

**Naming, Making, and Connecting—
Reclaiming Lost Arts:
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CHAPTER 2

Naming, Making, and Connecting— Reclaiming Lost Arts: The Pedagogical Possibilities of Photo-Story Production

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WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

Imagine a typical day in your life. If you have a job outside the home or go to school, you may rush out the door and grab a bus, enter a subway, or jump into your car; or perhaps you just walk down the street to a neighborhood store or to see a friend. Wherever you are going, one thing is pretty certain: Your visual environment, filled with images that bombard you constantly as you move through the day, has been defined for you. One day try counting the number of advertising images you encounter: television commercials and flyers on your doorstep; signs on telephone poles and billboards on the expressway; illuminated ads in the subways and painted ads covering buses and in bus shelters; ads on the placemats at fast food restaurants, in banks, in shopping malls, in the morning newspaper you read, and, in the case of York University where I teach, even inside the bathroom stalls!

This environment of images is taken for granted; it has become normalized. If it weren't there, we would feel that something was missing. When I worked in Nicaragua in the early 1980s, the Sandinistas had banned the use of women's bodies in advertising. I was struck by their absence, which made me realize how common their presence had become in North America, and how most of

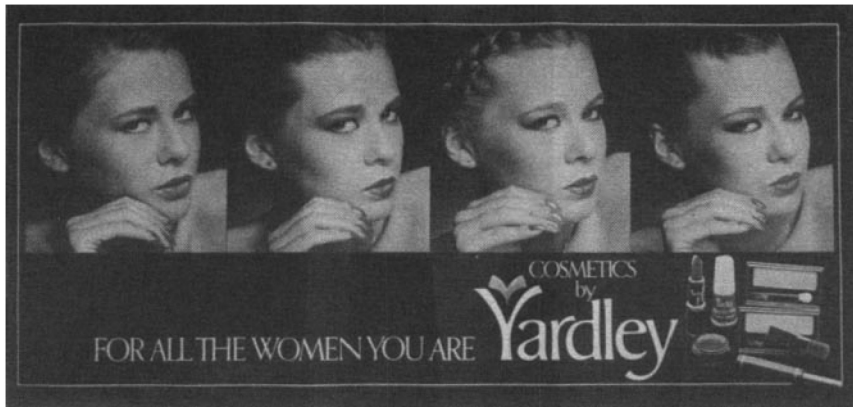


FIG. 2.1. Yardley advertisement: All the women you are.

us have stopped even questioning it. Or if we did, we felt powerless to change it. And why? Because we have a sense of someone with more power than us making those decisions, creating those images, not even bothering to ask us if we want to digest them as daily fare.

What does this visual environment have to do with adult education? For one thing, it is part of the ideological landscape that surrounds us and forms us, and within which we work. It is also a resource for critical and creative educational practice. When I was teaching ESL in the late 1970s and early 1980s in garment factories in downtown Toronto, we often brought bus or subway ads into the classroom, first to reinforce language practice in reading the few words they bore (and that could be practiced on the way to and from work), and second to use the photos as catalysts for deeper discussion. The Yardley ad (Photo 2.1) generated tremendous response. “For all the women you are,” it proclaimed. “It doesn’t say anything about OUR lives,” was the critical response of the immigrant women in the class. And so they proceeded to alter the title (inserting words to read “For all the women we REALLY are NOT!”) as well as the image (plastering the idealized face of western beauty with their own photos reflecting a multiplicity of origins and colors and moods).¹

The following year, a group of middle-class community educators at an international women and media conference also had their hand at reconstructing the Yardley ad. They noted that only a small corner of the ad

1 At that time, almost 20 years ago, deconstructionism had not yet become vogue, and the fine art of “ad busting” was yet to be born. These days there is even a monthly magazine, *Adbusters*, put out by the Media Foundation in Vancouver, that features creative and critical reconstructions of ads as part of a deeper critique of consumer culture. For a good chuckle and a new critical tool, check them out on the Internet at adbusters@adbusters.org.



FIG. 2.2. Doctored Yardley advertisement: “Really are Not” and “What’s behind it all?”

revealed the product being promoted, whereas most of it promoted an ideal notion of beauty and a particular lifestyle. Then they asked, as the factory workers might have, where are the workers that made this product? It did not suddenly appear out of nowhere. In probing “what was behind it all,” they developed a collective analysis of the multinational production and promotion of cosmetics. In the process, they discovered that Yardley had branch plants in each of the countries they represented, and so they turned the ad over and revealed the global production of goods that the original image obscured.

This ad and the critical and creative doctoring it received at the hands of immigrant workers and women educators reflect some important aspects of the cultural terrain that shapes our pedagogical work. The ad, like most, reveals one of the ways people, and in this case women, get officially “named,” and how a homogenous ideal gets perpetuated, denying or devaluing the existence and daily reality not only of marginalized groups but of most of us who do not fit this market-driven ideal. The obscuring of the product as well as the invisibility of the producers and of the production process keeps us as consumers unaware of how what we consume is made, by whom, and under what conditions. In the same way, the image itself has magically appeared in our visual landscape; there is another factory somewhere for “ideological image production” where someone decides what we will see, and by extension, influences how we think about ourselves and the world. Both processes disconnect us: from the material and natural world, from the relations of production, from *naming* and *making*. In effect, such images, which by excluding us negate the value of our lives, also *disconnect* us from ourselves.

