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# Using a Cohort Approach to Convert EdD Students into Critical Friends

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**Abstract**

A steadfast but not previously examined feature of our department's six-year (and counting) experience with a Carnegie Project for the Education Doctorate (CPED)-influenced Doctor of Education (EdD) program is the successful implementation of a cohort model and, in turn, the utilization of practitioners' sense of belonging and familiarity to become each other's Critical Friends. Looking across the experiences of three cohorts of University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL) CPED students—a first cohort that graduated eight EdDs, a second cohort with twelve students who attained candidacy just three months before this writing, and a new cohort of ten students also composed largely of educators who have not known each other prior to enrolling in CPED—this chapter considers the action steps pursued and the formative evaluative processes that compel minor redirections of course that have helped convert a collection of advanced graduate students into enduring Critical Friends Groups (CFGs). Data include program design elements, including syllabi, but the main sources of information are the accounts of the practicing professionals who have completed their EdD journey as members of our first cohort.

## Background

UNL was one of 25 institutions that began participation in CPED during Phase I in 2007. Two departments in UNL's College of Education and Human Sciences were and continue to be involved, albeit largely

separately—Educational Administration and Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education (TLTE). It is the latter department in which we authors are faculty members and about which we are writing here. At the time of our application, the national conversation about distinguishing the PhD in education from the EdD that has informed CPED (Perry, 2012; Shulman, Golde, Bueschel, & Garabedian, 2006; Watts & Imig, 2012) had an echo in our intradepartmental conversations about the same topic that stemmed from both an academic program review (APR) and our university's twin charge to be both a land-grant and research intensive institution. CPED provided the encouragement and vehicle for figuring out how best to proceed.

With knowledge of the emerging CPED initiative, our working group of interested graduate faculty met throughout 2007 and 2008 to develop a program for EdD students. As our report at the October 2007 CPED meeting in Nashville explained, these regular meetings "served to cultivate commitment to this initiative and to make more visible our teaching, research, and service commitments to each other. These meetings also enabled us to articulate why the CPED is a worthwhile venture for ourselves as faculty, our students, the context and the work of teacher education more broadly." Since well prior to this CPED conversation, our department had offered an EdD degree (as well as a PhD), but the graduation rate from it was not high and there was no single clear-cut delineation between what it proposed to be versus the PhD, beyond nine fewer credit hours of graduation requirements.

By the conclusion of the 2008 spring semester, we had determined intended programmatic outcomes, a preliminary coursework structure, core principles and pedagogies, and other program features. Per our first publicity about the new program, we were focused on the commitment to preparing scholars of educational practice "within a collegial and supportive environment." Noting that our EdD students were full-time practitioners who intended to continue to self-identify as practitioners (even as they built new knowledge, gained capacity as researchers and policy interpreters, and qualified to become teacher educators), we identified *epistemology, praxis, efficacy, problems of practice,* and *reflectivity* as key words and phrases that described both what we hoped to draw participants' attention to and how we were to guide our own program coordination.

*Critical Friends* was not one of our key words, but it could have been, as an emphasis on collegiality is evident in several of these founding documents. For example, we asserted as a core principle of our program that, "cohort learning offers opportunities to learn from each other and foster

ongoing dialogue and connections beyond the degree." Descriptions of program coursework included the intent to "cultivate a culture of collaboration among scholars and practitioners across disciplines and roles, drawing upon the experiential ground of multiple concrete teaching/learning situations." Programmatic outcomes included to "cultivate a community of learning professionals invested in enlarging all understandings of the work of teaching and learning" and "build professional connections that sustain and nurture educator well-being."

### Critical Collegiality in Practice

Yet these were just intriguing ambitions until we admitted a first cohort of EdD students into this newly conceived program in January 2009. While we did not at any point in the ensuing semesters use the formal protocol associated with Critical Friends (Storey & Richard, 2012), our approaches were consistent with important aspects of it. For example, early in their programs, CPED EdD candidates read Brian Lord's (1994) account of critical colleagueship. For most, that was not their first encounter with the idea of professional learning communities and the related sensibility of professional peers as resources; indeed experience with these elements in professional practice is one reason our students have matriculated in the CPED program. However, the Lord article often was the first place where students actively considered the word "critical" as part of their expected and prospectively productive relationship with colleagues and it was also one of the early places where they have seen the design of their CPED program find an echo in professional literature that program faculty ask them to consider.

