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Cultural Humility in Community Practice: Reflections from the Neighborhood Story Project

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Cultural Humility in Community Practice: Reflections from the Neighborhood Story Project

Amie Thurber

Abstract: Although cultural humility is frequently emphasized in social work education as a lifelong commitment to reflection and action, there are few examples of what this looks like in practice—particularly outside the scope of clinical health settings. This paper situates the need for practitioner reflections on cultural humility and offers an autoethnographic case study of efforts to cultivate cultural humility in myself and among participants in a neighborhood-based action research project. I consider cultural humility from three relational positions: holding oneself accountable, creating conditions for cultural humility within groups, and acknowledging how group members co-create conditions for cultural humility.

***Keywords*:** community practice, cultural humility, participatory action research, neighborhood change

> *Ms. TK[1]: I was like, "Who are these people? What do they want?" Those was my concern. "Is they trying to put us in a trick bag or what? Can we trust them?"*
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> *Amie: And "these people" is me, right?*
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> *Ms. TK: "These people" is Amie. This is you, Amie, I'm talking about. You "the people."*

In social work classes, cultural humility is often introduced as a reflective stance, a process of lifelong learning, and a commitment to recognizing and—to the greatest degree possible—transforming unequal power relations. We caution students to aspire towards cultural humility much like following the North Star; the concept serves as a guide, not a destination. But what does cultural humility look like in practice, particularly in the messy practice of community work? While a good deal has been written about integrating cultural humility into social work education, there are few examples that consider what it looks like for seasoned practitioners. And yet, if cultural humility is truly understood as an ongoing process, reflections on its application must not be relegated to student assignments and in-class activities. After briefly exploring the genesis of cultural humility, the following account traces my experiences cultivating cultural humility in myself and within groups of residents as we worked together to improve community well-being.

The Genesis of Cultural Humility

"Cultural humility" emerged as an alternative to "cultural competence" in preparing health professionals to provide quality care, particularly to members of historically marginalized

[1] All participants were given the option to have their names or pseudonyms used. Their personal choices are reflected herein.

groups. Whereas "competence" suggests a finite set of tools that can be mastered to ensure effective provision of service, the word "humility" conjures a recognition of one's own fallibility and an openness to continued learning. Physicians Tervalon and Murray-García (1998) first introduced cultural humility as "a commitment and active engagement in a lifelong process that individuals enter into on an ongoing basis with patients, communities, colleagues, and with themselves" (p. 118) and describe the core elements of cultural humility as reflection on one's own cultural backgrounds and assumptions, respect for others' cultural views, and recognition of the power imbalance in the provider-patient relationship. In the years since, cultural humility has gained traction across a number of health fields and helping professions, and definitions of the concept have propagated (e.g., Foronda et al., 2016). Although most describe cultural humility as an internal, individual process, social work scholars Fisher-Borne et al. (2015) suggest a more holistic conceptualization, comprised of three elements: "reflection, institutional and individual accountability, and the mitigation of systemic power imbalances" (p. 173). While maintaining the core elements from Tervalon and Murray-García's original framework, this definition extends beyond individual reflection by linking thinking to action and recognizes that racialized and other health disparities result from both individual and institutional practices. Given that social workers are called not simply to observe systems of oppression but to endeavor to create more just social relations, the tri-part definition of cultural humility offered by Fisher-Borne et al. (2015) has particular utility for the field.

Over the last twenty years, the literature on cultural humility has facilitated an important shift within helping professions. Rather than asking what they need to understand about marginalized communities in order to provide effective service, practitioners increasingly ask, "What in my practice and organization creates barriers to effective service, and how can I address those barriers?" However, there are two noteworthy limitations in this body of work. First, the literature on cultural humility overwhelmingly focuses on implications for educational settings and the preparation of future practitioners and clinicians. The relative inattention to practice settings and the experiences of current practitioners problematically re-inscribes the "competence model" that proponents of cultural humility have sought to disrupt. It additionally reinforces binary thinking around student/teacher and education/practice. Such framing suggests that students—not current practitioners—should consider the relevance or applicability of the concept and undermines the conceptual integrity of cultural humility as an openness to continued growth. If cultural humility is truly a process of lifelong learning, then our progress will be marked by insufficiencies and errors, by mistakes and difficulties, and it is our grappling with these that informs our—and our colleagues'—growth.

