Chapter 1

Seeing What Matters

*Education as a Struggle for Knowledge and Power*

Real people plan real programs in real places to produce adult education. Experienced educators understand what it takes to work effectively with other people in social and organizational settings to produce educational programs for adults. These educators typically have particular ways of “seeing” (that is, understanding) the conditions in which they work and how to get the work done. Even though educators often recognize the contingencies, dilemmas, ambiguities, challenges, and opportunities of working with other people to plan programs, most adult education planning theory has not taken these into account. Over the decades, the gamut of rational decision-making models, linear and feedback procedural task systems, and general planning theories have not produced working understandings of the context in which people plan programs. Most planning theory, with its lack of attention to context and its pervasive focus on planning steps, is only partially helpful in focusing attention on what matters in planning programs. These planning steps frame practice as an iterative series of activities that begins with needs-assessments, includes educational design, and concludes with evaluation. In contrast, we frame planning practice as a social activity of negotiating interests in relationships of power (Cervero & Wilson, 1994a). To better understand power, interests, and the practical action of negotiation, we have focused on the “people work” of planning (Wilson & Cervero, 1996). This
work happens in complex, messy settings in which people gather at planning tables to make decisions about the educational objectives and the social and political objectives of educational programs.

In the first part of this chapter we introduce three planning stories that illustrate where educators do the work that matters: at the planning table. In the second part we introduce the major theme of the book: planners work to produce educational outcomes and, simultaneously, social and political outcomes for multiple stakeholders. In the last part, we discuss the historical development of our theory and its relationship to other educational planning theories.

Seeing What Matters I

The Planning Table

Each of the following vignettes introduces an actual planning story that shows the everyday life of educators making decisions about programs in social and organizational contexts. Each vignette is followed by the identification of the planning tables. We use the term planning table as a metaphor to focus attention on what matters in educational planning: namely, the fact that people make judgments with others in social contexts about specific program features. The many variants of this metaphor speak to issues of power, participation, and decision making across all areas of social life. The variants include references to people “sitting at the table,” “who was (or was not) at the table,” what people “bring to the table,” and putting issues “on the table.” The planning table can be either a physical one where people meet to make decisions or a metaphorical one where people make decisions with others on the telephone, in hallways, or privately in offices.

Management Education at the Phoenix Company

We tell this story as researchers who investigated the planning practices of people at the Phoenix Company, which was first reported in our 1994 book. This incident introduces Pete, a vice
president, and his early struggles to understand and manage the power relations as he was attempting to change the company's organizational culture.

The Phoenix Company is a service-oriented business that has conducted an annual management education program for the past ten years. The president, Mr. Jones, along with his top management team of vice presidents, has used this program to review the past year's efforts and present plans for the coming year to the middle management of the Phoenix Company. Over the past two years, however, an organizational struggle has emerged about the focus and type of activities used for this program.

As vice president for human resources, Pete has been one of the primary planners of the program. The program was typically held as a two-day retreat at a site away from the company, in which the executives made "informational presentations" announcing plans, projects, and goals for the coming year. Pete has been trying to work with Mr. Jones to include interactive and experiential learning activities in the retreat to make it more focused on organizational development.

Pete told this story of planning the program with Mr. Jones and Brad, the executive vice president. Pete had wanted to develop a retreat program in the spring that was more interactive than previous programs, "but the president was not ready to do it . . . he said that he might want to do it in the fall, but I never heard from him again." At about this same time, Pete was embroiled in a contentious relationship with Brad, who perceived that Pete was trying to undermine his authority. In the summer, this situation erupted into a serious confrontation between the two, at which time Pete was also informed that Mr. Jones expected him to hold the annual retreat in one month's time. Pete recalled that at that moment he felt as if he were standing on the deck of "a sinking ship":

We [Pete and Brad] got into a couple of real shouting matches in the budget preparation that I didn't understand. Apparently, the executive VP believed I was trying to undermine his
authority and that I was questioning his judgment in an inappropriate way. He really got upset about it. We continued to have disagreements on into the summer, and that’s when he shook his finger in my face one day in July and said, “Goddammit, where is our retreat, Pete? The boss said he wants to have a retreat; I just talked to him last night, and he wonders why you haven’t planned it. His understanding was that you were going to do one in August, and he wants to know why you haven’t got it together.” That’s exactly what he said in front of a whole group of people when I had not even heard the word retreat in the last sixty days . . . much less been given the mandate to do it.

