. Asian women activists such as Yuri Kochiyama also championed collective leadership and organizing models.

Equally important was our worldview that the academy generally, and Asian American Studies in particular, must serve the community, as embodied in the term "Asian American activism studies" (Fujino & Rodriguez, 2019). Robyn Hagalit Rodriguez, PhD, Professor and Department Chair of Asian American Studies at UC Davis, echoes this belief:

> To major in Asian American Studies is to major in social justice. . . . we don't just supply our students with critical thinking skills to better understand the causes and consequences of different forms of injustice. We actively encourage our students to do something about those injustices. (UC Davis, 2021)

I was extremely fortunate to have Dr. Isao Fujimoto, a UC Davis Asian American Studies instructor, as my first mentor. Isao didn't just use the teachings of Paulo Freire in his community organizing and applied behavioral studies courses. He actively practiced these empowerment strategies in his own work with rural immigrant communities. From Isao, I learned to empower Asian community members who were cannery workers and garment workers. These workers were often ignored by their own unions. We listened and learned from these workers, creating the conditions to elevate their voices.

An SPN is a sustained exploration of one's own narrative experiences of dealing with a particular question, problem or dynamic that has broader social significance. It entails analyzing that experience through the lens of relevant research and theory. Based on my lived experiences, my interpretation of SPN is to view SPN as a "new" manifestation of what BIPOC students have historically done in building academic credibility for their ethnic studies programs. Stories are powerful. They are the narrative histories and lived experiences of our people. If SPN is a methodology that breaks new ground in academia by expanding and challenging the definition of what is "scholarly," then SPN is following in the tradition of my own personal narrative.

I was dismayed to find few books on SPN outside those authored or co-authored by Robert Nash, the creator of SPN (Nash, 2004; Nash & Bradley, 2011; Nash & Viray 2013; Nash

& Viray, 2014). While these books provide useful guidelines for SPN writing, I am still analyzing their analysis and placement of SPN within "standard" qualitative research methods. Curtis and Curtis (2017) locate SPN as a form of autoethnographic research. They consider Nash's 10 guidelines for SPN writers a form of reflexivity, or self-reflection. SPN is also a form of narrative inquiry and can be utilized as a pedagogy for cultivating critical self-reflection (Kelly & Bhangal, 2018).

For the purposes of this paper, Dr. Brookfield's video explanation of SPN (2020), briefly outlines SPN as follows:

Scholarly: Constantly referring to relevant literature, theory, and research in the field. It is not just you telling a story, you are constantly bringing in relevant literature.

Personal: Your own personal experience is the dataset being examined. While conversations may happen in the company of others, ultimately you are recounting your personal take on those incidents.

Narrative: Told as a story. What are the dynamics you want to explore? Pinpoint significant turning points, high and low, points of contradiction, moments of dissonance. There is a beginning, middle, and end to your story. In addition, your story needs a literary "hook."

While I appreciate and honor the above explanation, my interest in SPN goes beyond the traditional meaning of "P" = Personal. I am upholding the "P" personal intent of SPN by using my own experiences as the data for my dissertation. Yet, much of my and other BIPOC people's personal experiences are inextricably linked with those of our cultures and peoples. I hope and expect that my SPN touches a chord with others, and we collectively can create what it means to do the type of change agent work that I do in the workplace. Starting this type of conversation is

vitally important, especially for social justice activists to share our stories and find those commonalities among and between us and elevate them into something greater than ourselves.

I take inspiration, for example, from *Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy: Educating for Wholeness, Social Justice and Liberation* (Rendón, 2008). Dr. Rendón's book brilliantly explores the

> transformation of teaching and learning in higher education so it is intuitive in nature, emphasizing the balanced, harmonic relationship between two concepts, such as intellectualism and intuition, teaching and learning, the learner and the learning material, and Western and non-Western ways of knowing. (Rendón, 2008)

I was instantly hooked by her research inquiry, "Why, as a scholar of color who has worked hard to establish herself in the academy, do I take what some would consider a perilous turn in my career to break away from some of the conventions and values of the academy I have been so well socialized to follow and deify?" (Rendón, 2008). Dr. Rendón's book is a form of SPN, framed around her personal journey. This is a model I look to, as I develop my own scholarly personal narrative dissertation.

Similarly, I was delighted to discover *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods* (Wilson, 2008). Dr. Wilson explains that the book is based on his doctoral thesis; but that he felt the dominant (academic) style of writing to an anonymous reader did not live up to the standards of relational accountability embodied in indigenous epistemology. Therefore, he used two different fonts in the book: one that denotes a more academic style, and one for personal narrative sections (Wilson, 2008, p. 8). I especially appreciate this passage:

> It is my intention to build a relationship between the readers of this story, myself as the storyteller and the ideas I present. This relationship needs to be formed in order for an understanding of an Indigenous research paradigm to develop. This paradigm must hold true to its principles of relationality and relational accountability. As I cannot know beforehand who will read this book, I cannot be sure of the relationships that readers might hold with me or the ideas I share. So, I will start from scratch just to make sure that we begin this book from a common ground. (Wilson, 2008, p. 6)

Wilson uses storytelling to build relationships, in part by writing letters to his own children. He states, “I hope the letter will serve as a medium for you to develop a deeper relationship with me through the already strong relationships I share with my sons. Relationality requires that you know a lot more about me before you can begin to understand my work” (Wilson, 2008, p. 12). In this sense, Wilson is using an SPN methodological approach.

What is it like to do a SPN dissertation? For me, the hardest part of writing this SPN was narrowing down my personal narrative into a manageable topic. There were so many directions I could go, and so many elements that were relevant to elevating workers’ stories! I wrote multiple outlines—often waking up in the middle of the night when a key concept or thought came to mind, and emailing myself on my phone with these thoughts so I wouldn’t forget them the next morning. Those insights were very helpful—it was my mind’s way of processing and reflecting on what I had written, and seeing the patterns that arose that were most important to me.

Suddenly the lightbulb clicked on what an SPN means. I am exploring my own data (my stories), searching for patterns, just as I do when I am doing focus groups of workers, and looking for patterns in their stories. It’s important to be comfortable with this process, rather than frustrated that your writing doesn’t seem to be coming together.

Dr. Brookfield gave me very helpful hints. First, he said to print out my inquiry and tape it to the wall above my workstation as a reminder of why I am writing. That worked to some degree, but I was still generating a huge volume of data that seemed relevant to my topic. Next, Dr. Brookfield suggested I write a purpose statement of WHY I am doing my inquiry . . . that my SPN was an exploration of the WHY and the HOW, not the WHAT.

Ultimately, I developed a “Poster” that captured my purpose statement and taped it to the wall. The Poster is what helped me narrow down my outline into two workable themes.

It can feel somewhat disconcerting to just tell your stories—to accept your stories as valid data, rather than just something you've lived through and experienced. Underneath everything, I had self-doubt—was what I had to say that important? On an intellectual level, I knew I have done a lot of important work with positive outcomes, that many people feel is valuable. Yet, even after 18 years, I still have a hard time accepting my own important role as a change agent. My job has always been to stay in the background as a scholar-practitioner, researcher/facilitator, using appreciative inquiry and community based participatory action research as my methodologies to elevate the voices of workers in their workplaces. . . . To give the ownership and power to the workers themselves. My role is to listen, to reflect, and to assist as needed in creating and guarding that safe space for worker voice. I don't feel I am that important, even though others around me always say that my role as a "third party neutral" is essential to the success of the work we do.

Through the SPN process of reflecting on my own data, I came to accept my own role as a leader—exercising a different kind of leadership, which is to consciously step back and NOT take on a traditional "leaders" role as the expert or dominant person in charge. I'm not trying to create a change initiative or movement based on me—yet that, in and of itself, is a type of leadership.

These are the kinds of reflections on your own experiences—your personal narrative—that take place in an SPN dissertation process. WHY am I doing what I do, so unconsciously or naturally? Those reflections—that type of analysis—is both live changing, and hopefully useful for readers of my dissertation. It's not WHAT you do, it's HOW and WHY you do it.

In a serendipitous or lucky coincidence, or not, I found that telling my stories orally on video became a liberating method for me to look for those patterns and to reflect on my own

stories. I originally wanted to try a new type of SPN—a video SPN—based on my own personal experience with using video to elevate worker voice on the job. Generally speaking, the video format is much more appealing and accessible to a broader audience in this digital world. As I explain in the Preface, the literature sections were still best described in writing. Thus, this dissertation is a "hybrid SPN," combining both video and written sections.

To start me off, Dr. Brookfield's only direction was to just "tell my stories" on video. I found that, freed from having to write the perfect sentence, the act of telling my stories brought up both memories and, more importantly, the feelings I had while going through those experiences. I let the storytelling guide me where I needed to go, if that makes sense. I often went "off script" from my original outline as new insights came to mind. In other words, reflecting on those feelings gave me deeper insight into WHY I did what I did. For me, this is a key reason I love stories—you discover more about the essence of a person. This is the way to build authentic relationships. Through my SPN, I am building a relationship with my viewers/readers, as a way of illustrating the power of workers' stories—through telling my own story.

What does it mean to examine your own personal narrative through the lens of relevant literature, theory, and research in the field? I've always wondered what "locating yourself in the field" meant. While I had done years of my own research on the themes in my dissertation, I still felt important literature was missing. What drew me to SPN, in part, was how Dr. Brookfield would casually mention leading figures or ideas related to my work. Oh—I wasn't alone in doing what I do! In an SPN, your chair—in my case, Dr. Brookfield—will look at my stories—my data set—and recommend relevant literature, based on the themes in my stories. I have enjoyed discovering how I "fit," or not, into existing literature.

To survive an SPN process, you have to be comfortable with the unknown. It's a cyclical or iterative process, with layers of discovery along the way. While I am comfortable with navigating the unknown, the "grey areas," as I do my work as a change agent, it's a different feeling when looking at my own stories! That realization helped me to relax into the process and have faith in my own personal narrative—that I AM part of the "scholarly field," and I DO have something to contribute.

I hope this description of SPN process is helpful to others on their journeys.