Yet when we critically and actively engage these images we can uncover the deeper processes behind them. We can begin to name, to make, and to

connect parts of our lives in ways that make us more whole and that build a sense of community. Beyond these images, we can make our own; beyond these stories, we have our own to tell. Building community does not mean obliterating our differences either; telling our stories may uncover conflicting interests just as it may help us find common ground. But the process of imaging and writing our own diverse histories counters any homogenous representation of community and feeds new ways of connecting.

In this chapter,² I share some of the ways I have been involved over the past 25 years in collective photo-story production, in various community education contexts in both Latin America and North America. What I hope to emphasize in this revisiting is the pedagogical potential of the processes of production, and how they can be part of a reclaiming of what I call the lost arts of *naming*, *making*, and *connecting*.

PHOTO-STORIES OR FOTO-NOVELAS: BORROWING FROM THE SOUTH

Just as many North American educators have been inspired in the past two decades by the creative practice and highly developed theory of “popular education” growing out of social movements in Latin America,³ so too have we learned from the related evolution in that region of “popular communications.” As Riano (1994) elaborated, this field includes multiple forms of cultural expression: from more traditional practices of poetry, textile work, silk screen, cartoons, music, and popular theater to more technologized forms of communications such as community radio, photography, video, and, now, the Internet. What distinguishes popular communications (from the official media and even some alternative media) is the stance it takes with marginalized populations (the word *popular* in Spanish refers to “the people,” with a clear class connotation). It is also different from mainstream media in its emphasis on the involvement of people not only in producing their own art and media but in producing their own meanings through this process.

Popular communications is a tool for popular education, especially when it promotes collective and creative processes, countering the more individualized, competitive, passive, fragmented, and text-based pedagogical

- 2 I would like to acknowledge the contributions not only of all the coworkers and participants in workshops and productions described here, but also of current coworkers and students at the Faculty of Environmental Studies, particularly those involved in the Cultural Production Workshop, the Focus on Food project, and the “Roots and Routes” media festival. Special thanks to those who have offered useful critical feedback on this chapter: Stephanie Conway, Mark Haslam, Zabe MacEachren, Robert Mound, and Julia Winkler.
- 3 Although Freire (1970, 1993) may be the best known of the theoreticians (Pedagogy of the Oppressed), popular educators in networks such as CEAAL (Latin American Adult Education Council) and ALFORJA (a consortium of Central American popular education centers) have been prolific in collectively developing and systematizing their methodology.

practices of most hegemonic educational institutions. Vancouver-based popular educator Nadeau (1996) has delineated the following characteristics of popular communications: It is concrete (not abstract); it's hot (starts from the heart, not the head); it starts from the local moving to the national and global; it often uses stories and metaphors; it is intersectoral, linking the realities of different groups; it takes a stand; it includes humor, celebration, and joy; it is always part of a broader ongoing process, linked to critical education and collective organizing for change.

I first became exposed to popular communications while working with a literacy program in Lima, Peru, in the mid-1970s (Barndt, 1980), which was applying a methodology of *condensitization* developed by Brazilian educator Freire (1970, 1993). As we sought appropriate cultural forms for teaching literacy to rural migrants forced off their land into the burgeoning cities, we came upon the “foto-novela.” Found on newstands throughout Latin America, photo-novels are a kind of soap opera in comic book form, using photographs instead of cartoons to illustrate an unfolding melodrama of intrigue and passion. They were particularly popular among illiterates in Peru, who would sit on street corners engrossed in the visual dramas, able to “read” them through the actions and expressions in the photos. In deciding that foto-novelas had great potential as a teaching tool, we borrowed only the form, consciously transforming the content and, ultimately, their use as well as the processes through which they are produced (Barndt, 1982).

Those first attempts at producing socially critical photo-novels resulted in some interesting lessons. Working with a group of literacy teachers we “constructed” two stories to illustrate traditional and transformative approaches to teaching literacy. Whereas the adult participants in the literacy program were good natured about acting out our story, they also let us know they would have constructed it differently. First, they noted, we had an indigenous teacher playing the role of the authoritarian literacy worker and an outsider playing the role of the teacher committed to participatory learning. No matter the method, they preferred to be with “one of their own,” in this case the (more oppressive) indigenous teacher. And so our casting had failed miserably. Second, the dialogue was definitely not theirs; it was ours. Finally, the story was ultimately BOR-ING: “This isn't a fotonovela,” they chided us, “Where's the drama, the intrigue, the love?”

Since that first attempt more than 20 years ago, I have been involved in facilitating collective productions of more than 50 photo-stories,⁴ from stories of immigrant women in Toronto looking for work (for use in ESL classes) to tales of Nicaraguans evacuating the mountains during the contra war (for teaching literacy), from a musical photo-story (in images and song) produced

4 See Barndt (1980); photo-stories in Barndt (1986–1991); Barndt et al. (1986); Barndt et al. (1983); Barndt & marine (1983).

at Tennessee's Highlander Center to a tool kit of photos produced for workplace classes in Toronto and Syracuse (Barndt, Belfiore, & Handscombe, 1984). In the early 1980s, we⁵ facilitated workshops across Canada that involved community activists in making Polaroid photo-stories on the spot, on social issues ranging from unemployment in Newfoundland to the role of Native Friendship Centres in Montreal, from exploitative advertising in Calgary to househusbanding in Victoria (Barndt & Caselli, 1983). Between 1986 and 1992, we integrated into every issue of the Jesuit Centre publication, *The Moment*, a double-page photo-story on a conjunctural issue, each one coproduced with a community group working on that issue. Through three editions a year over seven years, we explored issues ranging from free trade and native self-government to environmental health and peace in Central America.

