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EDITORIAL

WORKER EDUCATION / LABOUR LEARNING: TENSIONS AND LESSONS

This special issue of the *McGill Journal of Education* attends to labour education and learning in workers' struggles. Non-formal labour education has a long, rich history in many parts of the world, including Canada (Taylor 2001) and yet is often overlooked in scholarly adult education literature. The informal, often incidental learning which takes place in the course of labour organizing, strikes, and campaigns is also under-theorized (Novelli, 2004). Labour educators, organizers and other practitioners in a range of worker education milieus often lack the time to document or articulate their practice. Labour education and learning is also contested terrain. Some unions have extensive education programs and utilize approaches which draw from Freire and other traditions of popular adult education. Yet other programs may obscure or deny conflict and risk among participants, two essential components of deeper learning and understanding (Bleakney & Morrill 2010; Wilmot 2012). The articles in this issue explore and critically theorize approaches to and perspectives on learning and education in trade unions and workers' struggles while calling attention to the educational significance, possibilities, tensions and challenges of such work. This includes discussion of the relationship between education in formal institutions such as universities and learning in trade union settings and the broader labour movement.

In this issue, Salim Vally, Mphutlane wa Bofelo, and John Treat review key moments and dynamics in the trajectory of South African worker education. They contend that the legacy of worker education in South Africa is a rich and proud one from which much can be learned. The authors assert that worker education played a crucial role in the development of the trade union movement in South Africa and in the broader struggle for social transformation, but has suffered a decline in the post-apartheid years. Yet they write that there remains a significant legacy and influence of the traditions of worker education and militant trade unionism in South Africa, which can be drawn upon in reclaiming and re-energizing the rich tradition of South African workers' class-conscious struggle for a better world. The article aims to deepen the historical understanding of these developments in order to strengthen the ability to reach better-informed conclusions and draw salient lessons.

Susan Carter insists that viewing the everyday practices of unions through the lens of learning can both make visible, and more meaningfully intervene in, the everyday individual and collective learning of unions, activists, and workers. Drawing from Canadian union experience and using cultural historical activity theory (CHAT), Carter discusses the grievance procedure as a routine (and central) union practice and a key site of informal learning. While acknowledging that the grievance process is bureaucratic, heavily mediated by rules and division of labour with limited available tools, Carter suggests that it is the primary place where workers bring their experiences of injustice, seeking and expecting resolution / compensation. In concluding, she argues that CHAT also presents a powerful pedagogical tool for educators, leaders and activists.

Linda Cooper, Barbara Jones, Mphutlane Bofelo, Anitha Shah and Kessie Moodley argue that the model of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in use at the Workers' College in South Africa may be seen as a form of "radical pedagogy." Drawing on documentary sources, focus group interviews and observations, the article describes an educational philosophy which aims to build the competencies of activists in labour and community organizations, facilitate their self-affirmation and dignity, and provide an access route to post-school education. It attempts to theorize how this philosophy is enacted in classroom pedagogy, and explores tensions and contradictions encountered. For the authors, education must be seen in the broad context of bringing about change in intellectual understanding, contributing and developing new knowledge and responding creatively to the conditions and realities of society. The article concludes by acknowledging the unique contribution of these educational practices to an understanding of what RPL as 'radical pedagogy' might look like.

John Stirling analyzes the development of a union education program in Sierra Leone. This article discusses the limits and potentialities of a radical pedagogy when trade unions are constrained to engage with existing power structures that use English as the dominant language. He discusses how expectations of trade unions as agents of radical change are tempered by their need to be representatives of workers in the day-to-day reality of their lives and working relationships. Trade union education programs reflect such tensions and are pulled in different directions both in terms of content and delivery. These tensions are pushed into particularly stark relief in Sierra Leone with the legacy of British colonialism, the struggles of development and a severely under-resourced trade union movement.

In the final peer-reviewed article in this issue, Richard Wells argues that at a time when neo-liberal reformers push for a more instrumentalist form of higher education, older traditions of worker education, and more recent university-based labour studies programs, offer a compelling counter-narrative concerning the social and political purpose of US higher education. Building from

C.W. Mills' notion of the sociological imagination, Wells argues that labour studies has the potential not only to re-energize the transformational mission of popular worker education, but reclaim the idea of higher education as a public good. Teaching students, most of whom come to the program through building trades unions in a public university-based labour studies program in New York, he contends that thinking and talking sociologically can lead not only to critical knowledge of how and why the world works the way it does. It can help workers translate problems faced as individuals or as members of a particular union into public issues, around which they, along with others both inside and beyond their union, might mobilize politically.

Four notes from the field, and a contribution to the new MJE Forum feature round off this issue. Members of the Association of Graduate Students Employed at McGill (AGSEM) discuss learning in struggles for workers' rights and student-worker organizing and solidarity at McGill University; Wajih Elayassa writes on workers' education programs in Palestine; Helena Worthen writes on a union members' creative writing class in the US; and Clayton Sinyai, Pete Stafford, and Chris Trahan discuss building trades union-driven, peer-led occupational safety training in the US construction industry. Our co-authored Forum contribution on learning, education and knowledge production in workers' struggles is adapted from a presentation at the United Association of Labor Education Conference in Toronto in April 2013. The MJE Forum aims to open conversations and exchanges about topics related to education: here, specifically we invite responses from readers who may wish to share their accounts of learning and knowledge production in labour education / organizing settings, and/or to engage with the critiques we put forward. Heartfelt thanks to all the contributors and reviewers who worked on this issue.

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ÉDITORIAL

FORMATION DES TRAVAILLEURS / APPRENTISSAGE AU TRAVAIL : TENSIONS ET LEÇONS

Cette édition spéciale de la *Revue des sciences de l'éducation* s'intéresse à la formation et aux apprentissages des travailleurs en contexte de luttes ouvrières. Dans plusieurs parties du monde, incluant le Canada, l'éducation non formelle des ouvriers possède un long et riche historique (Taylor 2001). Pourtant, ce type de formation est encore souvent ignoré dans les travaux de recherche portant sur l'éducation aux adultes. Les apprentissages informels et fréquemment fortuits ayant lieu au sein d'organisations de travailleurs, de grèves et de campagnes syndicales sont aussi sous-étudiés (Novelli 2004). Les formateurs et organisateurs syndicaux œuvrant dans une variété de milieux de formation des travailleurs manquent régulièrement de temps pour documenter ou exposer leurs pratiques. La formation et l'apprentissage des travailleurs est également un domaine contesté. Certains syndicats possèdent des programmes éducatifs poussés et utilisent des approches inspirées de Freire et des traditions populaires d'éducation aux adultes. Certains autres programmes cependant camouflent ou nient les conflits et les risques entre les participants, soit deux composantes fondamentales à un apprentissage et une compréhension approfondis (Bleakney et Morrill 2010; Wilmot 2012). Les articles de cette édition explorent et théorisent de manière critique les approches relatives et les perspectives propres à l'apprentissage et à l'éducation dans le cadre des associations syndicales et des luttes ouvrières tout en attirant l'attention des lecteurs sur l'intérêt, les possibilités, les tensions et les défis éducationnels de ce travail. Ceci implique une discussion des relations entre l'éducation au sein d'institutions officielles, telles que les universités, et l'apprentissage dans le cadre de syndicats ou de mouvements ouvriers plus larges.

Dans cette édition, Salim Vally, Mphutlane wa Bofelo et John Treat s'attardent aux moments-clés et à la dynamique de l'évolution de la formation des travailleurs en Afrique du Sud. Ils soutiennent que l'héritage sud-africain de l'éducation des travailleurs est un riche et fier legs duquel il est possible d'apprendre énormément. Les auteurs avancent que la formation des travailleurs a joué un rôle crucial dans le développement des mouvements syndicaux en Afrique du Sud et dans les luttes plus vastes pour la transformation sociale, mais a connu un déclin au cours des années postapartheid. Or, ils soulignent

qu'il subsiste un héritage significatif et une influence des traditions d'éducation des travailleurs et du militantisme syndical en Afrique du Sud, desquels il est possible de s'inspirer pour se réapproprier et insuffler une énergie nouvelle à la riche tradition de travailleurs conscients des luttes de classes à mener pour un monde meilleur. Cet article vise à approfondir la compréhension historique de ces développements afin d'améliorer la capacité à formuler des conclusions éclairées et tirer des leçons utiles.

Susan Carter affirme qu'aborder les pratiques syndicales quotidiennes sous l'angle des apprentissages peut donner davantage de visibilité et permettre d'intervenir de manière plus significative au niveau des apprentissages effectués quotidiennement par les associations syndicales, les activistes et les travailleurs, de façon individuelle et collective. En se basant sur les expériences syndicales canadiennes, et en s'inspirant de l'influence culturelle et historique telle qu'expliquée par la théorie de l'activité (TA), Carter présente la procédure de règlement des griefs comme une pratique routinière (et centrale) ainsi qu'un terreau propice aux apprentissages informels. Tout en reconnaissant le caractère bureaucratique de la procédure, lourdement encadrée par des règles, une division du travail et un nombre limité d'outils disponibles, Carter souligne que c'est l'endroit de prédilection des travailleurs lorsqu'il s'agit d'exprimer les injustices vécues et de chercher / espérer une résolution / compensation. En conclusion, l'auteure insiste sur le fait que la TA possède également un fort potentiel comme outil pédagogique pour les formateurs, les leaders et les activistes.

Linda Cooper, Barbara Jones, Mphutlane Bofelo, Anitha Shah et Kessie Moodley soutiennent que le modèle de reconnaissance des acquis (RPL) utilisé dans un Workers' College sud-africain peut être considéré comme une forme de «pédagogie radicale». S'inspirant de sources documentaires, de groupes de discussion et d'observations, le texte décrit une philosophie éducationnelle cherchant à développer les compétences des activistes militant au sein d'organisations ouvrières et communautaires, à favoriser leur sens de l'affirmation et leur dignité ainsi qu'à offrir une voie d'accès à l'éducation postscolaire. Dans cet article, les auteurs tentent d'élaborer une théorie sur la manière dont cette philosophie est appliquée lors de l'enseignement en classe et explorent certaines des tensions et contradictions rencontrées. Pour ceux-ci, l'éducation peut être perçue, dans un sens large, comme ayant pour buts de provoquer un changement dans la compréhension intellectuelle, de contribuer au développement de nouvelles connaissances et de réagir de manière créative aux conditions et réalités sociales. L'article se termine en reconnaissant la contribution unique de ces pratiques éducationnelles à une meilleure compréhension de ce que peut être la RPL comme « pédagogie radicale ».

John Stirling analyse le développement d'un programme de formation syndicale en Sierra Leone. Dans son article, celui-ci aborde les limites et les

perspectives d'une pédagogie radicale lorsque les associations syndicales sont contraintes de collaborer avec des structures décisionnelles dont l'anglais est la langue dominante. Il explique la manière par laquelle les espoirs des associations syndicales comme agents de changement sont limités par le besoin de représenter le vécu et les relations de travail des travailleurs au quotidien. Les programmes de formation au sein des syndicats reflètent ces tensions et offrent des contenus et des modes de livraison épars, allant dans toutes les directions. Ces tensions sont particulièrement évidentes en Sierra Leone, un pays aux prises avec l'héritage du colonialisme britannique, les difficultés de développement et un mouvement syndical qui souffre d'un manque important de ressources.

Dans le dernier article révisé par les pairs, Richard Wells avance qu'à une époque où les réformateurs néolibéraux militent pour une forme plus productive d'éducation supérieure, de vieilles traditions de formation des travailleurs et de récents programmes universitaires d'études du travail proposent une contre-proposition intéressante en ce qui a trait aux objectifs sociaux et politiques de l'éducation supérieure aux États-Unis. S'inspirant de la notion d'imagination sociologique de C.W. Mills, Wells soutient que les études du travail ont le potentiel non seulement d'insuffler une énergie nouvelle à la mission transformatrice de la formation populaire des travailleurs, mais affirme que l'éducation supérieure doit être un bien public. Wells enseigne à New York au sein d'un programme d'études du travail offert dans une université publique et dans lequel la majorité des étudiants appartiennent à une association syndicale du domaine de la construction. L'auteur soutient que réfléchir et prendre la parole sur un plan sociologique peut mener non seulement à comprendre de manière critique comment et pourquoi le monde fonctionne ainsi. Selon Wells, ceci peut également aider les travailleurs à traduire les problèmes rencontrés sur une base individuelle ou en tant que membres d'un syndicat spécialisé en problématiques publiques, pour lesquelles les travailleurs avec la collaboration d'autres membres de leur syndicat ou d'autres organisations, peuvent se mobiliser au plan politique.

Quatre notes provenant du terrain et une contribution du nouveau forum de la Revue mettent la touche finale à cette édition. Les membres de l'Association des étudiants et étudiantes diplômés (ées) employés (ées) de McGill (AÉÉDEM) abordent la notion d'apprentissages au sein des combats menés pour les droits des travailleurs ainsi qu'au cœur des organisations de travailleurs-étudiants et de manifestations de solidarité à l'Université McGill. Alors que Wajih Elayassa écrit sur les programmes de formation des travailleurs en Palestine, Helena Worthen témoigne d'un cours de création littéraire mis sur pied par des membres d'un syndicat. Quant à Clayton Sinyai, Pete Stafford, and Chris Trahan ils s'intéressent aux syndicats du domaine de la construction et à la formation en matière de sécurité pilotée par les pairs dans cette industrie aux États-Unis. Cette contribution multi-auteurs de notre forum, portant sur

l'apprentissage, la formation et la production du savoir au sein des conflits ouvriers, est adaptée d'une présentation faite à la *United Association of Labor Education Conference* à Toronto en avril 2013. Le Forum de la RSÉM vise à inviter des conversations et des échanges sur des sujets en lien avec l'éducation. Ici, nous invitons précisément les réponses des lecteurs(es) qui souhaitent partager leurs expériences d'apprentissage et de développement de connaissances dans l'éducation syndicale/des contextes organisationnels, et/ou de s'engager avec des critiques que nous pouvons mettre de l'avant. Nous offrons nos remerciements les plus sincères à tous les collaborateurs et réviseurs ayant travaillé sur ce numéro.

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WORKER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: LESSONS AND CONTRADICTIONS

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ABSTRACT. Worker education played a crucial role in the development of the trade union movement in South Africa and in the broader struggle for social transformation. This article reviews key moments and dynamics in the trajectory of worker education in South Africa. We argue that international developments, the rise of neoliberalism, and the negotiated compromise between the African National Congress (ANC) and the apartheid state, as well as corporatism resulted in changes to worker education. While the latter as it existed in the past has weakened, the centre of gravity has shifted to community organizations where various forms of learning and creativity continue. Despite the challenges and setbacks of recent years, there remains a significant legacy and influence of the traditions of worker education and militant trade unionism in South Africa, which can and should be drawn upon.

FORMATION DES TRAVAILLEURS EN AFRIQUE DU SUD : LEÇONS ET CONTRADICTIONS

RÉSUMÉ. La formation des travailleurs a joué un rôle déterminant dans le développement du mouvement syndicaliste en Afrique du Sud et dans l'ensemble des luttes pour la transformation sociale. Cet article survole les moments-clés et les dynamiques de l'évolution de la formation des travailleurs en Afrique du Sud. Nous soutenons que les développements sur le plan international, la montée du néolibéralisme et les compromis négociés entre le Congrès national africain (ANC) et le gouvernement d'apartheid, ainsi que le corporatisme, ont provoqué des changements dans la formation des travailleurs. Alors que la forme sous laquelle elle existait dans le passé s'est affaiblie, le cœur de ses activités réside désormais au sein d'organisations communautaires, où des formes diverses d'apprentissages et de créativité se poursuivent. Malgré les défis et les échecs au cours des dernières années, il reste encore un héritage important et une influence des traditions de la formation des travailleurs et du mouvement militant syndicaliste en Afrique du Sud, desquels il est possible et essentiel de s'inspirer.

Worker education played a crucial role in the development of the trade union movement in South Africa and in the broader struggle for social transformation — especially in the two decades since the re-emergence of worker militancy in the early 1970s. Despite that rich tradition, worker education has suffered a serious decline in the post-apartheid years. In order to understand this decline and draw the appropriate lessons, it is vital to view South Africa's experience with worker education against the backdrop of the socio-economic and political shifts that accompanied the end of apartheid, and to grasp the economic and ideological agendas that inform worker education discourses and practices. It is also useful to review both the richness of the worker education tradition that played this vital role, as well as some of the key points in its trajectory.

Worker education was simultaneously a consequence, a platform, a site, and a weapon of struggle for the oppressed people of South Africa generally and the black working class in particular. With its humble origins in the adult night schools education movement throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the tradition of South African workers and their allies to provide emancipatory, politically meaningful learning for themselves and others would eventually achieve their fullest expression in the dynamic 1980s, with its dramatic upsurge in literacy programs, workers' cultural manifestations, and educational efforts to support trade union organizing and industrial action. These activities both arose out of and catalysed the vibrancy in the union organizing of those years, which would ultimately play a crucial role in putting an end to white minority rule.

The strike wave of 1972-73 and the Soweto uprising in 1976 led to the legalization of black union structures (albeit within tight constraints) by the apartheid state in a failed attempt to control workers and tame their militancy. The dramatic upsurge in union membership and activity that followed changed the conditions for, and the nature of, worker education in the ensuing years. These activities took a wide variety of structured and unstructured forms, and were often marked by remarkable ingenuity and creativity — particularly considered against the backdrop of decades of ferocious repression, and the apartheid state's "Bantu" education system. The latter inspired Steve Biko's aphorism, "The most powerful weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed" (cited in Arnold, 1979, p. xx).

Formal worker education efforts took the form of highly structured seminars, workshops, and training programs. Informal efforts varied from treating mass transportation of workers as "rolling classrooms"[1] to a dizzying range of cultural and mass-media forms, including the writing and production of plays, poetry readings, songs and musical choirs, and dozens of community-based and trade union newsletters. These efforts aimed to provide everything from general literacy and technical work-related skills to running democratic and

accountable union structures, organizing, political consciousness and social mobilization.

Trade unions in this period were referred to both as "schools of labour" and "laboratories for democracy" where workers could test out new ideas, arrive at new understanding, and develop and enrich collective practices (Vally, 1994). In the context of an apartheid system, where basic democratic processes were denied to the majority, unions played a crucial role in introducing concepts such as accountability, representation, participation, report backs, and the principle of recall. Through their informal learning experience as well as the intensive education carried out in shop-steward councils and workshops, worker representatives gained confidence to engage with their unions' officials on contested organizational and political issues (Vally, 1994). It was a period in which "[w]orkers searched memory, each other, history, the world, political texts, for ideas and knowledge, bringing everything into their intellectual embrace" (Cooper, Andrews, Grossman & Vally, 2002, pp. 119-120).

Education was grounded in the structures of the unions (where education committees linked to shop-steward councils featured prominently in some of the more militant unions; see Vally, 1994), and played a key role in linking the struggles of workers who were geographically dispersed and located in different industries. Union education also encouraged the development of a large leadership layer of workers who, despite limited formal education, went on to play a crucial role in the strengthening of the broader anti-apartheid movement. During this period, as Cooper et al. (2002) wrote:

> The production and sharing of knowledge was consciously linked to cultural work such as the production of songs, plays, and poetry and mass media was used to inform workers and build the basis for campaigns. Even more significant were the schools of labour where workers developed important new insights and understandings through a wide range of experiences: everyday struggles on the shop-floor, experiences of meeting, organising, and taking part in collective decision-making, and the experience of mass action such as strikes or stay-aways. (p. 112)

While worker education played a vital role in the genesis and rise of the trade union movement in South Africa — and thus in the eventual overthrow of the explicit policy of apartheid — macro-economic and educational policy decisions in the years following the 1992-1994 transition decisively reshaped the policy, political and material environment in which such efforts were pursued. Those changes seriously undermined the robust and self-consciously political tradition of worker education in South Africa.

THE RISE OF THE INDEPENDENT TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AND RADICAL WORKER EDUCATION FORMATIONS[2]

While systematic and widespread worker education in South Africa only emerged in the wake of the 1973 strikes in Durban, the country's tradition of worker education can be traced back to the formation of the first union for black workers in 1919. That year, the first black trade union was formed by dock workers in Cape Town: the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU). Shortly after its establishment the ICU formed branches in all of South Africa's provinces and claimed a membership of 100,000 (Lacom, 1989, p. 69).

However, the ICU was prohibited from organizing at the mines or the railways — key points in South Africa's production processes — and so was effectively limited to rural areas and townships. Internally, the organization had no clear structures ensuring worker control, and suffered from serious ideological differences as well as widespread corruption. This combination of external constraints and internal divisions led to its decline in the late 1920s. The expulsion of Communist Party members robbed the ICU of a number of people centrally involved in worker education activities.

Worker organizing and education efforts were severely impaired over the next several decades, not least due to the election in June 1948 of the National Party government and imposition of the party's racial policy of apartheid. Black trade unions remained illegal and all but non-existent until the Commission of Inquiry into Labour Legislation also known as the Wiehahn Commission (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1979) finally called in 1979 for the legalization of trade unions. The Commission was established following the Durban strikes of 1973 and the Soweto uprising of 1976, and its report called for sweeping reforms, including most crucially the granting of legal recognition to black trade unions (albeit with tight restrictions).

The 1970s were decisive in the emergence of intensive worker education programs in South Africa. Rising worker militancy encouraged the formation of a range of organizations committed to worker education. This rising militancy was the result of several factors. Repression and division of black workers through the 1960s combined with increased monopolization of key industries brought dramatic increases in economic growth, even as the majority suffered increasing poverty. Inspired by liberation struggles in neighbouring countries, conscientized by the Black Consciousness Movement, and outraged by the glaring inequality produced by the system they served, workers felt increasingly compelled and emboldened to challenge the state and capital.

The first sign of the emboldened workers movement was a series of strikes in 1972 and 1973. Over the course of 1972, roughly 20,000 Namibian contract workers brought the mining industry to a halt (Lacom, 1989, p. 161). The strike — a direct attack on the migrant contract labour system — was broken by force, with mass arrests and killings.

The peak of strike activity in the period was reached in 1973 when an estimated 100,000 workers participated in a series of short but widespread industrial strikes mainly in the then Natal province, mobilized around the slogan "*Ufilumuneti, Ufe Usadikiza*!" ("The person is dead, but his spirit is alive!"). In the first three months, 61,000 workers were involved in 160 strikes (Lacom, 1989, p. 163). The scale of this strike wave was likely due in large part to the fact that Durban's industrial working class was concentrated in large factories located in close proximity to each other, facilitating the rapid spread of action from one factory to another. As a result of this strike wave, workers' wages increased 15%-18% throughout South Africa (Lacom, 1989, p. 167).

The success of this wave instilled a new sense of confidence and consciousness among black workers, leading to a marked resurgence of radical trade unionism. This resurgence in trade union militancy in turn quickly renewed interest in worker education programs. In response, a range of new educational projects were initiated throughout the country, and existing initiatives saw rapid expansion. The Urban Training Project (UTP), which had been formed in 1971 in Johannesburg, soon had branches in several additional cities (Durban, Port Elizabeth, Vereeniging, Pretoria and Klerksdorp). Activists with the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) and the Black People's Convention (BPC), many of whom had been deeply influenced by the writings of Paulo Freire, were keenly involved in non-formal education, setting up the Black Workers Project in 1972. The following year saw the formation of the Institute for Industrial Education (IIE) in Durban and the Industrial Aid Society (IAS) in Johannesburg.

Countervailing initiatives set up by capital, such as the Institute for Industrial Relations (IIR) (formed by Bobby Godsell and Alex Boraine of the mining multinational Anglo-American in 1976), sought to counter this burgeoning militancy and political consciousness and shape worker attitudes in favour of employers (Seftel, 1983).

UTP and IIE were instrumental or closely involved in the formation of the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) and the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) respectively, the forerunners of the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). UTP is particularly important as it served the educational needs of CUSA, of unaffiliated unions such as the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA) and the Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU), as well as some FOSATU affiliates; UTP also served NACTU until 1990.

UTP arose after the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA), a union of several dozen mainly white and mixed unions, had changed its constitution in 1969, effectively excluding black trade unions from membership (after having allowed them membership a mere seven years earlier). By 1973, UTP

had initiated the formation of eleven different trade unions, which together formed the "Consultative Committee of Black Trade Unions" (CCOBTU) (Vally, 1994, p. 26).

From its earliest days, UTP foresaw a close relationship between education and organization; its aims were "to educate workers on how their lives and needs as people can be met, for example, through establishing sound workers organizations and independent trade unions with leaders elected by the members" (UTP, 1977). This ambitious, worker-centred vision found fertile ground amongst the rapidly radicalizing black working class. In 1975, attendance at its courses and seminars stood at less than 1,000. By 1985 it was recorded that twenty-four unions with a combined membership approaching 200,000 used UTP's services (UTP, 1976, p. 13). Throughout its existence, but especially during the heady period of 1984-86 — seen as a period of heightened mass mobilization and increased state repression — UTP's personnel faced harassment from the state, with several educators detained at various intervals.

In its educational activities, UTP recognized and strove to apply what it called "generally accepted Worker/Adult Education Principles." These included:

- Education to be active and not passive;
- Education to actively use the experiences of course participants to highlight significances of events affecting them;
- Education to be based on the needs of those receiving it thus respecting their self-determination;
- Education to equip those receiving it to help themselves. (UTP, 1985, p. 5)

These principles were manifested through a method used by the Young Christian Workers (YCW) organization, and adopted by UTP. The YCW called this the "See, Judge and Act" method. It was similar to Freire's method of "conscientização" [conscientization], stressing solidarity of labour and aimed at securing concrete change in the reality of the lives of working people through action.

Among UTP's first worker education activities was the publication of a "Workers' Calendar." Between ten- and twenty-thousand copies were distributed in the first few years (initially through churches, later through unions at factories). They contained minimal text (written in isiZulu, seSotho and English), relying heavily on illustrations, and were designed to serve not simply as calendars but as organizational and educational tools. According to UTP founding organizer Eric Tyacke: "We decided on a calendar because it would not be kept in people's pockets but put in their homes, so that when visitors came it could be a discussion point" (quoted in Seftel, 1983, p. 52).

Each edition of the calendar would focus on issues directly affecting workers that year, so that it became part of the organizing program of the unions. The first edition, for example, covered the inadequate regime of legal protections and benefits available to workers. In 1973, to coincide with and support the

tentative steps toward forming independent unions, it focused on collective action at the workplace. For 1974, it highlighted and explained the differences between "liaison committees" formed by management and trade unions formed by members. Later editions would explore the functions and duties of unions and their members, as well as issues such as the basic conditions of employment, health and safety rights, grievance procedures, retrenchment (or layoff) policies, working hours and leave policies. Many of these continued to serve as valuable reference points and discussion tools long after the year for which they had been printed.

The initial courses convened by UTP consisted of five two-hour sessions, generally only loosely structured, and organized around participants' needs and priorities. Specific activities included discussion groups, simulation games, and role plays; the latter were found to be especially important due to the lack of self-confidence amongst participants. In response to the dramatic increase in demand for worker education opportunities that accompanied this upsurge in membership and organization, residential courses over a period of two to four days became the norm and courses were conducted in languages preferred by workers.

Union membership and activity rose dramatically in the years following the presentation to parliament in May 1979 of the report from the Wiehahn Commission (RSA, 1979). This resulted quickly in the formation of two new trade union federations: the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), and the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA). Union membership around the country rose dramatically, and new union formations and structures proliferated. As Cooper et al. (2002) wrote:

> Amongst all these unions, the influence of the 1976 student generation was evident. Growing worker militancy was expressed in the large number of strikes in the early 1980s, and in a number of cases, workers began to enjoy systematically organised and widespread solidarity action from students and the community at large. (p. 117)

The formation of FOSATU was a particularly significant event in South African labour history. Despite harassment by the state (numerous leaders of the union movement were banned and detained), the strong shop-floor organization of the new unions forced the state to realise that it could not crush the unions by force alone. Between 1978 and 1981, legislation was enacted allowing unions greater freedom. In this way the state attempted to control unions — a process involving a combination of repression and reform.

In the early 1980s, FOSATU concentrated on building a strong shop-floor organization based on democratic worker participation. Broader community issues were neglected although this changed in 1984. At FOSATU's 1982 congress, Joe Foster, secretary of the federation, alluded to the formation of a workers' party. This speech, drawn up by a leadership collective in FOSATU,

confirmed that FOSATU was looking for an alternative to traditional forms of political organization. FOSATU's thinking constituted an open but unstated challenge to the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Communist Party (SACP) and its exiled trade-union partner in the alliance, the South African Council of Trade Unions (SACTU). According to Foster:

> Workers need their own organisation to counter the growing power of capital and to further protect their own interests in the wider society. However it is only workers who can build this organisation, and in doing this they have to be clear on what they are doing... This organisation is necessary to protect and further worker interests and to ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will in the end have no option but to turn against their worker supporters. (quoted in Callinicos, 1988, p. 95)

A series of articles in the FOSATU newspaper *FOSATU News* on the birth of the Workers' Party of Brazil and the independent trade union movement Solidarity in Poland helped to popularize the idea of struggling for a similar development in South Africa.

The educative role of other cultural forms such as choirs also needs some mention. In the early eighties, choirs formed by workers from companies such as Pretoria Auto Plastics, Frame, Simba Quix, Kelloggs and Braitex were popular. Khosi Maseko from the Braitex choir, explaining the wide repertoire of her choir, had this to say:

> We sing international songs like "Solidarity Forever," "Ballad of Joe Hill" and "The Working Folk of this Country Rise Again".... We also compose our own songs, sometimes using old tunes. We sing mostly in English and Zulu and we have just composed a Sotho song. We have prepared new songs for the FOSATU Education Workshop. One is a greeting song where we sing: "Even if I die I will still remember FOSATU." Another song is about GST [General Sales Tax] and income tax. The choir sees the recent exemptions as proof of the power of unions. Also we wrote songs about workers' unity. (quoted in South African Labour Bulletin, 1984, p. 114)

From 1982, FOSATU held national "Education Workshops." The direction of these workshops changed in 1983 in that a greater cultural dimension was introduced. Courses and lectures were combined with cultural events. In 1984, the two-week workshop culminated in an "Open Day" which was a festival of plays, choirs, dance groups, storytelling, children's events and videos.

The shop-stewards' councils played an important educative role in that different struggles were discussed, issues analysed and lessons learned. The councils relied on report backs and mandates, thereby encouraging worker democracy from below and the development of worker leadership. The first council was formed by shop-stewards in the Germiston area of the East Rand in April 1981 (Lacom, 1989, p.191). At this point the FOSATU constitution made no provision for shop-stewards' councils. Nevertheless, the initiative spread from the East Rand to all areas in which FOSATU had a presence. In April 1982,

FOSATU formally amended its constitution to include shop-stewards' councils as part of the structures of the federation. These councils became the foundation not only for FOSATU affiliates but for most other industrial unions.

The South African state in the 1980s faced simultaneously an economic and a political crisis. Economically, South Africa was in the throes of a severe recession. It was faced with a fiscal crisis, balance of payment problems, the depletion of its foreign exchange reserves, and the low value of the rand, inflation and unemployment. The years 1984-85 were also considered by some to be a period of insurrection. It was in these years that new forms of struggle by workers and students came to the fore. Factory occupations, alternate education and street / defence committees made their embryonic appearances. In 1984, there were 469 strikes, mobilizing 181,942 workers (Callinicos, 1988, p. 102). On October 30th, 1985, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was formed with a membership of over half a million. After four years of attempts at unity between different federations, CUSA and the Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions (AZACTU) remained outside COSATU and later combined to form the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU).

During the four years of unity talks, significant debates took place which still have resonance today. These debates revolved around the role of trade unions in the liberation struggle. At the base of these debates are fundamental questions such as democracy, specific representation of trade unions in political fronts, alliances, and most importantly the independence of worker organizations. These debates were also in part characterized as one between the "workerists" who supported the adoption of a Workers' Charter as the expression of the workers' independent voice, and the supporters of the ANC/SACP or the "populists" who favoured adopting the ANC's Freedom Charter. The ascendency of the ANC/SACP supporters and the decline of the "workerists" is well documented elsewhere (Vally, 1994; Cooper et al., 2002).

In the townships as well, struggles continued unabated. Between 1984 and 1986, thousands of students boycotted school in protest against "gutter" education. The Tricameral Parliament (derisively dismissed as a "kitchen" parliament by the democratic movement — an attempt by the apartheid regime to reform the whites-only parliament) was effectively undermined through resistance. Out of the 34 municipal councils elected in December 1983, only three were still functioning by the end of 1985. Two hundred local councillors were forced to resign (Callinicos, 1988, p.48). The regime made its opponents pay a high price for challenging its rule: during 1985 alone, the first state of emergency was declared, nearly 1,200 people were killed, many were maimed, and nearly 25,000 were arrested (Vally, 1994).

The struggle in these years, while heroic, was wracked with internal contradictions, an absence of long-term perspective, and plagued with sectarianism that on occasion gave rise to vicious internecine conflict. Many of these factors created

an opening for "agent provocateurs" and for the police, who often channelled the discontent into physical struggles among the oppressed (Vally, 1994).

Antonio Gramsci (1971), describing Italy before the fascist takeover, could well have been referring to South Africa when he wrote: "The old order is dying, but the new refuses to be born, in this great interregnum a whole series of morbid symptoms arise" (p. 58). The application of the "necklace" method — the horrific practice of summary execution carried out by forcing a rubber tire, filled with petrol, around a victim's chest and arms, and setting it on fire — came to symbolize the apocalyptic situation into which South Africa was plunged. Although this was meted out to collaborators, it was often used against those where mere suspicion or circumstantial evidence was present. More ominously, it was also used against ideological opponents in the liberation movement (Vally, 1994).

The promulgation of the second state of emergency in June 1986 saw the trade union movement become one of the prime targets of the state. The fear of the regime that their actions would trigger a general strike by the unions did not materialize. It was largely the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA) which came out on strike. What existed in CCAWUSA was a rank-and-file confidence and organization which allowed it to build a strike wave on the initiative of workers. The union continued to function and fight despite many officials and leaders being arrested or going into hiding. COSATU's slowness in supporting CCAWUSA's actions was disappointing. Its indecisiveness in building on CCAWUSA's militancy appeared to allow the state and employers to control the situation.

The demoralization in the second half of 1986 was again broken by CCAWUSA. This came in the form of the strike by 11,000 O.K. Bazaars shop workers over a period of 10 weeks. On the heels of the O.K. strike came massive strikes by the South African Transport Services (SATS) workers as well as postal, municipal, SASOL and mine workers. Not all of these strikes were successful but they opened space for tremendous militancy throughout 1987.