2.2 Why Am I Doing Scholarly Personal Narrative?

https://vimeo.com/822614811/52a8694815 *Run time 10:32*

- SPN's relevance to my personal experience with ethnic studies in the 1960s–1970s

2.3 A Broader Context for Scholarly Personal Narrative

https://vimeo.com/822614746/5809768e28 *Run time 8:52*

- My personal stories are part of the Asian American diaspora
- The SPN's personal narrative processes parallel my research inquiry processes on workers' stories

2.4 Scholarly Reflections

As described above, Rendón (2008) and Wilson (2008) inspired me to view the scholarly personal narrative methodology as a way of validating my own cultural history and tradition of struggle within academia. Academia has not been an easy journey for me. Beyond the typical "imposter" syndrome that many grad students face, I have often felt the "odd man out" when it comes to my response to literature or academic assignments. Often, my written school assignments or reflections were met with silence from my peers. Was my personal lens as an Asian American working woman/community activist incomprehensible to others? Perhaps my cultural storytelling approach was not "academic" enough to warrant a response?

I first "met" Dr. Rendón online at the 2020 Summer Institute of SpeakOut—the Institute for Democratic Education and Culture (www.speakoutnow.org). Her Zoom presentation, "Cultivating the disruptive power of love and healing: Educating for wholeness, justice, and liberation," was my first introduction to *Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy* and to her use of validation theory to build caring and affirming relationships with students (https://www.flipsnack.com/BFCDE6EEFB5/speakout-summer-institute-program-2020-zt365597t9.html). Beyond the content of her presentation, Dr. Rendón's presence conveyed the welcoming, contemplative spirit she brings to her students' learning environments. I felt myself relaxing in this environment and realized this was the same spirit I both craved for my own learning, and also strive to bring into my own work as a scholar/practitioner. Dr. Rendón's (1994, 2011) presentation inspired me to research other articles she has written on validation theory as it applies to higher education.

I discovered Wilson (2008) by chance, at another online academic meeting where the speaker offhandedly mentioned "Oh, you've never read *Research is ceremony*? Look it up!" At that point in my academic research, I was eager to find anything that hinted at a "non-standard" approach. I was totally enchanted by the skillful way that Dr. Wilson weaved storytelling cultural tradition into a journey with the intent of building relationships with his readers. Coupled with my experiences with Dr. Rendón's work, I became more confident about using my SPN dissertation as a way to both highlight the importance of relationship building through storytelling, and to build relationships with people reading my dissertation.

In SPN style, I have highlighted above several pieces of literature that especially stood out to me in my research inquiry. In addition, Brookfield's (2022) unpublished article succinctly outlined the elements of a scholarly personal narrative dissertation, while Mora (2015) wrote a

useful synopsis of *testimonio* that helped me understand my SPN journey in the context of my life experiences.

CHAPTER III: CREATING AUTHENTIC SPACES FOR WORKERS' STORIES FROM THE HEART

3.1 Synopsis

What do you do when fear is the predominant finding from a neutral organizational assessment, despite your best efforts to create a safe space for workers to speak out? Why do you need authentic spaces to support workers' stories from the heart? How do you create authentic spaces? How can workers' stories become the fulcrum for transformational workplace change?

Most of the time, if I ask people whether they feel comfortable speaking their minds at work, I get a knowing look that means, "What, you must be kidding, right?" It's a well-established, unspoken rite of passage for anyone entering the workplace—be careful what you say, lest you upset a boss or coworker and cause them to punish you in some way. I myself had many incidents when starting new jobs, until I learned to keep my mouth shut and be careful who I confided in.

When I first began my solo career as a third-party neutral/organizational change agent, I worked hard to ensure that I could create a safe space for the people I interviewed. I asked for private rooms, preferably with a window and/or sufficient light and air flow. I created an interview protocol that strove to build relationships with the people I interviewed. I asked people to tell their stories in their own ways, rather than use a standard survey detailed questionnaire format. I assured the interviewees that any report I wrote would not contain language that could identify them by name, unless they gave me written permission to do so.

This methodology worked well for me in the first few years, yet there was still something missing. Gradually I identified the issue. Clients would usually ask me to come in because they felt that "training fixes everything." They wanted me to recommend "training" to solve a specific

problem such as low job performance, workers' mistakes, tension between workers, and/or tension between workers and managers. However, in my experience, lack of training was generally not the root cause of the problem. The confidential stories that workers told me highlighted both deep issues in operational functioning and a sense that "nothing is ever going to change."

I decided to tell clients that I would only do organizational assessments (neutral focus groups) if they promised to take genuine action on my findings, even if those findings did not support their belief that training fixes everything. I wanted the focus groups and work that I did to actually make a difference in real life. In particular, I wanted to empower workers to act on their own recommendations for change. Once I introduced that concept into the neutral focus groups themselves—that I am here not to pick your brains, but to actually make recommendations for positive action based on your input—the depth of workers' stories and dynamics of the focus groups began to change to a more positive mindset. This approach worked well in my first large-scale organizational change project in the hospitality industry.

Feeling confident, I utilized the same approach when Tom Fink, a former coach operator and union official, approached me to "do some training classes" for transit workers, similar to the "training" classes I had done for hospitality. After I explained to him that the "training" classes actually had been the result of months and years of work, he agreed to approach the transit agency with a proposal for me to do a similar "snapshot" organizational assessment. Yet, after 150 focus groups with individuals and small groups, I was disheartened by the overwhelming sense of fear displayed by both workers and managers. How could I support worker empowerment and workplace transformation in this environment?

Within this context, Chapter III tells the stories of how I broke through this deep pattern of fear. Workers need and deserve the fundamental respect of being heard at work. This process started with creating authentic spaces for workers to share their stories, from the heart—not what they think they are allowed to say on the job, but what they really feel and believe, deep down. I choose to call these spaces "authentic" rather than safe spaces or brave spaces, although authentic spaces can definitely be safe and/or brave. I define authentic spaces in Video Segment 3.3, "Creating authentic spaces for workers' stories," as spaces that are grounded in the reality being told through workers' stories/lived experiences.

The opening Video 3.1, "In our own Voices: A glimpse inside our classroom," features a veteran worker/pioneering peer mentor named Mohammed. Mohammed's lively and effective video story stands in marked contrast to his reactions when I first met him in a neutral focus group. Mohammed's story at that time was dominated by the same fear as his fellow workers—that he would somehow get into trouble by talking to me. The source of that fear is in Video 3.4, "Context for my work in transit." It took everything I had to convince Mohammed and others that the focus group was a safe place to speak what was in his heart. I detail key elements of my approach in Videos 3.5 through 3.12.

How did my approach work out in practice? Videos 3.13 and 3.14 give examples of stories that worked, sort of worked, or failed—not that the stories themselves were wrong, but that I failed as a change agent to create the conditions for the changes that fully supported workers' stories.

3.2 In Our Own Voices: A Glimpse Inside Our Classroom

https://vimeo.com/403889251/118ee51c15 *Run time 10:21*

- A live video segment of a worker-run peer mentoring class (by Zoom, because of the pandemic): "Handling Stress"

- Mohammed's First Day, and other first day stories to help support new operators
- Finding ways to let go of stress, such as breathing exercises

3.3 Creating Authentic Spaces for Workers' Stories

https://vimeo.com/822615168/bbba0c41c9 *Run time 16:25*

- "Don't throw shade"—a personal quest for authentic space
- Speaking from the heart, modeling authentic spaces
- Without authentic/safe/brave spaces, workers' full stories will not emerge

3.4 Context for My Work in Transit

https://vimeo.com/822614995/81b25bbd91 *Run time 22:33*

- Using a neutral "snapshot" organizational assessment to surface workers' stories
- Fear as the dominant finding; the importance of context
- Building genuine relationships—key to creating authentic spaces for workers' stories

3.5 Being Present

https://vimeo.com/822615561/9ab596c4bf *Run time 8:51*

- What does it take to set the stage for truly authentic spaces?
- Beyond listening, be there with your whole self
- The role of physical environment and timing to create safe spaces

3.6 Being Vulnerable

https://vimeo.com/822614880/7991124744 *Run time 5:35*

- Being vulnerable is essential, to fully take in workers' thoughts and emotions
- Being fully heard can be a life changing experience; most people do not have that opportunity
- These spaces create personal bonds and support deeper levels of storytelling

3.7 Centering

https://vimeo.com/822614929/96280728a2 *Run time 6:28*

- Centering is a fundamental concept of who you are as a person; the more centered you are, the more you can speak and act from the deeper part of yourself
- Centering is essential to return to yourself and be ready for future discussions, after absorbing the thoughts and emotions of others in a focus group or meeting
- Centering worker voice also means putting the interests of the workers in the forefront; everything else is peripheral

3.8 Reading People

https://vimeo.com/822615497/af6a172998 *Run time 7:05*

- Reading people is seeking to understand the nature of people and their intentions
- Elements of reading people include what they say (or not), how they say it, and the context of the situation
- Reading people becomes easier if you always strive to develop genuine relationships

3.9 Listening for Context

https://vimeo.com/822615472/3d9374687e *Run time 1:47*

- Avoid cookie-cutter approaches; context is essential to determining what is appropriate at any given moment.
- "Tell me about that" is one of the most powerful questions in the toolbox.

3.10 Basic Approach to Workers' Stories

https://vimeo.com/822635984/2079cb8daa *Run time 12:12*

- Build authentic spaces by posing non-threatening questions that workers can answer on their own terms
- Listening without anticipating is one of the hardest essential skills to master
- Begin to shift the power dynamic to workers as the experts, by consciously taking yourself out of the leader/expert position
- Do not expect a linear process; this is a journey that needs constant reinforcement to break old patterns and transform workplaces
- This is a hard process; create conditions where it's ok to make mistakes and learn from them

3.11 Using Art to Tell Workers' Stories

https://vimeo.com/822636187/1b98984f9f *Run time 9:52*

- There are many ways to tell stories; art-based methods are a good alternative method
- Physical actions like drawing can validate who you are as a person
- Sharing stories through art can create powerful avenues for building community

3.12 Unpacking Art-Based Stories

https://vimeo.com/822636102/a6bb9550ea *Run time 5:13*

- How can an art-based story release a hidden story below the surface?