Finally, a course we offered from 1989 to 1993 at the Jesuit Centre on "Photography for Social Change" trained community workers in collective processes to produce their own stories with photos. Today I continue to be engaged in photo-story production as part of a research project uncovering the experiences of women workers in the food system: In Mexico, a tomato field worker tells her story,⁶ and in Toronto, a supermarket cashier tells her story at the other end of the food chain. And as a counterpoint to these stories of globalized food production, a group of women on social assistance examine the "roots and routes" of their food histories, illustrating recipes with photo-stories of their lives.

5 Throughout this historical review, I use "we" not in the "royal we" sense, but to indicate that I was usually codesigning and cofacilitating these participatory production processes. My coworkers, however, shifted from one project to another: I taught English in the workplace with dian marino and May Ann Kainola, and produced English at Work: a Tool Kit for Teachers with Mary Ellen Belfiore and Jean Handscombe, with the involvement of more than 20 ESL teachers. The Getting There photo-stories involved collaboration between the Development Education Centre (Feme Cristall and Anita Martin) and the Participatory Research Group (dian marino and myself). The Nicaraguan and cross-Canada photo-story workshops were coordinated with my former husband, Daniel Caselli. The Moment photo-stories were eventually coordinated by Christine Almeida and involved myriad coproducers from community groups. I cotaught the Photography for Social Change course with Amy Gottlieb. Other coproducers over the years have included photographers David Smiley, Kathleen Flanagan, and Vince Pietropaolo. More recently, it's popular educators in Mexico, food activists in Toronto, and graduate students from the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University that are working with me to shape these processes and products. Without diminishing my own initiative and leadership, I want to emphasize the collaborative way in which I have always worked, my own creativity fed by the synergy of an interactive process, not only in codesigning and cofacilitating workshops with colleagues but in engaging participants in their own productions. This dynamic was captured well by Daphne Uras (1996) in her Master's thesis at Carleton University, *A Certain Richness: Dialogues With and Within the Use of Photography of Popular Educator Deborah Barndt*. I am deeply grateful to her for giving me back a clearer sense of my own process.

6 For a deeper analysis of some of the problematics of being a northern gringa researcher and photographer making photo-stories of poor Mexican women field workers, as well as a full version of the photo-story, Teresa, Food Producer—At Work At Home (see Barndt, 1997).

Although we've come a long way since the first foto-novela in Peru in the 1970s, this process continues to be influenced by a cross-fertilization of ideas and practices in exchange with popular educators in Latin America and in North America. And, no matter the content, or whether the story is melodramatic or didactic, it is the *collective production process* itself that offers the richest moments for transformative learning, and the greatest possibilities for reclaiming the powers to name, to make, and to connect. It is time to explore what those processes are about, how they have been distorted or stolen from us, and how they might be reintegrated into our educational practice.

NAMING

To exist humanly is to name the world, to change it.

—Freire (1970, 1993, p. 76)

In a documentary film released in 1997, *Shooting Indians*, Ali Kazimi, Canadian filmmaker born in India, explores with his subject, native Canadian photographer Jeffrey Thomas, what it means to be called “Indian,” a label they both share, albeit with different cultural histories and meanings. Kazimi admits that his own stereotypes of North American Indians were shaped by the images of American popular culture permeating India that continued to *name* the reality of First Nations people through a colonizer’s frame, starting with the cowboys and Indians of childhood games and movies. The film peels away the layers of this “official” naming process and reveals its effects on how we see ourselves and others. Not only people but places were named by the colonizing powers, so, for example, aboriginal territory off the coast of British Columbia bears the name of a dead British queen. And this naming process is not merely a thing of the past; we are constantly being named and renamed by others. Consider the evolution over recent decades of state-constructed categories for new immigrants, from alien and foreign to Third World and visible minority. At the same time that an increasingly globalized and homogenized mass media culture (as in the Yardley ad analyzed earlier) names us mainly as consumers and labels us with less valuing of our differences, identity politics⁷ (in trying to address who names whom) often perpetuates a naming process that limits

7 The “politics of identity” became a strong theme in Canadian social movements in the 1980s, particularly because the naming of sexism and racism promoted a process whereby people examined more closely their own historical and cultural identities, and the ways they carried experiences of both privilege and oppression (see Giroux, 1994).

us to one category, denying our multiple and mixed identities, and obscuring the more complex struggles of our daily lives.

Naming ourselves and our world is a basic power, essential to our capacity to be subjects of history and not objects or victims. Freire (1970, 1993) said, “We cannot enter the struggle as objects in order later to become subjects.” For hooks (1994), Freire “affirmed my right as a subject in resistance to define my reality.” Yet so much has mitigated against our being able to name our world, to tell our own stories. Rich (1979) talked about the importance of breaking this silence: “Where language and naming are power, silence is oppression, is violence.” When we speak our story, we make meaning of our lives, and we find connection with other stories. Griffin (1992) described the power of this connection:

I am beginning to believe that we know everything, that all history, including the history of each family is part of us...and when we hear any secret revealed... our lives are suddenly clearer to us. For perhaps we are like stones; our own history and the history of the world embedded in us, we hold a sorrow deep within and cannot weep until that history is sung.... For deep in the mind we know everything. And wish to have everything told, to have our images and our words reflect the truth, (pp. 8, 16)

The “truths” are, of course, subjective and shifting, and there are no assurances that our own telling is more accurate or truthful than another’s telling, but to engage in naming and telling (whether visually or verbally), and even in the contradictions of that act, is in itself a process filled with pedagogical potential. Lippard (1990), in *Mixed Blessings: New Art in Multicultural America*, titled her chapters around processes of what I see as reclaiming our power to create and connect (Barndt, 1995). The first three processes that she calls “mapping, naming, and telling” are intimately related: Naming ourselves in the world involves a mapping, locating ourselves in time and space, in a historical and cultural context, putting ourselves in a bigger picture, seeing ourselves as part of a longer journey. Naming also invokes telling: To name is not only to declare who we are but to make sense of our lives. Telling our own stories affirms our power to write our own histories and our participation in making our history.