A second limitation has been a narrow focus on the relevance of cultural humility in clinical settings, where the roles between help-seeker and helping professional (i.e. doctor, nurse, social worker, therapist) are distinct, and the ethical responsibility to embody cultural humility is one-directional. That is, the social worker is expected to behave towards her client in ways that reflect cultural humility, though the client may not in return and is not required to. There are few examples of applying cultural humility in community practice settings, which often involves complex interactions between and among various parties (cf. Curry-Stevens, 2012). Whether working in community organizing, organizational change efforts, or policy change, the social worker must center cultural humility in their interactions with others, while creating conditions

within which all members of a group attend to self-reflection, reciprocal accountability, and the mitigation of power imbalances (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015). Thus, in addition to the general need for increased attention to cultural humility in practice settings, there is a particular need for reflective case studies that make processes of grappling with cultural humility in *community practice* visible—not only to our students, but to ourselves and other practitioners. The following case study picks up that charge, offering my reflections on cultivating cultural humility in myself and within groups of residents participating in a community project.

Context of The Neighborhood Story Project

In recent years, I have been particularly concerned with the negative impacts of gentrification (the transformation of low-income neighborhoods into areas targeting middle- and upper-income residents) on community well-being, particularly within low-income communities of color. My interests in this area reflect entanglements of my personal and professional life. I grew up a white child on the edges of one of the most robust black neighborhoods of Portland, Oregon, during the early years of gentrification, and as an adult moved my white family into a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood in Nashville, Tennessee. Along the way, I have witnessed, studied, and been implicated in the constellation of harms that follow gentrification (e.g., Thurber, 2018): As housing values rise, so do property taxes and rental rates, and low-income residents may be displaced or cost burdened. Friends and family members may be forced out, corner markets replaced by niche boutiques, and residents may lose their sense of belonging, even if they remain in place. As I worked alongside residents, city-wide organizing groups, and policy-makers to address these harms, I became increasingly troubled that those who were most directly affected by the rapid economic and demographic changes in their neighborhoods are often the least systematically involved both in defining the problems they experience and imagining possible solutions. I designed The Neighborhood Story Project in response to this exclusion, as one way to directly engage residents of gentrifying neighborhoods in responding to the changes in their communities.

Each Neighborhood Story Project begins with the formation of a leadership team of eight to twelve residents. This team participates in a facilitated twelve-week process to design and execute a community research project. Over the course of weekly, two-hour meetings, participants begin by getting to know one another and develop a collective line of inquiry related to their neighborhood. In the second phase of the project, members collect data to explore their research questions (such as interviews with the community members, contemporary and historic photographs, and archival materials). In the final phase, they determine what they want to do with what they have learned and disseminate their findings with their broader community.

Several practice traditions undergird the design of The Neighborhood Story Project: group work, popular education, public humanities, and critical participatory action research (critical PAR). The value of cultural humility is threaded through each of these traditions, though it is particularly salient in critical PAR. Critical PAR falls under the broad umbrella of "action research"; it is among numerous approaches to systematic inquiry that are designed to produce actionable findings within a particular setting, such as a school, workplace, organization, or neighborhood. Many of these approaches are considered "participatory" in that researchers

collaborate with members of the setting under investigation to design and implement the research. Critical PAR is further distinguished by explicit attention to power, both in the subject of study and the process of research (Torre et al., 2012). In the words of Torre and Fine (2011), adopting a Critical PAR stance requires an "acute analyses of power, domination, oppression, and resistance"; alongside this investigation of how communities are shaped by power, the authors also call for the "complex wrestling with researcher objectivity, subjectivity, and positionality" (p. 117). The simultaneity of looking outward and inward, to confronting systems of oppression in the world around us and as manifest in our own practice, reflects a deep commitment to cultural humility.