Lord (1994) begins his piece quoting at length from a study by David Cohen (1990) that highlights an individual practitioner—a math teacher from California—attempting to change her practice in response to new standards. While this is a scenario easily understood by our CPED students, it is the questions Lord (1994) poses reflecting upon Cohen that we really draw their attention to:

> Cohen's images [of the teacher] raise several questions for those who are concerned about teachers' professional development: In what ways might professional development contribute to a more reflective stance toward instruction? How will teachers be helped to move beyond "relatively superficial" interpretations of national content standards? From whom might [the teacher] get critical feedback on her teaching, and how might

> constructive criticism be built into the very fabric of profes-
> sional development? (p. 177).

It is not difficult to segue from questions like these (about a teacher they have never met who teaches 1500 miles from Nebraska), to questions that are far more overtly about our students' professional practice. We have asked: How and from whom do you get professional feedback? How do you know if your practice is responsive to ever-rising expectations? And how do you ca-jole, push, and collaborate with colleagues? In the No Child Left Behind-era, the question is not just "how well am I leading my own practice? ," but rather "how do we assure that our whole school or district moves forward successfully?"

Conceptually important as Lord (1994) has been, the cultivation of criti-cal collegiality has been more substantively advanced by three key features at the start of our program: the reinvention of existing course descriptions for new, more cumulative purposes; the continuation of certain courses for lon-ger than a semester (which has permitted longer time frames for activities like honing a group paper); and our expectation that 30 of the minimum 45 new credit hours that CPED students were expected to take for the program were to be pursued as "cohort classes"—that is, required for members of the cohort and, with very limited exception, not open to other UNL students.

As an example of all of these features, one of the first two courses that CPED students are asked to enroll in is a spring and summer-spanning, six-credit hour, doctoral seminar that is accurately and vaguely subtitled "Chal-lenges and Opportunities." (Our CPED cohorts have all started in the spring.) This seminar, which has been taught in each of its first three incarnations by one of your authors [Hamann], has fit within the similarly vague but flexible UNL guideline that requires six credit hours of "doctoral seminar" for EdD students. It has been the venue fur students reading the previously referenced Lord (1994) article, as well as where they first start building a common shared knowledge of American educational history's link to present conditions by considering titles like William Proefriedt's (2008) *High Expectations: The Cul-tural Roots of Standards Reform in American Education* or David Labaree's (2010) *Someone Has to Fail: The Zero Sum Game of Public Schooling.*

More importantly, however, each rendering of that class has included a multicomponent group assignment that has them not only studying and cri-tiquing a selected example of a practitioner-turned-scholar describing taking on a "problem of practice," but also critiquing each other's first forays in cri-tiquing the selected example. Below is a quote from the first cohort's syllabus and then the more expansive description of the same assignment to the third

cohort to illuminate 'this complex, critical collegiality-building assignment: From the first syllabus (Spring 2009):

## Group Project

The class will be divided up into three groups. Each group will have the task of reading Heaton (2000), Wilson (2007), *or* Wilhelm (2008). The group will then prepare a presentation and a paper that answer the following questions:

- What is the problem(s) that the author is attempting to solve?
- What appears to be the author's sense of what should be (i.e., their philosophical posture)?
- How does the author collect data germane to the identified problem?
- Do you find the research strategy compelling? Why or why not?
- If you were studying this problem, would you pursue it the same way?
- Are there relevant problems in play that the author is not acknowledging?

Note, in the summer you will read the two other books that you did not read for this spring final project.

The imprint of the first syllabus remains visible in the third, although there are a few clarifications and additions, for example overt connection to the challenging but important Deyhle, Hess, and LeCompte (1992) article ''Approaching Ethical Issues for Qualitative Researchers in Education'' and to our department's organization of our curriculum into five partially over-lapping curricular *areas of emphasis.* Also the third syllabus more clearly specifies the second and third phases (the summer phases) of the activity that are crucial for assuring both the iterative nature of the project and its critical orientation.