So how does photo-story production stimulate these mapping and naming and telling processes? In most of the productions I have been involved in for more than 25 years, there has been a collective process where people with some common interest have had an opportunity to tell their stories, in many cases breaking a silence in that act of naming. And the use of photos also made visible what had until that point been invisible. There is a tremendous energy released at these moments when people recognize themselves and their complex histories. The experience integrates pain, joy, and connection.

One of the first experiences in the early 1980s involved immigrant women from an English in the Workplace program sharing their stories of looking for work and “just getting there.” Managing the urban transport system or getting to the first job interview were actions deeply symbolic of what it meant for these women to believe they could make their way in this new country and into the work world. The process itself (Barndt, Cristall, & marino, 1983) brought women together in living rooms on Sunday afternoons to share their tales of looking for work and eventually to re-enact those tales with photos. The way they “named” and told their tales was intensely personal and revealed an inner dialogue with themselves. Climbing the wooden stairs of a railroad bridge, for example, became a metaphor for developing the confidence to enter an alien world. We tried to recreate through the camera lens the emotional as well as the physical perspective of the woman talking herself into taking the first step—up the stairs and toward work outside the home in a new country. This view of women’s internal struggles was never revealed in the more official dominant media images.



FIG. 2.3. Aurora climbing stairs of railroad bridge.

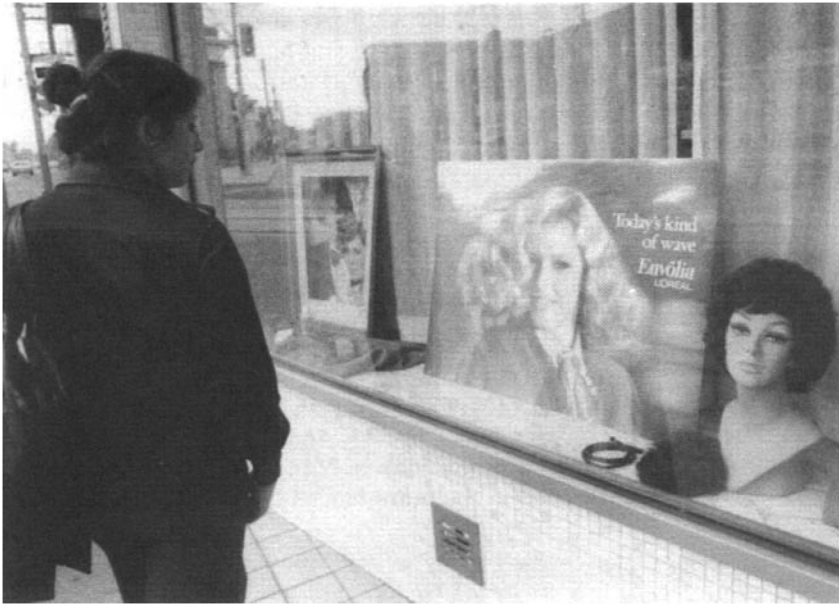


FIG. 2.4. Aurora looking at image of a western woman.

The photo-story production, although affirming the common experiences and feelings of immigrant women seeking work, was not without its own contradictions. As middle-class educators and editors, with more time to spend on the project and with an interest in publishing the stories, we made many of the decisions about what would stay and what would go in constructing the final product. In looking back on this process, coauthor marino (1997) suggested that we “cleaned up the text,” taking out the racism, sexism, and classism. At the same time that we juxtaposed their images with advertising images of women they confronted on their journeys, we had “turned out a whiter than white narrative, inadvertently silencing conflict and affirmation” (marino, 1997, p. 114). Here we failed to name and deal with our differences, and we ran the risk of reproducing what we were critiquing: naming these women through our own critical frames. This is always a danger in the process of collective photo-story production, especially when the editing is done by a select few. There are probably no perfect ways to approach these limitations and differences, but it is important to acknowledge and engage them.

In another experience, a decade later, we chose as facilitators to participate in the naming and telling processes, putting ourselves into the picture, revealing ourselves just as we asked participants to do. In a year-long photography course built around the theme of “Lifelines: Recovering Family and Community Histories,” we started with family album photos, which evoked deep memories

and generated storytelling immediately. Building on those first photo-storying processes, our personal projects engaged us in selecting aspects of our histories that we wanted to explore visually and verbally. Gathering oral histories was, in fact, an important part of the process.

During the first months of the course, we used an exercise called “Power Flower,”⁸ which asked each of us to identify different aspects of our social identity, related to power relations based on gender, race, class, sexual orientation, religion, political perspective, and so on. The activity required that we name what we thought was the dominant group in each category and indicate how we would name ourselves. It is always interesting to see how easily we fall into using the labels we have been given. In the past several years the categories that seem to be the most fluid and contested are “religion/spirituality” and “political perspective,” indicating people are struggling (individually and collectively) to define and name themselves in new ways around these dynamic aspects of culture. When we were really able to move beyond identity politics was when we began to dig into and share our own histories. Then our stories reflected the complexity and messiness that could not be edited out or placed into neat petals of a flower. By grounding ourselves in our own cultural contexts, unearthing our own histories while others were unearthing theirs, we were better able to acknowledge and deal with our differences.