Over the course of 2016, I facilitated Neighborhood Story Projects in three gentrifying Nashville neighborhoods. Only a couple miles apart from one another, each area historically had a robust black community—including residential, educational, commercial, and spiritual institutions—and high levels of affordable housing. In the last fifteen years, housing values in these neighborhoods have rapidly increased, and the areas are now attracting younger, whiter and wealthier residents. Reaching out to existing neighborhood groups, I advertised the Neighborhood Story Project as a way for those who were concerned about the changes in their community to learn more and take action. In total, twenty-eight people participated in one of the three Neighborhood Story Projects. Though demographics varied by group, participants were predominantly black women who had lived most of their lives in their neighborhood. Participants ranged in life stage from high school seniors to elders and were nearly evenly split between homeowners and renters.

Despite the similarities between the three neighborhoods and project participants, each Neighborhood Story Project ultimately jelled around distinct action research projects: one team was primarily concerned with the frayed social ties in their community and created an interactive community exhibition where residents of various tenures came to learn and share from one another. Another team, discouraged by damage-based narratives of their neighborhood, completed a feature-length documentary film to retell their place-history. A third team homed in on development-fueled displacement and created a set of community educational and organizing tools to mobilize neighbors toward resisting unwanted development. Local grant funding provided project support, including a modest stipend for all project participants in recognition of their community work. (For more about these projects, see Thurber, 2019).

Study Methods

I played multiple roles in the projects, having designed the intervention, facilitated the three projects, and also studied the process and outcomes. As a scholar-practitioner, I wanted to understand how participants experienced the Neighborhood Story Project, and how this model might be of use to other communities (see Thurber, 2019). Following constructivist design principles, I studied the project through close observation of naturalistic processes over the course of each twelve-week project (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, I conducted a focus group with each team at the conclusion of their project, followed by interviews with each team member three to twelve months after their project ended. A collaborating researcher participated in each project and contributed to data collection and early

analysis. The resulting multi-case study of three Neighborhood Story Projects produced a rich corpus of data, including audio recordings, transcripts, and field notes from each weekly session, focus group, and interview.

Given my multiple roles, this inquiry was necessarily something of a self-study. As the renowned community psychologist Seymour Sarason (2004) notes, "[T]he community interventionist is a very complicated variable" (p. 276). Following Langhout (2015), I endeavored to make myself visible as an interventionist and to critique my own practice in field notes, deliberations with collaborating researchers, and data analysis. Here, I focus on how I and members of the Neighborhood Story Projects grappled with cultural humility during our work together.

Tracing Cultural Humility in Community Practice

I offer reflections in three parts. First, I consider my efforts to hold myself accountable to cultural humility. The second section examines my efforts to create conditions for cultural humility between members. The final section explores how members reciprocally created conditions for cultural humility within the groups. My intention is to surface points of tensions, learning edges, and moments of grappling related to the core dimensions of cultural humility: self-reflection, accountability, and the mitigation of power imbalances. At times, the challenges described herein are generic (they could arise in any group, with any facilitator). Others are specific, resulting from my particular strengths, weaknesses, biases, and positionality. My aim is not to offer "fixes," but rather to make transparent my imperfect processes of reaching toward cultural humility in community practice, so that others might anticipate similar dilemmas and contemplate their own possible responses.

Holding Myself Accountable to Cultural Humility

Implementing Neighborhood Story Projects in three gentrifying neighborhoods required gaining entry into each community, building relationships with community partners to host each project, recruiting participants, and ultimately facilitating each three-month action research project. Holding myself accountable to cultural humility required working to earn team members' trust, consistently interrogating my own biases and assumptions, and actively realigning power relations within the groups.

Expect That Trust Will Be Earned

Though I had some connections in each neighborhood, I entered the Neighborhood Story Projects as an outsider. I have much more in common with those moving into gentrifying neighborhoods than those who have remained or been displaced. Unlike most of the participants, I had no longstanding ties to their neighborhoods. I was one of the only white people in each project (five of the twenty-eight participants were white), and though about half of the participants were homeowners, I was likely the only person who could have afforded to buy a home in any of the neighborhoods in the current housing market. Further, my engagement with the Neighborhood Story Project was part of my doctoral work, and I was working in

communities where academic researchers have a history of over-promising and under-delivering. In one neighborhood, for example, I was asked what ever happened to the oral histories that had been collected some years prior. Unfamiliar with the study, I looked into the question only to find that a former professor in my very own department had collected a series of oral histories with residents—many of whom were respected elders who had since passed. The stories had left town with the researcher and were not archived in a way that allowed for open access. The net effect of these differences in social location between myself and program participants was that a number of members entered the Neighborhood Story Project with a healthy skepticism toward the project and me.