- Be prepared for deep emotional patterns released through art-based stories

3.13 Stories that Worked

https://vimeo.com/822636497/e623678447 *Run time 13:39*

- Finding commonality through a series of workers' storytelling focus groups
- Taking positive action on workers' stories—first ever worker-led peer mentor pilot program
- "Throwing us off the deep end!" Letting go and having confidence in workers because they had the heart and expertise to develop their own program
- "Can we trust them to do the right thing?" My role as a change agent in breaking patterns and creating space for a worker-run program
- Building close relationships through worker-to-worker storytelling

3.14 Stories that Sort of Worked or Failed

https://vimeo.com/822636314/1ae41bf1b5 *Run time 13:44*

- What happens when everyone is not on board in supporting workers' stories?
- Workers' responses when I failed to convince management to support their ideas
- Things can work out over time, given changes in context/conditions

3.15 Scholarly Reflections

In this section, I describe several authors and their notable pieces of literature I have used to reflect on my work, organized by themes. I also briefly describe other literature, grouped into themes relevant to this chapter.

Theme: Psychological Safety

Amy Edmondson is the leading voice in both academia and business for her 20+ years of research on psychological safety in the workplace. Dr. Edmondson researched and wrote about what we had all known implicitly for years, but rarely spoke about—what holds workers back from speaking up about potential or actual safety hazards on the job? This is not a new field of research—Edmondson and Lei (2014) describe a history of the roots of psychological safety dating back to 1965.

I was especially interested examining in Edmondson's 2019 book, *The Fearless Organization*, in the context of my 18 years of work with a transit agency originally characterized by fear of speaking up. My biggest questions revolved around how she proposed to create the type of massive change needed to make psychological safety an established practice across an entire organization, as the book title implied.

In her introduction, Edmondson (2019) discusses fear in organizations—when people are reluctant to stand out, be wrong, or offend the boss. She defines fear, not on the broad range of things that can make workers fearful (such as fear of layoff), but more specifically as interpersonal fear. Her definition of a fearless organization is one in which interpersonal fear is minimized, so that team and organizational performance can be maximized in a knowledge intensive world (Edmondson, 2019, p. xv). She defines psychological safety broadly as an environment in which people are comfortable expressing and being themselves (Edmondson, 2019, p. xvi).

While I have deep respect for Edmondson's work, I struggled with her initial explanation of psychological safety as applying primarily to "knowledge intensive" industries such as healthcare, and industries/organizations characterized by the need for flexible teams in carrying out their operations. Most of the case studies in Edmondson's book reference these types of industries, although she does state that psychological safety should apply to any workplace.

Therefore, I especially appreciated her case study on safety in the mining industry, "Speaking up for worker safety" (Edmondson, 2019, pp. 138–142). The mining company she described, Anglo American, had a rigid top-down culture similar to transit. The female CEO in 2007, Cynthia Carroll, insisted on lowering the fatality and industry rate among mine workers in South Africa. Edmondson (2019) describes a culturally appropriate process for "setting the

stage" for psychological safety, with managers re-framing their initial questions on safety to "what do we need to do to create a work environment of care and respect?" The real change from management came from actually listening to the workers (p. 140).

Edmondson (2019) goes on to describe subsequent actions to create an organizational culture of psychological safety, including new policies, new management practices, and scaling to include industry associations. Notably, the union was involved in these organizational changes. Edmondson (2019) notes that CEO Carroll "realized that increasing physical safety in the mines was as much about transforming old attitudes about worker safety and changing the culture to make it safe to speak up as it was about technical or process improvements" (p. 142).

The processes described in this case study parallel those I describe in both Chapters III and IV of this dissertation. I especially appreciate the step-by-step approach of setting the stage; the open-ended asking for positive actions/solutions based on care and respect; the involvement of the union; and the need for management to actively demonstrate its ongoing commitment to listening to the workers. I also appreciated her description of the cultural sensitivities in approaching this work in South Africa, especially as it related to having a woman CEO pushing for change. (In future editions of this book, I would like to see a chapter that explicitly addresses issues of psychological safety as it relates to diverse teams/workplaces and BIPOC leaders.)

Edmondson's (2019) goal through this book is to establish the business case for psychological safety and change the way leaders run their organizations. She created a "Leader's Tool Kit for Building Psychological Safety" with three components: Setting the Stage, Inviting Participation, and Responding Productively (p. 159). In the context of my research inquiry, I especially appreciate her section on Inviting Participation, comprised of three components: situational humility, proactive inquiry, and designing structures for input. (These components

echo the work of Edgar Schein's "Humble Inquiry" series (see below), which she also cites.) Deploying this Leader's Tool Kit in the transit industry could be the subject of further research.

In my experience, even introducing the concept of psychological safety to top leaders can elicit considerable stress—how does one even begin this process, knowing that other leaders may or may not be on board with it? As Edmondson herself acknowledges, creating psychological safety in organizations is a lengthy, never-ending process that will not necessarily roll out in a consistent way across all work units.

Theme: The Need for Humility

I have followed Edgar Schein's work since my masters' studies in organizational development (OD). His seminal work, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (2010, 4th edition), provided a holistic framework to understanding organizational culture: through its (public) artifacts, its (stated and unstated) values, and its (often unconscious) assumptions. To my delight, I recently discovered Dr. Schein's "Humble" book series (co-authored with his son Peter), consisting of three books: *Humble Inquiry* (2021), *Humble Leadership* (2018), and *Humble Consulting* (2016). I was full of admiration that Dr. Schein could distill his long and distinguished career as an influential leader in management studies into this slender and elegant series of books, all highlighting the need to be humble. Dr. E. Schein and Dr. P. Schein define humble inquiry as follows (p. 3):

> An Art
> Humble Inquiry is the fine art of drawing someone out, of asking questions to which you do not already know the answer, of building a relationship based on curiosity and interest in another person.
>
> An Attitude
> Humble Inquiry is not just asking questions; it is a total attitude that includes listening more deeply to how others respond to our inquiry, responding appropriately, and revealing more of ourselves in the relationship building process.

This two-part definition of humble inquiry parallels the process I use in my focus groups and subsequent meetings with workers, to draw out their stories. It is also my approach to workers' programs—an approach that is not that easy to teach, if a person has not experienced it. The challenge of passing down my approach to future change agents is made easier through this easy-to-read book series.

The *Humble Inquiry* series also reinforces my approach to life—that true mastery of anything, is the ability to condense it to its simplest, most fundamental essence. Imagine what the world could be, if only we all approached life, work, and each other (including ourselves) with the gentle spirit of humble inquiry.

Theme: Community-Based Participatory Research

I was delighted to discover *Community-Based Participatory Research: Testimonios from Chicana/o Studies* (Deeb-Sosa, 2019), as it validates my earliest experiences as a scholar-practitioner in the early 1970s. How can the academy truly serve the community? How can we honor our communities' stories? This edited book is filled with nine stories: Part 1. Genealogies and reflections of activist scholar practitioners and theorists; Part 2. *Creandro confianza* (building trust) doing community-engaged work. This books' storytelling (testimonio) format brings to life the lived experiences of multiple segments of the Chicana/o communities. It is a stunning testimony to the use of stories in participatory research, and especially relevant to the topic of my research inquiry.

Other references useful to understanding community-based participatory research (CBPR) include Minkler and Wallerstein (2008) and Israel et al. (1998). Interestingly, I found strong examples of community-based participatory research from both Edmonson's original development of psychological safety in hospitals and from the Chinese Progressive Association's

research on working conditions in Chinatown restaurants, particularly focusing on health and safety (Chinese Progressive Association—Workers Committee, 2010). What is it about healthcare that lends itself to community-based participatory research? Why isn't the CBPR methodology more widely used in other research settings? This is a question to explore in future research.

Theme: The Role of Storytelling in Social Justice Movements

I was hugely intrigued by Lee Anne Bell's *Storytelling for Social Justice: Connecting Narrative and the Arts in Antiracist Teaching* (2020). Could the premise underlying Dr. Bell's work—that it is possible to teach and learn about race by creating counter-storytelling communities to promote more critical and thoughtful dialogue—be applied to my work in centering workers' stories as a fulcrum for transformational workplace change?

The creation of counter-storytelling communities certainly applies to my work with transit workers, in particular coach operators. The worker focus groups, and in particular, the peer mentoring programs run by workers themselves, definitely created a counter-storytelling community—one which promoted stories of coach operators as professional, highly skilled workers and built community through the peer-to-peer mentoring program. The worker-led programs also promoted more critical and thoughtful dialogue about professional coach operators among both workers and managers, giving workers more agency/power over their work lives. This new "story" about coach operators stands in contrast to old management views of "bus drivers" who were often thought about in less than complimentary terms. I also appreciated Dr. Bell's deliberate use of the arts as a transformative teaching methodology. Too often, arts-based work is considered "fluff" or a "team building exercise" in the corporate world.

Dr. Bell (2020) describes four types of stories utilized in the Storytelling Project Model: stock stories, concealed stories, resistance stories, and emerging/transforming stories (p. 17). These four types of stories resonated with me in the context of my own history, as well as my experiences in antiracist teaching/learning. I began to reflect on my own work using storytelling—were there similar "story types" from workers that I could identify in transforming workplaces?

There are definitely parallels between Dr. Bell's description of stock stories and concealed stories, to those of workers who have an "official" (stock) story of their job, compared to the "real" (concealed) story of what they do and how/why they do it. The parallels became somewhat murkier for resistance stories and emerging/transforming stories. The resistance stories and emerging/transforming stories are generally applicable to BIPOC workers, as a component part of social justice/antiracist work in workplaces/industries. The transit industry itself is one in which BIPOC workers have historically worked. Public transit also plays a unique role in serving BIPOC communities.

Issues of race do not currently play a defined role in public transit workers' struggles, in the same way that other industries are associated with BIPOC worker resistance (for example, agricultural industry farm work). Instead, based on grant requirements by funders, our public transit work is now focused more on serving "priority populations" (for example, communities heavily impacted by environmental racism) and on doing outreach and recruitment from "underserved communities," another euphemism for BIPOC communities.

