Witnessing Resistance in Community Work

Consider these ‘Understandings of Resistance’:
• Whenever people are oppressed they resist
• Resistance ought not to be judged by its ability to stop oppression, rather;
• Resistance is important for its ability to maintain a person’s connection to humanity, especially in situations outside of human understanding.
(Wade, 1997; Reynolds, 2010a)

Think of a position of resistance you have taken in your life in response to oppression or being the victim of someone's abuse of power-over. Pick a particular event, not a generalized feeling. Choose something that you can experience and re-member with enough-containment, not necessarily without pain.

Share the story of your resistance with a witness — someone you know or trust as safe-enough. The witness’ role is to ask questions to bring forward an account of your acts of resistance.

• How did you respond? What did you do?
• How did you choose this course of action? What were you paying attention to?
• What resources and knowledges were you able to access in this moment (Bird, 2006)? How was this possible? Did other events/teachings prepare you for this resistance?
• What was going on in your body in this experience? How were you experiencing your body that was useful in terms of your resistance?
• Did you have any allies in this act of resistance? Who could you count on? What differences did it/would it make to have an ally?
• How did you attend to power in this experience? If you had had less access to power, how may you have responded? More power?
• Can you connect this act of resistance to other experiences through your life — what Allan Wade refers to as your ‘repertoire of resistance’?
• How does this act of resistance serve as a resource to you in community work?

Reflexive questions to consider following the experience:

• How is it different for you to be positioned as a witness to your own resistance?
• How does witnessing resistance change your relationship to the oppressive event?
• What does this experience bring to your work as a community worker? How will it inform your theory/practice about community work that is accountable to power?
• How can you use your body's knowledges in your work now?
• What differences might your history of resistance make for:
  • The people you work alongside?
  • Your experience of yourself as a community worker?
  • Other aspects of your life?


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