

For learners at WISR, like longtime WISR faculty member, Vera Labat, Terry was a source of intellectual rigor, insightful curiosity and inspiration. Vera often talks of the weekly action-research seminars that Terry and I conducted way back in the early 1980s. She talks about how those seminars helped her to learn more about asking questions, looking beneath the surface of the obvious things we notice, and critically reflecting the larger implications of our everyday experiences. Each week for over a year, Terry and I would write a short article to use in stimulating discussion for the next week's class—offered in East Oakland's Spanish Speaking Unity Council Building by WISR. The seminars were an important part of our US Department of Education-funded nationwide demonstration project on helping community agency staff learn how to use action-research. This collaboration with Terry helped me to articulate some of the things that I knew but hadn't been able to put into words, and I also came to realize many important things that I didn't know—and, in the class we discussed how with good collaboration, we can come to realize that we know more than we realize, and with good collaboration we can begin to articulate more of what we do know. Terry and I learned, and the others in the class with us, learned as well. Terry was especially adept at helping us to learn more about interviewing—not the kind of interviewing where one pulls out a clipboard and rather robotically asks a standard set of questions. Instead, he reminded us that interviewing is a special example of the down-to-earth discussions we have with others in our everyday lives. It is a way to learn from others—in doing so, we give information to the other person, and we get information from them. With thoughtful reflection, we can learn much that we didn't know before, we can be reminded of what we already knew, and the other person with whom we're talking will learn, as well.

When one is starting a very small institution, it is important that the key people bring many kinds of expertise to the table. Terry had a law degree from the University of Chicago, and a sociology PhD from UC Berkeley. He was also a trained and skilled journalist, and very well-read in many other areas of study, including psychology. With his law expertise, he drafted our first set of By-Laws, which still provide a legal backdrop for our current institutional operations. He used his journalism expertise, and more than that, he drew on his deeply heart-felt human sensitivities in working with me to draft our first catalogue, as well as every other version of our official catalogue since then. He would patiently and painstakingly go over every word and every comma. In the process, I learned much from Terry about how to write better--more tangibly, more clearly and more engagingly. Like others of us on the WISR faculty, Terry had no interest in, or patience for what he aptly called “academic monkey-talk.” In writing WISR's catalogue, we put enormous energy into focusing on the stories of WISR students and alumni—as I said before, WISR is about the stories of the people involved. Over the years, we have received many compliments from people about the distinctive quality of our catalogue—about how we successfully convey many of WISR's distinctive qualities in the catalogue, in large part by telling stories about our students and alumni.

I would add that not only did Terry help the Board to intelligently and inquisitively reflect on and grapple with the issues before us, but also he was the person I always sought out to help me to think about the everyday difficult and challenging questions that might arise. Terry's wife, Rhoda, knew that on any given day she might open her front door to find me sitting in her living room pondering with Terry yet another matter pertaining to WISR. It might be about deciding when it was appropriate to make an exception to our policies and rules—for example, in considering admitting someone without the necessary formal academic prerequisites, or

reinterpreting an academic requirement in light of some particular student's needs and purposes. Terry was always a source of insight—he would bring to our deliberations flexibility as well as caution. He knew the importance of always being open to improvise, while still being careful not to be simply impulsive or expedient. Once we arrived at a possible solution, we would discuss it with others at WISR, and at the end of the process, Terry would provide leadership in helping me to write a detailed explanation of our process and our reasoning, so that there was always a “paper trail” that could communicate to any outsider, for example a State agency evaluating us, the thoughtful and reasoned basis for our making an exception to the rule.

Terry was an integral part of WISR in so many areas—as a faculty advisor for individual students, as a seminar leader and facilitator, as a Board member, as a dedicated member of this small community of learner. In these various roles, and in other ways, Terry modeled many important things for us. In particular, he demonstrated his deep belief that ideas can matter and can make a difference in the world, but only if we put forth conscious effort to connect and reshape the ideas in light of our everyday life experiences. Ivory tower academicians give intellectual pursuits a bad name; Terry restored many people's faith in intellectual pursuits, by showing how intellectual inquiry can be genuinely worthwhile, ethically informed, important in bringing about social change, and experientially meaningful.

Go back to section on Terry Lunsford to read more:

<https://sites.google.com/wisr.edu/celebration-2024/home/recognizing-wisr-leaders>. . .