In 1987, the campaigns for a living wage and the mobilizations against the Labour Relations Amendment Bill (LRAB) overlapped. The LRAB was an attempt to curtail the gains won by the union movement. Unfortunately, conflicts between unions in COSATU and the rivalry between NACTU and COSATU largely put paid to the effective initial coordination of these campaigns nationally. These campaigns were revitalized in June 1988. COSATU and NACTU jointly mounted the biggest three-day stayaway in South African history. Three million workers came out in support of the call.

Worker education programs in the unions in this period pivoted around the struggle for a living wage and against the new labour relations bill. COSATU widely distributed a "Living Wage Campaign Newsletter" which explicitly

linked the struggle for a living wage to the struggle against capitalism and for a worker controlled society.

At the high point of the struggles of the 1980s, major trade union structures had developed and entrenched an expansive and profoundly politicized vision of worker education. Gramsci argued that the institutions of the workers' movement should provide an educational context that "should effect a radical transformation of the workers' mentality and should make the masses better equipped to exercise power" (Hoare, 1977, p. 68) while emphasizing the importance of providing literacy and cognitive skills as well as technical education for workers. Gramsci's perspective informed a number of workers' education interventions in South Africa. An extract from the 1985 handbook on education produced by the Johannesburg branch of CCAWUSA provides an indicative example:

> The primary objective of the Education Department is to equip members at all levels of our union with knowledge to strengthen their hand in struggles with the bosses and the state. We believe in Education for Liberation. The long term of all our programmes will be geared to:
>
> 1. Politicise, organise and mobilise our members so that they play the leading role in the transformation of our society into an economic, social and political system controlled by workers to satisfy the needs and interests of those presently oppressed and exploited.
>
> 2. Develop the practice and understanding of democracy which will allow for maximum participation and decision making power for workers now and in the future socialist society we wish to build.
>
> 3. Develop the human potential of all our people to the fullest, to create and transform skills and abilities so that they are accessible and useful to our people. (CCAWUSA, 1985, p. 2)

Reflecting an orientation and set of influences and a similarly radical vision for education — and with an explicitly internationalist perspective — the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1987 argued that worker education should:

> discourage individualism, competitiveness and careerism; be directed against racism, sexism, elitism and hierarchy; promote a collective outlook and working class consciousness; be linked, as part of the struggle for socialism to production "in a creative, liberating way" as opposed to entrenching exploitation; and build working class leadership of the struggle for a transformed society. Education should be a way of ensuring maximum participation and democracy; it had to serve the needs of workers and their allies and develop an understanding among the working class "that their struggle forms part of the world struggle against oppression and exploitation. (Cooper et al., 2002, pp. 111-112)

The Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union (PPWAWU) understood workers education as the bringing together of the experiences and lessons of

previous working class struggles. These include factory and community-based struggles, nationally and internationally. According to the PPWAWU, the purpose of working class education was twofold: first, to strengthen existing struggles, and second, to build a working class cadre that can lead the struggle for socialism:

> If working class education is the lessons of previous struggles, then it becomes clear that education is inseparable from struggle. Our education programme must therefore be informed by the current struggles the working class is fighting. These struggles include those in the factory, community and the broader political struggle.
>
> Equally, it means that every single act of working class struggle contains within it an aspect of education, of drawing lessons and conclusions for future struggles. It is this last point that is most often neglected in terms of how we work in the organizations of the working class generally, including in PPWAWU. (PPWAWU, 1992, p.3)

FROM "NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT" TO "NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK": THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY AND THE TAMING OF WORKER EDUCATION

When attempting to come to terms with the precise nature, dynamics and constraints of the ensuing shifts in worker education, it is important to bear in mind the dramatic nature of the social and political backdrop against which the negotiations with the apartheid state and the discursive shifts took place. Despite fierce repression by the state in defence of capital, the workers' movement continued to grow in strength and sophistication. The dramatic increase in worker-led resistance of the 1980s, combined with increasing international pressure, eventually compelled the apartheid government to agree to enter into talks with the liberation movement aimed at negotiating an end to minority rule. At the same time, international developments at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s dramatically shifted the terrain against which these negotiations would proceed.

Alexander (2002) recounts how the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of what has come to be described as a new configuration of dominant capitalism called "neoliberalism" together profoundly reshaped the landscape for political struggle in many colonial and industrializing contexts. Although such factors undoubtedly had a significant effect in determining the *timing* of South Africa's political transition, he argues, the primary *impetus* for that transition must be seen to lie in "the overt and covert internal struggles of the oppressed people of South Africa against the economic and social deprivations of the system of racial capitalism coupled with international sanctions and diplomatic isolation" (Alexander, 2002, p. 44).

Nonetheless, the loss of a supporting superpower after the fall of the Berlin Wall, for the ANC in particular, all but eliminated militarized resistance as

a viable tactic in pursuit of revolutionary social transformation, requiring radical reconsideration of strategy and tactics. The ANC faced substantial additional pressure to adopt peaceful, "realistic" tactics from the various liberal and capitalist donors and Western countries. Although the ANC had been from its inception a multi-class organization, Alexander (2002) observes that its "dominant, indeed hegemonic, ethos" has always been that of "the upward-striving black middle class" (p. 48). According to Alexander:

> The complete pragmatism of the ANC leaders in matters economic is now well attested. Mandela's notorious somersault on the question of "nationalization" (of mines, monopoly companies, banks, etc.) is one of the more dramatic examples of this phenomenon. The ditching of the social democratic Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) for the neo-liberal Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy was the logical outcome of this trajectory within the global context of the transition. (pp. 48-49)

In part due to this highly radicalized recent history of the liberation movement, Alexander (2002) suggested that the ANC's rapid and enthusiastic embrace of neoliberal orthodoxy caught many by surprise — including crucially the ruling apartheid National Party. Simultaneously, from the perspective of the intellectual and economic elite representing the "white" Afrikaner minority, although they may not have secured all they had hoped from the process of negotiations, they were clear and resolute as to what they were unwilling to give up.

It is against this backdrop, Alexander (2002) argued, that the "Madiba factor" can and must be understood: the decisive role played by former President Mandela — one of Alexander's fellow prisoners on Robben Island — in effecting the negotiated settlement that brought political democracy, even as it effectively entrenched existing economic relations, advantages and incentives through the new constitution's property and sunset clauses. The politics of reconciliation and "social partners" thus became essential components in the process of suppressing awareness of real, material divisions and managing majority dissent and unrest. Mandela's unmatched combination of political savvy, personal charisma, "struggle credentials," and commitment to parliamentary democratic institutional forms made him the ideal leader of such a project.

Alexander (2002) summarized the net effect of these contextual factors, movement dynamics and exceptional personalities — "the entire dilemma and tragedy of the national liberation struggle" — as follows:

> To put the matter bluntly: the capitalist class can be said to have placed their property under new management and what we are seeing is the sometimes painful process of the new managers trying to come to terms with the fact that they are managers certainly but not by any means the owners, of capital....
>
> Ownership and control of the commanding heights of the economy, the repressive apparatuses of the state... the judiciary, the top echelons of the civil service, of tertiary education and strategic research and development, have remained substantially in the same hands as during the heyday of apartheid. (pp. 61-64)

The vicissitudes of worker education during and since the negotiated denouement can only be meaningfully comprehended with these broader political and economic developments firmly in view. Even as negotiation talks started, the state and capital continued their attacks against progressive forces. Thousands of workers aligned to progressive structures were murdered by "third force" groups supported by the apartheid state machinery, Inkatha in the then Natal province, the Witdoeke in the Western Cape Province, and others. The trade union movement itself was deeply divided, with powerful factions eager to cooperate with capital interests in reaching a settlement that would prevent radical shifts in economic and social relations to serve the interests of the long-oppressed majority. As Cooper et al. (2002) wrote:

> By 1988, it was clear that the broad movement was being led into a course of negotiation with the apartheid state. The labour movement came under pressure to review its role, as well as its strategies for change and its vision of the future. In line with the newly dominant politics of a negotiated settlement in the late '80s and early '90s, the trade union leadership responded by shifting its declared vision from that of opponent and adversary towards a stated goal of "equal partner" with business and government.... Increasingly, the leadership of the labour movement insisted on a partnership with the former "capitalist enemy" and a common commitment to international competitiveness and appeals for foreign investment. (p. 123)

Accompanying this conceptual and ideological shift, the dominant conception of "worker education" increasingly changed. From a tradition in which the dominant self-conception of workers' engagement with their own learning involved images of worker-led choirs, plays and poetry — aimed at entrenching the self-consciousness of the working class as a force capable of demanding progressive change in the interests of the oppressed — new images came to dominate, of individual employees earning certificates and filling out paperwork in pursuit of their own advancement. This would have two main impacts on worker education activities:

> Firstly, the priorities, form of delivery, and key target audience of trade union education were shifted; secondly, the labour movement was to become increasingly involved in workplace training issues guided by a new commitment to increased productivity and international competitiveness. (Cooper et al., 2002, p. 123)

In the years following the 1994 transition, the trend continued of a rapid move away from mass worker education and towards the provision of more specialized, modular training programs for sharply defined groups of workers. Dramatic changes to the country's economic, social, and political environment in the wake of the transition had profound implications for the trade union movement, and consequently for worker education. As Cooper (2007) observed, this led to a change in the role of the leading labour formations from being in an adversarial relationship with the state, to attempting to negotiate as an "equal partner" with business and the state. Despite its stated commitment

to socialism and worker control, COSATU has been key to the tri-partite alliance's retention of unassailable political dominance.

Unsurprisingly, shifts in the conception and forms of worker education in post-apartheid South Africa largely parallel the wider shifts that have occurred globally with the rise of neoliberal macro-economic policy regimes and political imperatives. By the year 2000, the radical vision of worker education that had animated so much of its practice during the struggle against apartheid had dramatically dissipated, having lost ground with the rise of a dominant "consensus politics" led by the ANC, which "assumes the essential compatibility of all 'stakeholder' interests" (Cooper et al., 2002, p. 112).

As Hamilton (in press), drawing on Cooper (2005) has argued, with the transition to a liberal democratic political regime, worker education has gone from having "a strong emancipatory objective, emphasising the value of experience in the collective struggle to build new knowledge and in developing democratic participation and decision-making for a socialist society" (Cooper, 2005, p. 3) to one in which "a human capital approach to worker education, which emphasises individual access to vocational educational and training and upward educational and economic mobility" (Cooper, 2009, p. 1) has become dominant within trade unions. Unions now "outsource" the training of shop-stewards to accredited private providers in order to access training funds available through Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAS) (Hamilton, in press).

At the level of terminology, this has led to a rise to dominance within policy discourses of terms like "adult education" and "lifelong learning." Of the latter term in particular, Mojab (2009) wrote that it "shifts the burden of increasing adaptability to the workers and at the same time, offers it as a ray of hope for a more democratic engaged citizenry" (p. 5). Stated another way, implicit in this shift in conception is the notion that unemployment can and should be attributed to "deficits" among the un- or under-employed — to a "skills gap."

Another key development affecting worker education in post-apartheid South Africa was the introduction of the "National Qualifications Framework" (NQF) in the mid-1990s, which imposed a standardized set of principles, guidelines and definitions for the creation of a national certification system for educational qualifications, overseen by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Hamilton (in press) cited Jones' (2013) observation that the NQF "looks both ways... [to] social upliftment through enabling access to educational opportunities for people to improve their lives, but at the same time commodifies education, training and experience and ascribes it with a market value; a credit currency":

> While some unions continue their own shop-stewards training, whole departments within unions and federations have been established to engage with education and skills development structures, often, at the expense of trade

> union education. In the skills terrain alone, trade unions are represented in 21 SETAs with representatives from government and business and many require more than one representative from each stakeholder to serve on their sub-structures. (Hamilton, in press)

Ngcwangu (in press) summarized Samson and Vally's (1996a) critique of the NQF's "outcomes-based" qualifications framework for education and training as follows: (1) the NQF system "would create an unwieldy bureaucracy with Standard Generation Bodies and similar structures resulting in an extensive 'paper chase'; (2) international experience indicates that outcomes-based systems focus on "what people can *do*, to the exclusion of other knowledge which they may *have*; (3) one of the underlying assumptions of "human capital theory" is that there is a direct link between education and economic growth [which obscures or underplays other, more important causes of unemployment]; and, (4) post-Fordist production methods would influence the logic of the development of the NQF: "For post-Fordists, investment in education and training must be justified by proof that they are an efficient means of ensuring increased productivity" (Ngcwangu, in press).

In a subsequent article, Samson and Vally (1996b) identified further challenges the NQF would pose to union education in South Africa: (1) the NQF's focus on clearly identifiable performance outcomes reinforced these trends and further marginalized more overtly political, class-based forms of mass worker education; (2) linking union education and training efforts to the NQF in order to satisfy training certification requirements would undermine the ability of unions to maintain control over their own education programs; (3) disparities between level of training achieved and level of employment opportunities available — an unavoidable disparity over which unions have little if any control — would tend to result in "educational inflation" (i.e., higher and higher credentials required for jobs that neither utilize nor remunerate workers according to the required skill level); (4) learning moments such as strikes and experiences of building and controlling organizations collectively, which are important elements of worker education that cannot be certified through the NQF system, could become devalued and marginalized; (5) limitations on the number of days off to pursue training would translate into pressure on workers to emphasize industrial and skills-based training over other forms of union training aimed at organizing and collective advancement of workers' struggles; and, (6) outcomes-based training and education models define outcomes in terms of individual displays of competence and hence learning understood as a social process would be undermined.

Continuing, Samson and Vally (1996b) wrote:

> The issue of collective vs. individual learning and evaluation processes highlights larger issues regarding the NQF's focus on generic competencies that are applicable in all spheres of learning. One of the ten "essential outcomes" proposed by the Inter-Ministerial Working Group is "solving problems and

> making decisions." The ability to make decisions and solve problems is by no means a "natural," neutral or singular thing across different contexts, however. For example, a manager may be very talented at quickly identifying what s/he sees as a problem, formulating a solution, and instructing others to carry it out, and at the same time completely incapable of participating in a joint identification and assessment of a problem, facilitating the collective development of a solution through a consensus-based decision-making process, and participating in a collective strategy to implement the group's proposed solution. Two very different sets of competencies are involved in these two different scenarios, and the skills applicable to each are not transferable to the other. Canadian and Australian critics of outcomes-based education have drawn on the vast body of work on learning processes and have argued that in fact there is no such thing as a de-contextualised generic competency or essential outcomes. (pp. 22-23).

The discourse of "Adult Basic Education" (ABE) — and later "Adult Basic Education and Training" (ABET) — had replaced the previous, informal discourse in which the term "literacy" was dominant, understood to encompass more than the ability to read and write, but familiarity with the structures and forces that shape lived opportunities, and a sense of self-driven agency to engage with them. Soliar (2000) argued that this was more than a mere change in terminology, but rather an indicator of the rise to dominance of a conception of education for economic skills, with the discourse and practice of ABET focusing mainly on the "T" for training and leaving aside any suggestion of education that would encompass the full range of skills, values, capabilities and competencies that equip one to participate in the transformation of power and social relations.

Thus ABET, "lifelong learning" and the construction of "worker education" to focus on certification together promote a widespread "flexibilization" of the workforce through a state-led training regime to maximize economically exploitable skills for the production of value within the (private) formal economy, and to increase a "reserve army" of skilled labour in advance of market demand. Even as it adopted struggle language of empowerment, participation and a people-centred approach, ABET discourse and practice remain firmly within, and in service of, a political economy of vocationalism, market values and individualism. This is reflected in the fact that the "Recognition of Prior Learning" (RPL) in higher education institutions and in the private sector are focused on — if not restricted to — providing access to education and the market on the basis of established norms and standards in these institutions (Soliar, 2000).

Within trade union structures, these changes have decisive impacts on roles, responsibilities and self-conceptions. Perhaps most significantly, they promote the conversion of shop-stewards — arguably the single most important function within unions for sustaining political consciousness, and therefore a site of often fierce contestation — into "trainers" (or even "trainers of trainers").

CONCLUSION: LESSONS AND PROSPECTS

Roux (1992) presciently noted:

> Trade unions all over the world have had, and still have, noble aims regarding their education programmes, but it is interesting to see how differently these aims are applied. Unions may have many wonderful sounding resolutions, but it is their concrete plans, strategies and programmes and how these are applied in practice that spell out what their resolutions really mean. (p. 4)

It is crucial to bear in mind that if worker education is to serve an emancipatory purpose, it must be grounded in the contexts and experiences of working people themselves. For this reason, it is important to resist the temptation to pursue the "right" or even the "best" conception of, and approach to, workers' education, outside of an active and concrete engagement. Scholarly research and analysis can provide evidence and conceptual resources for use by working people who are engaged in struggle — not merely for improved working conditions but for deeper collective self-consciousness and greater self-determination — but in the absence of such grounding and accountability such scholarship can quickly become irrelevant or even distracting. Additionally, as Cooper et al. (2002) observed, "a tight definition of worker education is difficult because its boundaries are fluid and dynamic, moving within the full range of learning experiences of workers" (p.112).

COSATU's position on worker education is currently under review in the wake of a rejection at its 2009 Education and Skills Conference of a proposal to adopt accreditation processes and standards for union education programs and activities, in favour of a more explicitly radical and collectivist conception of worker education. This renewal of interest in more politically responsive forms of worker education may indicate resistance among rank-and-file members of COSATU's member unions to the increasingly de-politicized and individualistic conception of worker education that has been operative in recent years.

The effectiveness of worker education efforts in shaping political consciousness and in supporting workers' struggles for fundamental social transformation depends to an important degree upon the opportunities those efforts provide for learning through and from concrete activities of resistance and struggle. For this reason, it remains vital that formal union structures actively resist tendencies towards formalization, technical functional division, and the rise of certification schemes and standards. In South Africa, this resistance has not been sufficient to prevent a profound de-politicization of trade union structures, and of political consciousness among workers. Nevertheless, there remains a significant legacy and influence of the traditions of worker education and militant trade unionism in South Africa among some trade unions, community-based organizations and social movements. Perhaps most noteworthy among these are the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), South Africa's largest union, which is currently in conflict

with the ANC/SACP; independent trade unions whose members have left the COSATU/ANC/SACP alliance, such as the General Industrial Workers Union of South Africa (GIWUSA); associations of "shack dwellers" such as Abahlali base Mjondolo; and other social movements rooted in working class communities.

South Africa's proud history of resistance in and through education continues. This resistance has generated popular epistemologies and pedagogies against racial capitalism. The "peoples' education movement," "worker education movement" and "popular adult and/or community education movement" are examples (see Cooper et al., 2002; Motala and Vally, 2003). This praxis, relative to the struggle against apartheid has diminished but still exists, and its centre of gravity today has shifted away from trade unions to new organizational forms, as workers and the unemployed resist the impact of neo-liberalism and increasing poverty and inequality two decades into post-apartheid South Africa. Tendencies towards de-politicization can be countered and even reversed through worker education that is critical, but this requires structures, activities and arguments that favour independent, democratic control, and that foster skills of critical thinking, building and maintaining solidarity, and cultivating collective self-awareness aimed at the self-emancipation of working, poor and oppressed people.

While the legacy of worker education in South Africa is a rich and proud one from which an enormous amount can be learned, new developments brought about by ongoing capital accumulation as well as the waxing and waning and changing forms of class struggle have brought forward new challenges. Only a few of the most notable among these are the widespread casualization of labour and the rise of "precarious work"; social, political and economic challenges arising from the movements of migrant workers, including xenophobia; and, the accelerating ecological crisis wrought by continuing, unfettered industrial expansion.

The workers' movement and workers' education must grapple with and respond to these challenges as a matter of urgency. As with the economic crises which the capitalist social order can be relied upon periodically to generate, the unfolding ecological crisis will inevitably produce opportunities for resistance — but only opportunities, not certainties. Unlike capitalism's past economic crises, the climate crisis poses dangers of incalculably greater consequence. As Bellamy Foster, Clark, and York, (2010), Harvey (2006) and others have argued persuasively, there is good reason to believe the capitalist system may be inherently incapable of addressing ecological catastrophe — certainly not without effectively committing genocide on an incalculable scale. For this reason, it is more vital than ever that worker education efforts remain clear, vigilant and resolute in their analytical, organizational and practical commitments.

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NOTES

1. Workers developed the phenomena of "moving meetings," turning buses and trains into literally vehicles of mass education to popularize various campaigns. Train carriages where these discussions and rallying speeches occurred were referred to as "*Zabalaza*" or "struggle" compartments.
2. This section draws heavily from Vally (1994; previously unpublished), with revisions.

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INTERVENING IN INFORMAL LEARNING: ACTIVITY THEORY AS TEACHING TOOL

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ABSTRACT. In this article, I argue that a concentrated focus on everyday informal learning about unions is critical not only to re-thinking union education programs, but to the overall project of union renewal. The article offers, by way of example, an inquiry into the grievance system as a routine (and central) union practice and a key site of informal learning. This inquiry is directed by cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) which provides method, tools, and theoretical building blocks for better understanding everyday learning. In addition, I argue, CHAT presents a powerful pedagogical tool for educators, leaders, and activists who are concerned with the challenge of intervening critically and strategically into everyday learning and everyday practices of unions and their members.

INTERVENIR AU CŒUR DES APPRENTISSAGES INFORMELS : LA THÉORIE DE L'ACTIVITÉ COMME OUTIL DE FORMATION

RÉSUMÉ. Dans cet article, j'affirme qu'accorder une attention particulière aux apprentissages informels réalisés au quotidien au sujet des associations syndicales est essentiel non seulement en ce qui a trait à la refonte des programmes de formation syndicale, mais aussi dans une perspective globale de revitalisation syndicale. Afin d'illustrer ce principe, l'article propose une incursion au sein du système de traitement des griefs en tant que pratique routinière (et centrale) et comme lieu propice aux apprentissages informels. Cet examen est effectué à l'aide de la théorie de l'activité culturelle et historique, théorie qui offre une méthode, des outils et des assises théoriques permettant une meilleure compréhension des apprentissages quotidiens. De plus, je soutiens que la théorie de l'activité, influencée par les contextes culturel et historique, constitue un outil pédagogique puissant pour les formateurs, les porte-paroles et les activistes vivant le défi d'intervenir de manière critique et stratégique dans les apprentissages et les pratiques de tous les jours des organisations syndicales et de leurs membres.

Union education is largely under-theorized. At the same time, learning theory is under-utilized in union education. This paper offers a cross-disciplinary meeting of social movement learning theory, adult education theory, and informal

learning theory. It is intended to contribute to a small but growing interest in expanding the use of sociocultural learning theory in union educational practice (Worthen, 2012) by building on the limited, but significant scholarly literature on informal, everyday (situated) learning in unions (Carter, 2012; Cooper, 2005; Krinsky, 2007; Sawchuk, 2001, 2002, 2013; Worthen, 2008), and makes practical recommendations for the use of informal learning theory in formal union education initiatives. As social movement learning theorist Foley (2001) argued,

> We need to get on with the difficult and rewarding work of trying to understand what people are actually learning in the places where they work and live. And of course, considering the implications of that learning for our educational interventions. (p. 86)

Fully attending to everyday union and workplace practices through the lens of learning theory offers an important window for organized labour's leaders, activists, and educators to 1) consider routine everyday union activity — informal learning — as the crux of union education, and 2) to re-position formal union education programs as interventions into this much broader learning context. The bulk of worker and union learning is situated in the routine (and exceptional) encounters workers have with co-workers, supervisors, union stewards, clients, products, technology, work practices, processes, machines, rules, conventions, space, and so on. Adult educator Thomas (1991) spoke of education as a small craft, floating upon a sea of learning. Our challenge as educators is to adequately interrogate everyday activity. In the case of a union, that will include grievances, strikes, collective bargaining, organizing, union elections, workplace harassment policies and procedures, union meetings, conventions, etc. We can adopt what Foley (2001) referred to as a "strategic learning approach," which

> sees learning as complex (formal and informal, constructive and destructive), contested and contextual. It assumes that critical and emancipatory learning is possible and necessary. It asserts that a first step to their realization is an honest investigation of what people are actually learning and teaching each other in different sites... it insists on rigorous analysis while offering a practical way of linking analysis, strategy and skill. (p. 84)

Shifting the gaze to everyday learning does not simply mean we take seriously *what* workers learn about unions, labour relations or the capitalist system, through everyday interactions, but that we also deeply investigate *how* that learning occurs. Taken together, *the what and the how* offer potentially new ways of thinking about both the everyday *collective* learning and practices of unions, and the tacit, self-directed, incidental, integrative (Bennett, 2012) (and sometimes transformative) learning of *individual* union members. A sociocultural analysis of informal learning, particularly that informed by cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) provides a critical (and useful) lens for thinking through routine and strategic practices of unions and union educa-

tion (Krinsky, 2007, 2008; Sawchuk, 2001; Worthen, 1999, 2008). By deeply honouring and inquiring into learning processes of workers, CHAT further offers new tools to engage members as educators, and provides a new angle for thinking about union pedagogy in both formal and informal learning (Carter, 2012; Wills, 2012; Worthen, 2012).

This paper will focus on the grievance process — a place of contradiction, conflict and differential power, and a key site of informal learning. As a routine everyday practice of unions, the grievance process merits substantial inquiry by social movement theorists, radical adult educators of any stripe, and most particularly union educators, activists, and leaders.

SOCIOCULTURAL THEORIES OF LEARNING AND CULTURAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY — SOME BASICS

Sociocultural theories of learning understand learning as deeply historically and socially situated and as active social and / or collective processes (Lave, 1996), starkly differentiated from a view of learning as an individual cognitive pursuit or outcome. As social movement learning theorist Kilgore (1999) noted,

> A theory of collective learning is more appropriate than individualized theories for the study of individuals and groups engaged in collective action to defend or promote a shared social vision.... Individualized learning theories do not adequately explain a group as a learning system, nor do they necessarily situate the learning process correctly between "knowing" and "doing." (p. 191)

Within the sociocultural learning theory tradition, and with its roots in Vygotskyan and Marxist theory, CHAT has emerged as a suitable methodology and important analytic / conceptual tool for understanding *how* learning occurs in everyday activity. CHAT is based in a series of key ideas that emphasize the dialectical relationship (two-way / mutual-interdependence and influence) between the individual and her world as mediated by *object / motive* and by *tools* (or "*artefacts*") (Vygotsky, 1962; 1986). Every day we act within and change our environment or circumstances by using the tools that are available to us — whether they are the tools of language and tone, symbolic tools like currency, or physical tools such as computer programs and crowbars. When the tools we have do not work, we improvise, or create new tools, or modify our objectives; in other words, we learn. Activity theory draws our attention to how learning, agency, and identity are shaped through activity and helps us understand the various elements most especially at play during moments of change, conflict, innovation, learning, transformation. Krinsky (2007, 2008) adopts an activity theory framework to understand informal learning in social movement campaigns. Krinsky (2008) explained

> CHAT emphasizes, above all, the activity of actors toward objects or goals. Like pragmatism, CHAT focuses on interaction among actors who have objectives and who identify and try to solve problems. The unit of analysis, however,

> is the "activity system" which includes artifacts, rules and divisions of labor that mediate this activity, rather than the individual 'mind'. Accordingly, CHAT does not begin with an individualist notion of cognition but rather treats cognition as inherently social and linked to inherently social activities. CHAT allows us to begin to understand, in a way difficult to do otherwise, what happens when activists or authorities change their minds, change tactics, and blend or adhere to central tendencies in repertoires. (p. 30)

Activity systems describe the complex mediated processes of learning. Mapping an activity system (Figure 1) can be a useful organizing exercise for understanding how different outcomes and learning emerge from what is ostensibly the same activity system.

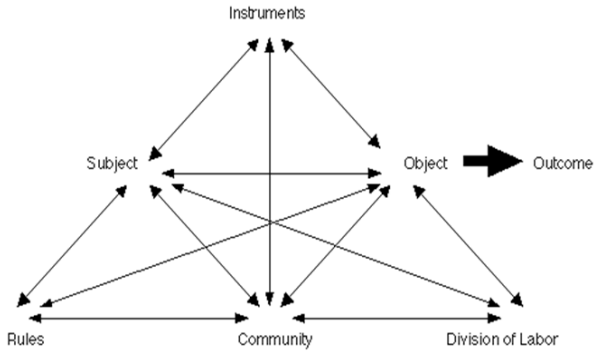

FIGURE 1. *Activity system diagram (Engeström, 2001)*

In a CHAT diagram, the *subject* refers to the viewpoint or standpoint from which we are analyzing learning in the activity system. It may be individual or collective; activity systems are "multi-voiced" (Engeström, 2001). In CHAT terms, *object / motive* refers to the overall purpose of the activity (as differentiated from goals which relate to specific actions, Leont'ev, 1978). *Tools*, or *artefacts* (also referred to as *instruments*), are the resources we grab onto or improvise in our effort to meet our *object / motive*.

> The mediating tool can be external (e.g. hammer) or internal (e.g. ideas). It can be a sign, procedure, machine or method. Tools are socio-cultural specific, in that they are influenced and dependent on social experience and cultural knowledge. They are created and transformed during the historical development of the activity itself and carry with them a particular culture - historical remains from their development (Kaptelinin & Nardi). (Coverdale, 2009, sec. 4.4)

Community includes those individuals (and collectives) who share the same overall purpose, and are engaged in the activity system. *Division of labour* refers to both the type (i.e. collective, hierarchical, volunteer, etc.) and the arrangement of

division of tasks (who does what). Power may be most visible in (though not limited to) the division of labour in an activity system. *Rules* refer to explicit and implicit, formalized and "hidden" norms and conventions that both afford and constrain activity and relations within an activity system. We can borrow from Bostrom (2004) who differentiated between three kinds of rules:

> directives, which are mandatory and issued by regulators with formal authority; norms, which are more implicit, internalized, and taken for granted in a social context; and standards, which as directives are explicit and have an apparent source but are presented as voluntary. (p. 77)

Mapping an activity system provides us with a means of investigating learning and development as it takes shape based on changing *object*, *subject*, and *tools*, *division of labour*, *rules* and *community* (what Sawchuk, 2011, referred to as kaleidoscope in motion — where *rules* become *tools*, and so on). These are useful categories — the more so if we consider them as activated, historicized, and malleable, not static. A CHAT analysis, based on recursivity within and between activity systems, facilitates the exploration of ways in which learning is mediated. How do historic, social, cultural, collective processes operate between people, relative in time and space to produce learning? In the following section we will consider each element of an activity system in turn, as it relates to the grievance system. But first, a word on expansive leaning.

Expansive learning, according to Engeström (2001), is that which occurs in the search to find resolutions to conflict or contradictions that arise within activity systems. Krinsky (2008) explained:

> The second basic premise [of CHAT] after the social nature of cognition is that elements of an activity system do not fit perfectly together and will eventually come into conflict or be unable to help actors solve problems. Solutions to these potential contradictions within the system produce, over time their own new contradictions. Thus there are dialectical tensions produced within the dialogic contexts of problem-solving that results in changes of mind among activists, influencing both their reconstructions and their prospective considerations of their activity.... This kind of inquiry becomes important for explaining the reasons that various actors adopt, drop, or try to modify the claims they make. (p. 30)

Thus a CHAT analysis supports social movement learning theorist Kilgore's (1999) contention that "conflict is crucial to collective learning" (p. 199). This is further articulated by Sawchuk and Stetsenko (2008) who argued for a non-canonical reading of CHAT which emphasizes transformative learning. As they noted (see also Stetsenko, 2008), activity systems — and more specifically contradictions within activity systems — generate transformative learning, as individuals and collectives work to understand and resolve tensions, creating new artefacts, new objects, rules, communities, and divisions of labour, in the drive to change.

Engeström (2001) offers important distinctions between primary contradictions (which deal with fundamental / broad systems of oppression, i.e. capitalism, and which upset the *object / motive*); and secondary and tertiary contradictions (which pertain to in-system, or operational conflicts, at the level of goals).

> In other words, the distinction lies in whether we are orienting to the problem with the project itself (primary contradictions), or to solving the problems that would help the project achieve its purposes more effectively (secondary and tertiary contradictions) — an issue that is recognizable in political critiques more broadly as revolutionary versus reformist concerns. (Sawchuk, personal communication, March 8, 2011)

The grievance system, to which we will now turn, involves, surfaces, and invokes contradictions at all these levels, making it ripe for analysis of informal learning. The following section provides a short "walk through" of the possibilities for analyzing learning in the grievance process as activity system, in an effort to illustrate activity theory's potential as a critical reflective pedagogical tool of inquiry to be shared with activists and educators committed to democratizing "reflection on practice" (Freire, 1998) in unions and to finding new ways of intervening meaningfully in informal learning.

CHAT diagrams can run the dual risk of becoming either reductionist — where "mapping" is followed didactically not heuristically, as intended (Engeström & Sannino, 2010) — or overly complex (multiple activity systems as the base unit of analysis and dialectics shot through and across at every angle). The latter can lead to endless theorizing of near-inexhaustible permutations and combinations of mediating factors afloat in the aforementioned "kaleidoscope" (see also Niewolny & Wilson, 2009). Nevertheless mapping an activity system, or systems, is a solid organizational and pedagogical activity. An activity system analysis of the grievance process takes us a giant step forward in surfacing contradictions within a routine practice that in the field of Canadian labour is all but taken for granted, and is not generally viewed through a learning lens at all.[1]

ASSESSING THE ROUTINE: GRIEVANCE PROCESS AS ACTIVITY SYSTEM

> [We can investigate] the extent to which everyday experiential learning reproduces relations of exploitation and oppression, and the extent to which it does, or can, resist and help to transcend, such relations. (Foley, 2001, p. 85)

Workers experience injustice on the job each day. For workers who belong to unions, some opt to enter into a formal grievance process in an effort to resolve the injustice. What they learn and what the union learns in the process should be of primary interest to trade union activists, leaders and shop stewards, as well as to radical adult educators, including, but not limited to those who teach grievance handling. Also of interest is why some workers do not grieve: what have they learned (and how), that makes them decide

against activating systems apparently available to them? In this section we will interrogate the grievance process both as a key repertoire (tool) of unions and as a key system of activity in which literally thousands of Canadian workers engage each year, in an attempt to change their circumstances.

Two important points must be made before proceeding. First, the distinction between *grievance as workplace injustice* (in the vernacular sense and as experienced by a worker) from *grievance as articulated in social movement literature* (McCarthy & Zald, 2003), from *grievance in its specific (and narrow) labour-relations context* is a question of meaning making, and part of what is attended to here.