At times this skepticism was expressed as curiosity. Before sitting down at the first gathering, one member wanted to know my motivation for starting the Neighborhood Story Project. He said, "Everything has a nucleus. Nothing can live without a nucleus. So, what's the nucleus?" Others were more overtly suspicious of my involvement in their communities. At another initial gathering, a woman asked pointedly, "I want to know how this is going to benefit the neighborhood, and not just be some project that helps you get your degree." The epigraph at the start of this essay was a particularly pointed expression of this suspicion. Months after the project concluded, I asked Ms. TK if she had initially had any concerns about participating:

> Ms. TK: I was like, "Who are these people? What do they want?" Those was my concern. "Is they trying to put us in a trick bag or what? Can we trust them?"
>
> Amie: And "these people" is me, right?
>
> Ms. TK: "These people" is Amie. This is you, Amie, I'm talking about. You "the people."

Although Ms. TK did not explicitly mention my whiteness, several others did. During our follow-up interviews, one woman explained that she had initially wondered, "Who's this white lady?" Establishing my trustworthiness necessarily took time. I navigated this by being forthright with members about my own concerns and commitments, tracing my own experiences growing up in a gentrifying neighborhood in Portland, Oregon, and my worries about the way gentrification damaged communities. As a relative newcomer to Nashville, and an outsider in two of the three areas, I deferred to members' knowledge of their neighborhoods. My transparency and demonstrated respect for members' expertise helped to create a foundation for relationship-building.

Interrogate Internal Biases and Assumptions

Throughout the projects, I strove to be vigilant about how my own biases affected my perceptions and interactions with members, intentionally interrogating my reactions in field notes. For example, as we began the second session in one Neighborhood Story Project, I was disturbed that few people from the first week had returned. That night, I wrote in my field notes:

> I was feeling some anxiety at the start of the meeting . . . *where is everyone?* Thoughts flashed through my mind: *Had they got scared away somehow? Had they only come for*

> *the money last time?* These were interesting to notice—everyone had seemed genuinely engaged last time, so neither of these made sense, and the latter immediately felt like a record—an internalized message that the public housing residents were only in it for the money.

As it turned out, the anxiety was unwarranted; by the end of the meeting, all but one person had returned. However, the internalized message that had seeded in my consciousness persisted throughout the two hours. Reflecting on the arrival of the final participant—an African American woman—my field notes continued, "When she came in, with less than 30 minutes left, my first thought was, '*She just came for the stipend.*'"

She had indeed arrived late and had quickly joined our discussion of significant people in the neighborhood's history. Drawing from her deep knowledge of the community, this member contributed more names and stories than anyone else around the table. We closed the session with administrative business, discussing how to distribute stipends—weekly or at the end of the twelve weeks. The latecomer advocated for waiting until the end of the twelve weeks, when we could fairly allocate the amount according to how many meetings people had attended (a recommendation with which the team agreed). She also apologized for her late arrival, tearing up as she shared that she had been at the funeral of a neighborhood elder.

That this team member had come—in spite of having experienced the loss of a friend—was a testament to both her commitment to her community and her investment in the project. It was painful and humbling to recognize that I had criminalized rather than empathized with her lateness. The split-second, unconscious assessment that "*she just came for the stipend*" revealed the degree to which I have internalized society's persistent stigmatization of poor people and people of color. As I concluded in my field notes, "This was a powerful opportunity for me to catch my projected racial bias." To the extent that I was able, catching my biases was critical to building authentic relationships with members. However, given that implicit biases operate "unwittingly, unintentionally, and unavoidably" (Hardin & Banaji, 2013, p. 14), I have to assume that I did not—and cannot—catch them all.