Despite the lack of exact parallels between story types, Dr. Bell's work has made me more conscious of the need to reflect on the types of stories I encounter, and the ways in which I

promote (or not) certain types of worker stories. This will be a future focus of my work, especially as I seek to expand the ranks of change agents to do this work in public transit.

Theme: The Art of Listening for Stories

Sometimes it takes wandering down multiple dead-end streets before finding gold. I was frustrated with my research on digital storytelling literature, which seemed more oriented towards commercial purposes or organizational initiatives versus individual/collective transformation. Suddenly I remembered an old friend who I had not seen in years, Joe Lambert, founder of the nonprofit organization StoryCenter: Listen Deeply, Tell Stories. The StoryCenter's mission states, "We create spaces for listening to and sharing stories, to help build a just and healthy world" (www.storycenter.org). Since its inception,

> StoryCenter has worked with nearly a thousand organizations around the world and trained more than fifteen thousand people . . . transformed the way that community activists, educators, health and human service agencies, business professionals, and artists think about the power of personal voice, in creating change. (www.storycenter.org/history)

Holding my breath, I sent off a generic email inquiry from the StoryCenter website, hoping to reconnect with Joe (who had moved to New Mexico from the San Francisco Bay Area several years ago). Joe quickly replied, and we had a wonderful reunion by Zoom where I described my work and asked for guidance. As we spoke, I felt my underlying purpose in doing videos of workers' stories coming into sharper focus.

The digital storytelling process itself is a powerful transformational tool when approached with deep thoughtfulness and core values exemplified in Joe's paper, *Radical Listening: Thoughts on Facilitating Story* (2016). Joe states that the most powerful gift we have to give to (people) is listening and attentiveness to each other's stories, and that the quality of our listening starts with the realization of why it is so hard to listen deeply to others (p. 1). In his

description of "Holding Space," Joe recognizes how uncommon shared listening space is in most of our culture (p. 4). He states,

> Our listening, our leadership in creating the conditions of safe and considerate sharing, is how we help people to unveil their dignity to each other. . . . We have come to believe that the quality of listening demonstrated by a storywork facilitator in our story circle process, but also in other kinds of interview or conversational processes, is what the potential (is) for transformation, for transformational learning. (p. 5)

Joe gave voice to the deep sense of wonder, reverence, and responsibility I feel when facilitating workers' stories.

I was particularly interested in Joe's description of the listening process in storywork (pp. 8–11). He describes situational awareness, in particular, of multiple social and cultural contexts. In this regard, Joe's approach to "safe space" rings truer to my experience in the workplace than Edmondson's more general approach to psychologically safe spaces described above. In listening for a good story, Joe describes his facilitation process as listening for breakthrough and working through multiple layers in a way that the storyteller owns the story's experience and lessons. Finally, Joe description of learning to listen with our whole body is similar to my own centering processes. Joe could be describing me as he ends his piece by saying, "The way we attend and hold compassion in our bodies is evident to anyone, and if we are successful, this way of being alone provides a first level of safety for participants, and filters out to everyone involved in the workshop process" (p. 11).

Theme: Centering, an Essential Approach to Change

When I was very young, my family used to go camping for a week in the High Sierra mountains. Those weeks were the highlight of my young life—in the bright sunlight, surrounded by a deep blue lake and the heady scent of evergreen forests, I felt more alive in ways that I couldn't understand at the time. When it was time to go home, I would climb up the hillsides and

hide behind the warm granite boulders, hugging them until they became a part of me and hoping that my parents would leave me behind.

Years later, I connected with that same feeling of being alive when I began to play violin in my school's orchestra. I had a gifted music teacher who knew how to gently encourage young musicians to do their personal best while playing together as one orchestra. As we all focused on the positive energy flowing from his conducting, something clicked. As all our instruments magically melded into a unified sound, pure joy welled up inside me—that same sense of being alive that I got when I was in the mountains. This teacher knew how to both put us at ease (oh no, a wrong note!) and keep us motivated to create beautiful music together. Subsequently, none of my other music teachers had that same special gift of creating welcoming spaces for musicians to excel together—even though we were more advanced musicians, our performances did not have that same energy impact.

What connected these seemingly disparate experiences? As I would learn years later, these "peak" personal feelings occurred because I was closest to my center of who I really am as a person. Surrounded by nature, I could feel life and the earth as it really is, without crowded streets and the dangers of urban life. I was free to explore, experiencing things in that moment, undistracted by other thoughts or feelings or outside concerns. In that orchestra practice room, there was no judgment of me or my actions to cloud my sense of self—only acceptance of who I was and freedom to explore my own potential and connection with others who were focused on a common goal.

Centering, therefore, starts with the self. The more we are able to have these kinds of centering experiences, the closer we become to who we really are as people. Our insights and our potential to adapt and change with our environment become sharper and clearer. These principles

are captured by Daniel Johnson in *Finding Your Center: The Quality of Thinking, Book I* (2019). Similar to my work with Mauricio Miller (described below), it was my direct experience training and working with Mr. Johnson for more than 20 years that led me to gradually understand the power of Centering; the book itself captures the essence of that training.

How did Centering become so prominent in my work as a change agent, and how does it relate to the power of storytelling? As a change agent, I gradually began to realize that I could take what I was learning from Mr. Johnson into the workplace. The more centered I could be as a person, the more effective I was in doing the type of deep listening and processing needed to hear workers' stories. I learned to be more fully present and create that same sort of environment that would encourage people to share their personal experiences. Centering is not a "one and done" process. Discovering who I really am as a person is a lifelong journey, as it is for everyone.

As described by Joe Lambert (2016), doing this type of listening work means it takes a toll on me as an individual, as well. The elements of self-care start with re-centering—letting go of what I have just heard and coming back to who I really am. Then I am in much better shape to hear the next group of workers tell their stories, and to have insights into how they may want to take action together to create something new.

I also learned the power of Centering in facilitating groups of workers to take action on their stories and insights. For example, I taught centered breathing and a movement-based centering technique called Active Meditation to hundreds of frontline workers, with outstanding results (Balance.point Strategic Services, 2009). Transit workers initially learn to use these techniques when they encounter stressful situations on the job; however, they now use these

techniques during their own peer-led meetings as a way to encourage more focused and productive discussions.

Theme: Peer-Driven Change

Is a book more influential than its author? Not for me, when it comes to my friend Mauricio Lim Miller, author of *The Alternative: Most of What You Believe About Poverty is Wrong* (2017). I had the privilege of knowing Mauricio through decades of community work in San Francisco Chinatown. After running a well-regarded community nonprofit doing anti-poverty work, Mauricio became disenchanted with the underlying assumptions of the "war on poverty"—that the only way to "help" people out of poverty was to massively fund anti-poverty organizations that provided services and training that would somehow transport people to the middle class. Instead, Mauricio used the personal experience of his mother and many others like her to promote the radical idea that people in poverty are not dumb. In fact, vast historical experience shows that people in poor communities work together to lift each other up based on their own resourcefulness, ingenuity, and determination. Mauricio believed that what people in poor communities needed most was direct access to the same sorts of resources that middle class families had, not "services" from massively funded nonprofit agencies.

Mauricio's "radical" solution? Promote peer-driven change, initiated and led by community members themselves. Leave it up to community members to decide how to improve their lives through "mutuality"—supporting one another—rather than impose solutions from the outside. Give resources directly to the people, rather than funding the "helping" professional anti-poverty bureaucracy. These "outsider" driven programs were not effective in closing society's gaps in wealth and social standing. It was time to invest in the leadership and responsibility of the people themselves.

Mauricio started the Family Independence Initiative (FII) as a demonstration project that spread to several cities, winning a MacArthur Genius Award and recognition from former President Obama along the way. *The Alternative* was written during FII's expansion period. When FII drifted from Mauricio's original vision, he founded the Community Independence Initiative (CII) and the Center for Peer Driven Change, conducting international work based on Mauricio's original principles (Miller, 2022).

Working with Mauricio for several years on FII heavily reinforced my approach to lifting up workers' stories and supporting worker-led programs. While workers at times jokingly say I have "thrown them off the deep end," in fact I deeply believe in workers' abilities to create and lead their own change projects. Did I learn all of this from reading Mauricio's book? No. Do I believe his book is still influential and belongs on this reading list? Absolutely.

In SPN style, I have highlighted above several pieces of literature that especially stood out to me in my research inquiry. Below, I have listed other literature, organized by theme, that has informed and illuminated this dissertation.

Theme: Safe Space, Brave Space

Watson (2014) describes a brilliant case study of creating psychological safety for African American boys in the Oakland Unified School District in California, utilizing extensive and ongoing educational research data, organizational leadership/commitment to eliminating institutionalized racism, and deeply respected community involvement and organizing. Pawlowski (2019) states, "brave space assumes that tension, conflict and risk are at the heart of the cognitive and personal transformation integral to learning about race and racism." He advocates for an extensive writing curriculum that is both anonymous (allowing for dissent to

more easily surface) and self-identified (to make students responsible readers and listeners; p. 68).

Theme: Research and Facilitation Methods

In addition to Deeb-Sosa (2019) and Lambert (2016) discussed above, the following literature also informed elements of my scholar/practitioner research and facilitation methodology:

I have used appreciative inquiry, or "AI" (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2018; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) as a foundational approach to my scholar-practitioner organizational development work for more than 20 years. AI's focus on asking positive (possibility) questions versus negative (fault/blame) questions as a way to address issues helps me diffuse the wariness and suspicion towards outside researchers/consultants that I typically find in organizations with top-down, command and control management styles. AI is also cited as an approach to asking powerful questions and stimulating lively discussion by Vogt et al. (2003).

Participatory action research (PAR; Schubotz, 2019) is a key component of my organic community organizing approach, stemming from my early days as a student at UC Davis Asian American Studies doing research with residents to support the need for an elementary school in a predominantly Asian community. I was intrigued by the combination of AI and PAR in Marchi's (2011) article, "Participatory and appreciative action and reflection in adult learning: Transformation as appreciative reflection." I tested Marchi's approach (also known as PAAR) by using it to analyze the labor/management partnership described in this dissertation and found a high degree of correlation.