Second, activity systems must be understood in relation to one another and in their historical context and complexity — in this case, the grievance activity system is nested in the collective bargaining activity system, which is nested in the workplace activity system, legal frameworks, and the broader context of labour-capital conflict. Canadian labour law prohibits the union's use of key tools such as slow-downs, work stoppages, work refusals, stay-aways, sit-downs, walk-outs, and so on during the life of a collective agreement. In "exchange" for giving up the right to strike — broadly defined to include any and all collective industrial action — during the course of a collective agreement, unions gained increased leverage to enforce negotiated language through an expanded use of the courts (Fudge & Tucker, 2009); today's grievance process must be understood in the context of that compromise.[2]

Understanding these "multiple and composite systems" (Krinsky, 2008, p. 7) as our base unit of analysis (Engeström, 2001) is critical to building an understanding of the particular role the grievance system plays in challenging / (re)producing labour relations, and in building labour movement learning, participation and capacity. And, as social movement theorists remind us, "in the case of collective action repertoires, discursive repertoires are developed interactionally with opponents and targets" (Tilly in Steinberg, 1998, p. 857); the grievance activity system exists in tension with the activities and meaning-making of employers, governments through labour laws, and arbitrators.

Although all of this may seem patently obvious to labour movement activists, when we turn to the question of how the grievance system operates, it becomes clear that this broader context and historical trajectories can sometimes get lost, even in the teaching of the grievance system to new shop stewards. Learning in activity systems is mediated by both broader socio-historical political and economic contexts, and by the individual biographies of those involved. Thus it opens up an analysis of learning that is both intimate and far-reaching.

Key questions

Activity theory can help resource a number of questions about the grievance process as a learning activity system. For example:

Learning outcomes. What do union members, stewards and the union as a whole learn in the process of a grievance? (Taking a wide view of where this process "starts" and "ends"). For consciously or not, through their direct or indirect participation, a worker engaged in the grievance process will likely learn some things about herself, her employer, her union, her co-workers, individual and collective action, public speaking, note-taking, the law, shopfloor politics, the broader system of capitalism, the inner workings of unions, and so on.

Learning processes. How, in the course of their activity, do shop stewards learn to represent their members, and how is this learning mediated by key *artefacts* / tools / symbols they access? What affords / constrains their use of these tools? How is learning mediated by the division of labour in the grievance system? How is learning mediated by formal and informal rules and conventions?

Dynamics and dialectics within (and beyond) the activity system. How are particular tools, rules, conventions and divisions of labour reproduced, or produced anew in activity? How are social locations and 'difference' (re)produced in activity (for example, how might a particular division of labour or use of particular *artefacts* serve to racialize members?) In what ways might learning in a grievance activity system be transformative at the individual and collective levels? At the level of class relations? And where it is not transformative, what can we learn by looking at the learning afforded or constrained by various aspects at play in any particular grievance activity system?

To borrow from Kilgore (1999), the grievance process shapes individual components of collective learning (i.e. identity, consciousness, sense of agency, sense of worthiness, and sense of connectedness) and shapes group components of collective learning: collective identity, group consciousness, solidarity and organization. We are interested in *how* it does so, in multiple and varied ways and how knowing more about these aspects could inform routine practices and union education.

FOCUS: SUBJECT & OBJECT

To understand learning in the grievance process we need to approach it from various subject standpoints – activity systems are "multi-voiced." Just as surgery looks different from the perspective of the doctor than from that of the patient, a grievance looks different from the perspective of the grievor than that of the steward. The learning is different. And yet, both share same overall *object*: workplace fairness.[3]

We can begin with the grievor as *subject*. The grievor encounters a contradiction between her *object / motive* in the *workplace activity system* (e.g., the need to care for and provide for her family) and the carrying out of the rules of that system (perhaps she is passed over for a promotion for which she held the requisite seniority). Based on collective agreement language regarding promotions and

seniority, she can enter into the *grievance activity system* which is designed to resolve the contradiction between the collective agreement (itself an outcome of the *collective bargaining activity system*) and the workplace activity system. The grievor's *object / motive* will be infused with her own personal history of the workplace, labour processes and work organization more broadly; and it will be connected, or nested in broader social structures and systems that are dialectically produced and reproduced in the workplace and within the grievance activity system. A grievance regarding promotions may, for example, include dimensions of gender and race.

A grievor's *object / motives* in entering a grievance activity system will likely include material dimensions (to be "made whole," financial compensation, reinstatement, re-classification, etc.) but it may also include emotional dimensions (to reclaim dignity, demonstrate anger, settle a score with a supervisor, seek vindication). When a worker comes up against an activity system that is (through a series of socialized conventions and assumed consensus) supposed to "work" and finds that it does not, it will likely evoke an emotional response (indignation, outrage, anger, frustration, betrayal, hurt, etc).

> The most prosaic daily routines, seemingly neutral, can provoke violent emotional responses when interrupted. Unusual actions probably involve even more, and more complex, feelings. Not only are emotions part of our responses to events, but they also — in the form of deep affective attachments — shape the goals of our actions. There are positive emotions and negative ones, admirable and despicable ones, public and hidden ones. Without them, there might be no social action at all. (Jasper, 1998, p. 398)

However, the tendency in social movement theory (where it even deals with emotion), is to relegate emotion as secondary to cognition (instead of, for example, part and parcel thereof) (Jasper, 1998). A CHAT analysis of the grievance activity system provides fertile ground for inquiring into emotion vis-à-vis learning, and is especially worthwhile to understanding the interplay of the "moral, cognitive, and emotional package of attitudes" (Jasper, 1998, pp. 409-410)[4] that are learned through activity. The degree to which the actual (vs. anticipated) outcome of a grievance meets both the grievor's emotional and material needs, is worth attending to in an analysis of learning. We can expect that a grievor's *object* will not overlap uniformly with the steward's or the union's more broadly, for many reasons, not the least of which is the emotion driving (and deriving from) activity. As we will see as we fill in the picture, the grievor's *object / motive* loses centrality through the grievance activity system.

From a steward's standpoint, *object / motive* may vary considerably. The shop steward's formal role in the grievance is to represent the membership, represent the union, and uphold / defend the collective agreement. She may variously understand her *object / motive* as asserting the union's power in the workplace (using the grievance process as a wedge), representing members, fixing problems, building membership capacity or membership confidence

in the union, maintaining her position as shop steward, and / or strategic preparation for upcoming negotiations. Her goals might include satisfying, appeasing or engaging a union member, winning the grievance at hand, meeting the union's duty of fair representation / avoiding a "failure to represent" charge, dealing with a particularly aggressive or abusive supervisor, sending a message to workers / members / management, making a good impression (on union leaders, co-workers, management, etc), and so on.

Depending on her *object / motive*, she will use or adapt key *artefacts* or tools which will mediate both the activity and her learning. For example, how and whether she relies on documentation, case law, particular use of body language and tone, relationships with supervisors, informal rules / workplace conventions, the letter of the law, a particular *division of labour* (i.e., is the grievor allowed / encouraged to speak at a grievance meeting or told to be silent, or not invited at all). Is the formal grievance procedure the only tool she accesses to resolve the workers' issue, or is it part of a broader campaign, or even bypassed altogether in favour of some other informal action, for example a community-based strategy? Each of these variables mediates learning, activity and outcomes.

Personal biography, social location, and the dialectical relationship between any particular activity system and other activity systems which (re)produce patterns of social inequity in both the workplace and the union are important aspects to understanding how learning is both afforded and constrained, and in particular what *artefacts* or tools a subject employs. For example, it is not a stretch to understand how a newly elected female Black steward in a traditionally male, white workplace would engage in a grievance process in a different way, have differential access to key *artefacts*, and might have separate and different *object / motives* from her white, male predecessor — offering an example of the highly contingent and variable outcomes of learning in activity. All of these factors need to be considered, while at the same time attending to the particular, and not reducing a subject to her social location. Sawchuk cautions against casting categories for subjects in this way: "a CHAT analysis that only recognizes an occupational identity will always fall considerably short of surfacing the contradictions at work in an activity system" (Sawchuk, personal communication, March 8, 2011). Obviously an analysis that can attend to the particular *and* the systemic tells us much more about both, than one in which the general eclipses the specific.

Where *object / motives* are unaligned or clash within an activity system we find opportunities for expansive learning (Engeström, 2001). Whether, for example, a steward adapts / invents additional tools to "meet" other aspects of the grievor's experience that do not "fit" the formal grievance process, will in part mediate the grievor's learning (and the steward's, no doubt, particularly as s/he may learn through the process to expand her *object / motives* to include

an emphasis on the grievance as mobilizing tool — or she may conclude that "some members just don't get that they don't have a grievance").

Finally, if we consider a grievance activity system from the standpoint of a local union, we can ask a similar set of questions regarding *object / motives*. Is the *object* to police the collective agreement, or test the collective agreement? To build the membership or to avoid a "failure to represent" charge? Is it to ensure due process or to capitalize on management's weaknesses?

> Understanding learning in social movements requires not only a concept of the group as a learner and constructor of knowledge, but also an understanding of the centrality of the group's vision of social justice that drives it to act. (Kilgore, 1999, p. 191)

Multiple motives come into play given the particulars of each situation, the overall orientation of the local union, the context, the union's history, the timing (i.e. just before or after negotiations, just before / after a strike, during a period of layoffs / economic growth, etc.), and so on. However, it might be a useful tool to plot the union's *object / motives* / orientation in a given grievance situation (see Figure 2) with the understanding that motive is neither static nor universal, and that it "includes but is not reducible to individual intentionality" (Fenwick, Edwards & Sawchuk, 2011, p. 24). In this way, the continuums represent a spectrum of *collective object* within and through which a given circumstance might be formulated.

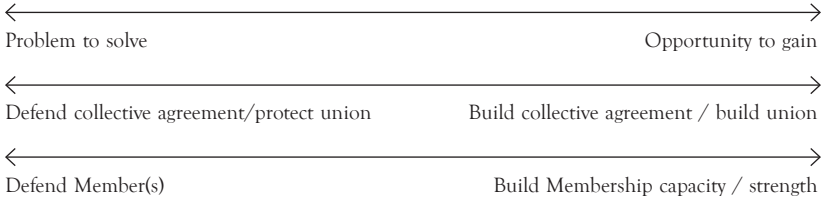

FIGURE 2. *Grievance objectives spectrum*

Turn the kaleidoscope and we could equally inquire into the grievance activity from the standpoint of a supervisor, arbitrator, or grievor's family.

TOOLS IN USE

> People... are active, thinking and feeling agents whose practice is mediated by the (conscious and tacit) use of the full range of symbolic, cultural and material artifacts at their disposal – they show agency but within the historical context of available artifacts. (Sawchuk & Stetsenko, 2008, p. 357)

What are the key mediating tools / *artefacts* in a grievance activity system? They might include: the grievor's story in all its emotional resonance, the grievor's story as framed by the steward, relevant collective agreement lan-

guage, past practice, case law, impeccable or sloppy documentation, witness accounts, seniority lists, positive or negative relationships between steward and supervisors, aggressive, assertive, conciliatory body language and tone of the steward, potential for labour disruption, timing, steps in the grievance process, grievor's employment record, a united and / or educated and / or angry membership, and so on. The degree to which subjects use, adapt, or re-fashion these *artefacts* will be in tension / dialogue with other elements of the system, including, of course, *object/motive*.

The grievance activity system centres around both the construction and resolution of workplace grievances. It may be reduced to a filtering process, or a process of translation, taking the workers' story and turning it into a violation of a rule. Or, as one shop steward manual says, "separating a complaint from a grievance" (Canadian Autoworkers Union, 2009, sec. 3, para. 2). When the grievance system relies solely on the formal grievance process and a narrow legal definition of the grievance (collective agreement violation), everything else falls outside of the frame to the extent that the worker's grievance (in the vernacular sense) may all but disappear. Equally, the fullness of the grievor's story may be used to "push" the grievance process — and become a key artefact in the system. In the framing of the grievance meaning emerges, as "context-specific social process" (Steinberg, 1998, p. 852). Krinksy (2008) expanded:

> a view of meaning that emphasizes its dynamic, organizational, and coalitional aspects highlights the distribution of cognitive processes within "cultural-historical activity systems" composed of actors, the *objects* of their actions, the tools or artifacts they use to mediate action toward their *objects*, and the rules and divisions of labor by which their communities operate. If this view is true, controlling the terms of debate requires far more than strategically finding the "right frame." Indeed, activists' own interpretations of what is going on and what is to be done become subject to the structuring influences of the dynamics of the activity system. Nevertheless, lest this seem too over-determined, it is important to emphasize that these dynamics are shaped by activists' own action and the actions of others. Here, cognition does not precede political action but rather exists in a dynamic, dialectical relation with it. (p. 10)

Analyzing patterns in artefact use (vis-à-vis grievance construction and resolution) using activity theory can provide important insight for strategic thinking, where there is an openness to think critically about routine practices.

Community & division of labour

Grievors, co-workers, family members, stewards, union presidents, local and national unions, in / out house lawyers, governments, arbitrators, invested community members, and so on could all be considered part of the grievance activity system community. Whether or not they play a key mediating role depends on other factors at play. For example, in the 1970s, '80s and '90s, the broader women's community (and a growing women's movement within

the labour movement) did play a key mediating role in the construction of grievances dealing with harassment — largely through consciousness-raising of both women workers, and to a more limited degree, of union officials, supervisors / managers, and through successfully lobbying to change human rights laws (rules, tools, activity systems in their own right).

The division of labour in the grievance activity system is traditionally hierarchical, on both union and management sides. As a grievance advances, with every step taken higher-ups get involved and the process becomes increasingly formalized, up to and including the involvement of an arbitrator. Asking the question "whose grievance is it anyway?" is instructive on the question of division of labour. From the point of view of the union (and labour law / rules), the union has carriage of the complaint. In other words, the grievance belongs to the union, not the worker whose experience triggers the system. The union determines whether to go forward with, or drop, a grievance. The degree to which the grievor participates in the process depends on any number of factors, including local traditions / conventions / rules (see below) about whether or not grievors attend and / or speak at grievance meetings, as well as an assessment by the steward / local union on whether the grievor's presence / voice at grievance meetings is likely to assist the union in meeting its objective. This may mean that the grievor never gets "their day in court" which may actually be a key goal of the grievor. Or, the grievor may take an active role. However, in either scenario there will be powerful lessons about how the system works / treats workers.

Rules & conventions

As noted, the grievance process is rooted in a legal framework that includes labour laws, past practice, case law, and human rights law, and excludes collective workplace job action. Collective agreements outline timelines, processes, roles and responsibilities and protocol for filing grievances. For example, they may require, or allow for an informal verbal attempt at resolution, they may outline who must be in attendance at grievance meetings, when and how a grievance advances to a subsequent level / step, etc.. Both formal rules and informal conventions (from where grievance meetings are held, to accepted tone of exchanges, to agreements to pass along grievances pertaining to human rights/harassment to a parallel activity system, etc.) will vary to some extent from one agreement and workplace to another, and can change over the course of several sets of negotiations.

Recall that from the union (as collective) subject position, due process is part of the overall purpose. Thus there is an inherent dialectical relationship within the grievance activity system between rules and *object / motives* wherein the exercise of the rules may become paramount — even (and sometimes especially) in the case of a non-winnable grievance, or a grievance filed on behalf of a member who has clearly violated the agreement or employer policy, or broken

another "rule" of the system (for example, in the case of member-to-member harassment). Here, the union will defend the grievor's right to due process, in part to strengthen the collective agreement, in part because "due process" exists in motion as a rule, a tool, and an *object* of the system. Suffice it to say that this dynamic is often lost on members and critics of the labour movement.

A further key mediating rule in the grievance activity system is the dictum to "obey now, grieve later," which fundamentally shifts the activity system temporally to a post-event response to workplace problems, rather than a key interventionist tool (e.g., a walk-out or "wildcat"). The mediating effect of this rule on both the workplace activity system and on the grievance system (and on the learning and outcomes they engender) should not be underestimated. This rule is designed to minimize workplace disruption, hold back or channel workers' real frustrations and outrage.

Outcomes, conflict and learning in the grievance activity system

> What comes out of social movement action is neither predetermined nor completely self-willed; its meaning is derived from the context in which it is carried out and the understanding that actors bring to and/or derive from it. (Hall & Turay, 2006, p. 7)

There are, of course, many ways to understand outcomes of social movement action. Material outcomes, like compensation, provide one angle for analyzing grievances, as do changes (or lack of changes) to systems, rules, and practices. A grievance may result in a settlement, it may lead to future union demands, it may increase membership meeting attendance, and / or it may divide workers, or bring them together. Outcomes will be experienced differently by different subjects in the activity system, based in part on their *object / motive*, and in part on how wide or narrow the gap between expected and actual outcomes. Take any one grievance and the union may interpret a win, management may interpret a win, the grievor may interpret a loss, and co-workers may interpret either a win or loss as well.

On the one hand, the grievance process is bureaucratic, heavily mediated by rules and division of labour with limited available tools. And yet it is the primary place where workers bring their experiences of injustice, seeking and expecting resolution / compensation. The idea of expansive learning calls forth an additional series of pedagogical and strategic questions for activists and educators:

- In what ways does a grievance activity system smooth over contradictions (seed for expansive learning) or create / expose them?
- In what ways does a grievance activity system mediate the grievor's *object*, outcomes, and learning? In what ways does it afford transformative learning? What mediates learning such that a grievance activity system radicalizes or moderates members, stewards, co-workers, and / or the union?

- How does the grievance activity system attend to (and produce) the emotionally-charged nature of grievances, and how do emotions mediate activity and learning outcomes? Why might thinking about this be strategically important to activists, educators?

Expansive learning describes the cycle whereby contradictions arise and are resolved through the use of existing, new, or adapted tools. The grievance activity system mediates primary, secondary and tertiary contradictions of the workplace activity system — fertile ground for expansive learning. And yet, collective agreements are negotiated to provide some balance to the employer's power in the workplace, thus mitigating primary contradictions between labour and capital — hence transposing contradictions to the operational level (where the way things are "supposed to work" is read as "according to the collective agreement"). The grievance system then becomes the operational "fix": grievances surface contradictions in the workplace activity system, and grievance handling handles them. The grievance is nested in the collective bargaining activity system which, as noted above, is historically steeped in compromise. And yet this is often forgotten. So the "injustice" of a grievance may be felt only insofar as a rule of the agreement was broken, and the fact that the rule itself was weak or even egregious may remain unproblematized, and in fact legitimated by the grievance system (i.e., if we lose sight of the broader activity system of negotiations, it becomes difficult, or even obsolete, to parley a win into a new demand, let alone push against class structures). It could be argued that the grievance activity system limits or dampens the possibility for a more expansive learning or transformative learning that might otherwise occur in the absence of the grievance system as mediating tool for resolving workplace disputes. Or, rather, learning which might occur in the presence of more militant tools, such as sit-downs, or walk-outs. Of course the flipside is to let all hell break loose, but sometimes this might make sense strategically; that is, don't use a tool that will mediate conflict if conflict is critical to expansive learning / transformation. Or at least use another tool.

> Forms of political consciousness... emerge from uniquely human labour processes: the processes through which human beings make themselves vis-à-vis a process of "expansive learning" defined by the progressive resolution of activity system contradictions. (Sawchuk, 2006, p. 294)

One could be inclined to conclude that the "available *artefacts*" to workers and their unions are "tools of the weak" (Alinsky, 1971). But take away these tools and this activity system, and put the grievance and collective bargaining systems of the unionized workplace up against the tools available in a non-union shop, and all of a sudden both processes come alive as a potentially transformative, radical (and radicalizing) activities. The trick, as most labour activists know intuitively, is for stewards, activists, and educators to intervene critically in these activity systems such that they are used as a tool for underscoring (and not obfuscating) primary contradictions of capital (or reducing

them to operational contradictions), all the while effectively using them to make gains for workers.

NEXT STEPS: FORMAL INTERVENTIONS INTO EVERYDAY LEARNING

> As people live and work they continually learn. Most of this learning is unplanned, and it is often tacit; but it is very powerful. (Foley, 2001, p. 72)

As educators, an activity theory approach calls on us to better understand and make better use of informal learning. Going forward, we might consider the following:

1) *Teach activity theory to activists.* Develop curriculum that offers activists tools to: inquire into their own learning processes and practices; critically reflect on workplace / union activity systems as nested within the broader capitalist economy; deeply consider what and how members are learning through their interactions within the workplace and with the union; and reformulate their own role as actors in a learning system. Providing conceptual tools for reflection is a critical role for the union educator. As Foley (2001) wrote, practitioners need "a method which helps [them] investigate and act on what people are actually learning and teaching each other in different sites" (p. 71).

2) *Intervene in informal learning; extend the reach of union education beyond the classroom.* Ask: what are the support mechanisms in place for members engaged in a particular activity system? We know, for example, that grievances are a tremendous opportunity for unions to connect with their members, but they can also leave members disappointed, frustrated, disengaged, and angry at the union. What resources might be useful for grievors that could support / intervene in their informal learning? For example, does the union webpage offer accessible question and answer pages for workers dealing with a workplace problem that provide historical context as well as specific advice and information about the process, outcomes, etc.? Is there an on-line module or forum for workers to navigate to learn more about the grievance process — something that offers both detail and broad context for how and why the system works the way it does, and what variables shape and effect outcomes? Is there a mentorship program / guide in place to support the informal apprenticeship that makes up the bulk of steward "training"? It is a mistake to direct union education about grievances to stewards alone, and to limit our format to formal classroom programs. In defending face-to-face popular adult education programs, we have left many of our members adrift in that sea of learning.

3) *Conduct formal empirical studies of informal learning in routine union activities.* This article did not present an empirical study of the grievance process, but rather argued for a multiplicity of informal community-based studies. However, formal CHAT-informed research projects that investigate everyday collective

learning in routine union practices will contribute toward "a new standard for understanding human agency... that is mediated as well as historicized and materialist which admits agency as both individual and collective social action" (Sawchuk, 2006, p. 292). Empirical research on the grievance activity system (as a precise site of differential power) will be of interest to social movement theorists, adult educators, and labour researchers, in part because it will help explain how social movement structures shape development and participation, and in part because it will resource questions pertaining to the (re)production of power, agency, and hegemony.

4) *Re-think formal union education program design.* Deepen the exercise of "starting with people's experiences" (see the *spiral model of education*, Burke, Geronimo, Martin, Thomas & Wall, 2008) to begin not just with what people know, but with critical inquiry into how we learn what we know. So, for example, in a health and safety course where one might traditionally ask participants to name key workplace hazards, we might additionally ask, how have you learned to "work safely," and how have you, and others, learned to "work around" safety rules? Acknowledging all of this as learning, and interrogating why and how it occurs within the workplace activity system, can help activists and educators better understand what is at play that mediates both safe and unsafe outcomes, and where intervention would be most effective.

Really taking seriously the deep learning that goes on through the everyday practices of a local union (not to mention the broader labour movement) offers important opportunities to deepen the activist / popular education model of union education most widely used today by labour educators. It is not enough to take more seriously *what* people learn about unions at an informal level, but also *how* they learn, for this tells us much more about useful interventions and has us examine routine practices more critically through a strategic and learning lens. It leads us to take members' informal learning seriously as a key concern in the development of strategy and an important piece of member mobilization. Teaching theory and processes for understanding informal learning could mean that the question "what are we learning here?" becomes part of the overall purpose, *object / motives*, of union activity systems, and directs new thinking about everyday union activity. Situated learning theories, and activity theory in particular, provide new critical thinking and pedagogical tools that integrate action and reflection, offer challenges for re-thinking strategic practice. At the same time, this approach "place[s] special emphasis on the self-definition of the learning process by the learner" (Livingstone, 1999, p. 68). It is very much in keeping with a popular education pedagogy (Freire, 1998) committed to democratizing theory.

> Theory is that which helps you comprehend what is happening around you and within you. Theory emerges from the concrete, from efforts to make sense of everyday experiences, from efforts to intervene critically in my life and the lives of others. (hooks, 1994, p. 70)

Union renewal requires a massive undertaking on many levels. Gasparin and Fletcher (2009) have called on union leaders to rethink and resist their narrow focus on the trade union movement, and re-invest in the needs, aspirations and strategies of a more broadly-configured working class labour movement. But while on the one hand, as they suggest, we need to think beyond organized labour, union renewal also requires a process of deeply inquiring into our current everyday practices. By viewing the everyday practices of unions through the lens of learning we can both make visible and more meaningfully intervene in the everyday individual and collective learning of unions, activists, and workers.

NOTES

1. With the notable exception of Worthen, 2008.
2. This is particularly significant, if we accept Piven and Cloward's claim that "the most powerful tool of the oppressed is their ability to disrupt things. Bureaucratization usually interferes with this, as bureaucrats begin to develop an interest in maintaining their organizations" (in Goodwin & Jasper, 2003, p. 167).
3. It is for this reason that "management" is not considered a subject standpoint in the union grievance activity system outlined here. The grievance process is the basis of two intersecting workplace activity systems: one defined by management *object / motives*, and one by union *object / motives* (reflecting the inherent class conflict). As Engeström (2001) pointed out in third generation activity theory, multiple activity systems must be considered the base unit of analysis; we cannot explore learning (of the grievor, the steward, the union as a whole) without an understanding of the interplay between, at a minimum, the union and management systems. Arguably one might determine that given the compromised nature of the grievance system (as previously discussed), the grievance process can be understood as a single activity system (of course still nested, etc.). This would make for an interesting discussion wherever activity theory is used as a pedagogical tool.
4. A CHAT analysis might recast this as dialectic, historic, and activity-based processes.

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RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING AS "RADICAL PEDAGOGY": A CASE STUDY OF THE WORKERS' COLLEGE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT. This article argues that the model of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in use at the Workers' College in South Africa may be seen as a form of "radical pedagogy." Drawing on documentary sources, focus group interviews with staff, and observations, it describes an educational philosophy which aims to build the competencies of activists in labour and community organizations, facilitate their self-affirmation and dignity, and provide an access route to post-school education. It documents and attempts to theorize how this philosophy is enacted in classroom pedagogy, and explores some of the tensions and contradictions encountered. It concludes by acknowledging the unique contribution of these educational practices to an understanding of what RPL as radical pedagogy might look like.

LA RECONNAISSANCE DES ACQUIS COMME PÉDAGOGIE RADICALE : ÉTUDE DU CAS DES WORKER'S COLLEGE D'AFRIQUE DU SUD

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article soutient que le modèle de reconnaissance des acquis (RPL) utilisé au *Workers' College* en Afrique du Sud peut être considéré comme une forme de « pédagogie radicale ». Le texte décrit une philosophie éducative en s'inspirant de sources documentaires, de groupes de discussion avec des employés et des observations. Cette vision vise à développer les compétences des partisans d'organisations ouvrières et communautaires, à favoriser leur affirmation de soi et leur dignité, ainsi qu'à offrir une voie d'accès à une éducation postscolaire. L'article documente et tente d'élaborer une théorie sur la manière dont cette philosophie est appliquée en pédagogie et explore certaines des tensions et contradictions rencontrées. Il termine en reconnaissant la contribution unique de ces pratiques éducatives à l'élaboration d'une meilleure compréhension de la façon par laquelle le RPL peut présenter comme une pédagogie radicale.

> *We taught one another what we knew, discovering each other's resourcefulness. We also learned how people with little or no formal education could not only themselves participate in education programmes but actually teach others a range of different insights and skills. The "University of Robben Island" was one of the best universities in the country... it also showed me that you don't need professors.* (Neville Alexander, cited in Magnien, 2012)[1]

This article aims to explore the model of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in use at the Workers' College in South Africa. According to Harris &Wihak (2011)

> The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the practice of reviewing, evaluating and acknowledging the knowledge and skills that adults have gained through experiential, self-directed and /or informal learning, as well as through formal education.(p.1)

The study on which this article is based forms part of a larger four-year research project funded by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), entitled *Specialised pedagogy: A comparative study of RPL practices within the changing landscape of the NQF in South Africa*. One of four case studies,[2] the Workers' College study focuses specifically on how RPL practices are integrated into the College's pedagogy, the content of its programs, its educational materials and assessment tools.

RPL usually takes the form of an assessment practice which occurs before entry into a program of learning. The distinctive feature of the RPL practice at the College is that it takes place not only prior to entry, but also in the form of in-curriculum RPL; that is, it forms an integral part of the pedagogy of the College and within an educational agenda geared towards the benefit of the collectives from which the individual learners come, and through which they are recruited into the program. The College's program is aimed at activists in labour and community organizations and is located within a strong conceptual and ideological framework of critical Marxist theories and activist values. The College views RPL as a tool directed simultaneously at building the intellectual and organizational capacities of activists working for social transformation, facilitating their self-affirmation and dignity, and providing an access route into higher education. The aim of the College is not merely that the content and education process be informed by, and relate to, the experiences and practices of the individual learners, but that they are also responsive to the experiences of the labour and community organizations from which learners are drawn and are of collective benefit.

Individual experiences are not merely recruited but are interrogated through personal reflections, robust debates, group and class discussions, inputs and interventions by the facilitators, and through exposure to, and critical engagement with, texts, concepts, theories, and debates that circulate within activist organizations, as well as within mainstream academia.

The College acknowledges that there is a body of conventional knowledge that resides in formal institutions of learning that has always been powerful and valued, while experiential knowledge is often dismissed as being less important. The College's approach to RPL attempts to explore and — where necessary — challenge the relationship between formal knowledge in the academy and experiential knowledge. The educational philosophy of the College is to begin with learners' *struggle knowledge*, to reflect on it, validate it through peer engagement, and link experiential knowledge to radical political theories of social change, as well as to the codified knowledge base of academia. In this process, *new knowledge* is generated with which the College aims to build an alternative knowledge base that can interact with, and enrich formal disciplinary knowledge bases, giving them greater relevance for College learners. Following on the traditions of Hart (1992) and Michelson (1996), this approach thus seeks to critically engage with dominant discourses and to challenge the hierarchies that lead to some kinds of knowledge being undervalued and unrecognized.

Over the years, the College has encouraged the recruitment and involvement in its educational programs of facilitators or educators from the broad landscape of trade union, community, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society, and academic backgrounds. Their experiences have contributed to a rich exchange of varied experiential knowledge which has shaped the educational events and discourse of the College. This exchange of experiential knowledge has also impacted on the organization itself and the way in which it interacts with learners and the broader constituency that it serves.

This article provides an overview of the educational philosophy of the College against the background of its history. It then explores in greater detail how this educational philosophy is enacted in classroom pedagogy and demonstrates the significance of activism as the organizing principle of its curriculum. It concludes by briefly reviewing learners' experiences of the impact of the program and of the tensions, contradictions, and challenges that the College is grappling with, while acknowledging its unique contribution to an understanding of what "RPL as pedagogy" might look like.

BACKGROUND AND PHILOSOPHY OF THE WORKERS' COLLEGE

The College was established in 1991 originally as part of the University of Natal, Durban, (now the University of Kwa Zulu Natal [UKZN]), but has subsequently become independent. The decision to establish the College was born out of the realization that there were very few worker education organizations and institutions in South Africa that addressed the peculiar educational needs and realities of trade unions and community-based organizations. In addition, educational programs that were designed for trade union activists were usually in the form of seminars and workshops conducted over a few days, without any form of assessment, and with little or no continuity or follow-up. From

1992, the College started providing a variety of educational programs for trade unionists. These were designed as one-year certificate courses and, as the learners were working adults, only required attendance at classes once a week.

The decision to seek formal accreditation for the courses arose as a result of pressure on the College from various trade unions for formal recognition of their members' learning. Despite this development, it must be noted that the content and outcomes of the College's educational programs continued to be designed to meet the needs and challenges facing trade union organizations. Initially, an agreement around formal accreditation was reached between the College and Ruskin College in the United Kingdom,[3] but because of the geographical distance between the two institutions, the arrangement became impractical.

In 1997, an arrangement was established with UKZN, providing for an accreditation link in the following way: the four, one-year College diplomas received UKZN Senate approval as alternative access qualifications into a degree program. Learners' performance in the four diplomas was to be assessed on the basis of class participation, assignments, and written and, at times, oral examinations, moderated by UKZN. A joint Workers' College / UKZN diploma was to be awarded to all successful diploma graduates at a graduation ceremony held at UKZN.

In 2000, a part-time, five-year Bachelor of Social Science (B. Soc. Sci.) degree was designed for the College's diploma learners in collaboration with the Industrial and Working Life Project (IWLP) based at UKZN. On successful completion of the diploma course, learners would qualify to enrol for this degree. The diploma served as an entry qualification should learners not have a matriculation (matric) qualification, or, if they did have matric, then the diploma served as a 16-credit UKZN module. Previously, only trade union representatives served on the College's governing structures, but as of 2000, the College amended its constitution to include community representatives.

Philosophy

As the College sees it, learning best takes place by connecting learners' experiential knowledge with broader theoretical concepts as well as academic knowledge. This pedagogy is rooted in an adult education approach, in this case with a specific focus on equipping trade union and community activists with the practical and theoretical capacities to strengthen their activism and their organizational practices. Not unique to the College, this approach forms part of a long, international tradition of radical worker education (see London, Tarr & Wilson, 1990; Lovett, 1998; Philips & Putnam, 1980; Welton, 1991) and of learning through social action (Foley, 1999; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2012; Newman, 1994). Additionally, it is also shaped by the College's own history as a worker-centred organization in civil society born out of the South African

liberation struggle and informed by a history of radical education against apartheid and long established traditions and practices of participatory, democratic educational practices (see e.g., Cooper, 2007; Morrow, Maaba & Pulumani, 2002; Motala & Vally, 2002; Nekhweva, 2002). As it grapples with the complexities and intricacies of South Africa's present neo-liberal, democratic dispensation in a globalized world, its pedagogic practices are also informed by some of the current practices of civil society organizations and social movements (see, e.g., Endresen & von Kotze, 2005; Harley, 2013).

While the College has tapped both into this history and various theoretical traditions, its educational practices have mainly been developed in the midst of action, shaped by practice, experience, and experiment, and informed by the ever-changing socio-economic and political landscape as well as the fluid and dynamic organizational environment of the labour movement and community organizations.

Policies, program structure and purposes

Learners who come onto the diploma course programs are drawn primarily from among those who occupy leadership positions in trade unions and community organizations — predominantly shop stewards, local office bearers, and local organizers — as well as rank and file members. There is a specific attempt to ensure that there is a gender balance in the selection of participants, including an equal spread of women and men in the Gender and Labour Studies Diploma to dispel the notion amongst trade unions and community organizations that gender is only about women. Learners are selected through the following processes:

*Notices and application forms.*These are sent to labour and community organizations which have an existing relationship with the College.

Submission of the application form. This form requests information on applicants' personal details, prior education within their organizations and in educational institutions and programs, their organizational membership and positions held, and an undertaking from their organization to support their application.

Invitation to write an assessment test. Should the application be in order, applicants are invited to write a test. The test seeks to determine their ability to communicate in English as well as their understanding of their roles in their organization and broader society.