Realign Power Relations

I also strove to enact cultural humility by realigning power relations within and through the Neighborhood Story Project. Given my role as facilitator, projects began with people looking to me for leadership. Over the course of the project, I encouraged members to take increasing ownership, and indeed, each group ultimately shaped their own research questions, conducted independent research, and completed projects with very little hands-on involvement from me. In turn, I endeavored to be a contributing member of the team by offering facilitation, technical assistance, and sharing content knowledge about gentrification when appropriate.

That said, I was also deeply aware of my influence as facilitator in shaping and constraining group work. At times, a strong suggestion from me felt appropriate. At other times, I wondered in my field notes whether I had shortchanged a discussion or imposed my perspective. For example, following the Stratford Story Project session in which the group decided to create a

film, I reflected:

> I asked about how to organize the film—over time or by theme. In the interest of time, I heavily suggested that we organize it historically, which made sense to the group. I played a more decisive/leadership role here than I would have liked should we have had more time. While I think the group would have come up with the same outcome—we have been circling around this plan for a while—in the end it felt a bit like 'my decision' or at least my suggestion.

At other times, I was aware of member suggestions that I did not take up or encourage the group to consider. Critical reflection, both independently and with collaborating researchers, helped me to discern when I might be overusing my influence or when additional structure and leadership was necessary. In addition to maintaining vigilance regarding my use of power within the group, I also sought structural realignment of power.

In traditional social science research, the stories and images that researchers gather often become the property of the researcher. When a community member consents to be interviewed, they "give away" their stories, often to the great benefit of the researcher—whose career is built on publications. Given the guiding values of the Neighborhood Story Project, I sought to maximize community members' control over how their personal stories were used and stored and to ensure open access to that data. Each Neighborhood Story Project was an action research project, and team members were the primary researchers. It was they—not I—who collected data to answer the questions they had generated, often through interviews with their neighbors. Team members provided interviewees with the opportunity to copyright their interview under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License. With this license, the interviewee maintains ownership over their own interview while setting the terms under which others can access and use their material. With participants' consent, all data collected by the Neighborhood Story Project teams are now archived at the Nashville Public Library.

Creating Conditions for Cultural Humility Within the Group

Facilitating any small or large group process involves both navigating one's relationship with participants and creating conditions within which participants relate to one another. A lack of cultural humility between members can undercut group cohesion, stifle collective learning and action, and replicate asymmetrical power relations. As we worked together over twelve weeks, I strove to hold group members accountable to cultural humility by addressing dominant behaviors within the group and by encouraging the consideration of alternative perspectives.

Address Intergroup Dominant Behaviors

Microaggressions are understood to be seemingly small acts of oppression, such as a man dismissing the contributions of a woman, a white person interrupting a colleague of color, a straight person making light of the safety concerns of a queer friend. Such behaviors may—regardless of intention—function to marginalize, silence, or diminish another person. Further, given the degree to which microaggressions permeate the lives of members of

marginalized groups, such experiences accumulate and often have demonstrated deleterious physical and mental health effects (Sue, 2010).

Although two of the three Neighborhood Story Projects were fairly homogenous, the third, located at a high school, was particularly diverse in ethnicity, gender, and age. The opportunity to work across generational lines was unique and ultimately deeply appreciated. However, this diversity also heightened the possibility of inter-group tension. Mindful of the possibilities for microaggressions, I facilitated a caucus activity where youth and adults (many of whom were elders) separately considered what members of the other group could do to demonstrate that they are respected and valued. Each group then shared these reflections with one another. For example, the youth caucus wrote, "Listen to us and don't treat us like we are inferior," and a member of the adult caucus shared, "Don't think I'm too old to relate or assume I won't listen." Many participants appreciated this foundational conversation. Just two weeks into the project, Jaime, a high school student, commented,

> I like how the group is very respectful of each other because I feel like yeah, I'm in a group of adults, but they don't look down on me because I'm seventeen. They see me as their peer, not a child. I definitely like that.

Several weeks later, Gary, an alumnus, reflected, "I remember when we first came together and how we were kind of separated, young and the mature . . . It's no longer 'these are kids and we're the adults,' and 'listen to us,' . . . That's my favorite thing . . . we're all a family."