Peat (2008) proposes a similar approach to PAR he calls "gentle action." He describes gentle action as a "creative suspension" of action, with the aim of developing a clearer

perception of the situation in hand, then creating a basis for action that is more sensitive, flexible, and creative. Out of these conditions will flow a more appropriate and harmonious action (pp. 16–17). Peat's work also echoes that of Miller (2017) described above, in its hands-off approach to community action and need for being comfortable with uncertainty (p. 16).

Finally, Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (2020) is the classic text that applies not just to facilitation methods but to an entire approach to interpersonal relations, team functioning, and organizational leadership. Emotional intelligence is one aspect of facilitating workers' stories.

Theme: Presence and Change

Underlying research and facilitation methodologies are the essence of the researcher/facilitator herself. In addition to the concept of Centering (Johnson, 2019) discussed above, the relationship between knowing oneself and creating change is addressed by Senge et al. in *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future* (2004). Levels of self-awareness related to types of change are also discussed by Scharmer and Yukelson (2015) in their Theory U framework.

Theme: Storytelling

Storytelling from a management/organizational perspective is captured by Brown et al. (2004) in *Storytelling in Organizations*. Similar in format to Horton and Freire (1990), this book documents a conversation between its four authors at an event sponsored by The Smithsonian Associates in April 2001. While the authors come from very different backgrounds and perspectives, collectively, they converged on the idea of narrative as an extraordinarily valuable lens for understanding and managing organizations in the 21st century (p. ix). This book also has the feel of an SPN with its conversational style, its inclusion of "Reflections" sections written by

each author three years later, in 2004, and its stated goal that the format of the book would stimulate further new discussions and activities in organizational storytelling (p. xii). Denning (2007, 2011) further elaborates on the relationship between narrative and leadership, labeling this leadership skill "narrative intelligence" that can inspire action in organizations (2021).

Storytelling in an immigrant community setting is documented in *Our Healing in Our Hands: Findings from a Mental Health Survey with San Francisco Unified School District High School Youth* (Chinese Progressive Association—Youth MOJO, 2018). This case study demonstrates the relationship between storytelling, participatory action research, cultural community organizing, and organizational change in an urban city school district.

Theme: The Role of Experience in Learning

Dewey (1998) validated the wisdom and knowledge that grows out of one's firsthand life experiences and elevated the role of students in creating their own learning in the classroom. He challenged the conventional view of education (at that time) as generalized, abstract theories that must be memorized by students, without connection to real life applications. Generations later, Brookfield and Holst (2011) carry on a similar struggle as seen in the debate between education versus training, with training seen as a lower form of education (pp. 64–85). In my experience, training (education for real life applications) is often labeled by educators as "career technical education" in a somewhat futile attempt to legitimize its standing. Further extending the debate between cognitive knowledge ("real" education) and other forms of knowledge, somatic learning (Kerka, 2002) is a mind/body, holistic form of experiential learning that encompasses body-centered, physical ways of knowing/learning. Ironically, experiential learning approaches such as somatic learning and "career technical education" are often relegated to the field of "adult" education, whereas a "learn by doing" educational approach has been elevated at

traditional four-year educational institutions such as the California State Polytechnic Universities.

CHAPTER IV: CREATING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR ORGANIC LEADERSHIP THROUGH WORKERS' STORIES

4.1 Synopsis

There is a symbiotic relationship between workers' stories and the organizational structures, or scaffolding, that support workers' stories. On the one hand, organizational scaffolding (through labor management partnerships and champions) is essential to manifesting the potential for workers' stories to create transformational workplace change. Workers' stories don't come to power on their own; you need to build support for that power shift. Worker-centered stories and actions can be really disruptive to the normal pattern of bureaucratic operations. At the same time, precisely because there is a strong pull backwards to the old patterns, workers' stories can serve as the inspiration and "glue" that enables organizational scaffolding to be effective. Video segments 4.2 through 4.5 address these issues.

Scaffolding provides both the boundaries and the necessary support for putting workers' stories into action. It is essential during this process for workers to own their own initiatives to transform their jobs and workplaces. Stepping back as a change agent is essential. At the same time, there are certain situations that still require me to be more directive. Ground rules help create and maintain authentic spaces for workers to design their own initiatives. Video segments 4.6 through 4.8 address these issues.

A key function of workers' stories is creating new narratives for the type of workplace they would like to see. These types of narratives require regular discussions over long periods of time, gradually breaking down silos and building new forms of conscious communities united around a common desire for change. Worker-designed and worker-led experiential learning

initiatives lend themselves naturally to building organic leadership for these new communities.

Video segments 4.9 through 4.12 address these exciting developments.

4.2 In Our Own Voices: Management and Labor Champions

https://vimeo.com/824430305/b6714c26db *Run time 7:36*

- A live webinar by management and labor champions on the importance of worker voice and creating a safe environment through peer mentoring programs
- Creating the basis for organizational culture change through worker voice programs
- The role of a third-party neutral in creating trust and building a true labor management partnership
- Let the people who do the work, develop the programs
- Worker-run programs helps the workers, the organizations, and the communities they serve

4.3 Building a Scaffolding: Labor Management Partnerships

https://vimeo.com/822638258/d4769ff86a *Run time 10:17*

- The need for a collaborative labor management partnership that finds ways to work together and support worker voice on the job
- The role of workers' stories in helping labor and management identify common ground
- Shape-shifting, an essential skill for labor and management to learn how to wear different hats at the same time, depending on the context
- There is no cookie cutter—you have to constantly work at building relationships and trust over time and multiple issues
- Relationships change as people rotate through jobs/positions; using workers' stories as the North Star to determine if the partnership is still working

4.4 Building a Scaffolding: The Need for Champions

https://vimeo.com/822638258/d4769ff86a *Run time 15:28*

- Champions believe in labor management partnerships and are genuinely interested in workers and their stories
- Champions exhibit a willingness to listen, to be curious, and to be humble, and to take positive action
- Champions must be willing to disrupt the normal ways of doing business in their respective organizations, and have the respect of others in order to be effective
- "Operators are the point of the spear"—the Super Bowl 50 story
- Without champions, it is much harder to build authentic space for worker voice

4.5 Building a Scaffolding: Disrupting Bureaucracy

https://vimeo.com/823929763/673e05bccd *Run time 6:27*

- Understanding how and why bureaucracy works at a particular agency
- Do not underestimate how worker-centered ideas and actions can be really disruptive to how people "normally" think work should be conducted
- Worker-centered initiatives have certain boundaries within a bureaucracy; how to realistically estimate what can and cannot be done?

4.6 Facilitating Workers' Stories: Ground Rules and Methods

https://vimeo.com/823928863/241cff0e6c *Run time 15:21*

- Shape-shifting my own role as a change agent; when do I need to be more directive?
- Ground rules are necessary for managing the effort
- Four ground rules that work to create and maintain authentic spaces
- Beyond talking—the important role of somatic learning
- Utilizing peer-driven change methodology in a bureaucratic workplace

4.7 Changing the Narrative through Worker Story-Based Metrics

https://vimeo.com/823929232/f39aecf8f7 *Run time 15:15*

- Changing the narrative, making history—the professional coach operator skills checklist
- Building community through worker-designed metrics

4.8 The Importance of Stepping Back as a Change Agent

https://vimeo.com/823928786/b78fa15520 *Run time 5:47*

- Stepping back as a change agent to create space for peer-driven change
- Being comfortable with the "gray areas," sometimes referred to as "chaos"
- Drawing the line at illegal, dangerous, or unsafe activities

4.9 Creating Community through Workers' Stories

https://vimeo.com/823929404/0f436fb221 *Run time 14:40*

- The importance of regular meeting times and spaces for workers to plan, implement, and most importantly reflect on their own programs
- The need to continually reinforce protocols for safe, authentic spaces for worker voice
- The process of mentoring a new person helped veteran operators become better operators as well; building a common culture and community between new and veteran operators over time

4.10 Using Workers' Stories to Break Down Silos

https://vimeo.com/823928675/30bede5ebc *Run time 12:41*

- Workers' stories are not unilateral; there are multiple types of stories
- Going beyond the "job title" stories to the real/hidden stories
- Creating spaces for workers from different departments to share stories with each other
- How could things be done differently? Creating new types of worker stories and building community through positive change initiatives

4.11 Developing Experiential Learning and Organic Leadership

https://vimeo.com/823929112/6ac5c3891e *Run time 8:43*

- Utilizing "real life" simulations as a peer-to-peer learning methodology
- Building organic leadership through creating worker-led learning materials

4.12 Using Video for Digital Storytelling, Experiential Learning

https://vimeo.com/823928496/da86d861b0 *Run time 13:07*

- Videotaping workers' meetings began as a way for me to document history in the making
- As workers became more accustomed to the video crew and saw themselves on video, it became a valuable tool to validate worker stories and worker voice.
- Workers began to produce their own videos, as a way to reflect upon and amplify the power of their own stories for their fellow operators and broader public audiences

4.13 Scholarly Reflections

In this section, I describe several notable pieces of literature I have used to reflect on my work. I also briefly describe other literature, grouped into themes relevant to this chapter.

Theme: Experiential Learning and Social Change

Narrative-style literature is especially appropriate for my research inquiry based on workers' stories. *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change* (1990) features a series of recorded conversations between Myles Horton and Paolo Freire, two giants in the field of education for social change. I was first introduced to Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2018) in my college Asian American Studies courses. In those days, my primary takeaway from Freire was that it was the role of academics/educators to validate and

uplift the voices of workers and community members in creating their own knowledge and education. I was inspired by my faculty mentor at that time, Isao Fujimoto, who put Freire's works into action with rural communities surrounding our university.

I have used that interpretation of Freire's work as a lens/filter throughout my life, without always consciously acknowledging the broadness of its impact on my work. Thus, I was astonished when Dr. Brookfield asked me if I had ever heard of Miles Horton and the Highlander School (answer: only in passing, when my union at the time was changing to an organizing/social justice model of unionism). Dr. Brookfield saw many parallels between my work and that of Highlander. The conversations between Horton and Freire in *We Make the Road by Walking* (1990) demonstrate why my Freire-based work seemed similar to Highlander. Starting with the very concept of "making the road by walking," experiential learning and honoring the wisdom and struggles of everyday people for social change lie at the heart of both men's approaches. I've learned more from the conversations between Horton and Freire than I have from reading their respective works. This is the power of storytelling—it reflects our lived experiences and thus enriches our understanding of what we think we know.