Invitation to an interview. After successful completion of the assessment test, applicants are invited to an interview which allows the College to get to know them, assess their verbal skills, understand their personal and organizational circumstances, provide information to them about the diploma program, determine which diploma is most suitable, explain some of the rules of the program and determine whether they can get time off work to attend the residential blocks, the revision program and examinations.

Although basic English literacy skills are considered in the entry test, emphasis is placed on experiences and capacities related to labour and community activism, and on a basic understanding of the historical and current social, economic, and political realities of South Africa. The RPL admission policy allows for applicants without matric to be considered, based on how they fared in the entry test, on recommendations from their organizations, and on their length of experience and the leadership position they hold in their organization.

The College offers four one-year diplomas equivalent to a level five National Qualifications Framework (NQF) qualification. The four diplomas are:

- Labour Studies Diploma (LSD)
- Labour Economics Diploma (LED)
- Political and Social Development Diploma (PSDD)
- Gender and Labour Studies Diploma (GLSD)

These are all recognized for the purposes of access (with limited credit) into the Bachelor of Social Science Degree, otherwise known as the Industrial and Working Life Programme (IWLP), at UKZN.

Each diploma program is structured into six modules with five modules delivered in five-day residential blocks. In a normal program, a day consists of four sessions: two in the morning with a tea break, then lunch followed by two sessions in the afternoon with a tea break. Quite often each module or block has extramural activities such as site visits, debates, guest speakers, sporting activities, and viewing of documentaries, which act as enrichment for the course. The sixth module is based on project work that is carried out in the activists' sites of practice.

In 2010, one of the six modules was designed to focus on activism, which has helped to further develop the College's approach to "in-curriculum" RPL. This activism module serves as a generic introduction to the themes and focus areas of the diploma programs. Its goal is to facilitate a process for learners to draw on their experiences, skills, and knowledge — including political, social, and economic concepts — acquired through life struggles and activism and to have such knowledge documented, acknowledged, and recognized as having value.

The themes and values adopted in the first module are threaded through the diploma programs and joint sessions with all the learners, engaging holistically with learners' experiences and informing their further engagement as activists in the workplace and the communities in which they live.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT: PROCESS AND FINDINGS

The first phase of the research project sought to document the historical development and educational philosophy of the College, and this information

has been set out in the previous section. In the second phase, the research sought to obtain a more detailed picture of, and a critical "outsider" perspective on, forms of pedagogy in use at the College. It focused on both "curriculum as planned" as well as "curriculum in practice." In particular, it focused on what experiences are valued and how they are recruited. This included a focus on the pedagogical methods used to recruit experiential knowledge, the teaching methodologies and tools of mediation used (Daniels, 2001), as well as teaching and learning materials and forms of assessment. The last phase of the research project involved a biographical study of a select group of the College's participants.

Data collection took place during module three of the 2012 residential diploma programs and was carried out by two researchers who had no previous involvement with the College, but who were part of the larger SAQA RPL research project. Their research entailed observations of one session of each diploma program over two days; an observation of a supervision session for module six, where supervisors gave individual feedback to learners on the progress of their projects; two focus group interviews with College staff and facilitators; and a systematic analysis of course workbooks, readers and assignments from module three — the "curriculum as planned." It is acknowledged that this was insufficient to provide a comprehensive understanding of what experiential learning was recruited and how, but it did provide significant insight into one section of the planned curriculum and illuminated the pedagogical approaches of the different facilitators, as well as how RPL practices may have evolved since the first phase of data collection in 2010.

Curriculum as planned

Findings revealed that RPL was functioning at different levels and in multiple ways at the College:

- at pre-entry, where admissions criteria prioritized certain types of activist experience;
- within the diploma programs themselves, where learners' experiential knowledge provided the scaffolding for epistemological access to the College's curriculum;
- and at the end of the program, as a route for successful learners from the diploma programs to access the specialist higher education Social Sciences degree at UKZN.

The outside observers / researchers noted that despite the stated intention of prioritizing activists' experiential knowledge, the planned curriculum of the College — as characterized by course readers and resource packs — comprised mostly academic texts, which were conceptually dense and strongly conceptually oriented.[4] This apparent contradiction was raised with staff in the focus group interviews, and while it was acknowledged that some concepts were

quite complex, facilitators argued that many of the learners would have already encountered them in their organizational involvement, and so would have some familiarity with them. In other words, elements of critical social theory, and the specialized language associated with it, are already circulating within civil society organizations and are not the sole preserve of the academy. The College sees this conceptual knowledge as essential in enabling trade union and community workers to become better activists in their sites of practice. As the Director remarked: "The context of the education discourse in the Workers' College is educating workers for the community and for the trade unions" (focus group interview [FGI] 15/06/2012).

Curriculum in practice

Despite the theoretical orientation of the curriculum, in practice conceptual knowledge is largely mediated through learners' experience. Observations of classroom practice showed that this process frequently begins in an inductive way, where facilitators draw on the learners' experiential knowledge, and interpret and re-contextualize this in relation to conceptual knowledge. Following this, concepts are then relocated back in the real world: working deductively, the concepts are either applied to case studies or re-contextualized alongside learners' experiences in order to deepen their understanding.

The dialectical movement between experiential knowledge and conceptual knowledge is facilitated through pedagogic methods such as:

- Role-plays and simulations of workplace, organizational, and community environments, which allow participants to relate the issues, concepts and theories explored in the diploma program to their experiences and struggles in these environments.
- Providing a platform for participants to share their own stories, journeys and struggles experienced in their communities, workplaces and organizations, through a medium of their choice, including drama, monologues, song, poetry, movement, pantomime, graphics and sketches. This allows participants to tap into forms of expression and modes of knowledge common within their own communities and organizations where non-formal and informal learning occur.
- Allowing participants to read and discuss case studies of strikes, community protests or campaigns and to relate these to their personal and organizational experiences. In selecting appropriate case studies, facilitators look at factors such as the organizational backgrounds of the participants, current or recent struggles, campaigns and topical issues in community and labour organizations and within broader society. In this sense, the educational agenda is influenced by the trade union, community organization, and broader sociopolitical landscape. At the same time, the educational agenda provides a tool for community and labour activists to critique this landscape.

- Drawing on the discussion and policy documents of some of the participating organizations, providing room for participants to critically engage with these policies and their implementation in their organizations. In this way, the curriculum draws on the culture, traditions and experiences of labour and community organizations, while at the same time critically interrogating these traditions.
- Drawing on the idioms, images, language and other forms of expression that participants use in their organizations and communities, and relating these to the concepts, issues and theories dealt with in the program.

Thus, the facilitator acts to mediate the engagement between learners' individual and collective (organizational) experiential learning, and the conceptual knowledge of the curriculum. One of the facilitators remarked: "It's about taking the learners from where they are and developing them further" and that, "we demystify concepts first, by describing them in experience, and then explore them in a more distanced, measured way, for example how globalization affects their daily lives" (FGI 15/06/2012). Working with learners' experiential knowledge to arrive at more conceptual understandings gives learners a theoretical language of description. When the facilitator subsequently works backwards from abstract concepts to learners' experiential knowledge, this helps them understand and critique their experiential learning, their assumptions, and their organizational, activist practice: "[we are] pulling them out of their context in order to put them back in again"(FGI 15/06/2012).

Facilitators emphasized that learning does not only take place in the classroom. The facilitators spoke of field trips that they had organized, such as to the informal traders' market in Durban, where the learners could see "concepts in operation." Poetry, drama, and other creative activities, such as drumming, were used to explore some concepts experientially (in the case of drumming, the issue of diversity).

The dialogical process of inductive recruitment of experience, that is relating experience to broader, analytical concepts, and then deductively relating these to particular contexts, seems to enable learners to "transcend their local context" and "access the academic and specialised knowledge that gives rise to abstract, specialised and context-independent knowledge structures that are the prerequisite for [formal] self-directed learning" (Haupt, 2005, p, 47).

Activism as the organizing principle for the curriculum

A research study by an exchange student at UKZN, Elena Tillman, in which she sought to explore how the College develops in its learners a consciousness about their role as activists in transforming society, indicated that the notion of activism is clearly key to the purpose of education at the College, which is one of "developing critical and informed activists in civil society" (Tillman, 2012, p. 4). This topic was further explored in the focus group interviews with the

College facilitators and staff, to try and gain a more in-depth understanding of how this manifested in the diploma programs.

As explained by the College's staff, all four diploma courses start with a common "activism" module (module one) in which learners' experience of activism is explored in relation to their life, community, and work, and forms the basis for all further learning at College. Activism is defined in this module as "when an individual or community or organization engages in activities... to address challenges facing their respective constituencies... and all forms of oppression and exploitation based on class, race, gender... for the betterment / improvement of their livelihood" (Workers' College, 2012, p. 1). The module explores and exposes the learners to different values, as "people may be walking the same road but have different values" (FGI 15/06/2012), and it shows how their values are shaped by the predominant values of their organizations. It must be noted that there are different forms of trade unions, those that want to bring about social change and those that confine their work to addressing "bread and butter issues" within the workplace, working within the system. Not all the learners have an awareness of themselves as activists for change when they come to the College, "but we make them into activists" (FGI 15/06/2012).

The diplomas, therefore, expose the learners to activist discourses, especially socialist perspectives on oppression and exploitation, the interrelationships between various forms of activism and between the issues and causes advanced by these forms, and related activist strategies for action. Activism is explored broadly in relation to their personal life struggles (drawing on personal experience), as well as more specifically in relation to their organizational experience (drawing on their activist experience), from the perspectives of the four different diplomas respectively. A facilitator explained that: "The discussions help raise their (learners') consciousness and embrace other perspectives and understandings — for example, looking at homophobia and "corrective rape," how this is a violation of personal rights, and how in a similar way workers' rights are abused in the workplace" (FGI, 15/06/2012). Learners are urged to develop a balanced perspective and to challenge existing ideologies and knowledge — their own and those of others in academia, in the trade unions and in their communities — but are also constantly reminded to respect difference.

The Director noted that all sessions are geared towards building understanding not only of social structure but also of agency, so that the learners deepen their understanding of their role as agents in their organizations, which further "heightens their consciousness" (FGI, 15/06/2012). It was clear that this notion of "consciousness" is an important one at the College, in particular, consciousness of being an activist and what this means. The curriculum of the first module outlines how learners are explicitly oriented to the principles, values, and ethics of activism, which they then apply in the context of the

College, actively learning these roles in social interactions and "conscientizing others not to oppress them" (FGI, 15/06/2012).

Of key importance is that participants learn to think critically, to "turn the lens on themselves" (FGI, 14/06/2012) from the outset. It was explained, for example, that learners are asked the same questions at the beginning and again at the end of this first module, and they then reflect on how their perspectives have shifted during this short time. The diploma programs also emphasize collective learning through group work as well as peer review of one another's assignments. As the Director remarked: "collectivism has become an underlying theme and value, which is reflected in how they help each other" (FGI, 15/06/2012). Learners from all four diploma programs participate together in the first four sessions of the activism module, and so from the start they are introduced to collective and collaborative learning and activist values. These values are also woven through all other sessions, learning activities and social interactions. It would seem that the activism module, and especially the first four sessions, act as an RPL module in itself, locating learning within learners' experiences and initiating them into the regulative discourse of the College. In the other modules RPL is integrated into the learning activities, which are based on the diploma-specific subject matter. The discourse of critical activism, with its embedded values, principles, and ethics for social change, therefore appears to be the "golden thread" running through all four diploma curricula, and all social interaction at the College.

Activist values become embedded in the facilitators as well, as they learn from each other and from the learners, sharing their own experiences and struggles with the learners in a collective fashion. It was explained that facilitators' collective experiences range from experiences of police harassment, detention and imprisonment, exploitative labour conditions, casual labour, single parenting, involvement in trade unionism, community work, cultural activism, and student activism at different periods in history. By referring to their own experiences, facilitators enable participants to be more open in sharing similar experiences and struggles. For example, one facilitator's narration of his experiences in organizing people in a peri-urban township to initiate and sustain community projects, not only helped to put faces and names to theories about community organizing, but also prompted one participant to share his own story of his struggles to draw community, primary care-workers into a trade union for informal workers. This led to an open discussion where people contributed their own recruitment and organizing strategies in the context of the union, and served as a useful introduction to a group activity exploring how community organizing and Asset-Based Community Development could be used by labour and community organizations to promote workers' control and people's power.

This mutual interaction has the effect of shifting and equalizing power relations and eliminating "the disjuncture between the values of the lecturer and what they are teaching" (FGI 15/06/2012), which is so often evident in higher education institutions. An example of egalitarian social relations between learners and staff, and collective identification as activists was observed on two occasions when all the learners and facilitators were assembling for a late afternoon seminar, and some learners spontaneously started singing "struggle" chants. Within minutes, all the learners, staff and facilitators present were chanting, whistling, and "toyi-toying" (a form of collective singing and dancing to protest or send a message) in solidarity.

Following feminist critiques of experiential learning theories for their separation of the mind and body, and of the personal from the political (see Michelson, 1998), the College strives for a holistic approach to learning. Drawing on learners' personal experiences as the starting point for creating knowledge is seen by facilitators as particularly significant as a means of empowering learners; as emphasized by the Director of the College, "the hierarchical structures of the unions disallows the personal" (FGI 14/06/2012). The College's emphasis on the personal is seen as important in strengthening an activist identity: "If you can't transform yourself you cannot transform broader society" (FGI 14/06/2012). The recruitment of learners' personal experiences is also seen as facilitating their assimilation of theoretical knowledge: "they appropriate the knowledge for themselves and can operationalize it, they are not just acquiring it" (FGI 15/06/2012).

The College's pedagogy also encompasses the emotion and the body. The theme of healing appeared several times in the course of the research: the restoration of people's humanity was considered as a vital outcome of the diplomas, helping learners to overcome feelings of inferiority in terms of their educational backgrounds and knowledge capital. As the Director pointed out:

> Healing happens quite naturally within the class, because of what they do. Their story comes through in the broader story of the collective — they locate themselves in a context through their stories: "I am an activist because...." These stories are then located in the broader histories and current contexts of activism, and the values that bring them all together. (FGI 15/06/2012)

As Tillman (2012) observed: "once the humanity of the oppressed is restored then it follows that they will recognize themselves as agents and will act to effect change and transform their environment, essentially what the College sets out to do" (p. 8).

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

The research pursued two lines of critical evaluation of the College's pedagogy: firstly, biographical interviews with a selection of five learners sought to explore their experiences of the College's program, as well as their views on its impact;

and secondly, critical discussions between outside observers and facilitators elucidated some of the pedagogic challenges faced in developing a program that brings non-formal traditions of radical worker education together with creating an access route into higher education.

Impact of the program on learners' lives

Amongst other features, the biographical study found that in comparison with their previous learning experiences, learners found the College environment and culture friendly and non-threatening. They were particularly encouraged by the manner in which the facilitators and staff at the College presented themselves as fellow comrades and their equals. Learners felt that the activist identities of the facilitators allowed them to do well in a learning environment that was centred on activism. The interactive nature of the educational practice strengthened this idea that all were equal and their experiences received equal recognition. In particular, learners highlighted the fact that the program was centred on socialist principles and values, and that it focused on current issues relating to race, gender, class and ecology.

Another aspect of the College's practice and culture referred to by all of the learners was its non-discriminatory ethos. They felt that concerted efforts were made at the College to make everyone feel respected and accepted irrespective of their gender, political affiliation, age or position in their organizations, or status in society. Regarding the pedagogic traditions at the College, all five of the learners interviewed mentioned that they had found the educational practice participative and centred on acknowledging and recognizing their experiences and *struggle knowledge*. They valued opportunities and spaces to reflect on, and critique their life histories and experiences.

All those interviewed indicated that the program had impacted on their personal lives and on how they conducted themselves in the community and at the workplace. It had enhanced and affirmed their agency as activists, empowered them with different skills and strategies that they could apply in different social contexts, raised levels of understanding and skill, broadened and changed perspectives, built their confidence, and inculcated socialist principles and values. They provided several examples of how they applied the knowledge and skills in their workplaces and in their organizations. For example, one participant from a community organization narrated how in his organization people did not usually continue with a meeting when the chairperson was absent. However, after his educational experience at the College, he took the initiative to facilitate discussions and chair meetings. He attributed his assertiveness and confidence to his experience of participatingin group discussions, facilitating some group activities, and being taught to value his own experiences and opinions. He also explained how, as a result of the activist consciousness and confidence gained at the College, he was able to stand up to a manager who

referred to him as a "driver," which according to him was demeaning and dehumanizing, insisting instead on being called by his name.

One of the community activists felt that in her leadership role in her organization, she had learned to be democratic and not just make decisions on her own. The College's program had helped her to change her perspectives: she had learned that there are many points of view and no one view is correct. The program had also taught her the importance of tolerance and respect for others and the need to listen to others.

> when I came here this notion of being a leader, sort of like, strengthened me — coming here strengthened my leadership, strengthened the way I thought, and strengthened the way I looked at the things in all angles of life.... Here I learnt more of leadership. I learnt of being democratic. [What] I learnt strengthened my passion. (Learner interview 1, 7/4/2013)

Some tensions and challenges

The two outside observers raised questions concerning two apparent tensions or disjunctures which they had observed, and these were discussed together with staff in the focus group interviews. One concerned the question of how effectively to integrate text-based tools of mediation into the curriculum. The other concerned the tension between the espoused educational philosophy of the College, and the nature of the tools of assessment, that is, assignments and exams.

Classroom pedagogy at the College draws substantially on oral and visual tools of mediation that are familiar to learners. However, it was noted earlier that the pedagogy also relies heavily on texts that are often conceptually dense. A common problem experienced by facilitators, and raised in one of the focus group interviews, was the difficulty learners have in coping with the text-based material, not only struggling to read, but also to understand the texts. This may be understood against the background that most students come from working-class backgrounds where their schooling was poor, and, for most, English is their second or third language. The facilitators discussed various strategies for dealing with this, mainly focusing on the reading of texts in class. It was acknowledged, however, that while these strategies may enhance learning, they were also time-consuming. Facilitators suggested that local written accounts of case studies should be sought as far as possible for interrogation and critique, as this would make it easier for learners to access the readings. Nevertheless, the issue of text-based tools of mediation presents a challenge to that dimension of RPL at the College which seeks to enable access for learners to higher education where learners are required to engage confidently with academic texts.[5]

The second tension or disjuncture lay between "RPL as radical pedagogy" and the nature of the assignments and exams. The final mark for each of the first

five modules completed for each diploma is comprised of: exam - 50%; assignment - 40%; and participation - 10%. The fieldwork module, module six, is marked incrementally, as the different stages are completed. To the outside observers, the assignments in the learner workbooks appeared very academic in nature, with a focus on testing understanding of general, abstract concepts and contextual issues, and not explicitly drawing on experiential knowledge in any way. Similarly, there seemed to be a disjuncture between having a formal "exam" at the end of each of the first five modules, and the experiential pedagogical approach that characterized classroom practice at the College.

In the focus group interviews, however, facilitators expressed the view that the assignments were based on issues that affect learners in the community, in their organizations, and in the workplace, and that they were given "the tools to critically reflect and critique these" in the diplomas. They argued that because of the way the learners process this knowledge in class through "RPL pedagogy" and in terms of their own trade union and organizational experiences, they are able to interpret the questions in the assignments and exams and to use examples from their own lives to answer them. It was emphasized that the aim of the diploma programs is for the learners to acquire "a way of interrogating the world" that highlights their own values and places these values under scrutiny, rather than acquiring knowledge for its own sake. However, it remains an interesting challenge as to how to devise creative approaches to assessment that are compatible with, and that promote "RPL as radical pedagogy."

Staff agreed that to accomplish this would require a variety of creative and innovative forms that were not restricted to written and oral exams and assignments. There is a need to look at forms of assessment that not only enlists prior learning experiences, but also explores modes of knowledge and expression embedded in working-class community cultures, history of struggle, knowledge systems, and anti-racist idioms and aesthetics. At present the College is exploring different forms of assessment, integrating formal and creative forms. For example, in 2013, the participants were asked to make a presentation of their final fieldwork report through creative modes of expression such as graphics, talk-shows, monologues, drama, statues / pantomime, and were offered the choice of presenting as individuals or in groups.

WORKERS' COLLEGE PEDAGOGY: TOWARDS SOME THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The Workers' College case study raises some interesting theoretical issues, challenging some of the assumptions often made in the literature about "experiential learning," as well as putting pressure on dualist models of pedagogy.

Traditional theorizations of RPL draw largely on adult and experiential learning theories (Andersson & Harris, 2006). The classic experiential learning cycle

of Kolb (1984) starts with experience, and proceeds to abstraction from that experience in a fairly "open" way, that is, drawing preliminary lessons, understandings and concepts from that experience. These understandings or concepts are seen as having primary relevance for the individual learner concerned. In this model, after this initial process of conceptualization, ideas, concepts or information from outside of learners' experience are brought in to deepen or challenge understanding. The resultant ideas / understandings are then used to inform practice. As noted earlier, experiential learning theories have been critiqued by poststructuralist feminists for, amongst other things, their rather mechanistic and "idealised mode of disembodied, context-independent contemplation" (Michelson, 1998, p. 227).

With the College, a close analysis of the lesson plans in the learners' workbooks, as well as the pedagogy in the classroom, shows a different pattern. Generally speaking, experience is first recruited in an open inductive fashion (where no specific conclusions are pre-figured), followed by a move towards "closed," inductive recruitment of experience, where learners engage in individual and collective dialogue between their experiential knowledge and the conceptual and theoretical content of the curriculum. There is therefore a dialectical movement between "theory" and "experience" often ending with the application of concepts back to concrete experience, in order to deepen understanding of the concepts or to re-organize and re-interpret experiential knowledge.

It seems that the model of experiential learning in use at the College is not that of the humanist, Kolb, but rather that of the more materialist thinker and educationalist, Vygotsky. Both models actually provide a role for theoretical concepts. In Kolb's (1984) model however, these are secondary and brought in later to test or enrich experiential knowledge. It is everyday concepts, organically derived from personal experience, that are given primacy.

Vygotsky presents a far stronger role for systematized theory, while also retaining a role for "everyday concepts." Vygotsky (1986) differentiated between two kinds of concepts (or processes of concept formation) which represent two different forms of reasoning: what he called "scientific concepts" (that is, systematized theory) that are developed through instruction and "spontaneous concepts" (or "everyday" concepts) that develop through experience. Although their paths of development are different they are related and constantly influence each other; the process is essentially a unitary one. Both systematized theory and "everyday" concepts have a developmental curve; but the development of systematized concepts leads the development of spontaneous concepts. According to Vygotsky (1986), "systematic reasoning, being initially acquired in the sphere of scientific concepts, later transfers its structural organization into spontaneous concepts, remodelling them from above" (p. 172).

The Workers' College case study seems to present a fruitful example of how a systematized body of theory (what Vygotsky would have called "scientific

concepts") derived mainly from Marxist / neo-marxist, critical and feminist theories is mediated to learners (although it is noted that some activists are already familiar with elements of these theories from discussions and debates within their organizations). Initially, everyday experience is drawn on selectively to illustrate the meaning of concepts. Thereafter, these conceptual tools are used to recontextualize "everyday" concepts that activists bring with them, deepening their understanding and, most importantly, systematizing their everyday thinking. This process seems to act as a good springboard for a form of RPL that is both inclusive of everyday, experiential knowledge but also prepares learners for the demands of academic study.[6]

In accounting for this approach, a key factor seems to be the strong contextual purpose of the College curriculum and its notion that the task of bringing about radical social change is served by providing learners with a strong set of conceptual resources. However, these theoretical resources, while tending to be general and abstract in form, must at the same time be meaningful and useful to learners as social activists. Furthermore, the College's philosophy is clearly one which does not regard established conceptual frames as remaining untouched in this process: The College explicitly holds the view that in the process of re-contextualizing learners' experiences, these experiences may also, in turn, act to challenge or change established theory.

CONCLUSION

"RPL as radical pedagogy" as practiced within the Workers' College attempts to mediate between the *struggle knowledge* of activists who come into the diploma programs, and a set of theoretical frameworks whose concepts relate to such experiences, directly or indirectly. It also attempts to facilitate a process for activists to understand their current existence and develop their own independent worldview in opposition to the dominant knowledge system and culture that prevails in our globalized society. With the embedding of RPL as "radical pedagogy" within an accredited program, however, it also seeks to provide an access route to the academy, and therefore a way into the dominant knowledge system which may challenge activists' experiences and worldview. The College has to work within this tension, all the while strengthening the confidence of its learners to challenge dominant knowledge paradigms.

The radical approach to pedagogy by the College is not new in South Africa, especially in adult education and within organizations that work towards social change. There are many such organizations that have and continue to mediate between experiential and theoretical knowledge in an attempt to find new and alternative solutions. Education must be seen in the broad context of bringing about change in intellectual understanding, contributing and developing new knowledge, and responding creatively to the conditions and realities of society. The RPL practice within the College and other similar institutions is

not primarily one of credit-seeking but rather one of liberating the individual and communities. This liberatory pedagogy should be integral to wider pedagogical discourses and education practices.

This case study has cast light on the College's RPL practices and provided an opportunity for the College to address the challenges identified and to build on the innovations identified by the study. The research will strengthen the College's attempts to develop best practices of RPL in the context of a developing country where the struggle to achieve equality, redress, restoration of dignity and social cohesion is of utmost importance.

NOTES

1. Former revolutionary and struggle hero Neville Edward Alexander (22 October 1936 – 27 August 2012) was best known as a proponent of a multilingual South Africa. He was a co-founder of the National Liberation Front and a director of the South African Committee for Higher Education.
2. The other three case studies focus on RPL in relation to undergraduate study and postgraduate study at two South African universities respectively, and on a private provider of RPL services to the corporate sector. The research project as a whole is funded by SAQA.
3. Ruskin College was originally established in 1899 specifically to provide university-standard education for working-class people so that they could act more effectively on behalf of working-class communities and organizations: trade unions, political parties, co-operative societies, working men's institutes and so on.
4. For example, they dealt with concepts such as privatization, nationalization, globalization, capitalism, Marxist perspectives on law, colonialism and neo-colonialism, imperialism, people's power, socialization, the state, underdevelopment, civil society, gender, precarious labour.
5. For further discussion on the role of tools of mediation in RPL in relation to workers' education, see Cooper (2006).
6. It has been argued that this model of pedagogic practice is not unique to the Workers' College, but is a commonly adopted approach in trade union and worker education in South Africa (see Cooper, 2007, pp.188-189).

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POWER IN PRACTICE: TRADE UNION EDUCATION IN SIERRA LEONE

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ABSTRACT. This article presents an analysis of the development of a trade union education program in Sierra Leone in the geo-historical context of British colonialism. It places the argument in relation to the contradictory trends of trade unionism more generally and alongside their antagonistic cooperation with capitalism. It discusses the limits and potentialities of a radical pedagogy when trade unions are constrained to engage with existing power structures that use English as the dominant language. It places more theoretical arguments within the context of a country characterized by major inequalities and facing the neoliberal challenges of globalization and a trade union movement seeking to be representative of an informal workforce but rooted in the formal economy.

LE POUVOIR MIS EN PRATIQUE : LA FORMATION SYNDICALE EN SIERRA LEONE

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article propose une analyse de l'élaboration d'un programme de formation syndicale en Sierra Leone dans le contexte géohistorique du colonialisme britannique. Il situe le débat en abordant de manière générale les tendances contradictoires de la formation syndicale et, en parallèle, la coo-pération conflictuelle avec le capitalisme. Il aborde les limites et les perspectives d'une pédagogie radicale lorsque les organisations syndicales sont contraintes à collaborer avec des structures décisionnelles privilégiant l'anglais comme langue de travail. Il situe plusieurs questionnements théoriques dans le contexte d'un pays reconnu pour ses inégalités profondes et qui fait face aux défis néolibéraux de la mondialisation et d'un mouvement syndical désireux de représenter une main-d'œuvre informelle, mais qui est à la fois ancrée dans l'économie officielle.

Trade unions as organizations exist in what has long been described as a state of "antagonistic cooperation" with the capitalist states in which they have developed. They are engaged in protecting and improving their members' terms and conditions of employment and, in doing so, they challenge the distribution of power and rewards at work and in society more generally. It has been argued that this generates a particular "conundrum" for unions in that:

> all unions are in a "business" relationship with their employers and face the conundrum of how much time is spent on building the rank and file and the community on the one hand and how much on "defending" the worker on the other. (Bleakney & Morrill, 2010, p. 141)

"Defending" implies a focus on negotiating and the interaction with employers, but unions have become equally engaged in balancing what have generally been described as "servicing" and "organizing" strategies in relation to their members with the latter focussed on "social movement unionism" (for statement of the position see Moody, 1997) and Bleakney and Morrill's (2010) "rank and file" engagement and self activity.

While much of this argument is longstanding in different forms and has been developed particularly in Western/Eurocentric analyses, the issues raised confront trade unions globally and inevitably raise questions of power and resources. African trade unions are often confronted with these issues very directly and sharply and in relation to the state as well as to employers. The politics of African trade unionism and its relationship with national states has commonly been formed as a response to colonialism, and this response can include accommodation as well as resistance, antagonism as well as cooperation.

The development, practice, and delivery of trade union education is inevitably embedded within this set of relationships, that is, between unions, employers, and states and between leaders and members. Education programs are necessarily, therefore, engaged in questions of the content of what might be delivered and to whom, in the context of scarce resources. Alongside this are questions of "how" trade union education might be delivered, and this raises questions of pedagogy particularly related to adult education. Each of these issues has generated debates that are exacerbated in an African context with its colonial past, continuing dependencies and scarcity of resources.

These debates are explored here in relation to the development and delivery of a collaborative project between UK trade union tutors based at Northumbria University, the Sierra Leone Labour Congress, the University of Sierra Leone (Fourah Bay College) and funded by the British Council. The program comprised six modules, which were piloted with trade union leaders to be delivered as a Certificate in English in a Trade Union Context. The program would be validated through the University of Sierra Leone procedures and delivered by local tutors.

In this context the relationship between the UK tutors and their cultural association with the former colonial power become of some significance and requires articulating. As Choudry and Kapoor (2010) argued:

> Studies of knowledge production and mobilization in activist, trade union, and NGO networks must attend to their specific geohistorical context and the actual social forces in which they are implicated, going beyond objectifying kinds of analysis. (pp. 6-7)

Others have also argued that such "objectifying" is, in effect, replicating a Eurocentric socio-cultural viewpoint and reinforcing its dominance (Asante, 2007). "The dominant attitude that imposes on most of us may be called a Eurocentric world view that gives rise to the spread of a particular as if it were universal" (p. 8). This is a dominance that has been hotly contested by critics of colonialism from Fanon (2001) onwards and from those like Asante who, for example, advocates an alternative: "Where Africans assume more than a marginal role in their own discourses" (2007, p. 7).

The "alternative" views that might challenge existing power structures can also be seen to be potentially delivered through trade union education given the possibilities for "antagonism" as well as co-operation. Brookfield (2005) argued for the significance of "critical theory" and its application in adult learning. However, with Holst (2011), and following Marcuse, Brookfield also argued that alternative and radical views can be "tolerated" particularly where they are offered as a "choice" among other ideas and that this "always dilutes their radical qualities" (p. 4).

This article seeks to place a particular program in its "geo-historical" context and as the outcome of a complex set of relationships that can reinforce as well as challenge dominant conceptions and practices of local employment relations. After a brief discussion of the research approach taken, the emergence of the socio-economic and political structure of Sierra Leone is discussed and trade unions placed in this context. Trade union education in an African context is then reviewed and the particular certificate program analyzed and assessed.

METHODOLOGY

The analysis presented here derives from three key sources, each of which have particular strengths as well as weaknesses that, taken together, provide a basis for exploring the general issues of trade union education in Africa alongside the particularities of the program developed in Sierra Leone.

The first source is the author himself who has worked with African colleagues in developing and delivering trade union education programs in Sierra Leone since 1980 (although with a decade-long gap during the rebel war period). This has the strength of active engagement over a long period but the obvious weaknesses that need to be articulated in relation to my status as a white male from the previously colonizing country with no knowledge of indigenous languages. There is strength in an "outsider" view, but however close the "participant observer" gets, they remain an outsider even if working within a "community of practice" (Wenger, 1998).

The second source is from working together with Sierra Leonean trade union leaders in developing and delivering their own education materials. Although influenced by what had been done elsewhere with its inevitable Eurocentric-

ity, all the materials used on programs were developed collaboratively and ultimately written and delivered by local activists and tutors. This process of "participatory research" was enhanced by regular ongoing debates and discussions in formal and informal sessions which were sometimes noted afterwards in personal diaries or a loose collection of field notes. As with the first source, the research strength is the day-to-day practical engagement but with the similar weakness of my outsider status.

The third source was a series of taped and transcribed interviews with experienced and influential trade union leaders who had been engaged with writing and delivering programs. A lawyer working without payment on labour law cases and an engaged academic from Sierra Leone's Democracy Commission were also interviewed and transcribed as was the local language course tutor. Finally twelve participants in the Certificate program were asked to comment collectively and that discussion was taped and transcribed. This approach had all the strengths of hearing the authentic voice and views of the local trade unionists but even semi-structured interviews and discussions are guided and remain open to respondents saying what they think the interviewer wants to hear.

Overall, these different approaches cannot completely shift the discussion from a Eurocentric to an Afrocentric one but they can go some way towards moving the African trade unionists from their "marginal role in their own discourse" towards the centre.

A FRAGILE STATE

Sierra Leone is a former British colony on the West African coast. Whilst it has the potential to develop abundant natural agricultural, fishery and mineral resources, it has remained one of the poorest countries in the world. Colonial exploitation of these natural resources saw the exportation of profits and infrastructure development focussed on the benefits to the colonizers. Following independence in 1962, Sierra Leone continued to be characterized by poverty and inequality, and it remains placed at 177 out of 186 countries on the UN Index of Human Development (2012). Whilst life expectancy has risen from 34 in 1970 to 48 in 2012 and the economy is expanding annually, there remain major problems in health and education, challenging social inequalities, and high levels of under-employment and unemployment.

Post-independence civil government developed through a short period of multi-party democracy, followed by single party government and then coup and counter-coup (see Kargbo, 2012). Corruption was widespread and focussed on the exploitation of natural resources, particularly diamonds. Moreover, the development that occurred was generally focussed on the capital city, Freetown, and its hinterland, while the largely agricultural communities beyond were neglected. The internal economic stagnation was exacerbated by rebel incur-

sions from neighbouring Liberia and a ten-year civil war that ended in 2002 (Kargbo, 2012). This has now been followed by more than a decade of relative stability that is seeing economic growth and peaceful multi-party elections. Rebel leaders have died or moved on, and Charles Taylor of neighbouring Liberia has been successfully prosecuted in the International Court in The Hague in 2012. However, substantial inequalities remain — economic policy is driven by the neoliberal agenda of privatization and deregulation and there remains a significant aid dependency.