Naming, then, is not a simple process, for it calls for us to be fully alive, reflecting on where we’ve come from and where we’re going. Yet, if we see ourselves not only as receivers of history but as makers of history, we can reclaim our capacity to name and rename ourselves. Photographs and photo-story production can be tools in this process, reflecting back to us, like a mirror, and framing our presence in the world, like a window. The struggle to name is not only individually affirming but also contributes to a deeper connection among people.

MAKING

Through the separation of matter and spirit, ordinary life has lost its significance.

—Griffin (1995, p. 121)

I have long been fascinated with the creative energies released when people come together to make something, using their minds and hearts as well as

8 See Arnold, Burke, James, Martin, and Thomas (1991, pp. 13–15) for a more thorough discussion of this tool and its uses.

directly engaging their bodies in a production, whether it be a theater piece, a quilt or banner, or, in this case, a photo-story. In the 1970s, with other members of the Participatory Research Group, we formed a Popular Art and Media Cooperative, attempting to counter the notion that only certain people could make art and produce media. We drew from a Marxist analysis that work within capitalist industrialization had alienated workers from the sources and processes of production, from any connection to the whole product (which, in contrast, the craftsperson experienced). In the same light, we suggested that artistic and media production, too, had become commodified and specialized, alienating most of us from any sense of being producers or makers of culture or cultural expression.

How is it that we have become separated from our “bodies,” in such a way that we speak of them as though they were outside of us, separate from our “minds”? The epistemological roots of this mind-body split lie in the emergence of western science in the 18th century based on a mechanistic rather than a holistic paradigm. The philosopher Descartes (“I think, therefore I am”) articulated the divorce of the human mind from the human body, of human from nonhuman nature, of cerebral thinking from the emotions. Still with us today, this dualism is reflected in western education systems that divide knowledge into subjects and disciplines, that privilege so-called intellectual over manual labor.

To reclaim making as a valid and dynamic pedagogical process is also to value the process of engaging directly with material reality and in the social relations of production. To see the transformation of a story into a photostory, for example, is a rich educational process that is both manual and intellectual. Through an engagement that is visceral, it affirms body knowledge and “flesh knowing” (Heath, 1995). One of the things I have loved over the years about my involvement with photography as a tool is the many ways it calls me to engage with both material and symbolic reality: from manipulating camera and film, light and shadow (mediating my experience with the subject) to processing and printing, designing and laying out a story with photos and text (representing that experience). It engages me with matter as well as with spirit.

Although a hegemonic practice of photography is usually individualized, the participatory production of photo-stories in an adult education context is consciously a collective process. We have not only reclaimed the production process (i.e., rather than digesting someone else’s texts, we are making our own), but we have attempted to democratize that process. There are several points at which the process can be participatory: in deciding what themes to focus on, in sharing stories that become the core of a text, in taking the photos, in making them in the darkroom (and for those with access, on the computer with photoshop software), in laying them out, in integrating text and photos,

in celebrating a finished product, and in using it collectively and critically in a new context.

A couple of examples illustrate this engagement in the *making* process that serves to demystify the technologies and reskill (rather than deskill) us as producers of goods as well as producers of meaning. In training literacy teachers in Nicaragua in the early 1980s to become what we called “popular photojournalists” (Barndt, 1990), I was amazed at how collectively they approached the process of production. After gathering oral histories and photographing in the community around a theme, we would crowd into our makeshift darkroom. Whereas my experience of making photos in a darkroom had been always a personal experience (bordering on the meditative and mystical), the Nicaraguans entered into the process with a collective energy I had never before witnessed: deciding among themselves the correct exposure and appropriate cropping, sharing the tasks of manipulating the enlarger, running the print through the chemical baths, and washing and drying the finished product. It was, in fact, a wonderful social activity, filled with laughter and creative fusion. A similar dynamic reigned in the construction of the final story as photos were integrated with text.

Whereas in the north we are so removed from production processes we most likely consider collective darkroom work as out of the question, there

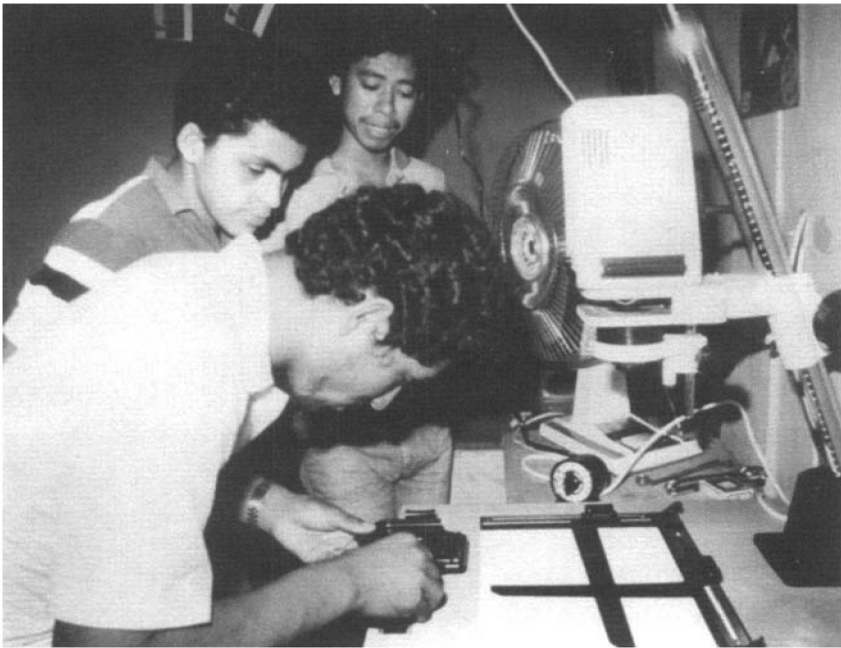


FIG. 2.5. Nicaraguans working in darkroom together.