When Pete tried to explain the circumstances to Mr. Jones, the president “was very critical.” Pete knew Brad “had done a real good job of letting [Mr. Jones] hear his side of it before I ever got there” and, consequently, felt “like a lamb taken to the slaughter.” So Pete pulled together the program using Harvard Business School cases as directed by Brad, secured the site, and hired an outside consultant from a local university to facilitate the program. As Pete recounted his planning, he said: “In some ways it was really good, but I was still in this real struggle because I threw it together at the last minute, I planned it under pressure, I didn’t go to the right person for direction. So I really did a lot of reflecting on why I had screwed up and why I had gotten blamed for not doing a good job.” However, Pete felt that the program “ended up being a real success, very positive.” This was due, in large measure, to the fact that Mr. Jones himself was very positive about what had happened and publicly commended Pete at the end of the program.

Planning tables abound in this story. The initial table is structured by the traditions and protocols in which people have planned previous retreats; the decisions made and protocols established at those tables are the ones Pete is attempting to change. A second
table lies in the informal conversations Pete has had with the president in trying to persuade him to endorse a more experiential, interactive retreat format. The most obvious planning table is the literal one in the budget meetings. The “shouting matches” at this table further the deteriorating relationship Pete has with Brad. The open conflict at this table bleeds into another planning table in which the vice president does “a good job of letting [Mr. Jones] hear his side of the story” so that Pete felt “like a lamb taken to the slaughter” for not doing the planning for the retreat.

The slaughter metaphor is perhaps not overstated, for it represents Pete’s sense of how power is being exercised at these various planning tables. The metaphor points directly to the people-work of planning in complex organizational settings. Although important activities of planning programs are clearly being tended to (decisions are being made about where the retreat will be held, what the curriculum will be, how it will be facilitated), the people making decisions at these planning tables are also embroiled in power struggles over whose educational vision for the retreats will prevail. This planning is about more than collecting data to be used in a needs-assessment; it is also about who has the power to determine the features of the educational program. This opening scenario shows that Pete’s initial efforts to alter the function and purpose of the retreat flounder because he “threw it together at the last minute . . . planned it under pressure . . . didn’t go to the right person for direction.” Pete may be managing some parts of planning properly, but he certainly struggled with managing the people-work. Whose educational vision will prevail as the planning begins for the next retreat?

**Continuing Education in the Society for Valuation Professions**

*This planning story, told in the first person by Arthur Wilson, is about the development of a new continuing education program for a professional society. Arthur describes his first meeting with the Society’s president, who explains to Arthur how he should understand the reasons for the Society’s new educational program. This*
meeting takes place at that ubiquitous planning venue in adult education: the restaurant table.

It was my first day “at the office.” I’d only been there once before to interview for a position as director of education for the Society for Valuation Professions (SVP), a professional association for testing and certifying the technical expertise of property valuators. When I entered the office suite, briefcase and trench coat in hand, I wasn’t entirely sure they were expecting me, as I was asked to sit in the reception area for some time while the receptionist went looking for the executive director.

I had only met the director during the interview. We had talked then for about an hour, in which I recounted my adult education experience—mostly adult literacy teaching and professional development for literacy educators—while trying to disguise my lack of “corporate” experience. I was also trying to find out what this job—vaguely described as “helping this group do adult education”—was about.

I learned that the director had been in the position only a few months himself—the reason he could shed little light on what the issues were. Neither of us had any professional experience as valuators either. The little I learned in this meeting was not greatly increased in the subsequent phone call offering the position. Three weeks later I found myself in new clothes in a new city in a new job as I heard the executive director’s voice from down the hall. Greeting me warmly, he said, “Let’s go see your office.” Winding through the maze of suites, we got there and he indicated for me to put my coat and case down. He then said, “You might want to get something to take notes with. You’re going to meet the president.” Almost before I had a chance, literally, to hang up my coat, I was about to meet SVP’s president—a major architect in reorienting the focus of this organization and the person who, as I soon would learn, was going to “brief me about how things are.”