These structural factors shape an economy in which the majority of people are disengaged from active engagement in civil society given their daily task of subsistence survival. Corrupt practices develop not just in the buying and selling of commodities for profit but in providing or denying access to resources such as education and employment. Sierra Leone is ranked 123 from 176 countries in the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (2012). Each of these factors has shaped, formed, and re-formed Sierra Leone's trade unions both historically and contemporaneously (Stirling, 2011).

BUILDING TRADE UNIONS

Trade unions' historical development in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa is interwoven with colonialism both as a product of it and in resistance to it (Phelan, 2011, offers various West African examples). Initial developments in Sierra Leone were associated with small-scale artisanal organizations, but expansion began with the industrial exploitation of resources through the opening up of mines and the subsequent infrastructural developments in railways, docks and maritime transport (see Luke, 1984). In particular, the mineworkers' union became the dominant force and provided the President of the country from 1971 – 1985, Siaka Stevens, who dominated the period of the one party state. The early British colonial response was the harsh repression of strikes and industrial conflict and some limited attempts to establish procedures of mediation. Periods of militancy in the 1920s and in 1939 were led most notably by Wallace-Johnson (Denzer, 1982) and associated with political action, but this faded in a period of global recession and it was the Second World War that brought the next shift.

Returning soldiers and the election of a Labour government in the UK in 1945 saw a move towards trade union recognition and the establishment of institutions of collective bargaining along with legislation derived from UK practice (Roper, 1958). Whilst this became the dominant force, the Cold War and the burgeoning struggles for independence saw African trade unions divided as competing powers sought local alliances as part of their foreign policies. Disputes and imprisonments indicated the political significance of the trade unions and a 1981 strike directly confronted the government over economic conditions such as unemployment and food price rises. Over 200 trade un-

ionists were arrested and a state of emergency declared. The resolution of the dispute also led to the establishment of the single trade union confederation: the Sierra Leone Labour Congress (SLLC). Unions were decimated during the civil war period and struggled to maintain membership and organization, particularly beyond the capital Freetown. However, the leadership also became a focus for civil society activities and protest and effective strikes and marches were organized often at significant personal risks; as Jennings Wright of the Hotel Workers records in an interview:

Our office was vandalized. The main Sierra Leone Labour Congress building was bombed. There is an area of the main hall in which the Research Department was attached, which was blown up. There are signs, if you go to the building to show that the building was bombed. The office of the United Mineworkers Union was bombed out completely. All of our official vehicles, four, were bombed completely and all our offices were vandalized. That was very difficult.

> The Sierra Leone context has important consequences for trade unions and for trade union education. Firstly, there is a legacy of colonialism that leaves English as the official language of the country and a framework of legislation and institutions modelled on British practice. Effectively, the old social and cultural power remains embedded and available to an elite group defined by education and ability to communicate in English.

Secondly, economic changes led to the growth and decline of particular unions — the destruction of the railways led to the decline of the industry-based union and the United Mineworkers Union (UMU) might lose a quarter of its membership overnight if a mine closes or a major accident leads to lay-offs. Equally significantly, the labour market is characterized by overwhelming employment in the informal economy whilst unions organize in the formal economy (Stirling, 2011). In these circumstances it is no surprise that the Sierra Leone Teachers' Union dominates the central union confederation as its members have state jobs and pay subscriptions through direct deduction from salary (Amman & O'Donnell, 2011).

Thirdly, trade unions have responded to the changing terrain of governance by seeking to remain independent of political parties. Those parties draw their strengths from tribal loyalties and there is no single "party of labour." Most recently, civil society organizations have occupied the space that state institutions might once have done and this provides a challenge for trade unions in determining their relationship with them (see Eade and Leather, 2005, for a discussion).

Finally, trade unions have reflected the dominant patriarchal attitudes and few women have become involved, although there are clear strategies to seek to change this.

> People thought the trade unions were men's issue. I think the greatest factor in this bringing women's issues on board was the fact that all those who were deeply and strongly involved in unionising, especially within the teachers union, were men. All of them were men, right through they were men. In all of the positions, all of them were men. (Gladys Branch, Teachers' Union)

TRADE UNION EDUCATION IN AFRICA

In a Sub-Saharan African context it is difficult to trace a history of trade union education through recorded accounts. Local traditions in cultures lacking written records are strongly focussed on storytelling and, equally, on the importance of hierarchies and distinctions between men and women and the young and the old. For trade union education directly the influences are, again, the old colonial powers and, more recently, the International Labour Organization. Northern European countries such as Sweden and Denmark have also had a strong international focus in their education work and have delivered projects in Africa, including Sierra Leone.

In this context Mwamadzingo and Ben Said Dia (2007) identified three stages of development in African trade union education: colonial, post-colonial, and contemporary, with the colonial period commencing in the 1950s and the contemporary in the 1990s. The absence of a "pre-colonial" category (or pre-1950s) in their account leaves out a period of active trade unionism in West Africa (Phelan, 2011) and might be explicable in terms of formal systems of trade union education but undervalues "informal learning" through day-to-day activities, industrial disputes and building cross border solidarities.

Nevertheless, the emergence of modern-day trade unionism is associated with the post-Second World War period and the significance of colonialism is evident in Sierra Leone as it is in other African countries. This is graphically illustrated through Roper's (1958) book on *Labour Problems in West Africa* and his own background as an adult education tutor before moving to a post as senior tutor for trade union studies at the University College of the Gold Coast (now Ghana). The Cold War period saw an extension of this strategy as trade union movements were politically divided and education programs delivered in and from Washington and Moscow.

The "contemporary period" identified by Mwamadzingo and Ben Said Dia (2007) coincides with the delivery of the Certificate program discussed here and which, they argued, sees the development of education focussed on trade unions as civil society actors. Given the period of warfare in Sierra Leone, the Labour Congress inevitably took on such a role and was instrumental in leading demonstrations and negotiations with government ministers. There was, then, as the authors suggest, a desire on the part of trade union leaders for education programs that increased their strengths as civil society actors. In this context, English language, the official language of the country, was and remains essential to building trade union capacity.

Mwamadzingo and Ben Said Dia (2007) also suggested this is a period in which African unions were and are developing education programs "to develop the services they provide to members and aim at involving the working people in the activities of their unions" (p. 51).

THE SIERRA LEONE CONTEXT

I now return to the tension identified at the outset between "defending" members and actively building the "rank and file." These are by no means necessarily conflicting strategies, and the programs developed in Sierra Leone sought to provide both a basis for organizing as well as developing skills in, for example, collective bargaining or health and safety.

Alongside these broader notions of development and the appropriateness of particular content in education were practical considerations of how a program could be sustainably delivered. In this respect, materials needed to be developed locally and a framework established for tutors to work in. This required financial, institutional, and human support. Finally, funding and resources remain a perennial problem in Sierra Leone and the Labour Congress has an extremely limited financial and human base.

In an interview, Abukabar Kargbo shared his view that the SLLC "lack resources to ensure their expansion and they do not have the resources to make them more national ... when you look at the headquarters you sense incapacity."

Funding for the program was, then, very important particularly if it was to be embedded in a University curriculum that would provide sustainability. An important "side effect" would also be the appearance of trade unionists as competent students at Fourah Bay College and push at a door for providing further mature student and adult access. In this respect, the recruitment process was signally important. Students were required to demonstrate five years of active trade union engagement (including the completion of short courses and day schools) and were interviewed by an academic member of staff and the Head of the SLLC Education Committee.

The implications for this were that the program focussed on leadership and leaders — whether these were paid full-time officials or otherwise. Both Max Conteh and Jennings Wright who were responsible for education at the SLLC believed that the course could and should be expanded in numbers and developed to a diploma level but noted the resource problems. Max Conteh in his interview suggests that employers "might sponsor some of their shop stewards to attend the courses" and there were further suggestions to seek government funding as well as from trade unions internationally.

The program itself had to be validated by the University's quality procedures. The British Council funded the preparatory project, which allowed trade unionists to visit the UK and, in particular, visit trade unionists from Europe

attending an English language program. Following this, the UK tutors and the SLLC leaders engaged directly with Fourah Bay College and through the local language tutor in piloting the Course through a validation program for which the selection procedure had become particularly important in two ways. Firstly, as a barrier to the potential for corruption that a more "open" recruitment procedure might make available and, secondly, to ensure that participants had both the trade union experience and the language knowledge to cope with the course.

The first year of the program took place in 2012 with 16 students and recognition that the number of female participants (6) remained too low but also reflected a significant demand. The course material development was a collaborative project between the local tutor, SLLC officials, and the UK-based project participants but, most importantly, the materials were first delivered through pilot programs with Sierra Leonean trade unionists. This enabled a strong level of feedback and the opportunity to re-assess materials both in terms of level and understanding.

THE CLASSROOM IN CONTEXT

The interaction between students and tutors in the field of labour education is particularly significant as it is a relationship between adults rather than teachers and children, and it takes place in a context where there is a commitment to ideas of justice and equality. Trade unions are organizations whose purpose is to pursue such issues on behalf of their members and this gives rise to expectations in relation to the human interaction in the classroom. Paulo Freire (2004) has been hugely influential in his ideas in relation to worker education and the relationships that exist in the classroom.

At the heart of Freire's educational arguments is a more general conception of the relationship between social structures and human agency and the notion that people will not be "freed" unless they participate in the making of their own freedom (Freire, 2004). Thus, the pedagogy of the oppressed "must be forged *with* not *for* the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity" (p. 48, emphasis in original).

In the classroom:

> Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn, while being taught also teach. (p. 80)

This raises the discussion of the relationship between tutor and student in a trade union classroom very directly and the focus on dialogue and learning together is unequivocal. Following on from Freire, debates continue as to the

significance of the "how" in delivering education programs. Focussing specifically on worker education, Bleakney and Morrill (2010) argued that:

> Worker education, then, does not presume a straight transfer of facts and information from a higher authority. People can and will act based on a deeper fulfilling personal and collective way when given the chance. It requires flexibility and qualitative methods. It is a place where facilitators become keen observers and listeners, intervening to maintain a learning space in innovative and challenging ways. (p. 146)

It is also important in developing a relationship of trust between the class participants for there to be recognition of the power relationships both inside and outside the classroom for, as Nesbit (2005) argued, "education has always represented a site of struggle between those with the power to define what constitutes legitimate knowledge and those excluded from such decision making" (p. 1).

This point is particularly appropriate here as the knowledge that has acquired "legitimacy" has been established through a colonial relationship. Thus the necessary understanding required by an active trade unionist in Sierra Leone is often of laws, systems of bargaining, and institutions that are the legacy of British rule. Furthermore, and crucially, the language for understanding these, English, has equally been established by colonial dominance (as discussed further below).

Given this structural colonial relationship and legacy, the biographies of class facilitators and discussion leaders assume significance beyond a simple exchange of information. Brookfield and Preskill (2005) made this point precisely when noting how "teachers and students [need to] probe their own taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions to uncover the ways they serve dominant interests" (p. 8). Thus education in the classroom remains a contested terrain and one in which the African context is strongly shaped by a colonial past reflected in teachers and students alike.

Trade union education has also been preoccupied with "the method" as much as the subject "matter" that is to be delivered. This at first might appear odd and it is not something that appeared to trouble early pioneers seeking to bring enlightenment to workers: they had knowledge to transmit. For example, looking back on one of the joint authors' own experience Brookfield and Holst (2011) noted that "for him [Brookfield] the connection of adult education to democratic socialism was quite clear and not very daring or remarkable" (p. 4).

In effect, the content and direction of adult and worker education was self-evident in Europe, although, there have been significant differences in approach to delivery based on different organizational structures. In the USA, similar points are made by Wong (2002) who saw different traditions in North and South America and argued that the more active popular education methods were adopted later in the USA:

> The U.S. labor movement has not always embraced a philosophy of teaching for social change and transformation. Unlike labor movements in Canada and Brazil that have viewed education as an integral part of organizing and union building, the approach to labor education in the United States has historically been narrow and conservative. (p. 1)

Thus, whilst traditions may be different in different countries, activity-based and discussion-led learning deriving from adult education has now become the "norm" in trade union education in Eurocentric delivery styles, and this is summed up succinctly by Bridgford and Stirling (2000) when they argued that in Europe:

> There has been a long-term shift in national patterns of trade union training away from teacher-centred, expert-based delivery towards participative, co-operative and student-centred learning. (p. 22)

ONE BEST WAY?

This "long-term shift" in Europe is the product of opportunism and funding as well as a commitment to the popular education strategies of Freire. For Sierra Leone, with its links to the UK for funding and support, the shift is a significant one given that trade union education can also be seen as originating in a colonial "export."

The dominant pluralist ideology in the UK recognized the legitimacy of trade unions and the inevitability of conflict but argued that it might be institutionalized. Whilst there were strong Marxist critiques (Hyman, 1975) they were unlikely to be reinforced by delivery in state-funded training programs even if individual tutors might support that view.

In effect, trade union education became focussed on skills-based training to which active learning methods that inherently valued student input became the dominant approach. Independent "knowledge-based" and "expert-centred" learning was marginalized in a context where the focus of education had shifted to skills learning. Thus, it is at least arguable that Freire's radicalism was removed as the method of delivery became a shibboleth but the political content of such delivery was removed.

This is to put the argument polemically, as if there is a necessary dichotomy between education and training, and one is delivered one way and the other another. Classes focussing on negotiating, for example, raise questions about power and the distribution of rewards and inequality in society as well as the workplace. Similarly, workplace representation skills raise issues about the "right to manage" as well as power and authority in society. Questions of labour law are ultimately political questions and so on. Nevertheless the tensions about the delivery method being an adjunct to skills development rather than worker liberation remain in debates particularly as labour movements struggle with the difficulties of offering coherent alternatives to dominant neo-liberal policies.

It is this tension that remains in delivering programs in Sierra Leone where the dominant pedagogy is the inherited one of student-centred learning that enhances skills but, nevertheless, neglects the explanations and alternatives for the position of the country in the world economy or its internal social problems. In effect, the content of programs is predicated on an assumed pluralist ideology despite the difficulties unions have in gaining institutional legitimacy as in, for example, gaining a reform of labour laws to reflect their position (Stirling, 2011). As in the UK, issues of collective bargaining can and do raise more radical questions of power and authority. In this context, the questions are of legitimacy, recognition, status, and access to existing power structures rather than challenges to them.

Engagement with the global economy raises further questions about the content of programs. Successive Sierra Leone governments are faced with implementing global neo-liberal policies with the most recent (2012) proposals envisaging the establishment of Export Processing Zones (EPZs). As Max Conteh noted

> We have a lot of new challenges as we have a lot of international investors coming in and they are coming with new ideas ... those ideas [are] about operating without trade unions and [there are] even intention on the part of government to create EPZs.

While one trade union strategy might be to resist EPZs altogether, Muluku Tarawaly, the Secretary General of the Civil Service Union, argues that "instead of looking at it from the point of view that it's going to be a threat it can be a strength if the Labour Congress is proactive."

The "international investors" mentioned by Conteh are, as elsewhere in Africa, often Chinese and, according to Abubakar Kargbo:

> The Chinese tend not to work in accordance with international rules and standards ... [and the unions] have not succeeded in changing the ideas of the Chinese on the organisation of workers.

Education programs in Sierra Leone need to be placed in this global context in which discussion methods need to lead towards exploring alternative strategies to neo-liberalism and the new Chinese economic interventions. At the same time and as we have seen, the danger remains of locating that discussion within a framework in which more radical views become marginalized and a UK-rooted pluralism dominates debate.

OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Trade union education might occur in many ways and places and the focus on the method of delivery has kept the focus so far inside the classroom. However, the intention of trade union education programs is that they have an impact outside of that classroom. Such an impact may occur in different ways; it may be intensely personal and change the individual themselves, mak-

ing them more confident or less homophobic for example; it may improve the organization of the union through developing recruitment strategies; it may provide the basis for challenging management and, consequently improve life at the workplace or it may lead to broader political engagement. In each case it is designed to encourage and support activism and engagement and develop ideas of solidaristic working both within the union and with other groups with similar values.

The activism that is encouraged and supported requires a space or spaces in which to be expressed and this is, most commonly, the workplace but it could also be in the family, the community or in a wider social engagement. However, spaces can also close down and, for example, the opportunity to negotiate and engage in collective bargaining may shift its location or be limited to a few "professionals." These issues of engagement beyond the classroom are particularly significant in Sierra Leone as is an analysis of the spaces for that engagement, and an understanding of this requires further discussion of the context for trade unions and education in the country.

The labour market is dominated by informal sector work: within families and communities for agricultural labour, and in small-scale workshops, petty trading, and casual labour in urban centres. Formal centre employment is confined to the state sector, mining, and some financial services and this division of work has implications for the trade unions. Historically, organization has focussed on the small but stable formal economy, which has also provided a view of unions as "elitist" organisations. It has also been particularly exclusionary to women workers. Current policies in the central Labour Congress encourage strategies that seek engagement with informal sector organization and the organization and involvement of women workers. However, neither strategy is without difficulties and implications for the trade union movement itself.

In relation to the informal sector, the SLLC is revising its constitution to draw in already existing representative organizations. The advantages of increasing overall representativeness and, hence, influence has to be set against the cost to resources and the potential for shifting internal power between unions:

Muluku Tawalary regarded the integration of informal sector organizations as a strength: "the strength is in numbers when taking industrial action" and, when asked if they might not come to dominate the Labour Congress he replied, "I don't know whether it is anything to be afraid of when it comes about ... because ... if they are doing well in their organisation then that is more than those who claim to be regular unions."

The implication for this is a need for widespread education programs that draw in informal sector workers and which have yet to be established on a large scale. They will depend on active non-professional tutors and on being delivered at minimal costs. Such a program would also open up further opportunities for

unrepresented women who overwhelmingly work in the informal sector. Thus, the challenges of globalization at the macro-level and organizing at the micro-level each put pressures on trade union education but also offer opportunities to rethink it beyond the program delivered at Fourah Bay College.

CERTIFICATES, ENGLISH AND THE COLLEGE

The Certificate program in English for trade unionists comes, then, within a complex set of theoretical debates, structural conditions, and inter-personal relationships. It reflects an old colonialism in both content and method as well as a new globalization and changing conditions in civil society presenting opportunities to influence government and new investors. However, ideas do not simply emerge from structural conditions, even if they arise at particular geo-historical moments. Personal relationships are equally the agencies of change.

At an anecdotal level, the certificate program that emerged began with a casual conversation towards the end of a capacity-building project and looking to the future. In seeking something that could be built and sustained locally, and which could have an impact, it might have been expected that there would be a focus on typical trade union areas such as organizing and bargaining. However, the local demand was for a program rooted in English language provision which takes us very directly to the heart of a power relationship. Trade union leaders may well have had some education, particularly at the senior, full-time officer level but can still be lacking in the skill of writing and communicating in the country's official language. This perceived lack may matter little when dealing with their own members who will often be less literate and use Krio (a local dialect version of English) or an indigenous language.

However, the acquisition and use of English also equates with the exercise of power, particularly by elite political groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that often control access to resources and finally, employers, particularly where they come from foreign multinational companies that use English as their working language. International links with other trade union bodies or the ILO, for example, also require good English language skills in order to make a voice heard. Moreover, there is an expectation from members that leaders will be able to deal, at least competently, with these groups. Collective agreements, legislation, safety standards, and so on are written in English, and if they are to be drafted and used, then a sophisticated use of language is required. Knowledge of language is, then, not simply a technical skill but an engagement with the power structures of a society which can exclude or disempower those that cannot match the standard of English used daily.

At a more general level, the ongoing significance of language in this context has long been regarded as of central importance, as was summarized by Brookfield (2005):

> As Gramsci, and later Freire point out, a precondition for working-class empowerment (short of violent revolution) is a critical appropriation of dominant language, so that one can use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house (to use Audre Lorde's ... phrase). (p. 89)

A SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION?

There are three areas for reflection in relation to the Certificate program that was developed and delivered: the impact on the trade unions; the impact on the University; and, most importantly, the impact on the participants. There can be little doubt that there was a strong positive response from the leadership of the SLLC given that the genesis of the course stemmed from their particular interests:

> Well I will say that I see a positive impact. The president of the union has been there and he has been very active in the course and as of now he has been elevated at his place of work to a supervisor. He is still the president of the union ... I believe that by the end of the course it will have created a lot of impact among the students that are there. (Jennings Wright, Secretary General of the Hotel Workers Union)

The impact on the University was equally significant. Firstly, by opening up the institution to a trade union program and trade unionists — it was not surprising to see the trade unionists standing for positions in the student union. Secondly, by opening up the University procedures to adult education access without it being regarded as somehow "unacademic" or a back door (or even potentially corrupt) entrance to higher education. Thirdly, there is the impact on the program leader who was a language tutor: his engagement with materials writing and delivery was crucial to the development of the program. Equally, he became engrossed in the language of trade unionism and the world that his students occupied, a world that was in the classroom each time a session took place.

For Max Conteh, Head of Education at SLLC, it was clear that developments and improvements could be made:

> If we have our way we want all general secretaries and all senior officials and leaders of the Labour movement to attend the course. Not because of the qualification that it has but because of the benefits it will have in terms of teaching skills and the benefits of speaking. I think that the course on the whole is very good and we see this as a test case to look at how we can further improve it. We want to bring more modules in terms of what we do. We have to bring issues such as industrial relations which is very key now.

For the participants themselves, there is an important impact in simply attending a University which was "not for them." However, the impact was well beyond that in terms of personal development and trade union engagement. It was also clear that they see the Certificate as a starting point for further

education with some already planning for diplomas and even degrees if they are approved by the University procedures.

> For my own personal development as far as this course is concerned, I can say that now, I can communicate more confidently both verbally and in writing to bring out the issues that affect workers, as well as my administrative skills. Also, the course has helped me identify some of the challenges and how to overcome them and, also it is a first step to future academic pursuits in trade union development in Sierra Leone. (Abu Bakarr Kamara, SL Seamen's Union)

Alpha A. Bah (Motor Drivers Union) made an important point beyond his personal development in terms of extending what he has learnt to his union members:

> It has helped improve my personal skill in communications and trade union issues. What I'm learning here I am taking to my organization and teaching my fellow members in the provinces. I tell them what exactly is a trade union and what are the rules and responsibilities of each position. That's what I'm doing now.

For Mohamed Gbondo (Construction Workers Union) the program had added to his confidence and skills as a negotiator:

> This program is very helpful to me because it tells me how to negotiate with employers, to see what employers want [and] to negotiate with them. It helps me to attend meetings with the stakeholders of construction companies [and] to negotiate with them about salary increase or whatsoever.

However, as Jamella Doherty (Post & Telecommunications Union) argued, there is still a need for further movement towards gender equality:

> I want to thank you all [the course participants] for seeing us through even though we are aware that we wanted more women on this program but it is rather unfortunate that we are very few. But we believe that we the women who are here will be on top. We are at the bottom but we want to challenge the men.

As is often the case with adult education programs, it is often the unintended or unforeseen outcomes that are as important as anything included in University validation documents.

The long-term impact waits to be assessed, as does the continuance of the program. There is no doubt as to the demand, and a "roadshow" took students and tutors to provincial centres, where packed halls indicated the need for the program beyond the capital. However, education is not free and trade unions have little money to sponsor students. Most students have funded themselves, which will, again, restrict access particularly to those with stable employment in the formal sector. Apart from one representative of the Traders' Union there was a lack of engagement with an informal sector that dominates employment and provides the future for trade union development. At the other end of the

spectrum, the Sierra Leone Teachers' Union (the largest formal sector union in the country) did not provide participants. This is perhaps understandable given their internal provision of courses and, perhaps, a view that their members have a mastery of English. But their engagement would add to the course for other participants and the "trade union" side of the program would develop different areas of skills and knowledge.

We have discussed the longer-term implications for the University and the unions but it should be emphasized that trade union education programs challenge both institutional power but also the informal power expressed in the daily life of the employment relationship. In this respect it is the confidence to use the official language of the country so that it serves the interests of working people and is not simply the prerogative of an elite that is crucial. There are lessons to be learnt on cross-cultural engagement, program delivery and personal relationships inside and outside the classroom that go well beyond the Certificate in English Language for Trade Unionists at Fourah Bay College.

CONCLUSIONS

The discussion in this article reflects a complex set of inter-relationships that confront issues of power and cultural hegemony alongside the tensions embedded in the relationship between trade unions and the capitalist societies that they inhabit. Expectations of trade unions as agents of radical change are tempered by their need to be representatives of workers in the day-to-day reality of their lives and working relationships. Inevitably, trade union education programs reflect such tensions and are pulled in different directions both in terms of content and delivery. These tensions are pushed into particularly stark relief in Africa where countries such as Sierra Leone continue to cope with the legacy of colonialism, the struggles of development, and a severely under-resourced trade union movement.

The colonial legacy does not remain simply in terms of a continuing hegemonic capitalist power relationship but, as has been suggested through the broader contextual analysis here, is also embedded in the local (Sierra Leonean) development of trade union education. Content remains rooted in a pluralistic ideology deriving from UK industrial relations theory that neglects the major inequalities in power and the dominance of the informal sector workforce in Africa. There is a need to shift content to relate to locality but also to utilise teaching pedagogies that focus on overcoming issues of illiteracy and English language dominance and engage particularly with women. Whilst the UK tradition of co-operative classroom working has the potential strengths of being engaging and democratic, it must also be fashioned by indigenous cultures and local traditions to make it work effectively.

The development of the course also illustrates the arguments of those quoted at the outset fearing a dominant Eurocentricity and a de-radicalization of

"popular education." The dominant colonial setting and its embodiment in the use of English as the official language reinforce these fears and set a significant challenge for education. Alternative discourses become marginalized as union education becomes a vehicle for accessing existing power structures from which unions themselves are struggling for recognition. Wider, global, debates about the content and delivery of programs become crystallized and pointed in a resource-poor environment in which "everything" needs to be done and everybody included.

The Certificate course program provides an articulation of these issues but, inevitably, not their resolution. Learning to communicate more effectively in English both empowers individuals and opens access to dominant hierarchies but leaves aside the more radical questions raised by Afrocentic approaches which might ask why collective bargaining, for example, might not be done in Krio or an indigenous language? That would certainly respond to Asante's (2007) comments about the marginalization of Africans and, in return, marginalize English language speakers, but it would still leave the dominant colonial structures and cultures firmly in place.

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LABOUR STUDIES, THE LIBERAL ARTS, AND THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

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ABSTRACT. In the US, the value of liberal arts is in question as neo-liberal reformers push for a more instrumentalist form of higher education. Older traditions of worker education, however, along with more recent university-based labour studies programs, offer a compelling counter-narrative concerning the social and political purpose of higher education. Taking its cue from C.W. Mills' notion of the sociological imagination, labour studies has the potential not only to re-energize the transformational mission of popular worker education, but reclaim the idea of higher education as a public good.

ÉTUDE DU TRAVAIL, ARTS LIBÉRAUX ET IMAGINATION SOCIOLOGIQUE

RÉSUMÉ. Aux États-Unis, la pertinence des programmes en arts libéraux est remise en question, car les réformateurs néolibéraux préconisent une forme d'éducation supérieure plus efficace. Or, des courants plus anciens de formation des travailleurs, ainsi que des programmes universitaires en études du travail récents, proposent une alternative intéressante en ce qui a trait à la mission sociale et politique de l'éducation supérieure. Lorsqu'ils s'inspirent de la thèse de l'imagination sociologique de C.W. Mills, les programmes d'études du travail ont non seulement le potentiel de revitaliser la mission transformationnelle de la formation populaire des travailleurs, mais peuvent mettre en valeur l'idée que l'éducation supérieure puisse être bénéfique pour le public.

> *I can now hold my own with the finest products of Eton, Harrow, Oxford and Cambridge whether it be in understanding problems of trade and commerce or in the realms of literature, art or music.... I've learned how to analyse government blue books and white papers, and to digest statistics; workshops practices, managerial problems, wage rates, currency problems, social planning, local and national government developments have all become understandable as a result of my studies.... Training in the art of thinking has equipped me to see through the shams and humbug that lurk behind the sensational headlines of the modern newspapers, the oratorical outpourings of insincere party politicians and the dictators, and the doctrinaire ideologies that stalk the world sowing hatred.* (quoted in Rose, 1989, p. 605)

These lines come from an active English trade unionist, reflecting in 1931 on what he had learned by taking courses under the auspices of the British Workers' Education Association. The program was initiated in 1903 and funded by universities and various civil society organizations, including trade unions, in the UK. Three things should be emphasized about the sentiment expressed in the quote, which taken together, reveal a more basic and essential point.

First, in these words we find a trade unionist whose imagination and confidence has been fired by a close examination of his own political and economic circumstances. Second, there is a distinctly public charge to his remarks. This is a worker who seems poised to step into the public sphere, and, perhaps, lead fellow workers in a broader critique of the political-economic status quo. Last, there is breadth and depth to the course of study that had emboldened this trade unionist, steeped as it was in the humanities and the social and political sciences. By enabling him to see through "the shams and the humbug" of everyday political discourse to actual problems with actual causes and effects, a *liberal education*–not a narrowly vocational one–changed this student's outlook on the world around him.

To facilitate engagement with the issues of the day has long been a goal of labour and worker education in the US. However, given both the general political climate and the decline in US union density and power over the last 30 years, unions are reluctant to spend precious time and resources on programs which pursue it. University-based labour studies programs could, then, play a unique role in terms of supplying the resources, the research, and the space — physical as well as cultural — to fill the void. Furthermore, the university system in the US has long claimed as one of its purposes the creation of the kind of engaged citizenry that democracy requires.

But powerful voices from the private sector and in educational policy-making circles are pushing for various measures that will make US higher education more and more instrumental. One could argue that the sort of narrow technical training that many once thought was all the working classes needed and deserved is now being offered up as the future of higher education in the US in general. As a college education becomes more about preparing *for* work, there is less room for the intellectual exploration that is the hallmark of a liberal education. Indeed, it is only through such an education — whether it takes places in a college classroom, a union hall, or a community centre — that we learn to situate the work we do (or are preparing to do) in a deeper understanding of how an economy functions, how politics are conducted, and how the wide range of human experience is measured and valued.

It is precisely these themes that the public university-based labour studies program where I am currently a full-time faculty member places at the forefront. Together with students, most of whom come to the program through building

trades unions, I explore what it means to discover and to use what C.W. Mills (1959/2000) called the "sociological imagination." While Mills is somewhat out of fashion these days, his straightforward discussion of the basic imperative of politically engaged social theory — that personal biographies, whether characterized by profound struggle or great triumph or something in between, need to be understood in relation to broad structural forces and historical transformations — can be put to productive use in worker education.

Thinking and talking sociologically can lead not only to critical knowledge of how and why the world works the way it does. It can help workers translate the problems they face as individuals or as members of a particular union into *public issues,* around which they, along with others both inside and beyond their union, might mobilize politically. While this shift does not necessarily imply a grand transformation of consciousness, or for that matter a direct route to action, it does represent an educational component of the struggle to create the kind of broad-based solidarity that many, including now the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, the largest federation of trade unions in the US) (Greenhouse, 2013), believe is essential to the invigoration of the US labour movement.

Getting there is not simple. Our students often resist the very idea of college, especially when it means liberal arts classes that have no direct impact on their ability to perform their jobs. Furthermore, many of our students, having finally been invited into the apprenticeship program of an established craft union, really feel that they have "made it." This is understandable. The prospect of a stable union career beats the idea of bouncing around in low paying jobs, without benefits or security. But life as an apprentice is not easy: they wake early, work hard all day, endure long commutes, all for a wage of around US$13 an hour. They also know that unions are under attack in general, and their union is not as strong as it used to be. All this amounts to pressure, which in turn makes it difficult for students to see beyond their own choices and struggles to grapple with the full weight of historical circumstance that frames both. Here is where incorporating readings, classroom discussions, and activities that encourage the sociological imagination come in.

WORKER EDUCATION AND THE ART OF THINKING[1]

During the 1920s, college was beyond the reach of the US working class. Moreover, standard university curricula gave little consideration to the place of organized labour in society. Facing a system biased towards ruling class interests, the organizers of a string of independent, residency-based labour colleges across the country began an experiment that sought to redefine higher education (Altenbaugh, 1983, 1990; Dwyer, 1977; Tarlau, 2011). At institutions such as the Brookwood Labor College in New York State, courses based in the liberal arts and social sciences were geared toward creating a real, effective, and sustainable

working class voice in the public sphere. More ambitiously, the objective was to put labour on an equal footing with the forces of capital so that it could take a leading role in the making of a more equitable society.

The experiment faltered when the depression drained off much of the private support that kept the labour colleges going (Altenbaugh, 1983). But as the federal government responded to the broader social and economic crisis with the programs of the New Deal, education and training for union members quickly gained new importance. The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (The Wagner Act) had the most direct impact. By giving the labour movement formal political legitimacy, it spurred the dramatic surge in unionization heralded by the advent of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). With a new legal environment to interpret, and the tactics of collective bargaining to master, there was an immediate demand for educational programs — most of which came to be housed in public universities — that would teach union members and leaders how to navigate modern industrial relations. Thus emerged what one historian called a "utilitarian labor education," which focused on negotiating skills and tactics, labour law, and the internal administration of a labour union (Dwyer, 1977, p. 188).

The notion that union workers should also get exposure to the liberal arts never disappeared entirely. But in a period when business unionism reigned, a liberal arts education that opened the door to an open-ended critique of the status quo was seen as politically suspect. More practically, such an education meant the re-dedication of resources and time, both of which many thought were better spent on preparing for the immediate and necessary tasks at hand: negotiating contracts, monitoring agreements, and preparing new unionists to do the same. Indeed, as an education director of the AFL-CIO put it in 1962 (as cited in Dwyer, 1977), "liberal education as such is of little interest to the American Labor Movement" (p. 198).

In recent years, the notion that worker education should move beyond the utilitarian has returned, both within university and trade union-based programs. Campus-based struggles to create programs in women's, black and / or ethnic studies in the late 1960s paved the way for the emergence of labour studies as a credit-bearing discipline, leading to a degree. Here social science and humanities-based curricula examined both the working class' position in the political and economic system and the particular values of the working class life. But unlike the independent labour colleges of the early 20th century, labour studies programs worked within the established university system.