are other simpler ways we can engage groups in production. During a cross-Canada tour with a photo exhibit on Nicaragua in the early 1980s (Barndt & Caselli, 1983), we offered 23 photo-story workshops for educators and community workers in cities across the country. Using a slide show on photo-story production made by the Nicaraguan literacy teachers, we proposed using Polaroid cameras to speed up production during these one-shot workshops that lasted either 3 hours or 6 hours (a shorter and a longer version). Participants were surprised by their capacity to engage with the technology and with the world outside the workshop space. With a limited amount of time and working in small groups, they collectively selected themes, gathered images, laid them out with text in a scrapbook form, and shared them with other groups. I am convinced that part of what made this process so dynamic and empowering was the synergy that emerged from what was, in fact, a physical process: going out with a camera (or constructing sociodramas to photograph inside), playing with the order and design of the images, and presenting a product to the plenary. Although the product itself was deemphasized for a focus on the process, it was nonetheless a source of great pride to see and touch and pass around something they had made so quickly and yet so creatively.

The physical synergy stimulated an intellectual synergy (just as the kinetic experience of walking can generate creative thinking), and the discussions and debates that accompanied the decision-making processes (what issue



FIG. 2.6. Halifax group: hands putting Polaroid photos in order; Winnipeg group sharing finished photo stories.

will we address? how will we frame this image? where will this photo go? what words will embellish it?) were active forms of collective analysis. First the camera and then the photos mediated the discussion, generated interaction, and sparked creative thought that I am certain would not have emerged if we had merely discussed the issues rather than produced images that represented them. The speeded up production processes, of course, were not conflict free, and part of the struggle was the common one of working together as a group, honoring individual interventions while coming up with something they could collectively own. No easy task. But the energy that filled the room was contagious, and, in part, I believe the participants' pride came from being directly involved in making something—hands, heart, head all working together, one stimulating the other, the artificial division between them dissolved.

CONNECTING

Because we think in a fragmentary way, we see fragments. And this way of seeing leads us to make actual fragments of the world.

—Griffin (1995, p. 61)

We have been denied opportunities to name our world and ourselves, and production and consumption have become commodified so that we no longer see ourselves as makers—of our food and shelter, of our artistic and cultural expression. In this loss of the power to *name* and to *make*, we have become disconnected: culture from nature, mind from body, ourselves from each other, from our roots, from our communities. Many of us, especially in the west, have become in certain ways refugees, homeless people, fragmented, postmodern persons. As people are beginning to name this schism and to address it, there are efforts to reconnect what has seemingly become disconnected. Indeed, reconnecting—body and mind, spirit and matter, human and nonhuman nature—is essential to our survival and the survival of the planet. Griffin (1995) spoke poignantly about this connection:

Of course, the body and the mind are not separate. Consciousness cannot exclude bodily knowledge. We are inseparable from nature, dependent on the biosphere, vulnerable to the processes of natural law. We cannot destroy the air we breathe without destroying ourselves, (p. 226)

This may seem like a tall order for adult education, but I believe that as educators we must see every learning event as a moment for nurturing these connections and countering the fragmentation that permeates our culture and many of our daily interactions with it. I am using “connecting,” then, in

several ways that in fact incorporate the acts of naming and making discussed earlier. Participatory photo-story production connects us individually with our own histories, encouraging us to name and to tell, valuing our stories as the central content for our learning, whether it's language training or community development or cultural work that is the context. Engagement with words and images, the production of learning materials, connects us as whole persons—body and mind, reason and emotion, intellectual and manual—challenging these dichotomies (and their implicit hierarchies) that have been perpetuated by one-sided educational practices. The physical engagement with cameras, photos, bookmaking, connects us with the material world, and, ironically, this creative process (transforming matter) nurtures our spirit.

The collective-production process illustrated in the examples offered thus far also connects us with one another: Personal stories are shared for their common elements; the construction of composite stories links both people and issues; the group creations draw on the varied skills of diverse group members; the finished product is not only an individual but also a collective achievement. Photo-story-production processes, which nurture both critical thinking and creative action, help to build a sense of community (hopefully honoring diversity and differences) among the namers, makers, and connectors. Again, this approach is in contrast to dominant educational practices that emphasize individuality, rationality, competition, conformity, and ultimately isolation and fragmentation.

I draw from two examples to illustrate the different kinds of connecting that photo-story production can engender. In 1986, we at the Jesuit Centre produced an issue of *The Moment* on native self-government to feed the public discussions generated by a series of First Ministers Conferences on the subject. The photo-story that served as a centrepiece for the issue was coproduced with a local First Nations School and the Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre, both located in the lower eastside Toronto neighborhood where we worked. In the process of sharing stories, first between adults and children at the school and later between native people and new Canadians, we uncovered the connections between the mercury poisoning of a lake in a northern Ontario native community and the poisoning of the soil and the Don River in South Riverdale by a local smelter spouting lead into the air. The native children shared the perspective they had gained from their elders with the immigrant children as they explored the smelter and the river: "If you hurt her (Mother Earth), it's like hurting your own skin."