The director and I went next door to a conference hotel restaurant where the president was eating breakfast. He had just taken the
early shuttle from the city where he worked as a senior manager in a major accounting firm; he would be returning on the afternoon flight. As we joined him (we wouldn’t leave the table for several hours, two meals, and countless cigarettes and cups of coffee later), I noticed on the floor next to him a bulging case marked “SVP,” crammed with papers, folders, and notebooks. The president said he had come to town on my first day to welcome me and to help me “learn who was important” and “what our plans are.”

As the president talked, his SVP case grew smaller as a stack of documents—lists of names, committee memos, meeting minutes, Society resolutions, educational marketing brochures and appraisal programs of study from competitor societies, even organizational train-the-trainer manuals—grew in front of me. I tried, gamely, to ask questions, to talk educationally, to inquire about objectives, instructors, courses. But that was not why I was there. Never, in what I had thought would be a program development discussion, did we talk about education other than as a “product we have to deliver to members if the Society is to survive.” Never was it discussed what the education was really about or how it was going to get done, just that they were going to do it. What we did talk about—or rather what I was told—was the recent history and circumstances that had led to the organization’s taking on something it had historically shunned.

Here is what the president wanted to be sure I understood as I began the work of assisting the creation of their new educational program: the newly created director’s position was part of an organizational identity change—an attempt to reconfigure the Society’s relationship with its members, with the occupation it represented, and with the public it served. Part of that transformation included doing something the association had officially said for decades it would not do: becoming a teaching society to provide entry-level professional education for aspiring and novice valuators. Teaching was something other organizations did, not the Society for Valuation Professions. In the words of one of its presidents, this Society was different because it was “multi-disciplinary . . . the only Society that tests and certifies
professionals who appraise all types of tangible and intangible, real and personal property.” As echoed by the chair of the Education Committee, “SVP has traditionally been a testing and certifying association. Its mission . . . has been to provide public testimony of the practicing appraiser’s competence in his or her chosen specialty. This testifying process is substantiated by a rigorous system of examination and appraisal practice review.” Thus the organizational function was to “certify” the expertise of established valuators rather than train new ones. The president’s and chair’s words represented a dominant Society mantra that had long stood as an organizational definer of its identity and purpose. If applicants successfully completed the Society’s technical expertise examinations, such candidates could then append the Society’s initials to their professional identity in the way that RN, JD, AIA, MD, and PhD are appended in other occupations. People’s professional identities were constituted by such “designations”; the designations could make significant differences in professional standing, capacity to generate income, or even whether or not the profession could be practiced. What the president emphatically wanted to be sure I understood was how crucial a successful continuing professional education program was, not just to the Society’s makeover but also to how that makeover would alter the relationships with its members (the appraisal profession) and their clients (the general public).

One of the last things the president gave me was a list of names and telephone numbers. Most names were of people he had briefed me about during the long morning and early afternoon; he now charged me to “talk to them right away.” I later realized I was, in effect, being given the names of those who were “on the right side”—those working to change the Society’s traditional stance against providing education for its members. Before I even knew I was on a side, I’d been given allies. What I was learning that day was that there were serious issues at stake, so much so that the president of the association felt compelled to get to me first—before anyone else, even the director—to explain how I “should see things.”
There are two planning tables represented in the opening scenes of this story. First is the one around which the director and Arthur gather to discuss the new education director’s position—the executive director’s desk. That meeting and subsequent telephone call were productive for beginning to establish working administrative relationships necessary to implement the Society’s goals. But because both the executive director and the education director were new to the organization and neither were appraisers, the meetings at this table were relatively unproductive for understanding the Society’s goals, plans, or conditions in which they would be enacted—hence the urgency of the restaurant meeting.

The second table at the restaurant meeting with the Society’s president was clearly significant because it conveyed what the president thought was at risk and what needed to change. The president was using his power as president to make sure Arthur got the “right” message right from the start. As at the Phoenix Company, this story demonstrates that the political work of planning (in this case, constructing and organizing alliances) is just as important as designing curricula, training teachers, and evaluating outcomes. The latter were almost never mentioned in this initial encounter, although Arthur made efforts to bring them to the table. These alliances would embody and construct the new educational vision for the organization, reshaping its relationship with the membership as well as with the consumers of its professional services and the public in general. As in the Phoenix Company story, then, Arthur’s educational planning is not just about the participants’ educational outcomes, but also about strategic positioning of the Society in its profession. We should see this intersection of educational and political outcomes as routine—not extraordinary—in program planning.