And yet, despite the high value the group placed on working together across generational lines, the adults frequently interrupted the youth. As facilitator, I interpreted these interruptions as evidence of the adults' enthusiasm to engage in the activity at hand. And yet, this behavior marginalized the voices of youth team members. At times, I indirectly managed these expressions of dominance by redirecting the conversation back to the young person who was interrupted. Other times I was more direct. During a particularly animated discussion in which a pair of adults were continuously interrupting youth, I stepped in, saying, "Hold up—kids aren't talking." The adults quickly self-corrected and became more mindful of their participation. However, the challenge to hold space for youth voices—despite the strong ties that had formed over the twelve weeks—demonstrates the persistence of this pattern of dominance, and the importance of creating conditions within which group members can attend to their own biases, beliefs, and microaggressive behaviors.

Encourage the Consideration of Other Perspectives

Any community work involves insiders and outsiders; within the Neighborhood Story Project it was important to cultivate conditions for cultural humility between participants, as well as toward the broader community in which our work occurred. Given that the projects involved data collection, members often gained information that spontaneously caused them to challenge previously held beliefs. For example, after interviewing several people on her block, an elder black woman participant voiced her surprise at the economic vulnerability of her young white neighbors. She reflected, "You may think, well, okay, honestly, you're Caucasian and never

would I have thought that you were concerned that you might have to leave out of this neighborhood because you can't afford it." Listening to her neighbors helped her to reevaluate her assumptions and nuanced her understanding of how gentrification was impacting her neighborhood.

Other times, I played a more active role in helping participants remain open to alternative perspectives. For example, the Stratford Story Project centered around a high school and was primarily concerned with countering the dominant, stigmatizing narrative of the school and its students. However, as members collected interviews, they encountered conflicting views of the school from alumni, students, teachers, and neighbors. At the close of one weekly meeting, a student offered that his hope for our project was "that we just get the, finally get all the facts straight. Get the true story." In response, I offered:

> Your hope is that we get the facts straight and tell the true story, and I appreciate that. And, where I sit, there is no true story, and there are no "facts"—there are many stories and there's many ways of interpreting data . . . My hope is we can tell a different story, not because it will be the *only* story or the *right* story but a different story, and it's one that hasn't been told.

We returned to this distinction—between telling "a" Stratford story and telling "the" Stratford story—time and again. Conceptualizing the project as a counter-story (rather than a "true" story) prepared the team for some critical responses from viewers who felt the documentary film was incomplete. In each of the three projects, cultivating a spirit of cultural humility required helping members develop a thoughtful analysis of their neighborhood while recognizing that their own understandings will always be partial.

Recognizing Reciprocity in Cultivating Cultural Humility

The previous sections focused on my efforts as a facilitator to foster cultural humility within myself and the group. Although a community practitioner bears unique responsibility for creating these conditions, it is also true that group members actively shape their environment, calling on one another—and on facilitators—to reflect on one's blind spots, to create more equitable social relations, and to modify practices in order to more fully disperse power. Indeed, a key aspect of cultural humility in community practice is letting others take the lead and letting oneself be led. Over the course of the Neighborhood Story Project, I was continually impressed by how members created conditions for self-reflection for one another and how members supported and invested in my development and growth.

Recognize Ways Members Cultivate Humility for and with One Another

Within the first few weeks of each Neighborhood Story Project, I began closing each meeting by inviting members to share a personal highlight from our time together. These ritualized endings became opportunities for members to appreciate one another and to articulate what they were learning from their collaborators. The following exchange among members occurred in the second week of one project:

Suzie: I just really appreciate the depth of knowledge within the group here. It's invigorating.

Mary: I think I was a little surprised of the stuff that I knew that I didn't think I knew, especially since I'm the youngest one here, as far as I've been living here about ten years. I've been involved. I've definitely been involved.

Avy: That's great.

Amie: Others?

TK: What I like about the group is it's a loving group. We're not rude to each other and I really like that. That means a lot to me.

Shirley: I like how everyone listens to me when I'm talking. Everyone is just really nice to me. I like that. It makes me want to come here instead.

TK: You're right. You're right.