Thus, the content of the story that resulted from this cross-cultural dialogue connected political-economic and ecological issues, and connected communities affected by them, and connected all of us with the earth that feeds us even as we sometimes threaten to destroy it. The production process brought together two communities that rarely see the common ground on which



FIG.2.7. From photo-story "Who Owns Mother Earth?"

they stand. The published story was to link the struggle for self-government with the broader struggle to protect the environment, connecting the nature-culture divide perpetuated by industries and governments that deny human complicity and the reality that we are all part of nature.

In my research on the journey of the tomato from the Mexican field to the Canadian table (Barndt, 1997), I also challenged the fragmentation wrought by a globalized food system that has disconnected most of us from the sources of food we eat. Photo-stories of Tomasa, a Mexican field worker picking tomatoes, and of Marisa, a Canadian cashier scanning tomatoes at the supermarket counter, each help to reveal the processes of production, distribution, and consumption that bring food to our table. As these stories are shared across borders and among women workers, they also are able to connect themselves to this broader process and to join in the analysis of our disconnection from the earth, from agriculture, and from food (Barndt, 1997). Marisa, for example, read Tomasa's story and became interested in the working and living conditions of the Mexican fieldworkers who pick the tomatoes she sells in Toronto. She learned from Tomasa about what's happening to the land because of monocultural cash crop production and the vicious cycle of ever-changing hybrid seeds and agrochemical use, and she wondered about its effect on the health of northern consumers. There are indeed many levels and layers of connections to be made.

The project also explored alternatives to this global process and involved a group of (mostly) immigrant women participating in a training program in downtown Toronto in naming and making their own food stories. In a collaborative project between the Focus on Food program of Metro Toronto FoodShare and the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University, we explored our diverse relationships to food under the theme "Roots and Routes: Nourishing Connections from Land to Table." The initial storytelling was catalyzed by sharing favorite recipes that revealed something about our personal and cultural histories. Tracing the origins of these recipes and their ingredients, and the equally twisty journeys of our own lives moving from one continent to another, we produced photo-stories that unearthed the tales hidden in the dishes we eat or in the ground of our often invisible histories.

Although the naming of the recipes and their "roots and routes" proved empowering, it was the making process that taught me new things about reconnecting with our histories and our creativity. By accident, we found ourselves working one day on the stories, while Maeza, an Eritrean, rushed back and forth to the kitchen to monitor a traditional stew she was making. Finally, we followed her and the aromas to the kitchen to taste the product of her culinary creativity. There, with her hands on the bread or stirring the stew, the stories really started to flow, and as we tasted her work and queried her process, a collective learning process emerged that was palpable. Cameras



FIG. 2.8. Maeza in the kitchen.

were there to capture some of it, and the photos proved lively additions to the photo-stories. We realized that the more visceral processes of cooking and eating really tapped her (as well as our) embodied knowing, and this was a much more dynamic way to work on our photo-stories. Thus, for the next 7 weeks, each week with a new person at the stove, we worked collectively on the individual stories that reconnected us to our own histories while connecting us across continents and centuries, bodies and spirits, land and table.

ENGAGING CREATIVE TENSIONS: IT'S NOT ALL SO SMOOTH (NOR IS IT MEANT TO BE)

I don't mean to paint a picture of a seamless process, methodically planned and executed, conflict free and deeply meaningful. In fact, just as the above story illustrates, these processes emerge often serendipitously, unlike what we might have planned, and it requires the ability to recognize the moments, pregnant with pedagogical possibility, that are to be grabbed, used, and deepened. Photo-story production, just like any other form of popular communications applied to contexts of popular education, must engage certain creative tensions. These tensions may make us uncomfortable but they can also challenge us, I have come to believe.

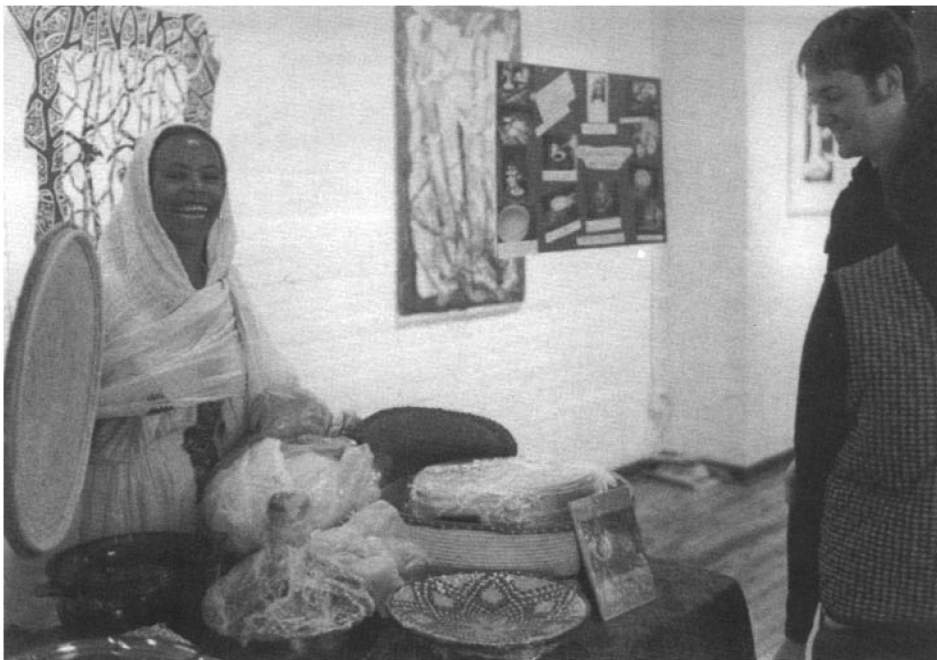


FIG. 2.9.