Historically, the organization’s membership had typically shunned any role the Society could have had in formally educating neophyte practitioners in their profession, preferring a gatekeeping role of determining access to the profession’s senior ranks. That stance now needed to change because of professional, economic, and legislative
pressures. As we'll show in Chapter Two, the educational program was the means through which the mission and practice of this organization would change—but not without resistance. How crucial would the educational program be in changing the organization? Would the Society survive? Like the Phoenix Company story, the SVP story represents a site in which stakeholders in a social and organizational context vie for control to enact a particular educational vision.

**Practitioner Inquiry for Adult Literacy Teachers**

This planning story is about a staff development program that Cassandra (Cassie) Drennon and Ronald Cervero worked on together for adult literacy teachers. The incident described in this section is told by Cassie, who was facilitating a workshop for these literacy teachers. The situation and circumstances Cassie describes illustrate another ubiquitous planning table: the classroom itself. [Note: We wrote this section and the Practitioner Inquiry section in Chapter Two in collaboration with Cassandra Drennon.]

It was midafternoon on Friday at the local conference hotel where a group of twenty-four adult literacy teachers were nearing the end of a two-day retreat for the Practitioner Inquiry (PI) program. In the spirit of the collaborative intent of “practitioner inquiry,” the goal for this retreat—the second of four retreats planned for the yearlong program—was for teachers to design a research project pertaining to teaching and learning that they would carry out with learners in their classrooms. So far, all activities we had planned for the retreat had gone smoothly.

On this particular afternoon, we had split the participants into two groups of twelve for the purpose of generating data collection strategies through a brainstorming process. In each of two meeting rooms, teachers clustered around three or four round tables. The procedure was for teachers to take turns sharing with the group the action they intended to take in their classroom (such as implementing a new
strategy for teaching reading or instituting a new attendance incentive program) and the research questions they wanted to pursue. Then the rest of the group brainstormed different ways data could be collected in order to answer the questions. A participant from each group had volunteered to lead the discussion and to record the ideas generated during the brainstorming on a flip chart. I sat among the participants and contributed ideas along with them during the brainstorming process. The process was going smoothly until Jean explained the background of her project to the group.

Jean’s research project grew out of an initial concern that the young men she was preparing for the GED were living in what she perceived to be a “cultural black hole.” As a consequence, she had explained during various activities throughout the retreat, the young men she was teaching needed to be more knowledgeable about life outside of their small community. Jean’s colleagues, however, had suggested she was failing to appreciate the rich culture of the region in which she was working and the distinctive local knowledge of the people there. Based on the encouragement from her fellow researchers, Jean had decided to try to “hook” the students’ interest in learning by first developing curriculum from their local interests—such as hunting and fishing. She thought she might gradually add content to the curriculum about national and world events that she felt the students needed to understand.

As part of her presentation to the group during the brainstorming exercises, Jean began explaining what life was like for out-of-school youth in her community who came to GED classes. She offered descriptions of their dress and slang terms they used to categorize one another according to social groups. One of the terms she threw out was wigger. Sonya, an African American woman sitting at an adjacent table, asked, “What is a wigger?” and Jean responded matter-of-factly, “White n——.”

When Jean uttered the term white n——, I felt my breath taken away. I looked at Sonya, who had asked the question. She had turned to Lois, the discussion facilitator positioned at the flip chart—another
African American woman. The two women made eye contact and then Lois said something like, “Oh I’ve heard of that. I saw a documentary on that.” Then she went right on facilitating the discussion about data collection.

As the group leader, I did not know what to do. I looked around the room to see how other people were feeling. Some people were looking at the floor. Some people had no noticeable reaction. Lois had so quickly moved ahead with the conversation that I guess inside of me I was saying, “Great. I’m glad that’s over.” At the same time I knew something destructive had just occurred. I felt bothered by what had just happened, and then, I hate to say it, but I also felt relieved that the conversation was moving on.