As neoliberal ideology and policy has gained hegemony over the last few decades, the stakes have risen significantly for the US labour movement. In this context, union-based education programs and university-based labour studies programs are now debating how best to confront both the political assault on unions and the economic onslaught on working Americans. Some university

programs have turned toward independent strategic research into local labour markets and local power structures. As the director of one program put it, "students are less interested in the AFL, and more in sweatshops" (as cited in Bacon, 2004, para. 18). In other words, while labour studies programs have adapted the older imperative of worker education to a new set of political-economic circumstances and to the new demographics of the working class in the US, they are still striving to provide students with a clear sense of the context in which workers' struggles are currently taking place (Bacon, 2004; Schmidt, 2011).

Union-based education programs are also fighting to adapt to current crisis conditions in the labour movement. There is an emerging consensus among union leaders and activists that in the face of the onslaught on labour a shift in basic strategy is necessary to move efforts away from a "business-service unionism" to a "social movement unionism" that places more emphasis on organizing new members, taking direct action, and joining unions to other institutions and groups fighting for social justice. As Tarlau (2011) has documented, this shift has ignited considerable debate about what kind of education is needed to put movement back in the labour movement. It is a debate that goes back to a difference of opinion between Myles Horton and Saul Alinsky, one that centred, according to Horton, on the "difference between organizing and education" (as cited in Tarlau, p. 373). According to Tarlau, many labour activists and organizers believe, following Alinsky, that the education that mattered the most in the struggle for change happened as working people organized and took action. Others, explained Tarlau, follow Horton in conceiving of education as a more deliberate process of space-making and consciousness-raising that, ideally, should take place before and after the organizing campaign, in addition to during.

But in current conditions, as unions have been forced to cut back on internal educational programs and devote precious resources to organizing, building the capacity for a longer term educational effort is hard even when the theoretical and philosophical commitment to do so is there. As one labour leader put it, "unions are to a large extent about alleviating pain, and the pain has to be alleviated at the moment and the fire has to be put out at the moment" (as cited in Tarlau, 2011, p. 377). While some have questioned trade union leaders' commitment to education in the aftermath of conservative attempts to undermine the credibility of labour studies departments, there can be no doubt that the current struggle to stay alive has caused the latter to focus on the short term (Schmidt, 2011).

THE VALUE- ADDED UNIVERSITY

As worker-centred educational programs in universities and unions adapt traditions old and new in the face of current political and economic conditions,

the university itself, in particular the *public* university, is doing the same. One could argue that the crisis facing US organized labour is of a piece with the crisis now facing the US public university.

As argued by Christopher Newfield (2011), gains on wages, benefits, security and workplace safety secured through the institutionalization of collective bargaining in the mid-20th century went hand in hand with the opening of access to a quality college education through a state-subsidized system of public universities. After the Second World War, the GI bill (the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944) supplied tuition grants and stipends for veterans to attend college. The Higher Education Act of 1965 paved the way for a system of need-based financial aid through grants, work-study opportunities, and low-interest federal loans (Folbre, 2010). These programs put forward an egalitarian ideal which, expressed as far back as the early 19th century by Thomas Jefferson, had rarely been honoured in practice. In 1947, President Harry Truman's Commission on Higher Education described why *access* to college for workers was important: "If college opportunities are restricted to those in the higher income brackets, the way is open to the creation of and perpetuation of a class society which has no place in the American way of life" (as cited in Folbre, 2010, p.38).

Certainly, the public university — which as noted above, was home to extension programs for trade unionists — was a driver of social mobility (Mumper, 2003). But it was also part and parcel of a social contract that spread out in a kind of virtuous circle from the bargaining power of organized labour to the main institutions of the welfare state. As Nancy Folbre (2010) put it:

> Trade unionists called on their brothers and sisters in the working class to unite and organize for change. The increased bargaining power of the wage earners forced many of the concessions of the so-called welfare state. But the early welfare state itself increased solidarity by developing institutions — such as public education and public pensions — that linked the collective welfare of the generations.

This was no golden age. Access was far from universal, and furthermore, the university had its entanglements with the private corporate sector, and with some of the less savoury purposes of the federal state, particularly when it came to research in the name of national defence. But during this time the *mission* of the university was rooted in the idea that it had a broader social utility (Steck, 2003). It not only served the public good, but *was* a public good.

The attacks on the institutions, policy and legislation that together served to regulate the wage relation and the private accumulation of wealth — unions and collective bargaining rights, workplace safety and health, progressive taxation, the regulation of banking and finance, environmental protections, and so on — are only the most obvious expressions of the neoliberal transformation of the US political economy. However, neoliberalism, both as a discourse

and a set of policies and practices, has continued to evolve. Other areas of governance and policy making have now come under enormous pressure to embrace market-based norms (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Peck and Tickell, 2002). As global competition focuses attention on a fictitious skills gap in the US workforce, and as recession and fiscal austerity at the federal, state and local levels radically pinch capacity for public investment, education is now very much under the gun: slotted, as it were, for "reform" (Foster, 2011).

Like many public institutions, state universities have been squeezed by the decline of government contributions to their operating budgets over the last few decades (Kelderman, 2012; Weissman, 2013). One indication of the trend, and the shift in priorities it indicates, is the fact that many states now spend more on prisons than on universities (Folbre, 2010; Gangi, Schiraldi & Zeidenberg, 1998). Universities have also made their own internal adjustments, becoming more and more like private corporations in the ideology and practice of administration and governance. In relying on an ever-expanding army of adjuncts to carry the instructional load, universities have created the kind of two-tiered labour market that many private sector companies have put in place both to protect the bottom line and to divide workers from within. Administrative departments have been growing at a faster clip that academic ones (Deresiewicz, 2011; Flaherty, 2013; Ginsburg, 2011; Schuster & Finklestein, 2008), and tuition rates have been rising steadily, even in the face of the decreasing value and accessibility of financial aid (Folbre, 2010; Mumper, 2003). Administrators have also been actively exploring ways in which to "commercialize" the institutional life of the university, and not just through big-time athletic programs but in the process of research, especially in the hard sciences (Newfield, 2011; Steck, 2003).

If one understands the present "crisis" in US higher education in terms of the latter's inability to contribute to a broader public good — indeed, it can be argued that the cost and structure of universities exacerbate the steep inequality that characterizes US society — the above catalogue of retrenchment and corporatization is a straightforward explanation of how it came to pass (McDermott, 2013; Michaels, 2006). But in the dominant discourse that addresses this crisis, very little attention is paid to actual structural determinants. Following the lead of the reform efforts that have encircled public primary and secondary education, federal officials and university boards of trustees point their fingers elsewhere.

Reformers frame the issue by citing data demonstrating how the US now lags behind its global competitors in higher education attainment, which not only puts the US economy in peril but restricts opportunities for US citizens to get the education they need to find jobs in the "new economy." Looking closer, we can see just how mechanical and economistic the purpose of higher education

has become in the minds of those who are pressing hardest for its "reform." A major US Department of Education report, entitled *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of US Higher Education* (2006) claimed that the university is now what mainstream economists would call a "mature enterprise." Mired in inefficiencies, lagging productivity, and out of control costs, universities, says the report, are driven by a head-in-the-sand approach to the reality of the 21st century marketplace.

The solution is taken out of a corporate consultant's playbook. While a decline in state support and the buying power of financial aid is certainly a problem, we should not expect a return to former levels. So, as the report claims, universities must introduce still more efficiencies (as if all those adjuncts weren't enough) that bring the sticker price down. They must embrace technology, particularly in the realm of online and distance learning. Perhaps above all else, those who create and deliver the product must be able to demonstrate what new skills have been added to students' existing stock when they leave college. Colleges must be accountable, in other words, to those paying for that product.

More accountability, in this respect, also means making college more affordable and therefore more accessible. As suggested by the critical response to the report published by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), its authors claim the goal of accessibility in order to defuse criticism — precisely because it is a goal so few can disagree with, at least in the abstract (AAUP, n.d.). But in the discourse of higher education reform, the concept of access has been incorporated into a whole new model that sees education as a social good only so far as it is a marketable good. The purpose of college is therefore entirely geared, as Deresiewicz (2011) put it, "toward the 'practical,' narrowly conceived: the instrumental, the utilitarian, the immediately negotiable" (para. 36).

While the report's recommendations have not been formally implemented, many in university leadership positions interpreted its findings and proposals as a sign of things to come. If anything, the pressure to "reform" through efficiency and accountability measures has become more intense since the recession which followed the financial crisis of 2008 produced a major bump in college enrolments. Things are moving, in quite real ways, towards that instrumentalist vision (Gardner & Young, 2013; Heller, 2013; Lewin, 2013). Haltingly, though, in part because of bureaucratic inertia, but also because the older vision of the social utility of higher education is not going down easily. Eloquent defences of a university education as a public good have appeared both in the press and in book form from writers of various political stripes (Delbanco, 2012; Ferrall, 2011; Nussbaum, 2012; Roche, 2010; Roth, 2012). Moreover, while they have yet to do so in any substantive and organized fashion, faculty has also resisted the trend (Gardner & Young, 2013; Lewin, 2013; Rice, 2012).

LIGHTING A FIRE, NOT FILLING A BUCKET

In *Democracy and Education* (1916/2011), John Dewey took a strong stand against those who argued that narrow vocational training was the only kind of education the working class needed. To perform manual labour jobs, the argument went, was the working class' lot in life. So why go beyond the know-how of operating a machine, or levelling a wall? Dewey was not opposed to vocational education. He was opposed to an educational system that isolated such learning from the kind of learning that allows one to appreciate and understand the meaning of one's work, and how, over time, it relates to other kinds of work, and, perhaps more important, how one's work constitutes and is constituted by a broader set of social and political relationships.

Without the latter, a vocational education would simply slot students into the existing economic system: education to create "human capital" in today's parlance. "Put in concrete terms," wrote Dewey (1916/2011), "there is a danger that vocational education will be interpreted in theory and practice as trade education: as a means of securing technical efficiency in specialized future pursuits" (p. 173). Furthermore, argued Dewey, a form of vocational education "which takes its point of departure from the industrial regime that now exists, is likely to assume and to perpetuate its divisions and weaknesses, and thus to become an instrument in accomplishing the feudal dogma of social predestination" (p. 174).

The study of work should still be a part of the educational process. But for Dewey (1916/2011), the point was to expand understanding of one's role as a worker, to see not only how the work one does has evolved over time, but to see how it fits in with broader political and economic relations and patterns. Delving into vocational life in this manner, moreover, could empower workers. They might not only gain control over the development of their own practical skills, but over the setting of longer term social and political purposes those skills might serve. "There is a great difference," wrote Dewey, between a "proficiency limited to immediate work, and a competency extended to insight into its social bearings; between efficiency in carrying out the plans of others or informing one's own" (pp. 173-174).

As Dereciewisz (2011) put it: "Education is lighting a fire… not filling a bucket" (para. 39). No doubt today's reformers would find this sentiment impractical and naive, and would be equally dismissive of Dewey's insistence that education be a means not to perpetuate an unjust society but to re-imagine that society and find ways to make it just. But this is exactly why it is so important to keep this understanding of the purpose of education alive and relevant. This is what we strive to do at the labour studies program where I teach.

Within the broader spectrum of labour education and labour studies in the US, The Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies is unique. In 1977, under the leadership of business manager Harry Van Arsdale Jr., Local 3 of

the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers mandated that a college degree must be an integral component of its apprenticeship training program. This speaks to Van Arsdale's longstanding insistence that his members get an education that went beyond technical training. It resulted in the establishment of a Labour College within Empire State College / SUNY, itself an institution founded on the notion that working adults and other "non-traditional" students should be given access to a college education. The apprentices of United Association-Plumbers Local 1 also take courses at the Van Arsdale Center. Local 1 thus joins Local 3 as one of the few trade unions that require a college degree as a condition of journeyman status.

At the Van Arsdale Center, students are offered courses on topics such as collective bargaining and labour law that serve to produce unionists that are knowledgeable about their political and economic rights *as* unionists. Equally important, they are also offered courses in the liberal arts and sciences. Through the examination of critical approaches to the study of economics, for example, or studies of literature or sociology that deepen understanding of the human condition, we encourage our students to become actively engaged in the issues of the day, and to join substantive discussions about how individuals and groups relate to each other to make a society, for good or ill (Fraser, Merrill, Ramdeholl, Szymanski, & Wells, 2011).

The key word here is *encourage,* for the challenges to making things really click in a sustained way run deep. Although my own practice in the classroom is inspired by the tradition of the Labor Colleges of the 1920s and 1930s discussed above, the work of Horton and Freire (Freire, 1970; Horton & Freire, 1990), and Raymond Williams's writing on his experience as a worker education tutor in the UK (McIlroy & Westwood, 1993), the program itself has to function within all the curricular standards, requirements, and parameters of an established university. Although we strive to structure our pedagogy to meet our students "where they are" and create participatory space, books must still be read and papers must still be written. There is also the resistance expressed by the students themselves. As noted above, they are mandated by union leadership to attend classes at the centre. Many, at least at first, would rather not.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Where does this resistance come from?

At the very least, the union requires that its apprentices attain an Associates' degree in labour studies, which means that they must perform at a basic level academically in a range of liberal arts courses, all of which explore the working class presence in economic, social, and political life. But students come to us with a wide range of academic experience and many are not well prepared for standard college-level work. What is more, they are often worn

out by the physical demands of their occupation, and many have commutes of an hour or more to jobs that begin at 7a.m. Making things more difficult still is the fact that the construction industry is cyclical — layoffs and periods "on the bench" are the stuff of common experience for journeymen. For their part, apprentices are less likely to be laid off, not least because they represent cheaper labour, relative to journeymen. Moreover, many work and often live in the outer boroughs of neoliberal New York City, where the top 10 percent of earners capture over 56 percent of total income (New York City Comptroller, 2012) while the working class that makes the city run struggles to get by.

The apprentices also know that their union, along with the labour movement generally in New York City, is still pretty strong compared to other parts of the country. Many understand the close-knit, craft militancy that has historically characterized unions in building trades. They also know that times have changed. Over the last few decades, the industry has been transformed by "efficiencies" in construction site management. Non-union contractors have succeeded in landing some of the big commercial jobs that have long been the mainstay of union construction, a fact which has led establishment urban planners to call for major concessions from unions on compensation and work rules. Proud and often conservative in political outlook, the unions in the building trades are nonetheless feeling the effects of the more general attack on organized labour in the US (Erlich & Grabelsky, 2005; Freeman, 2000; Martin & Cohen, 2011).

In this context — a field of force structured by the particularities of the construction sector, a labour movement scrambling to stay relevant, and an urban political economy that is increasingly hostile to its working class — it is hard for these apprentices to think much past the next paycheck. Apprentices don't make a high wage; that comes later, when they achieve journeymen status and provided they don't get laid off. Many work second and third jobs, and occasionally, a student is forced into homelessness. Although gaining admission into the union represents an important and very real step towards a secure career, coming to college at the Van Arsdale Center often (and understandably) represents an undue burden. Indeed, in their own way our students have internalized the notion that is embedded in the new discourse about the "value" of higher education.

If it is good for anything, the logic goes, college is good for getting one a decent job. But in an important sense the apprentices have already arrived at that. Many have waited for several years after first applying to get into the union, bouncing around in retail jobs, or in the small time non-union sector of the construction industry. Getting that call from the union meant persistence had paid off for them, as individuals. Once in the union, and getting the training they need to do their (comparatively good) jobs, what is the point of college now, they ask?

Furthermore, sometimes the resistance to college-level work takes collective shape. The hyper-masculine culture of the jobsite can combine with what could be called, following Harvey (1995), the "militant particularism" of a skilled craft union. This then masks the hard reality of the basic struggle to find the time and energy for the work of reading and engaging the material at hand. The resistance to college, then, needs to be understood as expression of a class experience, shaped by a context akin to what Earl Shorris (1997) has described as the "surround of force" (pp. 75-82) experienced by the working poor. Inside this surround, where insecurity reigns and imaginative and emotional energy is absorbed by just getting by economically, there is little space for reflection on one's place in the world.

In a 1954 lecture sponsored by the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults that was later published in a collection of essays, C.W. Mills (2008) declared that the basic purpose of a liberal education for working adults was to create that space for reflection. The idea was to enable students to understand "the burdens of modern life" (p. 117) and thus *not* become surrounded and overwhelmed by them. Although written over 60 years ago, his sociological analysis of how men and women of that generation were in danger of becoming overwhelmed is on point, and not only for the students that I work with but for the broader working class majority in the US (Zweig, 2000).

Mills (2008) framed his suggestions through an account of the historical transformation of the face-to-face public sphere of the pre-capitalist period to the mass public of an industrial society. In the latter, social relations are mediated by large, powerful, and impersonal forces: the bureaucratic state, the expanding market power of private corporations, the mass media. As a result, individual social experience, as it is formed through contact with others, becomes increasingly atomized, broken apart into various milieux, which then become the main source of political and cultural identification for both individuals and groups. The connection and mutually constituting historical relationships between these milieux and broader structural forces become disarticulated, invisible. The modern corporate media have compounded the problem by producing a "general tone of animated distraction, a suspended agitation" (Mills, 2008, p. 114). In the face of all this, commonality, much less social solidarity that reaches beyond the narrow range of specific milieux, becomes difficult to sustain across time and space.

In "metropolitan society" the effects are acute. There, men and women only "know one another fractionally," in that they tend to spend real time only with the like-minded, with those whose lives follow patterns similar to their own. Mills (2008) points out that residents of 20th century metropolitan society, as a mode of self-defence, develop something similar to what Simmel (1950) described as the "blasé attitude" (p. 409) of the denizens of the late nineteenth century metropolis. But, Mills added, it is much more than this:

> As they reach for each other, they do so by stereotype and through prejudiced images.... Each is trapped by his confining circle, each is split from easily identifiable groups. It is for people in such narrow milieux that the mass media can create a pseudo-world beyond, and a pseudo-world within, themselves as well. (p. 116)

Clearly, there are echoes here of Horkheimer and Adorno's (2002) analysis of the politically flattening effects of the emergence of a capitalist culture industry; Mills (2008) also parallels Habermas' (1991) account of the breakdown of 18th century political norms in *The Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere*. A similar critique might be made of Mills' case as has been made of these other, better known texts: the structures of power have so determined the space for thought and action that there is little room for alternatives. But still, I find it useful in both understanding where my students are coming from, and why the sense of solidarity students feel on the job and through their union, while valuable and hard-earned, can often serve to close off the conversation. The union, it seems, can become a milieu of its own, a "confining circle."

A liberal higher education for working adults, said Mills (2008), should open up the conversation by making connections between the lives of individuals and groups. It should provide a view of the "structure of society" that is invisible from the narrow perspective of particular milieux. In Mills' terms, a liberal education should "turn personal troubles and concerns into social issues and rationally open problems" (p. 118). Here Mills is referring to a set of ideas he would later introduce in the introduction to *The Sociological Imagination* (1959/2000). The key to thinking sociologically, according to Mills, was to understand the difference between "issues," matters of public concern rooted in institutional and structural patterns, and "troubles," more private and personal matters rooted in specific milieux.

Following Mills' lead, a liberal arts education becomes a process of cultivating the sociological imagination. It allows us to clear the air of "shams and humbug" that stand in for a truly public debate not only about the "issues," but what the really important issues for working men and women actually are. It allows us to map out the structural determinants of issues, which is to say, it is the kind of *political* education that worker education and labour studies programs have long pursued. Courses in the social sciences are critical, but so too are the humanities, particularly since they are often concerned with locating individual narratives in the wider sweep of human experience. Ideally, the use of the sociological imagination enables understanding of the relationship between our own personal biographies (transpiring in specific milieux, they are something over which we seem to have some control), and the historical events, circumstances, structures, and so on, over which we (at least as isolated individuals) seem not to have much control.

So it is not about taking personal troubles out of the educational process, but about making connections between those troubles and the issues. To take an example from Mills (1959/2000), when one person loses his or her job, it is that person's trouble, perhaps the result of a mistake or a bad choice. Maybe one could do better next time, having learned a lesson. But when millions have lost their jobs, this specific trouble becomes a broader trend, with significant social implications: unemployment. Poverty can be understood as a personal problem or failure, and indeed, in the dominant and often racialized discourse around poverty, it is seen as a kind of pathology. In conversations in my classroom, many students do in fact wonder about the "choices" the poor have made and still make. But when so many — 15% of the US Population (46.2 million) in the US and 21.2% of the New York City population in 2012 (Roberts, 2013) — are officially poor then something else must be going on. It is an issue that demands substantive intellectual inquiry and purposeful public action.

And finally, what about immigration, especially "illegal" immigration? From the perspective of the milieu of a skilled craft union, immigration can be intensely personal: as individuals, those crossing the border are viewed as not only breaking the law, but cheapening our labour if not stealing our jobs, and bilking the system in the process because they don't pay taxes. Through the lens of the sociological imagination, a more open discussion about the actual issues involved can take place, and a more humane narrative emerges. Instead of one-dimensional images of day labourers in the Home Depot parking lot, we get images of rural toilers displaced by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the same treaty that sent so many US manufacturing jobs overseas. Instead of walking threats to "homeland security" and welfare moochers, we see men and women coming to the US for work, not handouts. We see contributions — "illegal" immigrants do in fact pay taxes — to an economy and a society, not a drain. We see that the billions spent on border security and immigration control does little besides pad the profits of the defence industry; we see how that money could be better spent shoring up the agencies that are charged with monitoring the labour market, so as to ensure that wages are paid, working conditions are safe, and the right to organize is upheld.

The point is to change the conversation, moving it from "people are poor because they are lazy or made bad choices" to "people are poor because of the way the economy is set up and because of political choices that we as a society have made." Here is an example. In a course called Class, Race, and Gender that I have taught and now coordinate, a colleague and I ran a workshop that introduced students to Mills' (1959/2000) distinction between a trouble and an issue. After a discussion of the concepts, we asked students to read a sketch about a young black woman waiting to speak to someone at a crowded Bronx employment office. Were her "troubles" also issues that many others faced

as well, we asked the students? Soon students were drawing off other course readings and ticking from a list of issues: a history of discriminatory housing policy, official neglect of the inner city, joblessness, the lack of affordable childcare and housing. When asked if these issues were their issues, the class responded that they were (Ramdeholl & Wells, 2012).

On immigration, the goal is a similar shift in emphasis. Reflecting on what he had learned in my immigration course in an essay in *Labor Writes,* the student publication of the Van Arsdale Center, one student wrote: "In class, we learned about the economics of corn and how the [Mexican] farmers were out-priced and, therefore, couldn't afford to produce maize." In pondering the undocumented workers' experience, he wondered what it would be like to "cross the desert, a mountain, and travel below a freight car," and to then pay into a social security system knowing that you would never benefit from it. "After hearing all these stories, and learning more about the issues," he added, "my personal opinion has softened and I have become more inclusive in my thinking" (The Harry Van Arsdale Center for Labor Studies, 2013, pp. 64-66).

These are small but important steps. When the sociological imagination is engaged, the issues that concern all working people can be identified, analyzed, and understood. The "shams and the humbug" begin to fall away, and the horizon of political possibility expands. We can then begin to make an historically and empirically-grounded argument for a more *inclusive* labour movement. We can make the case for a fair tax structure, and a general re-ordering of political and economic priorities. We can push for living wage legislation and a strengthening of labour law to put an end to wage theft, prevent the harassment of workers that attempt to organize, and enforce safety regulations on the job for all workers, regardless of their status. In our cities, we can re-examine development policy, and begin to consider what the city *we* want would look like. We can describe why we need quality and accessible public education, at all levels, that is dedicated to the fostering of an informed citizenry. This is what labour studies is about. *Pace* Mills, it is what a liberal education is about.

NOTES

1. This section draws from the overview of US worker and labour education in Szymanski and Wells (2013).

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EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN WORKERS' STRUGGLES: LEARNING TO RESIST, LEARNING FROM RESISTANCE[1]

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ABSTRACT. Trade unions and other sites of community-labour organizing such as workers centres are rich, yet contested spaces of education and knowledge production in which both non-formal and informal / incidental forms of learning occur. Putting forward a critique of dominant strands of worker education, the authors ask what spaces exist for social movement knowledge production in these milieus? This article critically discusses the prospects, tensions and challenges for effective worker education practice in trade unions, alongside a discussion of informal learning and knowledge production in migrant and immigrant worker organizing. We consider how worker education practices within trade unions might best be built to support critical thinking, the collective power of working people and cultures of resistance, and the significance of knowledge and learning in community-labour struggles.

LES CONFLITS OUVRIERS, SOURCE D'APPRENTISSAGE ET DE CRÉATION DE CONNAISSANCES : APPRENDRE À RÉSISTER, APPRENDRE DE LA RÉSISTANCE

RÉSUMÉ. Les syndicats et les autres organisations communautaires de travail, telles que les centres pour travailleurs, constituent des bassins riches, quoique contestés, de formation et de production du savoir, au sein desquels des ap¬prentissages informels et fortuits se produisent. Ébauchant une critique des branches dominantes de formation des travailleurs, les auteurs questionnent l'espace donné dans ces milieux à la création de connaissances liées aux mou¬vements sociaux. Cet article formule une critique des perspectives, des tensions et des défis d'une pratique efficace de formation des travailleurs. En parallèle, celui-ci aborde la production de connaissances et les apprentissages informels dans les organisations de travailleurs migrants et immigrants. Nous examinons de quelle manière les pratiques de formation des travailleurs au sein des organisations syndicales peuvent être mieux développées afin de soutenir la pensée critique, le pouvoir collectif et la culture de résistance des travailleurs, ainsi que l'importance du savoir et de l'apprentissage dans les luttes menées par les organisations communautaires de travail.

Trade unions and other forms of community-labour organizing such as workers centres are rich, yet often contested sites of critical adult education and knowledge production in which both non-formal learning (e.g., union education programs) and informal / incidental learning (in the course of struggle) occurs. This article critically analyzes the prospects, tensions, and challenges for effective worker education practice drawing from experiences in a national Canadian public sector trade union, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) and engaging with knowledge produced from migrant and immigrant worker organizing in the work of the Immigrant Workers Centre in Montreal (IWC). In doing so, we attempt to think through some of the challenges to rebuild workers' power from below, in the context of today's climate of austerity and ongoing capitalist crisis, where workers are on the defensive.

Putting forward a critique of dominant strands of worker education, this article asks: what spaces exist for social movement learning and knowledge production in these milieus? How might they be created? Arguing that it is through social movement organizations that working people can develop their capacities to think and act for social change (Camfield, 2011), we contend that creating spaces for collective learning and action are essential to building a strong working class social movement (Bleakney, 2012; Bleakney & Morrill, 2010; Choudry, Hanley, Jordan, Shragge & Stiegman, 2009). Alongside this, we argue for a rethinking of who comprises the working class and where they are located (Choudry & Henaway, 2012), in a context where increasing numbers of workers in Canada — particularly those from racialized communities, with a range of immigration status — live and work in conditions of labour and immigration precarity (Block & Galabuzi, 2011; Galabuzi, 2006; Zaman, 2012), and who currently have no access to union membership Moreover, as Griff Foley (1999) and Mario Novelli (2010) noted, the incidental learning which takes place in the course of labour organizing, worker-led struggles, strikes, and campaigns is often overlooked and under-theorized. Labour educators, organizers, and other practitioners in a range of worker education milieus often lack the time to document or articulate their practice. Is Sheila Cohen (2006) right to suggest that "what is missing is not outrage, not militancy, but a more analytical and strategic awareness of the class issues and implications raised in struggle, whether everyday or explosive" (p. 177)?

As noted in the editorial for this issue of the *McGill Journal of Education*, labour education and learning is a contested terrain. On the one hand, many trade unions have extensive adult education programs and have adopted approaches which draw from, or at least invoke, Paulo Freire's (1970) work in Brazil, for example, or other traditions of popular education for action to change oppressive conditions and power relations (Boughton, 1997). But on the other, popular education is sometimes misunderstood and underutilized, and may obscure or deny conflict and risk among participants, two essential components

of deeper learning and understanding. If we are to build what David Camfield (2011) called a "new infrastructure of dissent that nurtures workers' capacity for collective action" (p. 138), we ask what can be learnt from different models of workers' organizations such as workers centres which are connected to anti-racist and immigration justice struggles in communities which have often been marginalized or tokenized within trade unions? How might worker education practices within trade unions best be built to support critical thinking, the collective power of working people and cultures of resistance?

This paper draws from the authors' engagements in popular education and organizing contexts in labour and other social movement struggles. One of us (Bleakney) has been national representative for Education for English Canada in the Canadian Union of Postal Workers for the past 17 years, and a postal worker since 1987. The other (Choudry) is a university academic who is a board member of the Immigrant Workers Centre, a community-based workers' organization in Montreal and who has long been involved in popular education, organizing, and research with a range of social movements, community organizations, trade unions, labour rights organizations, and anti-colonial struggles in the Asia-Pacific and North America. We have collaborated for many years, in many social movement, organizing and education contexts.

THE STATE OF THE UNION(S): LABOUR EDUCATION AT THE CROSSROADS

Unionized and non-unionized workers are in a downward decline. From concession bargaining to precarious employment benefits made in the post-World War Two period, workers face an unrelenting neoliberal onslaught. People, resources, and culture are viewed as mere commodities to feed stock markets within a globalized economy and culture of greed generating more social and ecological disasters. The willingness and capacity of trade unionism — or at least dynamic trade unionism — intent on going on the offensive is also shrinking. Between 1981 and 2012, Canada's unionization rate (the proportion of all employees who are union members) declined from 38% to 30% (Galarneau & Sohn, 2013). Social gains of the past are dismantled at a shocking rate as employers smell blood, as organized labour struggles with a meaningful response that could make a difference. Precarious and insecure employment is becoming more the norm than the exception (Choudry & Henaway, 2012; Cranford, Vosko, & Zukewich, 2003; Lewchuk, deWolff, King & Polanyi, 2006, Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario, 2013).

What role does organized labour play in confronting these challenges within a labour education milieu? Critically reflecting on these practices requires some unpacking. Since workers are hamstrung by a global race to the bottom brought on by free trade and investment agreements, they are left to compete with one another across borders, regions and continents. There is always

some place that the work can be performed cheaper with fewer rights and benefits, leaving organized groups of workers to resist in a defensive position. Further, the historical role of the strike is not as effective as it was in the past. Governments legislate workers back to work in the name of the economy, employers simply lock their doors and move someplace else, or subcontract to non-unionized workers. Unions have not fully adapted to this new reality nor have they effectively addressed the systemic features that created it. Union leaders are locked into legal responsibilities defined by law and collective agreements. Capital is on the warpath and has shifted the terrain while organized labour has not kept up, using the same legal and arbitration processes that now burden them with debt without many results. If this new reality is to be faced effectively dynamic education at the base is required. We must find spaces to talk and explore opportunities for resistance and reshaping society from the ground up.

Jeff Taylor (2001) suggested that union education is "about challenging the dominant power of employers and their supporters on the one hand, and building worker and union capacity on the other" (p. 7). But (for Bleakney) writing from a place of 17 years as a labour educator likely reveals unpleasant truths for some, based on experience, practice and critical reflection. Labour education is not just a preprogrammed transfer of facts regarding our own demise and presented in isolation from a bigger picture. It is not just about building models of "holistic inclusion" but must aim to contribute to the transformation into a new world, embracing other worldviews and those who struggle daily on the frontlines. Labour education today cannot live in Cold War denial of the systemic ravages of materialism and capitalism by fighting battles in disconnected isolation. The system is failing: it is rotten, and labour education must not only name it, but aim to find spaces to strategize against it, making it about more than changing the leader or the party in power but changing the nature of relations between human beings and the earth. Managing the crisis but surviving as best as possible by filing a better grievance or relying on labour law blinds us from seeing what we could be. Such education need not be bound by the paralysis and practices of union boardrooms. Labour education claims a special role beyond the latest communiqué from on high.

Undoubtedly, there will be those in the labour movement unhappy with what they find here. Speaking out in trade unions today is rather akin to speaking out of turn in church. Culturally these organizations can reproduce a certain non-critical worldview and politburo-like tendencies of hierarchy, patriarchy and white privilege. This is the nature of established and staid bureaucracies. It is too easy to blame leaders. Twenty-first century unionism places union leaders in a bind. Members find it easier to blame their union than their employer for changes in working conditions. There is less risk. But unions are not inclusive democracies, although they may claim to be. The leadership

is predominantly white, removed from shop floor struggle, and spends a great deal of time meeting and consulting with employers who are generally going to do what they want anyway in the absence of labour power. Labour conventions are not places of real debate or empowerment. Conversation is directed toward the front table. There is precious little time for debate or break-out groups. Most participants don't have an opportunity to speak: rules of order are used rather more to stifle differences than explore them. Rhetorical outraged drama from leaders permeates the field of labour which invites a culture of self-victimization and lays all blame for the crisis at the feet of conservative politicians and corporations (Bleakney & Morrill, 2010). Deeper systemic questions remain unrevealed and off-limits. How and where we learn and teach, the process, the content, and the spaces where all this takes place requires thoughtful attention. Absence from front-line struggles ensures this ongoing narrow or broken connection between much labour education, union conventions, and dynamic struggle.

Working for unions today leaves little time for critical self-reflection because the labour movement is not structured for that in theory or practice. In many ways the Canadian movement is a product of the Cold War and the Rand formula[2] and a "truce" with capitalism. In the post- war period economic growth and social spending resulted in an apparent rise in living standards. Collective agreements became more lucrative. Today, employers and governments are generally the ones in the driver's seat — they know that and pile on pressure, keeping unions busy chasing paper, consulting and lobbying. Possibilities of honest and radical perspectives, especially among staff, are often muted and rarely encouraged. Most self-regulate. They know which lines cannot be crossed, thus depriving our movement of valuable and transcendent opportunities. Employers like Canada Post have figured out and adapted to the game to benefit their interests, as seemingly (based on recent conversations at the postal union workshop at the 2013 World Social Forum) have other postal administrations around the world. Unions have not. Bosses deliberately violate contracts, forcing unions into expensive legal work only to do it again and again. This is done deliberately to ensure unions spend more time communicating with arbitrators and lawyers rather than having a two-way conversation with members. One of the features of corporate power in these past decades has been the ability to think outside the box and shift public acceptance of corporatism, from privatization to repression. If critical self-reflection is not built in at either the base or central command structure of large trade union organizations, they are left to defensively react to a deliberate onslaught and assault on the union movement.