The timelessness of the principles behind *We Make the Road by Walking*, published in 1990, can be found in this UCLA Labor Center report, "New directions in racial and economic justice: How California's Worker Centers are bringing worker power into workforce development:

> Worker centers often incorporate principles from 'popular education,' a community-oriented and community-guided approach to education that is grounded in everyday people's own experiences to raise consciousness about racial and economic injustice, and provides useful tools and support as they become an integral part of broader social and political transformations. . . . These organizations recognize that low-wage workers have skills and expertise, and that their knowledge is often devalued at their workplaces and by society at large. The strong, supportive relationships with and between members help foster dignity and confidence among all. . . . Participants in committees

> that develop and implement programs such as train-the-trainer models often gain enough industry expertise to become program instructors. Building confidence is critical in encouraging members to engage in organizing activities and to self-advocate in the workplace as well as within their own communities, at city hall, in state houses, and beyond. (Lee et al., 2022, p. 6)

The work I do with transit agencies and unions does not qualify as "worker centers" as defined in the above-referenced UCLA Labor Center paper. However, the worker-centered, experiential approach to education and training that I promote through workers' stories results in many of the same outcomes as some worker centers. The equity-related aspects of my work, in particular, were studied by the University of Wisconsin (Mackey et al., 2018).

Theme: Worker Voice and Organic Leadership

During my first discussion with Dr. Brookfield on possible dissertation topics, I told him I was not interested in pursuing the topic of leadership. Surprised, he asked me: "Why not? You are already exercising a clear form of leadership." He encouraged me to read a book he had co-authored with Stephen Preskill, *Learning as a Way of Leading: Lessons from the Struggle for Social Justice* (2009). I realized that my objections to studying leadership stemmed from my previous organizational development studies. I was not interested in studying various types of management leadership theories. Dr. Brookfield helped me realize that I, myself, was exercising a form of organic leadership in the tradition of the community organizing and social justice leaders described in *Learning as a way of Leading*.

Dr. Brookfield and Dr. Preskill describe nine learning "tasks," exemplified by a particular social justice leader: learning to be open to the contributions of others; learning critical reflection; learning to support the growth of others; learning collective leadership; learning to analyze experience; learning to question; learning democracy; learning to sustain hope in the face of struggle; learning to create community. As an exercise, I used their learning task rubric to analyze my own work and the work of others involved in various transit worker voice initiatives.

This exercise made me realize that in my zealousness to ensure that workers led their own initiatives, I was diminishing my own leadership role in keeping things moving along a transformative change path. Workers and managers often lauded my work and stated that they could not have gotten this far without me. However, I tended to downplay the impact of my own leadership so that the various worker initiatives were not dismissed by organizational naysayers as "Deb's Project" (in other words, something done by an outside consultant and therefore easily dismissed). Gradually over time, I have come to accept credit for the work I have done, especially as the work has gone to scale on both state and national levels. I speak more about this development in Chapter V.

Various groups have conducted research on the worker-centered approach I pioneered in public transit, with each study building upon the other. In 2015, the National Academies of Science (through its Transportation Resource Board, or TRB) conducted a national study of six transit agencies of varying demographics on the effectiveness of labor-management partnerships in transit. As such, it conducted a broad analysis of Joint Workforce Investment (JWI), the labor-management partnership I helped to pioneer in 2005-06. The TRB made particular note of how we institutionalized the voice of frontline workers and its resulting impact on the workplace:

> The mentorship meetings guide mentors and provide a forum for them to discuss problems that arise between them and the drivers they speak with. Over time, however, the mentorship meetings have become vital sources for everyone involved to improve operations, improve management accountability, and indirectly improve the grievance and bargaining processes by making changes which are premised on shared objectives. Moreover, the emphasis on the value and improvement of performance has fueled the sense that the operations and maintenance work is important and valued. (p. G-3)

The TRB research report was the first that specifically called out my particular role (much to my chagrin), although it labeled me an "administrator" rather than its first label, "independent facilitator" (p. G-3). Notably, they linked my role directly to the relationship between labor and management (understandable, given the focus of their research), but failed to

note that I used workers' stories and centering worker voice to bring the parties together. Therefore, I was pleased that Mackey et al. (2018) of the University of Wisconsin captured JWI's focus on frontline worker voice, experiential learning, and the relationship to developing organic leadership as one of four case studies they conducted on equity in apprenticeship, funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Similarly, the UC Berkeley Labor Center in two separate reports documented many of our California Transit Works! (CTW) best practices in incorporating worker wisdom into its work (2020), especially our emphasis on centering worker voice throughout the high road training partnership framework (2020).

Theme: Organic Community Organizing

I learned the power of storytelling in organic community organizing from my early days working with Asian working-class and immigrant communities (see Chapter II). In my literature review for this dissertation, I researched whether communities are continuing to use storytelling as a vehicle for creating their own change, and how that could illuminate my current work.

The Chinese Progressive Association Workers Committee (2010) published a groundbreaking, comprehensive research report on health and working conditions in San Francisco Chinatown restaurants. Their Worker Leadership Committee helped design the 'research for action' project from start to finish and trained other restaurant workers to conduct survey interviews" (preface). In partnership with the San Francisco Department of Public Health and two University of California departments, this study utilized a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach (Israel et al., 1998; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008) with extensive involvement of approximately 30 former and current restaurant workers themselves (p. 9). The report's data findings draw from stories of the study's 433 participants—stories depressingly familiar to me from my former community organizing days.

I chose this study, in particular, as its research data documents a "low road" approach to Chinatown restaurant workplace health, safety, pay, and working conditions, while showing that a "high road" is possible, offering a "New Vision to the High Road" for restaurant employers that includes measures that the City of San Francisco can take to address the multiple needs of immigrant workers and others facing barriers to employment (pp. 22–23). The report further points out that the problems documented in their research extend to low-wage working communities across San Francisco (p. 24). Their extensive use of worker leaders and workers' stories to develop the datasets and findings of this research, supporting genuine transformational change, has clear parallels to the methodology I use with transit workers in building the high road to public transit.

I took inspiration from other examples of storytelling as a method of organic community organizing: Jobin-Leeds and AgitArt (2016) use the power of stories to highlight the cause of dreamers and immigrant rights, while McClure et al. (2021–2022) use stories to engage Latinx families through popular education. In workplace organizing (another form of community), Morillo (2022) describes his process of building a strong, multilingual union local for primarily Latino and East African immigrant janitors as "negotiating stories from the bottom," where respect was the number one demand of the workers. Morillo and his members built a successful contract negotiations campaign from the story of a Latina janitor who personally cleaned the office of a CEO—a CEO whose bank was foreclosing on her home mortgage because she couldn't afford the payments. Perlman and Patel (2015), as white labor leaders in their union local striving to build genuine support for the Black Lives Matter movement, learned to keep the focus on the specificity and stories of anti-Black racism, while meaningfully acknowledging police violence against other communities of color and giving white workers a vision for what

they stand for in the fight for racial justice (p. 132). In all these examples, storytelling—the lived experiences of frontline workers—became a powerful tool for organic community organizing, often serving to cross entrenched or intractable "divides" between different groupings of people or institutions.

As a group, these case studies bring the lessons of Mauricio Lim Miller (see Chapter III), Myles Horton, Paolo Freire, Stephen Brookfield, and Stephen Preskill into contemporary focus. These case studies inspire me to reflect more deeply on how I can improve our worker voice initiatives in transit. Currently we are somewhat "stuck" in the lane of peer-to-peer mentoring and career ladder/apprenticeship training initiatives. While these initiatives are extremely important and life-changing for most participants, are they the only lanes we should be pursuing? Are there other avenues we should explore, while maintaining our focus on worker voice/worker stories? One avenue in particular we are just beginning to act upon is a closer connection between the public transit industry, transit workers, and the communities we serve. It is time to start a new series of transit workers' stories centered around their lived connections to their "under-resourced" communities' struggles for equitable access to essential services, good jobs, career opportunities, and a cleaner/healthier environment.

Theme: Digital Storytelling

As I researched literature on digital storytelling, I was disturbed by what felt like a "commercial" approach using electronic stories to "sell" a management campaign or concept to the public or to a company's workforce. Of this literature, Groh (2017) stood out as someone who directly linked digital storytelling to a particular approach to better leadership.

I was more encouraged by Joe Lambert's extensive digital storytelling work as documented on his Story Center website (https://www.storycenter.org). The Story Center offers a

wide range of accessible workshops on digital storytelling approaches as applied to various formats (writers, podcasts, etc.), occupations (educators, healthcare, advocacy workers, museums), and communities (Spanish speakers, LGBTQIA+, trans teens), as well as a digital storytelling certificate. They have brought their mission to “Listen deeply, tell stories” to thousands nationally and internationally. Story Center has not done extensive digital storytelling in workplaces; this is an area of future research and perhaps collaboration with the work I do in public transit.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION, WE-SEARCH, BROADER IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WORK

In conclusion, this SPN dissertation has examined my personal experiences as a scholar-practitioner change agent in centering workers' experiences/stories as the fulcrum for transformational workplace change. The stories I have related, in SPN style, are drawn from my experience at a medium-sized transit agency and their largest union between 2005–2016. In this chapter, I also include lessons from bringing my approach to scale between 2017 and 2023. I utilized my own video stories to recreate for the viewer the experience of listening/learning to workers and demonstrate the power of storytelling.

The purpose of this research was to shine a light on a key element of workforce development/training initiatives—workers' stories—that receives little attention in conventional literature. I asserted the need for authentic spaces for workers' stories to emerge and documented my methodology in creating those spaces. I examined types of workers' stories and emphasized the need for taking positive action on those stories, in order to build trust and relationships. I further documented the role that workers' stories can play in supporting and strengthening labor/management partnerships. I demonstrated how impactful communities and organic leadership can be built by centering workers' stories through peer-driven training initiatives, especially through the use of video and experiential teaching techniques. Throughout this dissertation, I utilized the lens of my own role as a change agent/organizer dedicated to empowering workers through peer-driven change initiatives.