At the end of each inquiry retreat, we had participants fill out a critical incident questionnaire to identify moments that might have been particularly troublesome or, on the other hand, particularly effective in terms of achieving the goals of the retreat. None of the participants mentioned the incident with Jean on those questionnaires, and nobody said anything to us about it immediately after the retreat. But on the following Wednesday I received an e-mail from Sonya. She started by saying that she had enjoyed the retreat and had gotten a lot out of it. She went on to write, “Jean’s white n—— comment had no place in what we were trying to accomplish.” She wrote, “I made no comment on the evaluation because I needed time to think about how I felt about the comment. I didn’t say anything about it because I didn’t want to disrupt the session. I didn’t think any response would have benefited our purpose. But,” she wrote, “having had time to think about it, and my own values and beliefs, I still feel the same way . . . OFFENDED.” Sonya did not ask anything of me specifically. She just signed this e-mail message and I was left wondering what in the world to do next.

It is not uncommon in traditional planning theory to assume or even assert (Boone, Safrit, & Jones, 2002) that planning is something
done before educational activities begin. Indeed, as Cassie indicates in her depiction, “all activities we had planned for the retreat had gone smoothly,” which would tend to confirm this view. Yet an extremely disruptive incident occurred that threatened to undermine how smoothly the planning and retreat had developed to that point. Experienced educators know that no matter how well the activities are “preplanned,” the exigencies of the situation often present opportunities as well as dilemmas that require ongoing adjustments as the activities occur. The fabled “teachable moment” is a reminder of this frequent occurrence, to which we might add its counter, the “lost opportunity.” One way to see this planning phenomenon is that teaching and learning processes at actual learning sites also constitute a planning table.

There are several planning tables in this story. First, decisions are made as the wigger incident unfolds in the learning site. Cassie bravely admits her paralysis, saying her “breath was taken away.” Even with Sonya potentially challenging the insensitivity of the remark, Lois goes “right on facilitating” the activity. Cassie chooses not to intervene after ascertaining what she took to be the mood of the group yet knowing something destructive had just occurred. Other decisions occur when the participants choose not to report the incident on the evaluations. Finally, Sonya does decide to respond and Cassie is left “wondering what in the world to do next.”

Even though the planning for the session had gone well, its enactment required an ongoing series of judgments about what to do in the real time of classroom activity. These decisions are made not only during the activity itself but subsequent to it as well, and each affects the process and the consequence of educational activity itself. Nor does the incident occur in isolation. Indeed, even though the planning has gone smoothly and represents a particular participatory ethic about organizing knowledge and practice, a powerful social force—racism—intrudes. Like the other two stories, then, the story of Cassie’s planning is not only about participants’ learning, but also about reproducing or challenging the political
system of racism. Was the incident as destructive as Cassie feared? What will the consequences be?

**Seeing What Matters II**

**What’s Going On at the Planning Table**

People at physical and metaphorical planning tables plan educational programs. In introducing the three planning stories that are used throughout the book, we identified the planning tables around which people have made decisions about educational programs. There is nothing particularly extraordinary about what is happening in these programs; rather, it is their everydayness that makes them useful for understanding the nuances of working with people in social and organizational contexts. Indeed, what people do in practical situations at these planning tables depends, in part, on how they see what’s going on. Most important, the dynamics of the social and organizational context shape educators’ practical action. The educator’s perspective on these dynamics matters at each of the multiple planning tables for an educational program. Can she see who benefits and who loses from her actions at the table? If not, the planner is likely to be blindsided by the actions of others, as Pete was by the executive vice president. In the Phoenix Company story, a struggle for power was played out through the planning of the program, and that struggle determined, in part, how needs were defined, what was taught and learned, and who benefited from the program.