In my teaching I use a framework that suggests we pay attention to five aspects of popular communications: the *context* within which we are working and creating (which offers both constraints and possibilities), the *content* of our product (the message or story we want to tell), the particularities of the *form* (media technologies, their evolution, and how they have shaped the process of telling), the processes related to *production* (what has been emphasized here), and its *use* (from the dominant function of selling goods and a way of life that predominates the use of mainstream media images, for example, to the pedagogical and political uses suggested here for images we find or make). Under each of these elements, I've identified tensions that are engaged through counterhegemonic media production, which is where I locate the participatory photo-story production. The framework is as follows:

Content

Personal versus political
Didactic versus problem posing

Form

Technical or artistic quality versus relevant content

Artist versus animator

Production

Process versus product

Individual versus collective

Use

Private versus public

Education versus organizing

I name these tensions not as dichotomies to be resolved but as contradictions to be engaged. And it is the overarching factor of context that usually determines how we work or play with each of them. When I'm training a group of students or a community group in participatory photo-story production, for example, but we have a deadline for a publication or an exhibit, I inevitably must confront the tension of process versus product. If it is important that the product see the light of day, and there are real time constraints, this may shape the process, making it less than ideal. There are judgment calls all along the way. Do I want to offer a clear statement of my own message in the content of my story or do I want to pose some questions and ambiguities that engage the viewers and readers in the issue, compelling them to develop their own positions? How can we honor the unique experiences of individuals within a group while finding common ground that gets expressed in a collective production? Is our photo-story mainly to raise awareness about an issue or to stimulate people to act? These are not simple questions, nor are the answers necessarily straightforward. Sometimes these seeming contradictions are not resolved with an "either-or" framing but rather with a "both-and" response. My motto is ultimately: "Embrace the contradictions" and find within them the possibilities for moving forward.

Other tensions inevitable in the kind of production process promoted here arise out of the differences in power among participants. As suggested earlier, these are not always easy to articulate, as each of us embodies both privilege and oppression in our multiple social identities. As a white teacher in an ESL class of immigrant women of color, for example, although we share the experience of gender discrimination, I have to be conscious of how my skin color privilege, my class privilege, and my educational and occupational privileges shape our interactions. We had this difference brought home to us only too poignantly, when we did a story in a factorybased English class on the dangers workers faced in crossing a busy highway to catch the bus after work. Although we supported their organizing a petition to request a crosswalk from the city, officials responded by fining them \$28 for jay walking, consuming their daily wage and angering management. In a painful reflection on this

process, they reminded us that we could leave the factory, while they had to live with the consequences of any political action we might engender in the class.

As educators, we have responsibilities to our students, and these must guide our production and use of any stories that are drawn from their daily lives and struggles. Razack (1993) warned about the dangers of “storytelling for social change” and suggested we develop an ethical vision based on our differences. Even in mixed-sex and mixed-race groupings where there is a commitment to social change, “our various histories are not left at the door when we enter a classroom to critically reflect” (p. 90). She invoked Ellsworth’s (1992) suggestion that we critically examine what we share and don’t share. Narayan (1988) also explored strategies educators might apply: “If ‘working together across difference’ is to at all be possible, we must learn to analogize from situations of oppression in which we have been ‘insiders’ to those in which we are ‘outsiders.’” Photo-story-production processes, then, can generate rich (and sometimes tense) discussions about our differences, as stories are told, interpreted, compared, and represented. Again an educator’s sensitivity and skill are as important tools as the camera.

CRITICAL CONDITIONS LAY THE GROUND

I have resisted offering any formulaic outline of the principles or steps of participatory photo-story production because I believe these tensions and questions have to be confronted *in the process* and *in the context* and *with the people* whose lives are implicated and whose critical and creative capacities are engaged. But I do think there are certain critical conditions for these kinds of processes to unfold. The first is a basic and deep *respect for the people involved*; no matter how careful the planning or creative the tools, without this, the process will fail. Second, a *climate of trust* must be nurtured that affirms participants’ diverse histories and their capacities to tell them in a variety of ways (as well as their right not to tell them at all). Trust takes time to develop and has to be constantly nurtured, and sometimes regained and renegotiated.

A *commitment to learning and growing*, and the willingness to learn from mistakes (which includes recognizing our own racism or sexism, for example), is also essential. Almost any daily situation can become an educable moment with this attitude. A *spirit of adventure and playfulness* is also important in this very “serious” work. It is risky to try new things with many voices saying you’re not able, it’s not appropriate, it’s not good enough. With all of this comes the belief that the sources of *knowledge and creativity are within us and among us* that we know more than we think we do, and if we don’t, perhaps someone else in the group can fill in or pick up where we left off.

A final condition is the ability to *embrace the contradictions* named here and the inevitable contradictions within our own personal lives and ways of being. Granted, these conditions are not easily created, so we have to forgive ourselves for not reaching them all, and nonetheless jump in and try.

The rewards ultimately, I believe, are in the energy and strength we gain as we reclaim our own power to name ourselves; to make our stories visible; and to connect, challenging the dichotomies of body-mind, pri-vate-public, personal-political, individual-collective, critical-creative, and nature-culture. Perhaps it's a radical notion, but as *radical* means "going to the roots," promoting participatory photo-story production in adult education can address the roots of our alienation and fragmentation, and reclaim the lost arts of naming, making, and connecting. As educators, can we aim for anything less? Not only our learning, but our survival depends upon it.

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