From the third syllabus (Spring 2013):

## Action Research Group Projects

In early February, the class will be divided up into three groups. Each group will have the task of reading Heaton (2000), Herrera (2010), or Wilhelm (2008). For the final spring class, the group will then prepare a presentation and a paper that answer the following questions:

1. What is/are the problem(s) that the author is attempting to solve?
2. How does the author collect data germane to the identified problem(s)?
3. What about the author/researcher's research strategy did your group find generally compelling? How or why was it compelling?
4. What appears to be the author's sense of what should be (i.e., their philosophical or pedagogical posture)? What seems to be the author's research posture(s)? Per Deyhle, et al., (1992) what seems to be the ethical stance in which the author/researchers carried out his/her project? Would you label this effort as positivist? Interpretivist? Critical realist?
5. If we used the language and lens of design research, what would you say is the author's design that he/she is implementing and refining?
6. Are there relevant problems in play that the author is not acknowledging? What decisions did the author/researcher make that you think you might make or avoid (b/c of the author/ researcher's experience and the nature of the research you are starting to consider)? If you were studying this problem, would you pursue it the same way?
7. Often schooling is about knowing—for example, knowing *what* to do and *why* to do it as a teacher, knowing academic content and behavioral norms of students. Whose knowing mattered in this action research project? What counted as knowing?
8. Overtly linking this text, to TLTE's Areas of Emphasis (i.e., (a) Curriculum, Teaching, and Professional Development, (b) Education Policy, Practice, and Analysis, (c) Literacy, Language, and Culture, (d) School, Society, and Reform or (e) Teaching and Learning with Technologies), explain how your book ties in to at least two of these areas.

The first action-research project presentations will occur in 40-minute blocks on April 24, for which the orthodox assumption is 20–25 minutes of presenting and 15–20 of Q & A. However, groups have control over how they organize this 40-minute segment and more interactive departures from the orthodox model will be welcome. A laptop and LCD projector will be available. Presenters should account for the fact that not everyone present for their presentation will be familiar with the text that is being analyzed (the audience could include classmates, CPED faculty, members of earlier CPED cohorts,

and perhaps other grad students or guests). Given the time constraints, it is not expected that presentations will cover all eight of the questions. The papers that are part of the group project should be 10–20 pages and are due shortly after the presentations (the first group paper after April 24 presentations is due 29 April).

On June 4 and 11, the presentation and paper cycle will be repeated. For the first paper (April 29), groups have discretion over the way they organize the paper, but are responsible for assuring that all eight questions are answered. For the second paper (i.e., June 4), the group will take the earlier "April 29 paper" from their peers and revise/refine/supplement it using the track changes and comment functions. In this instance, if the "Heaton group" for the April 29 assignment becomes the "Herrera group" for June 4, then the former-Heaton group needs to get to modify the original "Herrera" paper that was prepared for April 29. If the original Herrera group becomes the Wilhelm group, then for their June 4 assignment they would work with the original Wilhelm group's paper as a starting point. In other words, the products of the first groups become the source material for the second. Second papers can be 12–25 pages long and will be due June 11 (one week after the second presentation). I am anticipating that three to six net new pages worth of material will be added. Second paper groups should expect to share their papers with all classmates (just as first and third groups will too).

For the third presentation/paper, action research groups will read the remaining action research book that they have not yet reviewed. They will also review the "twice-drafted" paper about that book that emerged from the second cycle on June 4–11. However, the third presentation and paper will differ substantively from the first two. It should look across the three examples of action research and the nascent problems of practice research ideas of each group member to address considerations for your future research design. More specifically, it should include ten recommendations and/or cautions related to problems of practice. Returning to the four ideas emphasized at the beginning of this syllabus—epistemology, praxis, efficacy, and iterative [practice]—at least one recommendation/caution needs to .. address each of these themes (so this accounts for at least four of the ten total). The intent, quite literally is for each group to generate a checklist that can be used by all in the CPED cohort going forward. After each recommendation, there should be text (a paragraph, a page, or two pages) that clarifies the recommendation or caution and that justifies/rationalizes its inclusion. As a final component of this third paper, each group should generate three pages (total) worth of verbatim quoted recommendations or cautions from the three action research

authors. Other authors from the 995 reading list can also be included in this three-page compilation, but each of the three action research authors must be represented at least once. Thus your third paper should have the following structure:

     I. Ten recommendations and cautions related to studying problems of practice ( 8–12 pages)
    II. Direct sage advice from the three action researchers and other 995 authors ( 3 pages)

The third paper will be presented July 1 and submitted as a final document by July 8.

As the two figures just presented suggest, our syllabi can be complicated and there is not space here to illustrate each of the intended dimensions, but we can point to a few key ones. First, building collegiality requires creating circumstances for that building to occur. By dividing cohorts into thirds (which has created groups of three, four, or five in every cohort) and then giving each team a series of required group tasks (planning a presentation, crafting a paper) team members have to collaborate. In that collaboration different propensities emerge: some reveal themselves as careful readers and good questioners; others warm to the task of preparing a PowerPoint or, more in keeping with their practitioner background, a different strategy for gaining the attention and comprehension of their peer audience; and still others agree to lead the paper writing task. In short, participants learn each other's comforts and discomforts, their weaknesses and strengths, and the ways to optimize the value of this intragroup variation.