Pete’s experience points directly to the part of practice that many theories ignore: practical action requires planners to see that educational programs benefit many people in many ways. By assuming that programs are only about educational outcomes such as increased knowledge, most planning theories ask people to see with one eye closed. In contrast, the three planning stories illustrate the driving insights around which we structure this book. In order to see what’s going on at the table, planners need to pay attention to
the educational and the social and political outcomes that people seek to achieve from educational programs. Further, planners need to see that while these outcomes can be distinguished in theory, in practice they are utterly interdependent. As Pete engages in practical action at the table, he simultaneously develops the program’s educational features (purpose, curriculum, instructional formats) and—just as important—seeks to strengthen the power and visibility of the human resources office. Likewise, in the SVP story, Arthur goes into a meeting with questions about how best to organize the educational program, whereas the president of the Society is most concerned with changing the strategic position of the Society in the valuation profession and creating a new income stream for the Society. In the PI story, as the planners develop educational activities consistent with their participatory education vision, they are called also to address the power relations structured by race in society. These stories illustrate the need for adult educators to plan with both eyes open in working the planning table, thus seeing both the educational as well as the social and political outcomes resulting from the program.

These stories demonstrate that in the struggle for the distribution of knowledge and power in social and organizational contexts, educational programs are not a neutral activity. This view calls for a relational analysis that takes seriously the idea that education does not stand outside the unequal relations of power that more generally structure social life; rather, educational programs not only are structured by these relations, but also play a role in reproducing or changing them. The heart of this relational analysis is the fact that “education represents both a struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations. Thus, education becomes a central terrain where power and politics operate out of the lived culture of individuals and groups situated in asymmetrical social and political positions” (Mohanty, 1994, p. 147). Planners’ work, then, embodies the struggle for knowledge and power as it is embedded in wider forces that structure social and organizational life (Cervero & Wilson,
2001). More specifically, planners operate at the intersection of these struggles and structural forces in their practice, seeking to provide programs that simultaneously produce both educational outcomes and social and political outcomes for multiple stakeholders. Even though balancing both sets of outcomes can be difficult, planners can neither “step outside” such conditions nor be neutral about who should benefit. This relational view therefore requires that planners ask that timeless political question about their efforts: Who benefits? Necessarily tied to this political question is the ethical one: Who should benefit? To assume neutrality in educational planning is disingenuous at best. More important, such political naïveté, whether feigned or real, allows others’ social vision and political agendas about who should benefit from educational programs to prevail.

In the remainder of the book, we draw upon these planning stories to exemplify the connections among the technical, political, and ethical dimensions of planning (Caffarella, 2002; Cervero & Wilson, 1994a; Sork, 2000; Sork & Newman, 2004). We conclude Chapter One by locating our approach to planning in the theoretical discussions that have occurred over the past several decades. We discuss how our theory has evolved since we began with the question: What do educational planners really do when they plan programs for adults?

Seeing What Matters III
Planning Theory and Beyond

We have planned hundreds of educational programs for adults over the past thirty years, including community-based adult literacy programs; hospital-based continuing education courses for nurses and physicians; professional development workshops for literacy, community college, and extension educators; antiracism workshops for university faculty members; and graduate courses in adult education. These programs were serious attempts to improve the lives of
people, the organizations in which they worked, and the communities in which they lived. The models that were supposed to guide us did not really account for the realities of working with other people in planning these programs. As faculty members responsible for teaching about planning to practicing educators, we felt a sense of unease that soon became public. How could we teach, and therefore endorse, planning theories that did not even account for our own experience? We had to rely on a literature base that fell profoundly short of making sense of what really mattered in developing educational programs. In 1989 we began to put a name to what really happens and what really matters in planning educational programs.