This research was not intended to be an examination of worker voice in other contexts like traditional union roles like collective bargaining and joint labor/management health and welfare or safety committees. I also did not delve into the development of traditional

worker-centered curriculum, such as pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs, nor demand-side workforce development strategies that have been extensively researched since "high road" workforce and economic development strategies emerged in the 1990s. Finally, this research was not intended as an in-depth examination of the traditional role of intermediaries in labor/management training programs.

My dissertation can be utilized in many other contexts—in particular, as a challenge or disruption to the traditional ways of approaching education/training programs, workforce development, and organizational development both in academia and in the field. Truly centering worker voice means workers having a direct seat at the table. This type of power-sharing and acknowledgement/active support of workers' wisdom does not come easily. I hope my description of change agent approaches/roles can assist others who wish to research and/or play similar roles as change agents and scholar-practitioners. This chapter provides a glimpse into the challenges of "going to scale" with a worker-centered, worker voice approach in any area, and could inform future research into worker voice.

On a larger scale, my dissertation and its approach are applicable not only to public transit but to a wide range of occupations and industries, especially in the public sector. Any organization that has a similar top-down, chain of command structure with frontline workers who are widely dispersed geographically and/or required to work on by themselves for most of their duties, could benefit from the approach outlined in this dissertation. I have also used this approach successfully in the hospitality industry, with student groups, and with nonprofit organizations.

It is also important to note that the approach described in this dissertation is not limited to one-on-one focus groups as a methodology for hearing worker stories. Indeed, most of the focus

groups and subsequent frontline worker meetings were conducted in both small (2–10 people) and medium (11–30 people) sized groups. In these group settings, it is even more important to manage the interplay and interactions between people as they surface their stories. Managing these group dynamics and creating the conditions for positive collective action are topics of future research.

5.1 Synopsis

Eighteen years ago, I met Tom Fink for the first time and heard his simple request for a training program that would improve the lives of his fellow frontline transit workers. Today, I am astonished at the growing national demand for the peer-driven transformational work described in this dissertation, that began with a single focus group of coach operators in 2005. Even more meaningful to me are the number of frontline workers and other folks who are stepping forward and creating their own peer-to-peer mentoring and training initiatives—defining their own work and creating new communities at their workplaces.

None of this would be possible without an amazing group of frontline workers who stepped forward to lead this effort—first in their own workplaces, then regionally and statewide through California Transit Works (CTW), and nationally/internationally through the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU). (ATU is now CTW's fiscal sponsor.) There is a tremendous untapped wealth of energy among frontline workers, desiring a respectful, meaningful, and impactful voice in the daily operations of their transit agencies.

This pent-up frontline worker wisdom and energy, combined with the transit industry's urgent need for more workers, creates a unique situation for me as I write the "We-Search" final chapter of my scholarly personal narrative. I have had the rare opportunity as a scholar/practitioner to test the approach outlined in this dissertation at other transit agencies,

recruiting others to assist along the way. I am blessed to be part of an enthusiastic group of CTW and ATU change agents—most of whom are former or current frontline transit workers themselves. This is new territory for all of us, in the spirit of "make the road by walking on it."

This We-Search chapter is grounded in my lived experience of the past five years. Since CTW's formation, I have found myself in a new role of senior advisor/strategist to CTW and ATU—WHY and HOW do change agents do this work and bring it to scale? This is especially challenging, as worksites have circumstances that can be very different than those of the original effort. To meet these new challenges, each member of our frontline worker team had to personally grow beyond their original roles in peer-driven change initiatives. Most importantly, the entire team needed authentic spaces to try out different approaches together and discover what worked and didn't work as we "went to scale."

This was certainly a new learning situation for me, as well. How do I pass along the lessons I've learned as a change agent, in a way that upholds the spirit of peer-to-peer organic leadership and transformational change? How do I handle multiple huge challenges simultaneously (fundraising, program administration, stakeholder alignment, etc.), while staying true to the reason I got into this work in the first place? How do I get through the many moments of self-doubt, exhaustion, and frustration?

Here is a story that illustrates several lessons in centering workers' stories and experiences as a path to transformational change:

CTW recently held a very well-attended statewide Zoom webinar on a successful approach to recruiting new coach operators by one of its labor/management partnerships. This recruitment effort includes partnering with a community college/adult program and community

organizations to recruit community members into a "pre-apprenticeship," leading to a paid apprenticeship upon successful graduation.

While the webinar was very successful from an informational and attendance standpoint, we missed a big opportunity to feature the workers' stories themselves. Luckily, one of the management partners mentioned the program's first graduate—a person from a "priority population" (underserved) community, who has become the program's biggest and most enthusiastic advocate. That brief story, towards the end of the webinar, instantly energized the webinar participants and panelists alike. Smiles broke out all around, as both the management partner and the union peer mentor coordinator described the HEART of why we do this work—to transform this person's life with new opportunity, while helping the transit agency fulfill its mission of serving these same community members through public transit services.

Why didn't we create space for this worker to tell his story as the featured presenter? Because the webinar organizers became too caught up in presenting lots of *information*, much of it designed around the community college's description of its program. What was missing? The HEART of why we even do this work—the frontline workers/community members themselves.

The webinar did feature all the formal partners in the program and did a very good job of demonstrating the labor/management partnership scaffolding needed for centering worker voices. Yet, the frontline worker coordinator's voice was just one voice among many presenters, with a relatively smaller role compared to others. Also, I saw that folks from both labor and management tended to defer to the college presenter as the "professional expert" during the discussion. The college presenter was very good, but she also jumped in first to answer many questions, without thinking that it might be better for someone else to answer. This is not her fault—it is what traditional approaches trained folks to do. During the webinar planning, we did

not help her understand a new way to do presentations by centering workers' stories/voices. I am sure she would have enjoyed trying on a new role.

This story highlights how easy it is to fall into the standard patterns of doing a webinar, even though CTW stands for centering worker voice. Nothing takes the place of actually centering worker voice through workers doing their own presentations. This webinar could have been much more powerful, had we asked ourselves a simple question: How are we centering worker voice in this webinar? (Ironically, CTW usually DOES feature frontline worker presentations; that's what we are known for! But this was the first time doing a webinar of this nature, and with this particular community college partner. It was a good indication of more work that needs to be done in this arena.)

After the webinar, I realized that it was my personal responsibility as the senior strategist to help the webinar planners find ways to stay focused on our core mission. I needed to do a better job of creating spaces and asking questions in a way that would help the webinar planners learn how to counter a "traditional" webinar approach with a more worker-centered approach. Instead, I let myself become overwhelmed with urgent program administration needs. I failed to check in with the webinar planners in a timely way.

What are some lessons from this story—a story that reflects We-Search, the broader implications of my work, as told in this dissertation—that can apply to future change agent work?

First, never underestimate both the opportunities and the constant effort it takes to center frontline worker voices/lived experiences through stories. Centering frontline workers is almost always a disruption to the status quo. Most established organizational processes will ask for a "project leader" or "point person," whether it is for a conference presentation or a grant

application. It is too easy to fall into either assuming the role by yourself or giving that role to a single designated worker-leader. You have to consciously find ways to include and promote frontline worker VOICES (plural). While videos featuring first person worker voices/stories work well, even better is creating opportunities for frontline workers themselves to be in these roles.

If there really is only room for one person, make sure that the one person (including you!) is accountable to their fellow workers at all phases—preparation, participation, debrief, and follow-up. The bottom line must always be: do frontline workers feel their voices/stories are being heard and acted upon? This requires the lead/point person to adopt a humble, collaborative, and integrative approach to the work.

It can be difficult to center frontline worker voices through stories, even with the best of intentions. Frontline workers themselves are not immune to the "expert" syndrome—deferring to the perceived "expert" or higher ranking (power) person in the room. Folks may stand down and defer to others unless you create that safe space for workers to speak up.

Second, stay focused on the WHY and the HOW. As workers (including myself), we are trained to "do the work"—the WHAT. That pattern becomes the safe thing to do; if I do a poll in any group, very few folks will raise their hands and say their voices are always welcomed in any situation (lacking psychological safety.) On the other hand, when I listen deeply to workers' stories, I am drawing out the WHY and the HOW. It is not a natural pattern for most folks to speak up about the WHY and the HOW, let alone advocate for and deepen our understanding of centering worker voice. This is one of the reasons why I believe so strongly in using workers' stories/lived experiences to center worker voice; and to test if you are on the right path in your change agent work. Stories have the potential to open up multifaceted ways of learning and

relating to one another. It is easier to understand the WHY and the HOW through stories. In the example above, the impact of that first graduate's story is not unique. When we summed up the webinar, folks instantly understood how we strayed from the WHY and the HOW, just by referring to the moment that story was told. Somewhat sheepishly, folks realized that we always need to put the question, "How are we centering workers' stories?" at the top of all future planning.

Third, consciously build regular self-reflection processes into my daily routine as a change agent. Am I doing what is most essential as a change agent? Am I creating authentic spaces for my own team? How are my actions being received in real life? How am I learning from others, especially from the folks who are doing the work? How can I do things differently? This should not be done from a perfectionist standpoint, but from a humble desire to constantly learn, grow, and improve myself in the service of others. I had learned the value of self-reflection during my years as a classroom teacher (clearly outlined by Brookfield, 1995); self-reflection is just as important for change agents.

Beyond the specific lessons outlined above, there are three personal attributes that help me survive and grow as a change agent:

Finding and Staying True to Your Heart—Your North Star

This is not an easy process, as the world is all too eager to tell you what is or is not acceptable. By focusing on my own story, in the context of the history of Asians in this country, I discovered my own North Star—a fierce belief in the power of everyday people to transform their own lives through collective action. I chose the lane of service industry workplaces, as these workers are primarily people of color, immigrants, and women.

Further, I defined my role of scholar/practitioner as working in the service of and for the empowerment of our communities, as defined by community members themselves. This means as a change agent, I am usually a facilitator, not a stakeholder—except to the extent that I am also a member of a particular community itself. But even then, I recognize my privileged position and defer to those living/working under the harshest conditions.