This is an important step that occurs concurrently with and intertwined with the prospectively critical analysis asked for regarding each book and author. So as the new-to-each other cohort members are learning to be collegial and then collaborative with each other, they are also learning to be critical. This critical lens manifests itself in questions like: "Who's knowing mattered in this action research project? What counted as knowing?" (from the seventh question on the third syllabus) and "Are there relevant problems in play that the author is not acknowledging? What decisions did the author/ researcher make that you think you might make or avoid (b/c of the author/researcher's experience and the nature of the research you are starting to consider)?" (from the sixth question on the third syllabus). But the critical lens also comes from each group having to rewrite and expand a previous group's paper. This is unusual work. Rarely are practitioners called upon to substantively review

their colleagues' work, let alone find any of it wanting. Yet the point is not to tear down, but rather to show how critique can be an iterative vehicle of advance and improvement.

## With Critical Collegiality Established,
## It Could Be Accessed and Developed

Not surprisingly, through the intense, multifaceted, and sometimes critical collaboration pursued during the "Challenges and Opportunities" class, affinity, common cause, and intragroup reliance all began to emerge. The third cohort's creation of a cohort members-only Google circle is a routine exemplification of this, but multiple manifestations as perceived by CPED students are shared here in later paragraphs. For now, the next point is that, with norms of critical collegiality established, these could be both drawn upon and deepened in subsequent course work.

During the remainder of their programs, CPED students were frequently required to interact with the entire class and sometimes again aggregate in smaller pairings and groups during class sessions and in Blackboard discussion forums. The notion of Critical Friendship was a regular aspect of this work. For example, during the final class in the program taught by one of your authors (Wunder), students worked on their comprehensive examination portfolios for the first several weeks. During each class session, small groups of three students would read and critically reply to each other's abstracts of each of the four identified portfolio strands in peer-review-type discussions.

Throughout their EdD programs, we regularly have the CPED students respond to a questionnaire that is directly related to our stated program outcomes. There are two items that relate directly to the emphasis on Critical Friendship and, the responses of a first-cohort student, Elise, are illuminating, suggesting the trajectory of her growth. Early in the program (July 2009) she remarked on the importance of the cohort as her community of learning. One year later (July 2010) she had incorporated the cohort into a larger network of learning professionals and had decided that community was so important to her that it would become the focus of her problem of practice. Her responses over three cycles to the prompt "I cultivate a community of learning professionals invested in enlarging all understandings of the works of teaching and learning" follow. The first was recorded just as she finished "Challenges and Opportunities."

> July 2009: *The cohort is a strong community. I relish the conversations that we have and I see myself employing the same conversation skills and visiting the same topics with colleagues at my school.*
> January 2010: *The cohort is my community right now.*
> July 2010: *Community is emerging as my research focus. Through experiences with the cohort, PLCs, and the Nebraska Writing project I see its pivotal value in education.*

The responses of Emily, another member of the first cohort, to another prompt—"I build professional connections that sustain and nurture educator well-being"—illustrate how she too she became increasingly involved with and invested in the cohort and its critical collegiality.

> July 2009: *It isn't something that I'm currently doing, but I hope to build more professional connections by way of this cohort.*
> July 2010: *The cohort group's mutual support of all members is why I've stayed in this program. I feel very comfortable discussing questions (& doubts) with the other members of the cohort.*

Graduate education can be lonely and exhausting, particularly when, for a part-time student, it comes on top of responsibilities to one's family and job. Emily's observations echo a refrain that we have heard from most cohort members (and that we have never heard challenged or dismissed) that the collegiality and related accountability to peers has helped them persevere and persist.

After completing their EdD degrees, Cohort One students were asked to participate in an "exit interview" and five agreed to do so. A graduate student not associated with the CPED EdD program conducted the interviews and asked questions related to reflecting on experiences in the program. None of the prompts (shared below) explicitly asked about the cohort model per se, so that it frequently was referenced voluntarily is particularly striking. The following guiding questions grounded the program's exit interview:

1. Please offer recollections and reflections on how you proceeded through the EdD program courses and experiences. What stands out as particularly memorable? Why? Particularly difficult? Why? Tell a story about a time you struggled. How did you get through this?