There was no shortage of program planning models to draw on, as Sork and Buskey (1986) demonstrated in their review of ninety-three program planning models that had been published from 1950 through 1983. They pointed out that since the 1949 publication of “Tyler’s Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction, in which he outlined a decision-making framework that continues to undergird many approaches to programming, a substantial literature has developed” (p. 86). The problem was that although many options were available, there were no true choices. Despite these multiple variations, Tyler’s classical planning logic was both universal and unassailable in every single model (Sork & Buskey, 1986; Wilson & Cervero, 1997): assess needs, construct objectives, develop content, choose instructional methods, and evaluate learning. Tylerian-like theory continues to proliferate today not just in education but in nearly all other planning disciplines as well (Forester, 1989, 1999; Friedman, 1987; Hooper, 1992). From our experience, these theories were not able to see, nor address, all that mattered. The problem has been that most theories have only attended to the dimensions of good planning that address educational agendas (such as developing objectives and evaluating outcomes). Even though adult educators have long acknowledged planning’s political challenges and ethical dilemmas (Boyle, 1981; Brookfield, 1986; Clark, 1958; Griffith, 1978; Newman, 1994), for over fifty years the
literature has been unable to account *theoretically* for these issues. Planning theory has focused on processes used to develop educational outcomes, while it has ignored the social and political outcomes that also result from educational programs. So we kept asking: Where is the real world in these models? What about the messy social and organizational contexts in which people do this work? We found some comfort in Houle’s (1972) insightful assumptions, which suggest that any effort to plan “must be centered as far as possible upon realities, not upon forms or abstractions” (p. 32). Caffarella (1988) had a similar insight in presenting the first version of her own model, fashioned after Tyler’s: “Developing training programs rarely works in a completely logical fashion . . . the more persons that you add to the planning process, the less logical the process tends to be” (p. 36). Caffarella is correct: when educators find themselves in situations in which people are not involved in planning educational programs, the models reviewed by Sork and Buskey (1986) might be excellent guides to practical action.

Our questioning built on others’ insights that these models do not account for what happens when people plan educational programs (Boyle, 1981; Brookfield, 1986; Sandmann, 1993). Boyle (1981) found that “a rational model is rarely, if ever, achieved in the practical world of planning with people” (p. 42). Sork and Caffarella (1989) agreed that “anyone who claims that a planning model accurately represents how planning occurs in practice . . . has a naïve understanding of what planning involves” (p. 234). Brookfield (1986) concluded that the models do not provide effective guides to practical action, leading practitioners to develop their own “context-specific theories-in-use” (p. 259). Sork and Caffarella went even further, asking that new theories be developed that account for the importance of context. Thus, for decades planning theorists have argued that the context for planning matters. Houle’s (1972) two-part planning system—identifying an educational situation and addressing his decision points—is perhaps one of the more powerful presentations of the importance of context. Sork and
Caffarella noted that the “exigencies” of practice might be so complex as to make planning theory irrelevant. Not only was this an explicit recognition that context matters, but their observation also confirms the inability of planning theory to articulate any particular understanding of how context works. Many theories over the decades have included some version of the planning step “to analyze the context” (Boone, 1992; Sork, 2000; Sork & Caffarella, 1989; Sork & Newman, 2004). But too often the exhortation stops there. There has been little discussion in the literature about how to understand the social and political dimensions of the context (Sork, 2000; Wilson & Cervero, 1997). Our initial work sought to characterize the political contexts of planning as negotiating interests in relations of power (Cervero & Wilson, 1994a, 1994b; Cervero & Wilson, 1995). We sought to identify the conditions that planners experience, but that existing theory does not help them to see.

Developing theory to account for the realities of educators’ contexts already had a robust tradition in the K–12 curriculum literature (Reid, 1979; Walker, 1971, 2003), beginning with Schwab’s classic, “The Practical: A Language for Curriculum” (1969). We entered this ongoing questioning of planning models with a desire to produce a theory that could both account for what educators face in their organizational and social settings and serve as a guide to practical action (Cervero & Wilson, 1994a, 1994b; Wilson & Cervero, 1995; Forester, 1989). Foley (1999; see also Apple, 1996) echoes these two criteria, saying that educators have a need for theory “that both explains and enables action” (p. 130). In developing our theory, we took the position that people would not really apply theory to practice. A more accurate understanding is that theory organizes attention to possibilities of action: “theories do not solve problems in the world; people do. Nevertheless, good theory . . . can help alert us to problems, remind us of what we care about, or prompt our practical insights into cases we confront” (Forester, 1989, p. 12).
Historical Development of Cervero and Wilson’s Planning Theory

To be optimally useful, then, planning theories must both account for what actually happens when people plan educational programs and also provide a guide to practical action. We sought to meet these two criteria by deriving a theory from real-time observations of planning for three educational programs (Cervero & Wilson, 1994a). Based on these stories, we defined planning as a social activity whereby people construct educational programs by negotiating personal, organizational, and social interests in contexts marked by socially structured relations of power. The four concepts that structured the theory (power, interests, negotiation, responsibility) account for the world that educators experience, define their essential action, and prescribe their ethical obligations. As a guide to practical action, our theory identifies the repertoire of technical knowledge and skills, the political analyses, and the normative standard of nurturing substantively democratic planning that educators need to master to be able to plan responsibly (Cervero & Wilson, 1994a, 1994b). Whereas previous planning models focused solely on the educational outcomes, the theory posits that planning practice always has two types of outcomes. As planners negotiate interests in relations of power, they produce educational outcomes and, simultaneously, social and political outcomes by reproducing or changing the social and political relationships that make planning possible (Cervero & Wilson, 1994a, 1994b, 1998).