REFOCUSING TO MOVE FORWARD

Struggles are reduced in scope and vision. The rules are set by governments, media and corporate-speak as we play blindly or hopelessly within them. Instead

of aiming to build social power to challenge corporatist hegemony we retreat to superficially liberal notions of atomized struggles. We celebrate identity politics, human rights, and international solidarity as if they are disconnected from the social organization of society becoming mere moral questions of good and bad, and right and wrong. We do this in the absence of recognizing our colonial legacy. Recognizing Indigenous title means more than cheering for some drumming, dancing, and other sacred practices rooted in another worldview. This is not merely entertainment for polite settler audiences. Yet many unions meet again and again on stolen and occupied lands without so much as an acknowledgement. Trade unions tend to view Indigenous Peoples not as distinct and vibrant nations that have been occupied and robbed in our name and without so much as a cursory expression of outrage. Notable in the recent Idle No More uprising were union flags of support at the round dances, from coast to coast. Letters of support, of the "we are with you" variety, were commonplace (after many weeks of actions). Letters without bodies on the ground are typical. This reveals a kind of "white guilt" detached from the systemic and economic factors that benefit from these relationships. We stop short. Class power, or genuine Indigenous sovereignty and the two-row wampum[3] are rarely, if ever, on the agenda for the trade unions. It would be fair to say this critique may sound overly harsh. Fighting for maternity leave, the eight-hour day, workplace health and safety regulation, and dignity are surely worthwhile. Some unions supported Occupy and Idle No More in whatever limited or humble way they could (typically through letters of support and financial donations). Without the unions, things would surely be worse and the benchmark of labour standards even lower. But this remains incomplete. Can we explore the racialized nature of materialism itself or explore other worldviews and ways of relating to the planet? Can we address the seeming ineptitude of our unions? How could focusing on systems rather than merely on leadership carry us forward? How can egos be parked at the door to allow us to have the kind of discussions we all need to have?

Where, then, is the space for critical self-reflection in organized labour? What legacy is to be left for future generations? Where are the connections and learnings drawn from historical and front line struggles of today? Organized labour risks being seen as an irrelevant or out of touch privileged group by youth, students, environmental and other social movements grounded in the present.

Part of this "speaking out of turn" includes the recognition that unions are often places of hierarchy, patriarchy, personality cults, gossip and ego. Ideas are welcomed when bookended in a narrow space of banality. These are cultural union practices unsuitable for these times. This reproduces the helpless and reactive nature of worker organizations in the twenty-first century. Without critical self-reflection, those struggling at the base are locked into a defensive battle rich with rhetoric from their leaders (when they choose to communicate,

it is generally one-way) producing feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and fear. Resistance does not take place without risk but where are these risks to be taken? Where are the places where those at the base can contribute? Speaking out at the local or regional level may ensure that your opportunities for playing a bigger role in the union remain stifled. Bureaucracies, especially privileged ones, are like that. The dynamic and the curious either conform or are weeded out, even if such silencing is not always conscious or deliberately vindictive.

Unpacking these systems and recognizing this requires courage and patience. What spaces are there for labour education to critically challenge ourselves and our organizations? The Canadian Union of Postal Workers negotiated a fund of three cents per person per hours worked which is used for an education program that the union controls. There has been no increase in this amount for almost twenty years. Most labour education is comprised of topics to fit within narrow employer-defined parameters; grievance filing, health and safety and disability advocacy, human rights discourses, and route measurement systems (a kind of Taylorism constantly in speed-up). Human rights courses remain critical of personal biases and behaviours that isolate others based on their class, gender, culture, background, ethnicity and so on. But they risk incorporating a kind of charitable or "can't we all get along?" notion of inclusion, however necessary, without delving deeper into the economic systems that generate division. So where do we find those spaces? Who are we educating and for what?

Like literacy and numeracy, these things are certainly important to the work relationship and reality of the shop floor but obscure the "world of social context" (Kuehn & Shaker, 2010). Labour education could ask, how, in this milieu, will the "collusions and collisions between spontaneity and organization play out" (Keefer et al., 2013, p. 1). Unions may embrace semi-popular education methods and the work of Freire (1970), but within pre-defined contexts. If some topics remain off-limits, forums to express them are stifled. Spectators, whether at a union convention or in a classroom face the front, not each other and engage in programmed topics of discussion limited to yet another union "campaign" and corresponding "worldview" in managing crisis (Bleakney, 2012). Workers have both the capacity and need to engage in processes of discussion more fulfilling than this but do not receive "permission." If social change is desired then it requires more than, as one postal worker recently posted on a Facebook discussion forum — a forum that CUPW up to now does not use — "re-arranging deck chairs on the Titanic." (There is currently no official CUPW Facebook, Twitter or other social media pages. Members are left to create their own and are having cyber-discussions without the filter of the "official" union and corresponding bureaucratic and hierarchical structures.) So where can this need for organization and spontaneity of struggle merge? Can education play a role in this?

Educators make choices. The classroom can become a democratic space, a space where chaos can meet organization. Classroom design, physical space, emotional space, other channels of learning can be opened up that challenge closed practices. How was it, for example, that a few dozen postal workers from small Prairie locals closed a highway to the 2002 G8 Summit in Kananaskis, Alberta, defying the government, police and army? This action, using spokescouncils and grassroots planning would not have happened without the ingredients above (Bleakney & Morrill, 2010). The question is not whether they work, but why they are not used more often.

Many trade unions have become legal entities virtually removed from the day-to-day struggles of unionized and non-unionized working people. The dominant worldview of unions is programmed by their employers. One union president from France recently said "we are paper animals, employers keep us occupied and we fall for the trap while removing ourselves from membership development and resistance" (N. Galepides, personal communication, 28 March 2013). Further, unions often fail, for example, to recognize the role of women's unpaid and unacknowledged work in nurturing and providing for children, materially, emotionally, and socially as part of the economic paradigm. There are rare exceptions to this. Our gender discussions are often limited within the framework of a patriarchal system — yes, women can be pilots, drive trucks, and be hockey players just like men. Can men be nurturing and co-operate, while not having to speak on every issue? Doesn't dismantling patriarchy include those things too? Why do we confine ourselves to material relations? How can we conduct our discussions so they are not competitive?

Labour conventions could be a place to launch processes aimed at meaningful short and long term change in an unsustainable economic system. Currently they are typically a staged theatrical performance long on rhetoric and short on debate and especially cooperative discussions (Bleakney, 2012). It is as if we are frozen in the past, reproducing the same methods over and over, sometimes with new words, sometimes not, leaving a disempowered audience of "sheeple" who fall in line lest they be overlooked for the next trip or a weekend in a fine hotel and a meal allowance.

WAYS FORWARD FOR LABOUR EDUCATION

Where does this leave us? What role can education have in providing permission for participants to deconstruct and disconnect from this privileged reality? The alternative and the reality on the shop floor and community is that austerity and corporate fascism deepens its destructive social and ecological blueprint. Worker victories are becoming fewer and fewer and where they occur is akin to plugging the dike or holding the line.

Vibrant and effective labour education of these times would support, embrace and nurture new spaces where every teacher is a learner, and every learner is

a teacher. It would learn and apply lessons from other worldviews and aim to build systems and relationships of equality and respect among every person, including the disempowered workers we represent. We can ground ourselves in the present moment in the places where we stand, where everyone is "grassroots" and the separation of bureaucrat and community vanishes. This would include the power of assembly, the realization that our collective liberation will not be defined by a narrow set of laws and programmed education processes, but the nurturing and expression of everyone in a safe place of not one answer, but many.

What is labour education for in these times? Is it to maintain a status quo, a legal entity where struggle is a game played by advocates and decided by arbitrators? Is it where human rights are merely those ones defined by law? The classroom must become an insertion point for highlighting new practices and cultures that synthesize this into something more powerful, while representing its parts, all its voices. And where that is not happening in a classroom then it must be designed so that it does. Workplace assemblies are one powerful but overlooked process of teaching and learning in a union environment. More work can be done to shift terrain and seek new contact and entry points for learning that supplement the local union hall. Every moment can be a teachable one. There are other models to consider that encourage self-organizing.

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND LEARNING IN THE STRUGGLE AT AN IMMIGRANT WORKERS CENTRE

We turn now to focus on some aspects of the politics of learning and knowledge production in migrant and immigrant workers' struggles in Canada. Montreal's Immigrant Workers Centre (IWC)[4] was set up in 2000 as a community-based workers' organization in the diverse, working-class neighbourhood of Côte-des-Neiges by Filipino-Canadian union and former union organizers along with other activist and academic allies. The IWC engages in individual rights counselling and casework as well as popular education and political campaigns that reflect the general issues facing immigrant and temporary foreign workers–dismissal, problems with employers, and sometimes inadequate representation by their unions. Often issues arise from individual cases and form the basis for campaigns and demands which are expressed collectively. DeFilippis, Fisher and Shragge (2010) argued that for community organizations to be part of a broader longer-term movement for social change, social analysis and political education are vital. They argued that "both contribute to understanding that the specific gains made and the struggles organizations undertake are part of something larger, but so is the broader political economy that structures organizational choices" (p. 177). While perhaps this part of the article sounds a more positive note than the preceding discussion of the limitations and tensions of labour education within a trade union context, we should also emphasize that we are not romanticizing this model of organizing, nor the

knowledge and learning that takes place therein. There are many challenges for workers' centres and migrant and immigrant worker organizing. Indeed, as Jennifer Chun (2012) noted, "the struggles of workers at the margins have the potential to create new horizons of organizational and structural transformation. However, how do we evaluate this potential without exaggerating its broader impact?" (p. 41). While it is outside the scope of this article to answer this question, we are aware of the dangers of false optimism about new modes of labour organizing.

For the IWC, labour education is a priority, targeting organizations in the community and increasing workers' skills and analysis. Workshops on themes such as the history of the labour movement, the Labour Standards Act, and collective organizing processes have been presented in many organizations that work with immigrants as well as at the IWC itself. For example, the "Skills for Change" program teaches basic computer literacy, while incorporating workplace analysis and information on labour rights and supporting individuals in becoming more active in defending those rights in their workplaces. Language classes held at the centre teach workers French through engaging with the labour code. But labour education also happens in the course of outreach — while handing out informational flyers at locations to connect with migrant and immigrant workers, often in precarious work such as that involving temporary labour agencies (Choudry & Henaway, 2013) and in the course of meetings and assemblies of workers. The IWC strives to develop leadership among immigrant workers in order to take action on their own behalf. Support for self-organizing, direct action, coalition-building, and campaigning are used to win gains for workers and to build broader awareness of, and support for, systemic change in relation to their working conditions and, often, immigration status. As an IWC organizer, Mostafa Henaway (2012) wrote, the Centre

> tries to build from an organizing model that incorporates radical traditions, going back to basics, focusing on outreach, collective organizing, casework, and education. At times, there are many challenges faced in balancing all of these facets in the organization; but each facet has proven to be critically important to the political work of the centre, such as weekly outreach outside Metro [subway] stations, building relationships with both communities and individual immigrant workers, or attempts to collectivize the casework and individual issues faced by workers, and to respond in a politicized way. The foundation of this organizing has come from these principal organizing methods, in addition to a flexibility in tactics and strategy, due to ever-changing economic conditions in Montreal, and globally. (p.146)

Significantly, organizations such as the IWC, and the workers' struggles that they support can be key sites of informal and non-formal learning and knowledge production for labour justice struggles. This process occurs through workers' struggles and contestation of their conditions and rights and is important in winning gains for workers. A recent study on immigrant workers' struggles in Quebec, which conducted extensive interviews with migrant and immigrant workers noted:

> Individuals that did eventually take action always did so with the support of others, who provided information and other resources to help them in a dispute with an employer. These others can be unions, community organizations or co-workers or friends with whom they have informal relationships. "Street smarts" and small victories are shared between people: this in turn encourages others to take action. Such learning most often grows out of pre-existing relations with other individuals, peers or friends. However, organizations play a key role. (Choudry et al. 2009, p. 112)

This study found that learning to question or to resist exists in tension with learning to cope, adapt or "get by" — as indeed it does in workplace industrial relations since the emergence of capitalism.

MOBILIZING WORKERS' KNOWLEDGE TO BUILD STRATEGY AND ACTION

More recently, knowledge produced by workers themselves has been key to building the organizing, strategy and broader campaign work on temporary labour recruitment ("temp") agencies around the IWC and the newly-formed Temporary Agency Workers Association (TAWA, see Choudry & Henaway, 2012, 2013). Besides workers' own experiences of exploitation, they are often well-positioned to be able to shed light on the identities and (mal)practices of the agencies, for example. Such knowledge is shared in the course of outreach to agency workers at various sites, and at meetings of agency workers where they can pool their experiences and discuss the conditions and possibilities for action. This is also key to mapping the sector in Quebec, especially given the "fly-by-night" nature of some unregistered agencies, and informing the direction of campaigns. Another major challenge is the ability to create effective outreach strategies and target sites of companies that contract out agency workers. The ability to effectively learn and understand the geography of the agencies could only happen through contacts in different immigrant communities, and with agency workers, especially through assemblies and organizing meetings. For example, at one meeting, an agency worker working for a food processing company discussed how many of the agencies operate through financial services offices clustered in neighbourhoods with sizeable immigrant communities. Some agencies did not pay workers directly but rather they received their weekly pay from these businesses that service working immigrants. Similarly, in the course of outreach at such locations, through building a wider contact base, agency workers told organizers that to find out which employers use agencies one must go to various metro stations at 6 am where workers are picked up for work. This has helped locate more companies, especially in the agricultural sector that use agency workers.

This process of outreach and organizing meetings has enabled the IWC and the TAWA to begin to map the web of agencies in multiple sectors such as healthcare, food processing, warehouse work, cleaning, and hospitality. Un-

fortunately because there is no organized existing body of knowledge that has systematically mapped the political economy of Montreal's temp agencies (and given the logistical difficulties in doing so — especially for fly-by-night operations), the day-to-day organizing and outreach is a key research resource that allows the TAWA and the IWC to build a clearer picture of the structure of agency work in Montreal. It also enables building a list of abusive and exploitative agencies. Another aspect of mapping the agency industry involves two other forms of coalition building. The first is a collaboration between the IWC and several unions, in order to discuss temp agencies and acquire the knowledge they have from organizing workplaces with agencies, or share resources on broader issues of precarious work which the unions are currently engaged to put forth a series of demands around temp agencies in Quebec. The second initiative has been to try to transform and build upon the knowledge presented by workers to create a coherent critical narrative by forming an agency research committee in collaboration with engaged academics informed by the experiences of the organizers. This is a more critical and organic attempt to facilitate research combining the real experiences and knowledge of workers / organizers with the tools and resources available to academics to develop research that is relevant to organizing / campaigns.

New organizing strategies also emerge from agency workers' knowledge. One issue that the TAWA has taken up is that of holiday pay. This demand is a strategic way to ensure a living wage, without going after the employer directly. In Quebec, all workers are entitled to statutory holiday pay for holidays such as Christmas and Thanksgiving. But agency workers are usually left out of this scheme and do not receive this pay. An agency worker originally from Colombia suggested that if the fight is for agency workers to have equal rights with other workers, they should be entitled to holiday pay. So he put forward a strategy to fight for this by posting complaints and educating workers about what they are entitled to. In turn, the TAWA has produced flyers and framed outreach based on the workers' strategic demands, and their knowledge about effective locations and times to communicate with other agency workers.

Further demands came from workers and reflected a shift in strategy and the political demands itself. In 2013, in an open letter to Quebec's Minister of Labour, a group of agency workers demanded the right to be made permanent after three months of work at the same workplace, arguing that merely making agencies and client-companies co-responsible for working conditions was not enough. This was critical because agency workers themselves are directly articulating proposals about creating a healthy labour market and workplace conditions.

Examples of struggles to change the economic and social conditions of migrant and immigrant workers, including low wage temp agency workers in Montreal highlight the importance of engaging workers in collective self-organization.

Such strategies break from orthodox post-war trade union organizing traditions and create community responses to labour problems. The IWC's support for building a worker-led campaign and organization to change the structural issues of agency work has meant the creation of the TAWA that can address the different type of agency workers coming from a wide variety of experiences and ethnicities. It grapples with challenges faced by mainly newer immigrants and migrant workers in more exploitative conditions, contending with both labour problems and the regularization of status. Alongside this are workers in factories and manufacturing who mainly seek temporary work in the hope of improving their skills and education. This organizing approach allows the IWC to build a more comprehensive organizing strategy, and a sense of solidarity across communities, immigration status, and other experiences. Leadership development and education are central to the organizing model through labour rights workshops, media training, and by supporting workers to take leadership roles. It is a hybrid model — firstly, building an organization or association that can have a broad membership, secondly, dealing with policy issues at the provincial level, and thirdly working to resolve individual grievances with agencies and employers around wage theft, health and safety, and other violations.

In thinking through the forms of significant learning taking place in these struggles, we are appreciative of Church, Shragge, Fontan and Ng's (2008) notion of solidarity learning, Foley's (1999) "learning in social action" and attention to the significance of incidental and informal learning, Mojab's (2012) work on critical adult education and imperialism, and Holst's (2002) pedagogy of mobilization. For Church et al, solidarity learning happens not according to an explicit curriculum but spontaneously and unpredictably through social interaction in situations that foster people's participation. In coining the term "pedagogy of mobilization," Holst writes that "there is much educational work internal to social movements, in which organizational skills, ideology, and lifestyle choices are passed from one member to the next informally through mentoring and modelling or formally through workshops, seminars, lectures, and so forth" (p. 81). Drawing upon Freire, Foley, and Hay (1995), in discussing the role of education and strategic learning in a successful anti-privatization campaign by a union in Colombia and its supporters, Novelli's (2010) thoughts are perhaps particularly salient to thinking through the learning and knowledge production we discuss in this paper, but especially in regard to the IWC: He contended that

> "popular education" needs to be seen as not only involving formal educational events, but is part of much bigger processes which, though appearing "informal" and "arbitrary," are very deliberate. In this definition, both the "popular education" events that take place, and the actual practice of "strategy development" and "protest actions" can be seen as examples of popular education whereby the "school" (the social movement) learns. (p.124)

Workers' centres like the IWC and new groups of workers like the TAWA are testing grounds for alternative approaches or models of collective labour organization, and in a sense, are grounded attempts to work through some of the issues, debates and tensions around the shifting centres and margins of labour market regulation and workers' struggles in Canada today. For example, as the expansion of agency work enhances employers' ability to create a sense of fear, austerity, and denial of decent work with job security in order to generate profits, such organizing work amongst a changing working class and their daily issues arising from precarious work is a key way to highlight local impacts of globalization and as critical as fighting for public services and against privatization and outsourcing. There are challenges for political coordination for organizing precarious workers across cities in Canada. This kind of precarious worker organizing is a relatively new phenomenon in Canada, by comparison to more established networks in the USA. Organizers are beginning to facilitate a conversation that could allow organizing experiences to be a way of building more effective campaigns and synergies, yet due to the relative young nature of this organizing it will take some time and resources to achieve this. The need for coordination will be crucial between the mainstream labour movement / trade unions, community-based labour organizations, and other community organizations to build a broader movement against the agencies and workplaces that exist transnationally and within Canada.

ON THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND LEARNING IN MIGRANT AND IMMIGRANT WORKER ORGANIZING

Sometimes, as Robyn Rodriguez (2010) noted, such knowledge emerging from the daily experiences of workers contests not only the power (and knowledge) produced by governments, but also that of professionalized non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which purport to speak on behalf of migrant workers. But building alliances with trade unions, through education and supporting internal debates occurring within organized labour to encourage unions to more meaningfully represent the needs and concerns of immigrant and migrant workers is an important aspect of these local and global struggles for justice. As Biju Mathew (2005) and others noted, migrant and immigrant workers can and do bring their own histories of struggle and organizing strategies from their countries of origin to the new countries in which they labour. For those located in universities and engaged in research on migrant and immigrant workers, this work requires some careful reflection and political commitment. Commenting on the role of a growing number of NGOs and think-tanks which purport to represent migrant workers' interests at national and international levels, yet exclude workers themselves, Rodriguez (2010) argued that it is vital to pay attention to the knowledge production of those excluded from official venues and who cannot participate in the circuits, virtual and otherwise, frequented by others in the "global justice movement." She said that in order

> to be able to document the kinds of struggles engaged in by migrant worker activists…requires some level of political investment on our part as scholars, for it is in spaces outside of the seats of power, like the space of the street, where migrants can come together not only to narrate their experiences, but also to articulate radical alternatives to the contemporary global order. (p. 67)

Rahila Gupta (2004) of Southall Black Sisters, a long-established British Asian and African-Caribbean community organization in London noted, it is not easy for activists "to sit down and record their work, but in this age of information overload you need to record in order almost to prove that you exist" (p. 3). Indeed — and for engaged labour scholars working on immigration and labour issues, as well as organizers on the frontlines of struggles for social justice, the analyses and knowledge produced in the course of such struggles can be seen as not only important intellectual contributions, but as rich conceptual resources for understanding and challenging the continued exploitation and commodification of migrant workers and immigrants, locally and internationally. They are intrinsic to revitalizing and refocusing labour education in trade unions and community-based forms of labour organizing.

CONCLUSION

The labour movement in Canada — and here, we include both trade unions as well as workers' centres and organizing that takes place at the margins, as these margins themselves move to the centre with the spreading precarity of work — faces serious challenges, as does labour education. At the same time, as Camfield (2011) pointed out, it is through movement organizations that working people can develop their capacities to think and act for social change. Building, maintaining and democratizing collective spaces where workers can struggle, learn and act together has never been more urgent.

For unions, the cross-pollination of ideas and actions from social movements and community organizing traditions not specifically rooted in unions can be important spaces of exchange, learning and the building up of social knowledge production and constructing alliances across societies and borders. This requires taking risks, and classrooms or other learning situations where participants have a real voice. Workers' centres like IWC highlight the limitations and possibilities of community-based labour organizing in Canada. Yet, though under-resourced and limited in their capacity to address the widespread and urgent needs faced by large numbers of migrant and immigrant workers, such centres are important in helping to transform understandings of who and where the working class is located and who and how trade unions could organize.

The MJE Forum aims to open conversations and exchanges about topics related to education: here, specifically we invite responses from readers who may wish to share their accounts of learning and knowledge production in labour education / organizing settings, and / or to engage with the critiques we put forward.

NOTES

1. Adapted from a paper presented by the authors for a panel on unions, community organizing and anti-austerity strategy at the United Association for Labor Education Conference in Toronto, 18 April 2013.
2. Devised by Justice Ivan Rand in 1946 in answer to ongoing workplace disruptions that employers could not control (see *Ford Motor Company of Canada Ltd. v. International Union United Automobile, Aircraft and Agricultural Implement Workers of America*, 1946). This led to the "dues check-off" where union dues are deducted automatically and sent to the union. Previously the union collected dues by having direct personal contact with workers. The Rand formula removed that necessity and direct contact.
3. This refers to the Two Row Wampum belt on which the first peace and friendship treaty between representatives of the Haudenosaunee and Dutch government was originally recorded in 1613.
4. See http:/iwc-cti.org

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NOTES FROM THE FIELD / NOTES DU TERRAIN

TRAVAILLEURS-EUSES, ÉTUDIANT-ES : MÊME COMBAT![1]

ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATE STUDENTS EMPLOYED AT MCGILL (AGSEM), 2012-2013 TEACHING ASSISTANTS' UNIT EXECUTIVE

ABSTRACT. In the wake of the Québec student movement, graduate students of the 2012-2013 executive team for the Teaching Assistants' Unit of the Association of Graduate Students Employed at McGill (AGSEM) reflect on their individual backgrounds and motivations for pursuing union work. With various opportunities for employment on and off campus, what compels academic workers to serve their union; to become accountable to a diverse and growing membership, and to challenge the very institutional machinery upon which our careers can depend? As students, educators, activists, and workers, we reflect on these questions in considering how we have come to the union, why we have become advocates for workers' rights, and the kinds of challenges and successes we experienced.

TRAVAILLEURS-EUSES, ÉTUDIANT-ES : MÊME COMBAT!

RÉSUMÉ. Dans la foulée des mouvements étudiants qui ont eu lieu au Québec en 2012, les étudiants de 2e et 3e cycle et les membres du comité exécutif des auxiliai¬res d'enseignement de l'Association des étudiants et étudiantes diplômés-ées employés-ées de McGill (AÉÉDEM) de 2012-2013 ont entrepris une réflexion sur leurs vécus et leurs motivations individuelles en ce qui a trait à leur impli¬cation syndicale. Considérant l'éventail d'opportunités de travail sur le campus ainsi qu'hors campus, qu'est-ce qui motive ces travailleurs universitaires à demeurer au service du syndicat, à rendre des comptes à un nombre grandissant de membres aux profils variés et à contester l'employeur, une organisa¬tion aux rouages très institutionnels, dont leur carrière dépend? Comme étudiants, enseignants, activistes et employés, nous réfléchissons à ces questions en nous attardant à la manière dont nous nous sommes engagés dans les rangs de l'association. Nous abordons aussi les raisons qui nous ont poussés à représenter les droits des travailleurs ainsi que les défis et les succès que nous avons vécus.

Founded in 1993, the Association of Graduate Students Employed at McGill (AGSEM) was initially certified to represent teaching assistants; 20 years later AGSEM is the largest labour union at McGill University, representing over

3,000 teaching assistants, exam invigilators, course lecturers, and instructors. With a long history and a progressive political presence on campus, AGSEM has worked with various groups and community organizations to advocate for workers' rights and has aligned itself in solidarity with a number of salient movements and causes. Since 2011, a number of social movements including the Quebec students' strike, Occupy, and Idle No More have collectively signified a growing and intensifying push against capitalism, neo-colonialism, and oppression. Labour unions, by definition, are implicated in this resistance as we are pressured to compromise previous gains for our members in response to austerity measures, and our rights to resist and protest such policies are threatened through increased surveillance and repression.

With various opportunities for employment on and off campus, what compels academic workers to serve their union; to become accountable to a diverse and growing membership and to challenge the very institutional machinery upon which our careers can depend? As students, educators, activists, and workers, what kind of learning do we experience in the context of union work? In this paper, the 2012-2013 executive team of AGSEM's Teaching Assistants' Unit engages in a reflexive exercise to think about these questions in considering how we have come to the union, why we have become advocates for workers' rights, and the kinds of challenges and successes we have experienced thus far.

JUSTIN MARLEAU, VICE PRESIDENT

Growing up, I had the privilege of living in an upper-middle class neighbourhood with good schools and many opportunities. However, as I grew up and made friends from outside my socioeconomic background, I realized how difficult life can be and how our current economic, political, and social systems are reinforcing societal inequity. Our society's current practices keep those born with the "wrong" name, the "wrong" skin tone or the "wrong" accent out of jobs they are qualified for, snatching opportunities away before one can even hope to pursue them.

I did not want to be part of a system that treats people in such a way, and so I joined student groups, political parties, and charity organizations that are supposed to make a difference in everyone's life. Unfortunately, many of the political organizations I have joined or been involved with have curried favour with the powerful, rather than promoting the interests of the powerless. The only organization that I joined which was not so craven and cynical was my labour union, AGSEM. Once I became an AGSEM delegate, I found that through working with others in the union I was able to make a real difference by bringing problems that my co-workers had out in the open. We managed to win important concessions from the University, particularly during the hectic (Fall 2011) semester-long workers' strike by MUNACA (the McGill University Non-Academic Certified Association / Public Service Alliance of Canada).

Since then, I have come to appreciate how the democratic and rights-based struggle of labour can bring out the best in people and can truly raise people up from desperate conditions.

MEGAN MERICLE, COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

The most significant and positive difference in the quality of living for my family came as a result of my mother's decision to return to her studies and to earn a college degree. As a direct consequence of receiving an education, she secured a job caring for the elderly suffering from forms of dementia, such as Alzheimer's disease. My father was absent during most of my youth, and I did not know about the nature of his career path until shortly before he passed away in 2011. He had earned a bachelor's degree in history and master's degree in history and philosophy before working in the Canadian film industry. Later he worked as an organizer of unionization drives for workers in various industrial construction companies and plants in Alberta.

The experiences of my parents shaped my beliefs regarding student and labour organizing and my conviction that access to education is particularly crucial not only to make society more equitable, but also to create further understanding and awareness of our unique differences and similarities across race, class, sex, gender, religion, ability, and so forth. My parents' experiences demonstrated to me that education is the first step to challenging and dismantling social, political and economic inequalities.

I entered McGill University in 2009 as a Master's student in the Art History and Communication Studies department, and took a position in my Graduate Student Association (AHCS GSA). Soon, mobilizing other students around departmental issues led me to become interested in the labour conditions of graduate students. I worked as a teaching assistant and I experienced the effects of cuts to hours and positions in favour of hiring more precarious and non-unionized workers such as graders. My *real* education has occurred through the collaborative work that I have undertaken with my colleagues at AGSEM, the AHCS GSA, and in other mobilization groups. Without these experiences I would not have the same perspective about working with and for others, and I would not be aware of the radical potential for community and coalition-based forms of organizing.

Working for AGSEM has revealed to me that universities can be places where exploitative working conditions exist and are particularly difficult to challenge. Universities are powerful institutions and much of the labour that supports their existence is temporary and/or precarious. Unionizing university employees has been met with great resistance at McGill, and the unions that do exist have had to engage in long drawn-out battles to win rights for their members. Senior university administrators mobilize institutional power and resources to impose draconian and anti-progressive measures against student and labour

activists who work to improve the quality and accessibility of education and to promote social justice on and beyond our campuses. The University is not a de-colonized space, and it is not separate or distinct from systems of hierarchy, power, and privilege that continue to create inequalities — but this does not mean that we should simply give up on the radical possibilities of student and worker education to challenge these systems! Union activism has allowed me to cope with my own experiences and has provided me with a chance to learn, share and work in collaboration with others to create positive social change. I realize that student and labour unions need to work much harder to be transparent, accountable, and to create direct, participatory forms of organization.

ROSALIND HAMPTON, GRIEVANCE OFFICER

Struggles for social justice have always been part of my life. Both of my parents worked in social and community service jobs, and I grew up hearing stories of their experiences as activists in the 1960s American Civil Rights Movement. I have particularly powerful pre-adolescent memories of my mother's involvement in unionizing the employees of the social service agency for which she worked. I remember many meetings and a sense that it was an exciting and very stressful time. I did not completely understand what my mother and her friends were doing, but I knew that it was very important work. Later I would understand the risks she had taken and how she had compromised her chances for career advancement in order to pursue the unionization drive. I would also understand that it had been worth it to her, and that they had won.

In the context of the neighbourhood I grew up in, our family was relatively well off; many friends' parents were on social assistance, some working "under the table" to make ends meet (and there were always stories of the unlucky ones who got caught and had to find ways to reimburse welfare for thousands of dollars). Most of the working people in the neighbourhood had jobs that involved physical labour, poor working conditions, few benefits, and little if any job security. Health problems — particularly those related to hard work, high stress and low resources — were not uncommon. The rates of school disengagement were also high, and my sister and I were among the few who graduated from high school and went on to some form of post-secondary education. Thus, I grew up understanding the connections between employment conditions, job security, health, education, and intergenerational social outcomes.

Entering doctoral studies in Education at McGill in fall 2011, class-consciousness surged to the fore of my identity. Never before had I been so aware of my working-class background. The intersections of race- and class-based elitism at McGill were an intense culture shock for a Black woman of my background as I found myself inundated with spoken and unspoken messages that told me that I did not belong at this institution; that it was not meant for "people like me."

During my first semester, one of the loudest sources of these messages was the incessant stream of emails from the McGill's Media Relations Office, degrading and criminalizing the university's striking non-academic workers of the MUNACA union. I resented the condescending suggestion these messages conveyed, constructing a *we* — students, faculty members, and senior administrators — who were part of an elite McGill community that was being disturbed by the nuisance of striking workers: *them*. Further "othering" the MUNACA workers as outsiders, the senior administration attempted to erase their visible presence through securing injunctions moving picket lines further and further away from the University[2] and threatening pro-union students and faculty members with punitive measures for any show of support for MUNACA on campus. Identifying with the striking workers (among whom I found many more people of colour than elsewhere on campus), I became involved in MUNACA solidarity actions. The first meeting I attended was held at AGSEM.

The MUNACA strike, in essence, introduced me to the people and strategies that would allow me to claim my space at McGill; I became an "activist" and by the end of the school year, a union executive of AGSEM. Alongside the PhD program in which I am enrolled, I have engaged in a parallel course of non-formal learning in action from which I am gaining a diverse, grounded, and deeply meaningful education. Through student activism and working for AGSEM, I have learned about the role of universities in society, especially of "elite" universities like McGill. I have learned about workers' rights, the strengths and weaknesses of labour unions and the critical role we have to play in current neoliberal contexts. I have learned from colleagues and comrades of all ages, and from academic and non-academic workers from a variety of disciplines and personal backgrounds. I have learned about acting in solidarity across differences, to defend others and myself against social injustice and institutionalized oppression. I have been reminded of the many ways that "school" is not synonymous with "education." I have learned that change requires risk-taking; that when it feels like everything about you is under attack, it's possible to find allies, organize, stand up and fight back.

SUNCI AVLIJAS, MOBILIZATION OFFICER

I am actively involved as a student at McGill because I believe that universities are a keystone of society, and if they are to serve society we must fight for them. During the years I spent completing my undergraduate studies in Ontario and a master's of science in biology at McGill, I repeatedly witnessed our universities being aggressively airbrushed and cut into unrecognizable glossy models on the verge of becoming universities in name only. Today's university has been so well compartmentalized into a corporate mould that the single most important driver of decisions regarding all university affairs is financial returns. If investing in the public image of the university is more profitable

than the actual quality of education and the student and research experience, it is considered only logical to invest in image and reputation at the expense of everything else. Decisions at universities are made by a handful of senior administrators and a board of governors who do not have any investment in the best interests of students, professors, teaching support and any other workers who are part of the university community, nor are they concerned with the benefits universities serve to our society. Students are seen as more or less transient paying customers, and university employees including professors and other teaching support workers are considered an unfortunate necessary expense required to render a service. I was drawn to unions on campus because collective organization and action are the most viable strategies, for both workers and students, to successfully fight for our universities.

At both universities I have attended (McMaster and McGill), student associations have been disenfranchising. In my experience, at the best of times, the associations are actively depoliticized spaces for students to socialize and build support networks; at the worst, they are bureaucratic cliques in the grips of (sometimes well-meaning) executives who think they "know what's best" and fear their members being allowed to make decisions. I became involved with AGSEM's Teaching Assistants' Unit during the mobilization for our last collective agreement and was excited by the glimpse this provided me of the power that a group of organized workers can have. In parallel, I was living an incredible collective student strike action that shook all of Quebec. Observing the failures and successes of these labour and student unions, three crucial elements for collective action became evident: first, direct democracy that is accessible to all members; second, accountability of executives; and third, independence. My goal in joining the AGSEM executive was not to organize a particular collective action. I wanted to work to transform our union into a space where members can participate to organize themselves. To do this, executives cannot be afraid of what members will say or how they will vote at a general assembly: a mandate is only words on a page unless there is a solid group of real people who can talk, organize, and act together. A union whose members view themselves as passive customers receiving a service and their union executives as yet another set of bosses is an utter failure. To be able to fight, unions must be empowered and the key to empowered unions is empowered workers.