2. How did you decide and define a problem of practice to research?

3. As you proceeded through the program, how did you develop associations between and among theory and practice?

4. Describe the impact of the program on your professional trajectory as a scholar of practice.

5. Looking at all of the questionnaires completed in your classes over time, how do you explain the changes and consistencies?

6. Have you revised/changed the professional role(s) you are seeking?

7. What recommendations do you have for the CPED faculty as instructors and advisers for their future work with future cohorts? If you could do anything differently, what would it be?

8. What is your overall impression of the program?

9. Is there anything you would like to add?

The notion and importance of moving through the program with a set of trusted colleagues was something the graduates referenced repeatedly. Their reflections can be clustered into two themes: the cohort as a knowledge source; and the cohort as a source of encouragement.

## Knowledge Source

In all of the cohort classes, instructors valued and included discussion during class meetings and often on Blackboard discussion boards as well. These were events to which the students brought their wide range of personal and professional experiences as examples and/or contrasts with the class topic and readings. Cohort One members included two high school English teachers, an algebra coach, a religious educator, a middle school business and technology teacher, an elementary teacher, a district special education coordinator, and a child care center owner. They came from our state's two largest cities, but also suburbs and small towns. By coincidence rather than design, all were women.

A participant named April viewed the cohort as "a tremendous support for discussion and understanding." As Elise explained, there is "a humungous amount of background knowledge [among the cohort members] as you work through the courses." She added that "you have your teachers and you have your reading that you're learning from, but I probably learned as much [when] each [cohort member] became a textbook for me." The stories of cohort members that infused the readings and course discussions, was the "the cool part" she added.

Kristen was very involved with Elise throughout the program. They even organized a project in which Elise's then-high school students met and

communicated with Kristen's elementary students. The challenging part of colleague work was when it became "critical" during peer review assignments. As she exclaimed, "I read eight-year-old writing!" Her level of comfort with peer review expanded over the program years, as she and Elise made and kept to a plan to meet regularly to review each other's work and talk as they wrote their dissertations. By that point, Kristen was referring to Elise as her "Critical Friend."

During the dissertation phase of the program when each student worked on her dissertation with no regular cohort meetings, the cohort members took it upon themselves to stay in touch mostly through email. As Kristen recalled, "missing [the cohort members] was hard" but regular electronic contact helped them work through what they saw as "mixed messages" from their different advisers.

## Encouragement

During their exit interviews, all five EdD graduates who participated in them reflected on the importance of the cohort in times of doubt, fatigue, or personal and family misfortune. As Emily remembered, "if there hadn't been those other people who really understood what it was like to go through this experience, I might not have made it … they understand" in ways beyond what nonparticipating family, friends, and school colleagues do. April, too, believed that she "couldn't have done it without this cohort … they picked me up more than a few times." Sometimes describing herself as a bit disassociated from other cohort members' settings, Cindy nonetheless found the cohort to be a "support network [that] can't even be described in words. [It is] so powerful."

In her interview, Kristen remembered the nights at home telling her husband that she was going to quit because "it's too hard." Then she would gather herself, go to class the next Wednesday night and her cohort colleagues would challenge her doubts, telling her to "Stop it! We feel that way, too." Later, when Kristen dealt with a serious family medical situation during the program, she recalled how the cohort students and the CPED faculty "drew their wagons and circled around [her]" with a "sense of family that was above and beyond what [she] expected."

What had developed across the program and within the cohort was what Drago-Severson (2012) describes as a "holding environment." Borrowing from a concept originally related to healthy child development and later to

adults, Drago-Severson defines a holding environment as one in which individual growth and experiences are regarded and supported. She finds the most effective ones: (a) meet and accept members at their current development point; (b) "let go" when the person is ready to move ahead; and (c) adapt to individual changes and growth in an ongoing manner.

At all stages group members are supported and challenged to grow. That is, the holding environment is "a context in which adults feel held well psychologically, supported and challenged developmentally, understood in terms of how they make sense of their work and the world, and accepted and honored for who they are" (p. 48). Not only, then, is high support necessary, but there must also be high challenge for adult growth, be that at the individual, group, or institutional level. It is what April described in the CPED cohort when she stated, "We had this experience together, but at the same time we were on our own journeys ... the paths they took were very different from the paths I took ... we identified ourselves as being cohort, but yet we had these individual paths that we took."