Each person's journey to discovering their North Star is unique. The important thing is to embrace that you are, in fact, on a journey along with everyone else. If you are fortunate, you will find others whose North Star aligns with yours.

Being Flexible

As much as we as humans tend to seek out comfort in set patterns and routines, life is always changing. Anticipate and learn to work with grey areas, chaos, and constantly changing conditions in your work. It helps to always assess the context of the work you are doing at any moment in time—the environment, operations, and people involved. The environment is the pool you are swimming in—COVID-19, politics, history, industry trends—over which you may have little control. Work operations include "hidden" ways of doing (or not) things that have a huge impact on the work. Above all, people are always changing—in relationship to their environment, to the work operations, to each other, and in themselves.

Is there a contradiction between staying true to your North Star and being flexible? Not at all. Staying true to your North Star does not mean being rigid. Perhaps the best analogy is that of sailing across the open seas to a faraway destination, without navigational instruments. This type of indigenous Polynesian "wayfinding" relies, instead, on reading the natural elements—the sun, the moon, the stars, the winds, the ocean currents, wave patterns, the interaction of air and sea,

the movement of birds, the weather, and so on—to chart the best line to sail at any given moment in time.

Similarly, you will learn over time how to read the ever-changing contexts of your work and make adjustments that keep you heading in the right direction. You will not be able to chart a linear course; there are no "cookie cutters." There are, however, common elements or processes to watch for, one step at a time. Being comfortable with the grey areas means being comfortable with taking that one step, making an assessment, taking another step, and so on. This can actually be a very freeing process—there is no pressure to figure out a plan, completely and accurately, before you start.

However, you also have to watch out for seasickness (figuratively speaking)! My secret weapon for combat seasickness is Centering.

Centering Yourself and Those Around You

On the surface, my work lies at the intersection of many "standard" fields: mediation/conflict resolution, labor/management partnerships, industrial/organizational psychology, human factors/ergonomics, organizational change, organizational learning, high roads training partnerships, workforce development, adult education, community college innovative instructional design/program development, labor studies, apprenticeships, public policy (workforce development, higher education, public transit), community development, and human development, to name a few. I am constantly pulled by all these fields, while staying true to my North Star of frontline worker empowerment.

It is easy to get pulled directly into one or more of the "fields" described above. Often, this could occur during important local, regional, state, national, and international campaigns that

would give you a high professional profile. When this happens, it's easy to get caught up in the mission/methodology of a single "field" and lose sight of your North Star.

At times, organizations and institutions may love your work so much, they try to play to your ego. Individuals may try to recruit you for their own reasons—be it altruistic ("You will be such an asset to advance the X program!") or personal ("Having this person work for me will make me look better and advance my career"). On the flip side, you may discover (slowly or suddenly) that you've been dismissed if the project you are working on is de-prioritized or ended by clients. It's tempting to take things personally and lose sight of the bigger picture. You can easily become overworked, trying to be all things to all people.

The key to staying true to my North Star is to center myself and those I work with. Centering is a core concept with universal applicability. On a personal level, centering myself as a person means coming back to who I am in this moment in time. I am not the work I do, or where I live, or the roles I play in my family or community. I am a human being with physical, mental, and emotional characteristics that are constantly changing, making me the person I am at this moment.

If I am not centered and balanced, I will not be at my best to work with others. This is the popular "oxygen mask on the plane" analogy: put your mask on first before helping others. In fact, it is a very good analogy, as a technique called "centered breathing" is the simplest and most effective way to regain your center. Simply put, breathe in through your nose for a count of four, all the way down to your abdomen. Hold for a count of four. Exhale out through your mouth for a count of four. As you do this, inhale and visualize bringing in fresh new life; hold your breath and feel new life expand within you; exhale out everything you want to get rid of. In scientific terms, this is exactly what you do when you breathe—inhale oxygen, replenish, exhale

carbon dioxide (waste). However, visualization transforms this breathing technique into a personal empowerment tool.

I have taught centered breathing to hundreds of bus drivers, who use it on the road to let go of the myriad challenging experiences they face every day. I use centered breathing in meetings to help everyone focus back on the work or to calm down from a challenging discussion. I have multiple other "somatic" (mind/body) techniques that we use, often in the form of group games or exercises (NOT teambuilding), that all serve to teach this crucial centering skill to frontline workers.

The results: Facilitators/change agents who can stay focused in the midst of organizational chaos and find ways to move forward, one step at a time. Workers who are both calmer and more energized, who think clearly and have sharper insights into themselves, their work, and the changes they want to see. Organizations that learn to "center" worker voice in their operations, as described in earlier chapters of this dissertation.

Centering is my "secret sauce" to combatting the physical, mental, and emotional impacts of working in a very intense field for many years. There are many ways to center yourself—walking, playing a musical instrument, drawing, building a piece of furniture, gardening, swimming, dancing, meditating, or simply being outside in nature, observing all that is around you. All of these activities can be forms of meditation, which I will define as being fully engaged in the present moment. In my experience, being in nature is the most profound way to center myself—even if the best I can do in an urban environment is go outside and connect with the sun's energy.

In summary, these three personal attributes—staying true to my North Star, being Flexible, and Centering—are the wayfaring techniques of my life's journey as a change agent. These wayfaring techniques can be applied to any line of work, anytime, anywhere.

It has taken me decades to realize that I don't need to answer the question, "What is it that you actually do?" With these wayfaring techniques, I can simply follow my heart, and trust that each of my actions will be another step on the path I am making for myself and others.

5.2 In Our Own Voices: It's Our Work!

https://vimeo.com/831268836/5d17cd612a- *Run time 5:10*

- Presentation by workers about what peer mentoring means to them.

5.3 It's about Respect

https://vimeo.com/824398178/f8e4277161 *Run time 14:59*

- Going beyond "workforce development programs" to the heart of our work: building respect for workers by centering worker voice.
- Unique opportunity to explore the "we-search" space.

5.4 Knowing Your Role as Change Agent When You Go to Scale

https://vimeo.com/824397758/b649d186b0 *Run time 6:50*

- Staying true to who you are—don't get pulled into a "leadership" role by others.
- You are the third-party neutral facilitator/change agent. The work itself belongs to the partnerships. You are the outsider.
- Litmus test—Do workers feel like their stories are being heard?

5.5 Growing New Change Agents

https://vimeo.com/824397625/085f15ddda *Run time 5:25*

- Shape shifting—Retired workers are CTW leaders of this new worker voice movement, but the work belongs to the partnerships.
- "Learn by doing" approach—you have to experience change agent work to really understand it.
- Reaffirming the need for scaffolding—labor/management partnerships and champions.

5.6 Modeling the Authentic Spaces We Are Trying to Create

https://vimeo.com/824397938/9899689748 *Run time 10:11*

- This is a giant pilot project—no one has ever taken this worker voice/worker story approach to scale in transit operations before.
- Even bigger need for being humble, asking questions, and really listening to the folks who are doing the work.
- Creating our own intentional way of doing things—modeling worker voice from the heart, true partnership, authentic spaces—and how this makes us stand out from others when we go to conferences and communities of practice.

5.7 Organic Community Building

https://vimeo.com/824398814/49c8852377 *Run time 6:28*

- Bringing to scale my original intent, for workers' stories to lay the basis for building community.
- People are now organically creating their own communities, across agencies and regions, across occupational lines, all centered on workers' stories and lived experiences, and taking positive action on those stories.
- As a change agent, always remembering to Let Go. You cannot and should not try to plan and engineer this community building as an outsider. The key is Peer Driven Change.

5.8 Being a Change Agent: It's a Journey

https://vimeo.com/824397256/20d9e8f727 *Run time 3:41*

- There is no magic formula. As things change, you need to change too. "We are flexible" is our famous slogan.
- This is a journey—you have to constantly assess what is going on and adjust accordingly, while always keeping the goal in mind—transformation of the workplace by centering workers' stories/voices.

5.9 Scholarly Reflections

The following articles reflect the chronology of my scholar-practitioner work as we went to scale:

- In 2017, I took the approach described in this dissertation to scale through a new "high road training partnership" (HRTP) consortium of public transit agencies, transit

unions, education, and community partners called California Transit Works! (CTW). This consortium is described on the CTW website, California Transit Works! (2022).

- One of the CTW founding labor/management partnerships described in this dissertation, Joint Workforce Investment (JWI), was chosen as one of four projects examined in a national research study on equity in apprenticeship (Wolff et al., 2019).
- The UCLA Labor Center was commissioned by the California Workforce Development Board to document the impact of CTW's first two years in a research report, *High Road to Public Transit* (2020).
- The UCLA Labor Center was commissioned by the California Workforce Development Board to evaluate its initial High Road Training Partnership (HRTP) initiative, a pilot project that was conducted in 2017–2019. CTW was one of eight HRTPs who initially participated in this pilot project. Outcomes from this pilot project initiative, reported in *Unified Strategic Workforce Development Plan: Strategic Planning Elements, 2022–2023* (2020), became the basis for the California Labor Agency's current approach to workforce development.
- ATU (2023) is a press release from the Amalgamated Transit Union (International), announcing the significance of ATU becoming the fiscal agent for CTW as of February 2023.

It is humbling to realize that the approach outlined in this dissertation has developed a growing state and national presence. We represent a very real, authentic community movement. When the Amalgamated Transit Union (International) put out its press release on March 7, 2023, on partnering with CTW as our fiscal agent, I do not think any of us realized the full significance of this development. The work I began with a single worker focus group in 2005 has suddenly

been thrust onto the national stage, in addition to being an integral part of the state of California's High Road workforce development strategy. Indeed, the High Road strategy is now being actively discussed and adopted at the federal level by the US Department of Labor. If we hope to remain true to our North Star and work towards transformational workplace change, it is even more imperative to maintain our focus on centering workers' experiences and stories.

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APPENDIX A: GOING TO SCALE: STATE AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

https://vimeo.com/824397340/0c87c0a268

APPENDIX B: WORKERS SET NATIONAL STANDARDS

https://vimeo.com/824398558/ca916ecc50