The four key concepts provided the structure of the theory, and we continued to develop areas of the theory in later publications. We introduced the metaphor of the planning table (Cervero & Wilson, 1998) as a way to locate the theoretical concepts in the real world of planning, saying that “planners routinely negotiate power and interests in terms of whose interests get to the planning table and how those interests shape the program. . . . Determining whose interests get to the planning table . . . is the fundamental ethical question” (Wilson & Cervero, 1996, p. 21). Another major development came in response to Sork’s critique (1996) that the
theory “did not distinguish between different kinds of negotiations” (p. 84). Based on a suggestion in his critique, we distinguished more clearly between the substantive negotiations about the educational outcomes of the educational program and metanegotiations about social and political relationships involved in planning the program (Cervero & Wilson, 1998). More recently (Cervero & Wilson, 1999, 2001; Wilson & Cervero, 2001, 2003), we have developed our understandings of adult education as a struggle for knowledge and power in society. This political interpretation of practice, which Sork and Newman (2004) describe as moving “beyond the conventional” (p. 112), asks more precisely who benefits from adult education and in what ways. The question of benefits is critical to understanding the practical action of adult educators in terms of its intentions and consequences. Other adult educators have adopted and adapted some of the concepts into their own models and analyses of planning (Hansman & Mott, 2001; Rothwell & Cookson, 1997; Sork, 1997). In the most recent version of her model, Caffarella (2002) has tended to issues arising from people’s involvement in planning and has made power and negotiation central to understanding the context for planning. Donaldson and Kozoll (1999) have focused on the issues arising in those situations in which institutional collaboration is a central dynamic. Sork (2000) has elaborated on our description of planners’ necessary repertoire of ethical, political, and technical knowledge and skills (Cervero & Wilson, 1994a) to propose a “question-based approach to planning” because he believes “that posing and answering questions will lead to better decisions and therefore better programs” (p. 180).

Who Benefits in the Struggle for Knowledge and Power?

Theory should not be seen as positing some transcendent truth but as providing plausible grounds for politically pitched and ethically illuminated practical action (Harvey, 1996). In seeing educational programs as a terrain in the struggle for knowledge and power, it is
practically and ethically essential to ask who benefits and in what ways (Cervero & Wilson, 2001). Education matters because it is about making individual, organizational, and social change, which benefits people educationally, socially, and politically. In acknowledging that planners deliberately intervene in people’s lives to make change, theories must address the question of who should benefit from these changes. Because education affects the distribution of knowledge and power, there is no politically or ethically innocent position from which to plan programs (Cervero & Wilson, 1999, 2001). By producing both educational and political benefits, planning practice answers the question about whose interests matter (Wilson & Cervero, 2001). Such action should be directed by an ethical commitment to substantively democratic planning (Cervero & Wilson, 1994a). With this ethical commitment, we align ourselves with others (Hall, 2001; Newman, 1999; Walters, 1996; Youngman, 1996) who maintain that all forms of education offer the practical space for the distribution of knowledge and power that creates hope and the possibility for increasing people’s life chances.

To act practically, planners need to understand how social life is organized, have a vision for how education should change the world, and have strategies for achieving this vision (Livingstone, 1983). Chapter Three explains more fully how the theory addresses all three requirements for practical action by offering defining features of social life (power and interests), a vision for educational planning (substantively democratic participation), and negotiation strategies (for consultative, bargaining, and dispute situations). In Chapter Two, we offer a more extensive account of the three planning stories begun in this chapter. These accounts are used to illuminate the presentation of the theory in Chapter Three and its application to specific planning tasks in Chapters Four through Eight.