Mary: What's not to like? There you go.

Austin: I would echo that. I go to a lot of meetings. To me, this doesn't feel like a meeting. I like that, that it feels like we're just sharing with each other and learning from each other and it doesn't feel like a meeting.

Avy: Now by the time Shirley said what she said and Miss TK and then Austin, I just got chill bumps because Austin is so, he's right… I am so excited and I am just floored with how well we are working together and the respect. It's like there's already camaraderie.

Notably, in just the second week, members were already deeply appreciative of one another, and of the conditions they were co-creating to learn from and with each other. Though I as facilitator created space for the appreciations to be verbalized, what members were appreciating were their own collective efforts.

Acknowledge Others' Investment in Your Own Development

Despite the high premium Western academic traditions place on seemingly individual intellectual contributions, all learning is relational. It is not possible to do justice to all that I learned from members of the Neighborhood Story Project. Their place-stories deepened my knowledge of Nashville and transformed my experience of living in the city. The ways that members talked about the effects of gentrification heightened my sensitivity and honed my scholarly interests. I am a different neighbor, researcher, and practitioner because of what I learned from these collaborators. The degree to which members encouraged and supported me is also noteworthy; just as they invested in one another and in their communities, they invested in me.

My first session in one of the Neighborhood Story Projects offers an example. As the room filled up with twelve people I did not know, Ms. Mary—who I had met only minutes before—caught my eye and said, "It takes courage to show up at a group you don't know and invite people to be part of something." Nearly a year later, as we met to review an early draft of my dissertation, Ms. Mary reflected back on this initial encounter: "I remember that first meeting, you was the only little white girl there, and most the rest of us already knew each other. It was obvious to me that you were the one that needed encouraging." She was right. Having my vulnerability seen by these team members was both affirming and reassuring; they buoyed my resolve to keep pushing myself and the projects forward. Part of recognizing the reciprocal nature of creating conditions for cultural humility is letting people know the difference they make to you. During the tearful closing session with the first Neighborhood Story Project team, I tried to put some of this into words:

> If I get a PhD, it's because of you. Seriously. This is my dissertation research, and I'm doing this project to see what do these kinds of projects do, what difference do they make, and this is the first one . . . I've been the leader in some ways, but I am a student and you are my teachers here. I'm learning from you how this works, if it works, if it makes a difference, how to make it better, and so I'm incredibly indebted to you for this opportunity. You are all part of my—what we call—committee. You're all on my committee . . . You're helping me grow in huge ways, so thank you for taking the risk and making the commitment and investing the time and investing your heart.

As the projects progressed, I continued to feel grateful, indebted, and lucky to be mentored by such an outstanding group of neighbors who invested in me, as well as their communities. And though not formally on my Dissertation Committee, a number of the Neighborhood Story Project participants came to my dissertation defense, some many months after our formal work together ended, to celebrate the collective learnings from our work together.

Conclusions

The above reflections are specific—I am a single practitioner, with a distinct history and positionality, who facilitated a particular neighborhood intervention with a unique set of collaborators. And yet, others may find resonances in these reflections with their own projects and community contexts. Moreover, community practitioners may find utility in considering cultural humility from three relational positions I have traced above, considering how we can hold ourselves accountable to cultural humility, create conditions for cultural humility within groups, and acknowledge how group members co-create cultural humility for one another.

Where many accounts of cultural humility suggest an internal, individual process, adopting a more relational understanding of cultural humility better aligns with group and community work, which is—by design—dynamic, unpredictable, and multisystemic, in that it reflects interactions between individual, intergroup, and community levels (Rubel & Okech, 2017). Ethical community practitioners must be accountable to themselves, critically interrogating and amending their practices as they contend with their biases and imagine how to redistribute power in their collaborative work. They must also be accountable to those with whom they work,

offering leadership when needed to create conditions for all members to reflect on their assumptions and to consider how inequities manifest both within their own collectives as well as within the larger community. And they are equally accountable to follow the leadership of their collaborators, to remember that in community practice the roles of teachers and learners, leaders and followers are often shared, and though they may be facilitating change, they simultaneously will be guided to greater learning by those with whom they work.

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