O'Connell Rust and Freidus (2001), too, have recognized and incorporated the necessity of challenge as they worked with a reform partnership project. As they organized the various members and activities of a large learning community of school and university personnel, they worried that "they might either gravitate uncritically toward a shared perspective, or, on the other hand, be stymied by competing opinions." (p. 143). Therefore, O'Connell Rust and Freidus intentionally configured partners in multiple levels, with one defined as a "critical colleagueship." Among their conclusions about the importance of partnerships that they learned from this project, the authors note that experience in the partnership including that with critical colleagues "provided a glimpse of the light at the end of the tunnel ... [where] seeing others succeed gives hope that success is possible" (p. 152). Success was indeed possible for the members of our first CPED-influenced EdD cohort with nearly 90 percent of them graduating within three and one-half years. Elise acknowledged that "[the] cohort is kind of a magic ... [it's] a lot of work for [the professors], but it is something that works."

Our colleague Elaine Chan (2012) studied several of our EdD students' experiences as practitioner researchers and the challenges of conducting research in one's own workplace. She found that our CPED students identified their involvement in a cohort as essential for both academic and emotional support. Chan explains that the cohort structure provided a "collective memory of course work and academic experience on which to draw" and an "intellectual space in which to draw upon a common body of theoretical

knowledge built through the experience of having gone through their doctoral course work together as a group" (p. 191).

## Final Thoughts

While the purpose of this chapter has been to focus on our CPED-tied EdD program, we should add that because of the success of CPED our department has also made some changes to our PhD program based on our experiences with the reshaping of our EdD program (a hope of the national CPED initiative is to strengthen both degrees). A clear example is that we now require a first-year seminar for incoming PhD students that features weekly sessions with departmental faculty members related to their research agendas, something the EdD faculty introduced with Cohort Two. We also keep the "generations" of cohort students in contact with each other through inviting the previous cohort to attend end-of-semester class sessions with the current students.

As CPED-influenced EdD cohort faculty members, we are encouraged and supported by the accomplishments of our students and their obvious support for the cohort program structure. Two of the Cohort One students included in their dissertation acknowledgments the following two statements:

> "Thanks to my cohort sisters for being my human textbooks."
> "To my cohort 'sisters' and colleagues, thank you for the fun, laughter, and your friendship during our CPED time together."

Dedications such as these boost our commitment to follow the advice of Kristen to

> "keep pushing this cohort 'cause it's awesome."

Of course that makes us proud and renews our own energy and engagement, but the task is not just to feel good about what we do or the EdD students think. As a member of the second cohort explained to us:

> The cohort design has tremendous practical value, but also reflects, I believe, an important theoretical position regarding both the conditions necessary for professional learning and but also the nature of knowledge and expertise related specifically to educational practice.

On the one hand, for full-time working professionals, the cohort helps avoid feelings of isolation, frustration, or stagnation and offers a community that off-campus graduate students may lack. Traditional on-campus doctoral students have regular access to faculty and often take many courses with the same students in their field—CPED students would totally lack this sort of social continuity if not for the cohort design. In the simplest sense, your cohort colleagues are your friends, for better or for worse, because you are all doing it together.

More importantly, the cohort provides a core group of individuals who are familiar, in a more than cursory way, with one's problem of practice, professional interests, and areas of expertise. Over time, this allows for deeper and richer conversations than one can manage with less familiar colleagues or classmates. When we are able to converse beyond a cursory overview of our ideas or problems, it is easier to engage critically and constructively; my familiarity with my cohort members' prior thinking and the evolution of their ideas, helps me to listen, praise, suggest, recommend, and advise with greater wisdom. At the same time, the relative heterogeneity of expertise and interests in the cohort ensures that we are always able to articulate our ideas to the interested lay-professional and not merely experts in our own fields.

Critical collegiality is at the heart of the CPED philosophy and certainly at the heart of what most of us imagine as good professional practice in education. The cohort design respects the conditions necessary to foster true critical collegiality—time, trust, continuity, plus shared knowledge, practices, and goals. From a program that purports to create the next generation of practitioner-scholars, the cohort helps us to build a network of like-minded, reform-oriented practitioners and allows us to tap in to one another's "funds of knowledge" about practice, theory, and local policy. The diversity within my cohort has allowed me to glimpse educational practice in a variety of contexts and appreciate more fully the size and scope of issues faced by practitioners. This vicarious knowledge has allowed me to broaden my understanding of the educational topography and serves a better advocate for sound practice in my professional life.

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