CORA-LEE CONWAY, FINANCE OFFICER

Although I am currently in the PhD program in Educational Studies at McGill, I come to it by way of a BA and MA in Political Science from Toronto's York University. I have long since been fascinated by political systems, forms of governance, and the conditions in which free thinking people relinquish significant aspects of their personal autonomy to become citizens, governed by albatross-like political structures that often fail to deliver on their promises.

Projections of plenty have not held true and the resulting impact has become too pervasive to placate, too vast to disregard, and too systemic to "band aid" with piecemeal solutions.

We are in a season of protest, an era of movements aimed at calling into question the failures and breaches of the social contract that binds us. So last year when I had the pleasure of working as a teaching assistant in McGill's Department of Political Science, the juxtaposition between what we discussed in the classroom and what was happening outside our window and beyond was truly uncanny. The students sat in classrooms and listened to lectures about nation formation, the nature of political revolutions, and the role of labour and early union movements in shaping modern capitalist regimes. Many students submitted final papers that explored the political unrest and strikes of France in 1968. All this while hundreds of thousands of students in Quebec demonstrated and voted to strike in protest of the proposed tuition increase; and just months earlier McGill non-academic workers had taken to the streets to exercise their right to strike in hopes of achieving better terms in a new collective agreement. As an educator, I attempted to facilitate some nuanced understanding of the parallels in the classroom, as a student I sought opportunities to learn about the issues, and as a worker I looked to my union for a better understanding of my rights in this very unique situation.

AGSEM is a union that works to bargain for protections and benefits for its workers, and it is also a strong advocate for the quality of education at McGill. In this sense, we are actually an important ally to the University, although it rarely seems that this is understood. As part of our last round of bargaining, for example, AGSEM negotiated for first-time Teaching Assistants to receive paid-training sessions, thereby contributing to their education as both workers and graduate students. An integral part of our quality of education campaign is educating workers about their rights, the context in which we work and the services that are available to them via their membership in the union. As AGSEM's Finance Officer, I gained a keen awareness of the trust that the membership instills in executives to exercise our judgment and discretion in using resources in ways that support not only the union and its members but the labour movement as a whole. As executives, we are accountable and our actions can and should be called into question. It wasn't my years of financial or administrative experience that brought me to this role, or the influence of my mother's long-time passionate involvement with her union as a public servant, but the knowledge that I was taking on the task with a group of individuals committed to being accountable to the membership of our union and to each other.

LOOKING (AND LEARNING) FORWARD: THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

We came together at AGSEM as five graduate students from a diverse range of ethno-racial, class, and academic backgrounds. When we were elected as the Teaching Assistants' Unit Executive we already knew one another's unique strengths and weaknesses as student organizers and activists, and this gave us a solid foundation upon which to build an executive team with a shared commitment and vision. The struggle for workers' rights at an institution like McGill – where recent events such as the MUNACA strike and the senior administration's attempts to ban the right to protest on campus[3] have increasingly and publicly highlighted a disregard for the rights and autonomy of students and employees as well as a prioritizing of economic returns over the quality of teaching and learning – requires profound inter-union and student-worker organizing and solidarity. As we look forward to the future of AGSEM and of post-secondary education, we stress above all else the importance of popular education campaigns on the university campuses where we work and in the communities where we live, in promoting critical awareness of the ties that bind and empower us to act in our collective struggle against neoliberalism.

NOTES

1. Roughly translates in English as, "Workers, Students: Same Struggle". A popular slogan in the 2012 Quebec student movement.
2. Regarding the conditions of the first injunction, see http://munaca.com/node/345, and regarding the second and third injunctions see http://www.munaca.com/node/368
3. For more information see http://protesttheprotocol.com/category/in-the-media/

SUNCI AVLIJAS graduated with an MSc in Biology in 2013. She served as the Mobilization Officer of the 2012-2013 Teaching Assistants' Unit of AGSEM and as the interim Vice President of the same unit from September-October 2013. She is currently an Officer on the TA Unit Bargaining Committee.

CORA-LEE CONWAY is a PhD student in Educational Studies and served as the 2012-2013 Finance Officer of the Teaching Assistants' Unit of AGSEM.

ROSALIND HAMPTON is a PhD Candidate in Educational Studies and served as the 2012-2013 Grievance Officer of the Teaching Assistants' Unit of AGSEM. She is currently an Officer on the TA Unit Bargaining Committee.

MEGAN MERICLE graduated with an MA in Art History in 2013. She served as the Communications Officer of the 2012-2013 Teaching Assistants' Unit of AGSEM.

JUSTIN MARLEAU is a PhD Candidate in Biology who served as the Vice President of the 2012-2013 Teaching Assistants' Unit of AGSEM, re-elected and continuing in the role of VP through the summer of 2013.

SUNCI AVLIJAS a obtenu une maîtrise en biologie en 2013. Elle a travaillé au sein du comité exécutif des auxiliaires d'enseignement (AE) de l'AÉÉDEM comme agente de mobilisation en 2012-2013 et elle a occupé le poste de vice-présidente par intérim en septembre et en octobre 2013. Elle fait présentement partie du comité de négociation des AE.

CORA-LEE CONWAY est étudiante au doctorat en éducation à l'Université McGill et a été agente des finances du comité exécutif des auxiliaires de l'enseignement de l'AÉÉDEM en 2012-2013.

ROSALIND HAMPTON est doctorante en éducation à l'Université McGill. En 2012-2013, elle a occupé le poste d'agente de griefs du comité exécutif des auxiliaires de l'enseignement de l'AÉÉDEM. Elle fait présentement partie du comité de négociation du comité exécutif des AE.

MEGAN MERICLE a reçu une maîtrise en histoire de l'art en 2013. Elle était agente de communication au sein du comité exécutif des auxiliaires de l'enseignement de l'AÉÉDEM en 2012-2013.

JUSTIN MARLEAU est doctorant en biologie. Il a été vice-président du comité exécutif des auxiliaires de l'enseignement de l'AÉÉDEM en 2012-2013. Réélu, il a poursuivi son rôle de VP au cours de l'été 2013.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD / NOTES DU TERRAIN

WORKERS' EDUCATION IN PALESTINE

WAJIH ELAYASSA *Democracy and Workers' Rights Centre, Palestine*

ABSTRACT. Due to the political context and the restrictions placed on general freedoms and trade union activities, workers' education in Palestine remained informal and largely reliant on oral memory until the early 1990s. For decades, it was an integral part of political education. Workers' education only became a stand-alone field after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, when the change of circumstances enabled the Democracy and Workers' Rights Centre in Palestine to focus on developing training materials and curricula specifically aimed at strengthening the Palestinian labour movement. First inspired and modelled on materials and courses taught internationally, the Centre's labour education program has grown to encompass many locally produced materials and seeks to address specific challenges that face unions in Palestine.

LA FORMATION DES TRAVAILLEURS EN PALESTINE

RÉSUMÉ. Jusqu'au début des années 1990, le contexte politique et les restrictions imposées aux libertés générales ainsi qu'aux activités syndicales étaient la raison pour laquelle la formation des travailleurs en Palestine soit demeurée informelle et largement tributaire de la mémoire orale. Durant plusieurs décennies, cette dernière était une partie intégrante de l'éducation politique. En fait, la formation des travailleurs est devenue un domaine à part entière à la suite de la création de l'Autorité palestinienne lorsqu'un changement de circonstances a permis au Democracy and Workers' Rights Centre, en Palestine, de se concentrer sur le développement de matériel de formation et de programmes visant à renforcer le mouvement ouvrier palestinien. Si, dans un premier temps, le Centre s'est inspiré et a calqué son matériel et ses cours sur l'offre internationale, le programme de formation des travailleurs a évolué de manière à inclure de nombreux contenus pédagogiques locaux. Il cherche aussi à répondre aux défis plus spécifiquement rencontrés par les syndicats en Palestine.

It is not easy to talk about workers' education in Palestine without taking into consideration major historical developments in the past hundred years (the British mandate, the creation of the State of Israel[1], the period of Jordanian rule in the West Bank and Egyptian rule in the Gaza Strip, and the Israeli occupation[2]). These developments have clearly affected all aspects of people's lives in Palestinian society, at the political and social levels. Trade union work has not been spared by these sufferings, although union organizing started early in Palestine, arguably before it appeared in many other Arab countries. Palestinian trade unions have led many struggles during which the line became blurred between union, national, and political demands. This did not give the opportunity to the trade union movement to focus on other aspects, including workers' education.

For decades, for reasons related to the successive occupations of Palestine, the Palestinian trade union movement was unable to develop normally, and most efforts were concentrated on national liberation and building the dream of establishing an independent and democratic state in Palestine. Thus, workers' education, like trade union work, remained associated at various periods with political action as it was the only narrow window for spreading national, political and trade union education, and a culture of free education and volunteer work, which began in the 1970s and spread among young people at that time.

For the most part, workers' education in Palestine also relied on oral memory, particularly regarding the history, activities, and struggles of the trade union movement for labour legislation or for solving problems faced by workers. This cannot be dissociated from the restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupying power throughout this period, especially after 1967 and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israel did not allow the establishment of new trade unions in the occupied territory, in addition to prohibiting all trade union activities in the Gaza Strip. Until the 1993 signing of the Oslo agreements between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel, books and publications on workers' education were scarce and it was not easy to gain access to them. In this context, trade unions played an important role in disseminating basic workers' education that relied on practical knowledge, that is, their experiences, and their political and cultural backgrounds. The quality of the teachings depended very much on the life-course of the unionists involved in workers' education. Workers' education was also affected by the fact that public assembly was forbidden, and that trade union offices were often raided and closed.

From a theoretical point of view, workers' education was not a priority for trade unions, political parties, or other civil society organizations. Trade union education was not a stand-alone field, it was considered part of political education. In most cases, workers' or youth education focused on general national issues, and no one saw the need for developing workers' education

curricula that would address matters related to the world of work and focus on empowering workers to achieve their labour and social rights. This appears clearly in the literature issued during most of these years. A majority of writings researched the history of the labour movement, mostly from an academic or a mixed political / trade union perspective. Educational materials were translated from external sources and mostly produced by Palestinian communists, who had played a central role in developing the trade union movement. At the time, Palestinian trade unions were linked to the World Federation of Trade Unions. Thus, the publications that were issued were influenced by socialist and anti-imperialist political ideology and focused on topics such as the concepts of working class, trade union, and global union solidarity.

In short, all this did not help in the accumulation of knowledge and expertise in workers' education and contributed to the absence of a labour culture among Palestinian society, which itself led to a lack of awareness of the importance and necessity of workers' education in Palestine.

This situation continued until the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1993 and a change in local circumstances. This was followed by the establishment of many democratic and independent trade unions, non-governmental organizations, and other human rights organizations, which played an important role at the local level. The Democracy and Workers' Rights Centre in Palestine (DWRC) was established during this period, and remains to this day the only organization that focuses on workers' education. It aims to develop the right to this form of education on the premise that workers' rights are human rights. This opened the way for trade unions and unionists to become acquainted with various forms of workers' education and training and get access to training of trainers (educators) specialized in workers' education.

It was not an easy task to develop workers' education in the absence of literature related to labour culture, especially in Arabic. Thus in the mid-1990s, the DWRC set itself the daunting task of translating several works relating to trade union work into Arabic and adapting educational materials to the domestic situation, as well transferring Arab and international experiences. This process started before the IT revolution, before the internet enabled unions and workers' education organizations to share their materials online.

In the post-Oslo period, Palestinian trade unions and workers became able to focus on union education, which also allowed the recognition of workers' education as a social science that can be taught in universities (although it is not yet taught in Palestinian universities). The right to workers' education was finally stipulated in the Palestinian Labour Law No. 7 of 2000 that entered into force in 2001. This law states in article 76 that "the labourer is entitled to a one week paid labour educational leave a year arranged through a decision by the Minister" (Ministry of Labour [Palestine], 2002). However, a vast majority of enterprises still do not apply this disposition of the labour law,

and thus most workers' education programs have to be implemented during week-ends and off-days.

The DWRC's vision of workers' education, its experience in this field, and the education methods and tools that are used are intimately connected with the recent evolution of the Palestinian trade union movement and the organization's humanistic values and rights-based approach. It can thus not be considered as neutral education since it serves a clear social purpose and is placed at the service of the organization's mandate: to promote democracy, social justice and equality.

The DWRC's philosophy regarding workers' education revolves around the motto "Education for Organizing and Social Change." It has developed its training and education program to help achieve a number of objectives, including defending freedom of association and the right to organize, improving work conditions in workplaces, training workers' committees and unionists to represent workers at workplace level, assisting workers in exercising their rights and empowering them to access justice, providing technical assistance and advice to workers' committees (particularly those under establishment), and strengthening workers' committees (and through them the labour movement). A lot of emphasis is placed on strengthening democratic grassroots organizing.

The DWRC kick-started its program by translating and adapting materials produced by the global trade union movement. It has been able to keep abreast of developments in the field of labour education through its active involvement with the International Federation of Workers' Education Associations (IFWEA). The accumulated experience and feedback obtained from participants in its training and awareness sessions (between 1997 and 2012, about 7500 unionists and labour activists have taken part in more than 430 courses, and over 63,000 workers and unionists in awareness sessions), as well as other activities undertaken with trade unions have enabled DWRC to assess the evolving educational needs of Palestinian unions and workers. For over a decade, the DWRC has produced materials in collaboration with local trainers, academics and lawyers to help unions in developing their representation and bargaining power in the difficult context of state-building under occupation, ongoing colonization, and an economy that has been made subservient to that of the occupying power. These materials address a variety of topics, such as local labour legislation, collective bargaining, advocacy and campaigning, basic administrative skills, good governance in trade unions, media skills, statistical analysis, national budget analysis, social dialogue, gender equality, and political (civic) and socio-economic education. In addition, the Centre has collaborated with trade unions in developing awareness brochures on occupational health and safety, addressing risks at work in various sectors.

Four education levels have been adopted by the DWRC. The first level focuses on cognitive or informational education, that is, imparting knowledge. It involves the provision of information and developing the knowledge of trade unions and unionists about labour legislation, in addition to providing direct information. This form of education is supported by awareness materials and publications that use non-academic language and are based on content developed through the DWRC's curricula along with the accumulation of experiences among trade unions and workplace representatives. Information is provided in a simple and direct manner that is accessible to all. Technological tools are used in addition to relying on direct communication with workers. Education methods were adopted to develop the skills of trade unionists and train them on mechanisms for using acquired knowledge, such as how to use legislation to defend workers' rights, submit complaints, manage trade unions at the workplace level, follow up on violations of occupational safety and health, organize workers, organize union meetings, submit demands and organize activities through practical training, role-play and group discussion among participants in training sessions.

The second level of education concerns capacity-building of union leaders and decision-makers in trade unions and trade union federations, in particular democratic and independent trade unions. It aims at building the capacity of leaderships in decision-making, managing trade unions, and organizing activities at the sector or national levels. It aims to connect them with labour policies and their position on issues of public interest and governmental policies, such as taxes, social insurance, the national budget, and so on. In other words, this focus hopes to influence socio-economic policies in Palestine. Emphasis is placed on specific issues such as using statistics, advocacy work on legislation, the social protection system or other important topics. Union leaders are also introduced to Arab regional and international labour conventions and how they function, in addition to exposure to experiences of trade union work in other countries.

The third education level is civic education, and concerns the monitoring of elections to ensure their impartiality, transparency, the code of conduct for trade unions, in addition to other topics related to civil society and democracy, accountability, and human rights.

The fourth level of education, in cooperation with trade unions, aims to form labour educators in each trade union and union federation through a specialized training of trainers program. The training material for this, the first of its kind in the Arab region, was initially prepared in the mid-1990s with the assistance of foreign trainers and based on a training manual from the Canadian AutoWorkers union. Many sections were adapted to the Palestinian context, and the material now continues to be updated and used on a regular basis in order to train educators who will be able to spread labour education in all areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

One of the main challenges that we face nowadays is how to use social media and distance learning methods for workers' education, while many workers do not yet have access to the internet or are not computer literate. On the other hand, internet use is growing rapidly and it is important to occupy this crucial space for learning and exchange that is privileged by the youth. Like unions elsewhere in the world, Palestinian trade unions need to engage the youth in trade union work because the future of the labour movement is at stake. With wide segments of the labour force still unorganized (professional and trade union affiliation levels of employed persons stood at 15.5% in 2011 according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics [2011]), the energy, dynamism and determination of youth are needed to conquer additional sectors. It is thus a priority to educate them on labour issues and provide them with the skills and knowledge that will allow them to play a decisive role in shaping the present and future of Palestinian trade unions. Already, the space occupied by youth union leaders in independent and democratic unions is growing. In sectors like information technology, post and telecom, finance, pre-school education, or health, young unionists have played a significant role in developing trade union work and conducting struggles to improve work conditions and circumstances. They are also crucial allies for spreading workers' education.

Imad Tmeizi, the young president of the Palestinian Postal Service Workers' Union, which was established three years ago, holds the view that:

> developing workers' education in various fields, in particular those related to human rights and trade union work, enables workers to obtain their rights and protect themselves from oppression by employers. Workers' education also has a positive impact on workers' professional career, as they have a better chance to gain advancement due to improved knowledge and skills, and a better capacity to obtain their rights. In addition, training and learning in the field of occupational health and safety protects lives and contributes in reducing work-related accidents. In our field of work, post and logistics, which is fairly recent in Palestine, workers' training needs in occupational health and safety have neither been assessed nor met so far, and employers have no information on the matter. (Personal communication, 30 April 2013)

Not everyone yet understands the multiple benefits and ramifications of workers' education, and it remains a challenge to convince workers and their representatives in certain sectors of the importance of workers' education regardless of their profession. At the same time, the growth of the independent and democratic trade union movement, nurtured by workers' education, has generated an exponential increase of educational needs. DWRC faces the challenge to develop its relationship with its partner trade unions, especially democratic ones, and to equip them with needed skills to spread workers' education in order to promote and strengthen the role of trade unions in workplaces. This means that more labour educators from within the unions have to be formed, and resources have to be mobilized to enable unions to undertake regular edu-

cational activities. Most Palestinian unions have extremely small budgets and rely entirely on volunteer work from union members and representatives. At present, they do not have the means to finance workers' education programs, nor do they benefit from any local governmental subsidies for this purpose. International trade union solidarity and support is thus extremely important to ensure that Palestinian workers continue to have access to labour education opportunities, and that unions develop their capacities in this field.

NOTES

1. After the First World War, the UK obtained a mandate over Palestine (which it had occupied since 1917-1918) from the League of Nations. The British Mandate for Palestine officially started on September 29, 1923, and ended on May 14, 1948, in the midst of a civil war that had started in 1947. On the same day, the Jewish leadership declared the establishment of the State of Israel. This was followed by the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. For Palestinians, the year 1948 is the year of the "Nakba" or catastrophe, during which more than 700,000 Palestinians were displaced from their towns and villages, and became refugees.
2. From 1948 until the 1967 war, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, was under Jordanian rule, and the Gaza Strip under Egyptian administration. The 1967 war resulted in the occupation of both territories by Israel.

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DOING IT OLD SCHOOL: PEER-LED OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY TRAINING IN THE U.S. CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT. Many labour organizations that sponsor occupational health and safety training champion "peer training," preferring instructors drawn from the shopfloor over academically credentialed experts. But peer training is hardly new: in the skilled trades, master craftsmen have instructed apprentices since the Middle Ages. Building on the apprenticeship model of education, the U.S.-based construction unions have created a network of more than 4,000 peer trainers who provide occupational health and safety training to up to 100,000 men and women in the building trades each year.

COMME DANS L'ANCIEN TEMPS : LA FORMATION EN SÉCURITÉ AU TRAVAIL OFFERTE PAR LES PAIRS DANS L'INDUSTRIE DE LA CONSTRUCTION AUX ÉTATS-UNIS

RÉSUMÉ. Plusieurs syndicats offrant des formations en santé et en sécurité au travail valorisent la formation par les pairs et favorisent l'embauche de formateurs issus du plancher de l'usine, au détriment d'experts universitaires. Or, cette façon de faire n'est pas récente. En effet, dans le domaine des métiers spécialisés, les artisans forment les apprentis depuis l'époque du Moyen Âge. Se basant sur le modèle éducationnel de compagnonnage, les associations syndicales du domaine de la construction ont créé un réseau regroupant plus de 4 000 formateurs-travailleurs qui donnent une formation en santé et sécurité au travail à plus de 100 000 travailleurs et travailleuses du domaine de la construction par année.

Union-driven, peer-led outreach training has featured prominently in US labour's occupational health movement at least as far back as 1978, when the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) began supporting such activity under its "New Directions" grant program. The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) supports an even greater volume of this activity through programs dedicated to training workers in the safe handling of hazardous materials. In 2010, OSHA reported that the New Direc-

tions program (now renamed the Susan Harwood Training Grant Program) awarded US$10.7 million in grants, reaching 65,732 workers; NIEHS funded $36 million in worker training that reached 217,419.[1]

The Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW), more than any other US labour organization, is associated with the birth and popularization of the modern peer-led model for worker safety and health training. OCAW Secretary-Treasurer Tony Mazzocchi, legendary for his role in pressing for the Occupational Safety and Health Act that created OSHA and for his association with the martyred Karen Silkwood, worked with New York's Labor Institute to theorize and develop a remarkable method for worker education.

In the late 19th century, industrialization brought many new technologies into use in the workplace, with important consequences for the division of labour. Frederick Winslow Taylor, the founder of scientific management, became a spokesman for the idea that new conditions required decisions be reserved to those with extensive technical education. As Taylor (1911/1998) explained, "the science which underlies each workman's act is so great that the workman is incapable, either through lack of education or insufficient mental capacity, of fully understanding the science" (p. 18). It was the responsibility of managers to give directions and workers to obey. Occupational safety training under this scheme called for academically credentialed experts in industrial hygiene to draft policies and lecture the workforce on following them.

The OCAW activists believed that this attitude was not just anti-labour, but counterproductive from an occupational safety standpoint (Merrill, 1994; Renner, 2004; Slatin, 2001). They were convinced that workers understood a great deal about their workplaces that credentialed experts did not, that unaddressed hazards rather than worker error were responsible for most accidents, and that the passivity inculcated by Taylorism prevented workers from acting to address these hazards. OCAW recruited safety advocates from the ranks of union workers on the job for a "train-the-trainer" program. They did not become full-time safety professionals, but returned to the factory and periodically led short courses on occupational safety for their coworkers. This outreach training relied less on lectures than on small group problem-solving activities. Both elements — the group problem-solving activities and the peer leadership — were meant to cultivate feelings of efficacy, preparing workers to take collective action for health and safety on the shopfloor.

The OCAW model caught the imagination of union and occupational health activists alike and spread rapidly through the loose community of trainers gathered around the NIEHS and Susan Harwood Grant programs (Deutsch, 1996). OCAW is now part of the United Steelworkers, and in its 2011 annual report, the union's Tony Mazzocchi Center reported training 26,173 members.

DOING IT OLD SCHOOL: PEER TRAINING IN THE BUILDING TRADES

The OCAW model has many attractive features, but is not the only union model of peer-led health and safety training. The construction industry unions offer an alternative.

The construction industry is really like no other in North America. Every union affiliated with the Building and Construction Trades Department (BCTD) of the AFL-CIO was established *before* Taylor wrote his 1911 treatise on scientific management. Many of the functions reserved to management in other industries fall instead to the labour organization in union sector construction. Workers seek employment by reporting to a union hiring hall rather than applying to a company, and they obtain their health and retirement benefits from their union rather than their employer.

Most importantly, the unions provide their vocational training through an apprenticeship system inherited from the medieval guilds. Workers learn their trade through a multi-year program of hands-on activities supervised closely by experienced peers. A contribution or tax assessed on employers indicated in the union contract — typically 50 cents or a dollar for every hour they employ a union tradesman or tradeswoman — finances this training. Employers share supervision of an apprenticeship trust fund, but as a practical matter the union administers the program. The very nature of the building industry dictates that construction firms must hire skilled workers in large numbers upon winning a contract and dismiss them upon completion. Union construction firms are thus party to a social contract with their respective labour organizations — they cede control of most personnel functions to the labour organization, and the union in turn guarantees the availability of a sufficient supply of skilled labour when needed.

The scale of union apprenticeship programs can astonish those outside the trades. In a 2013 interview with *Engineering News-Record* magazine, BCTD President Sean McGarvey estimated that the union apprenticeship programs spend nearly US$1 billion annually. Reports submitted to the U.S. Department of Labor by just four of the fourteen major apprenticeable construction trades claimed over 100,000 active apprentices in 2011.[2] The effect of this network of institutions is to give labour in the building trades a degree of control over work practices unheard of in other sectors of the economy — as has been demonstrated by the rapid expansion of safety training for craft labour over the past decade.

HEADING OFF TAYLORISM IN OSHA OUTREACH TRAINING

Construction is one of the most dangerous sectors of the economy. On average, in the US, construction accidents claimed the lives of more than 1000 workers every year between 2003 and 2011. Firms in the sector pay a hefty

price for this in workers' compensation insurance premiums as well, and in the 1990s they increasingly looked to a small OSHA program to address the issue. At that time the OSHA Training Institute (OTI) operated a modest, voluntary train-the-trainer program focused on hazard awareness in construction. Outreach instructors trained at the OTI campus near Chicago, Illinois were authorized to teach two basic courses in construction hazard awareness, known as OSHA-10 and OSHA-30 for construction. The courses took ten hours and thirty hours respectively, and participants would receive a card indicating they had received the OSHA-authorized training.

With demand increasing, OSHA expanded the program by allowing certified nonprofit institutions like community colleges to become OSHA Training Institute Education Centers (OTIECs) eligible to "train the trainers." But much of the industry embraced the program from a distinctly Taylorist perspective. Their target audience was supervisors, not workers. Many companies adopted policies requiring the training for supervisory personnel — sometimes even administrative assistants and clerks who never left the corporate office! — but not workers themselves. One workers' compensation provider spoke for many of his colleagues when he shrugged off the necessity for training workers: "The supervisors are planning the work" (personal communication, January 11, 2013). If any worker training was necessary, supervisors could provide it on the job site.

The unions' role in industry governance, however, gave them the power to respond. Labour representatives cogently argued that workers often had the initiative on the jobsite, and that a peer-led train-the-trainer program based in the apprenticeship and training system was the best vehicle to deliver this training.

The BCTD, as the coordinating body for the building trades unions, established critical infrastructure for the effort. In 1994, CPWR – The Center for Construction Research and Training (CPWR) (the BCTD's affiliated safety and health institute) partnered with the National Labor College (US) and the extension program of West Virginia University to form the National Resource Center, an authorized OTIEC eligible to train the trainers and issue OSHA-10 and OSHA-30 cards. Meanwhile, union safety and health representatives from each of the affiliated trade unions, working with outside technical experts and soliciting input from construction employer associations, drafted a standard health and safety curriculum that both reflected worker concerns and met OSHA requirements.

The National Resource Center (NRC) then worked with the affiliated construction unions to recruit a team of 50 master trainers, trade workers of extensive experience and wide-ranging practical health and safety knowledge, representing every construction craft. These master trainers fanned out to local apprenticeship and training centres, teaching a corps of over 4,000 outreach

trainers how to administer OSHA-10 and OSHA-30 to their brothers and sisters in the local union.

The trade unions took two additional steps to help establish this safety training as a standard for craft labour in the commercial and industrial building sectors. First, in the course of the decade, virtually all of the construction trades amended their national apprenticeship standards to make OSHA-10 — and in some cases, OSHA-30 — a mandatory part of the apprenticeship curriculum. Today most union apprentices receive this training near the start of their vocational training.

Equally importantly, the unions launched a campaign calling on public agencies, in their role as construction owners, to mandate the OSHA-10 safety training for workers employed on public construction contracts. Many public construction contracts already contained clauses requiring bidders to meet wage and benefit standards, local hiring requirements, and goals for participation by women and underrepresented groups. Starting with Rhode Island in 2002, seven US states have mandated OSHA-10 training cards for workers on taxpayer-financed construction contracts — much to the chagrin of non-union "open shop" employers who have not matched the union investment in safety training, or indeed in training generally.

RESULTS AND PROSPECTS

The National Resource Center has issued over one million OSHA Outreach Cards since its 1994 inception. Not all were in construction, but most were: the building trades unions trained over 220,000 workers in OSHA-10 or OSHA-30 between 2010 and 2012. Before the National Resource Center was established fewer than 2% of industry workers received this training.

Depending on one's assumptions about labour turnover, retirement, and the like, it seems likely that this training reaches at least a quarter of active workers, and that share is growing.

For those of us in the US occupational safety field, this record is astonishing. It's difficult to find any comparable workplace safety initiative adopted so widely without a national OSHA regulation mandating its use — and finding such an example driven by labour is harder still. Yet many who take their orientation from the OCAW model find it difficult to conceive of these programs as "peer training" or labour activism in the sense to which they are accustomed.

This is understandable, for there are important distinctions between the OCAW model and the apprenticeship and training programs operated by the building trades. Many of the instructors who deliver OSHA-10 training have put down their tools for good to become full-time instructors. They learned their skills on the job rather than in university, but are they "peer trainers"?

Perhaps more significantly, the apprenticeship and training funds are supervised by a board of trustees on which a union and its signatory contractors are equally represented. Trade unionists typically take the lead in preparing curricula, operating training centres, and delivering instruction, but the funds function by mutual consent. They presuppose that employers and employees share certain, if limited, common goals, a notion many labour militants find difficult to accept.

This constitutes a definite limit on the scope of their activity: if workers want to press for changes employers resist, they must pursue them through the union itself, using traditional tools like strikes and collective bargaining, rather than through the joint training and apprenticeship apparatus. On the other hand, the apprenticeship committees have compensating strengths as well. Much peer-driven health and safety training in the United States is dependent on a handful of government grant programs; the vulnerability of these efforts in a time of austerity, budget deficits and a political leadership that ranges from lukewarm to hostile is self-evident. The funding of the building trades' apprenticeship and training apparatus is certainly endangered by long-term trends in union density, but is at least safe from the vagaries of the election cycle and congressional budget process.

More importantly, it might reasonably be said that shared governance of the training system is the price that unions must pay to play in a system that delegates to them vast power over personnel functions that in other industries is an employer monopoly. This partnership may not allow for exclusive union control over occupational safety training, but it allows the union the opportunity to influence norms across an entire industry in a way few other labour organizations can match. Only that scope enabled the building trades unions to create a new norm in health and safety for workers across the US construction industry.

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NOTES

1. For details and statistics on the Susan Harwood Grant Program see OSHA, https://www.osha.gov/dte/sharwood/statistics.html; for details on the NIEHS program see http://www.niehs.nih.gov/careers/hazmat/programs/awardees/index.cfm
2. The United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters, the Sheet Metal Workers, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and the Ironworkers reported a combined 106,503 apprentices in 2011 on their LM-2 reports submitted to the Department of Labor. Some unions do not report apprentices as a separate member category so a total number is not available.

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NOTES FROM THE FIELD / NOTES DU TERRAIN

WHY UNION ACTIVISTS WRITE GOOD STORIES

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ABSTRACT. The representative structure of a union is a maze which, when travelled as a narrative, has drama at every turn. It sets up expectations, pits good against evil, involves many characters with different interests, keeps the clock ticking, and offers opportunities for happy endings (and disappointments) at every level. Union members who are not experienced writers can produce good stories by writing about their lives at work and in the union.

POURQUOI LES ACTIVISTES SYNDICAUX ÉCRIVENT DE BONNES HISTOIRES

RÉSUMÉ. La structure de représentation d'un syndicat est un véritable labyrinthe qui, lorsque parcouru comme un récit, propose un drame à chaque détour. Celle-ci établit les attentes, dresse les bons contre les méchants, implique de multiples intérêts, souligne le temps qui passe, et offre des chances de fins heureuses (ou de déceptions) à tous les niveaux. Les membres d'associations syndicales, sans être des écrivains expérimentés, peuvent écrire d'excellentes histoires en témoignant de leur vécu au travail et au sein du syndicat.

Last year, six people started writing short stories in a creative writing class. None of these people had written short stories or any fiction before. Yet they produced stories that were full of action and conflict, animated by characters and personalities, and fleshed out with real-world details. These people included a nurse who is president of her local union, an ex-steelworker who now drives a tanker truck and is a member of a big Teamster local, an instructor at an electricians' apprenticeship program, a janitor who is now a business representative for the janitor's union, a union staffer who used to work for Chicago Animal Control who is now an organizer for the public sector union American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), and a freelance journalist who is on the National Writers Union national executive committee. Why did these people produce such good stories so quickly and apparently easily?

The class was called "Writing about Labor and Literature," and they were all writing about work, but from their own experience in unionized workplaces. I was their teacher. Here are some thoughts about why they had a leg up on writing good stories.

1. THE UNION AS A SOCIAL CONTEXT PROVIDES A STRUCTURE OF EXPECTATIONS THROUGH WHICH THE STORY MOVES.

The work narratives of people who are in unions are likely to sound like stories even before they get written down as stories. Take a grievance, for example. If everything goes as it should, the person who has been fired without just cause gets their job back with pay. The name of the ideal outcome is "made whole," which is better than anything that can be won in the criminal court system. That's a happy ending. There is a process by which this happens. This process is written down and known to those who implement it. If the process is not known or implemented, that itself becomes the conflict and thus a story. There can also be tragedies: concessions, layoffs, bad elections, strikes that are called off. Either way, the union generates a set of expectations and actions to implement those expectations, which become the things that the characters do. The union itself, in other words, is a structure of expectations. So is a plot; so is a genre. The convergence of these two structures makes for good stories.

This may seem so obvious that we should stop for a moment and think about some alternatives. What are some other plots that are so familiar that we could call them a structure of expectations? The Cinderella story is one; the abused but virtuous little girl who marries the prince. Then there's the peripatetic romance, in which a young man (usually) has one clever or funny adventure after another. The Horatio Alger story takes an honest, enterprising boy from poverty to wealth. Joseph Campbell's hero's journey is the most complex: it involves setting out on a quest, conquering temptation (represented by a serpent, a woman, an ocean or the need for sleep), and gaining a trophy or honour. When we read these stories, we feel we know what we should expect to happen. But by comparison, even though these stories (called archetypal stories for this very reason) call up familiar patterns that dialectically shape whatever version we are telling or reading, they are set in contexts that are less specific than, for example, the story of a steward who has to try to get someone's job back. The story of the steward processing a grievance moves forward through more precisely defined stages than the story of the ragged stepdaughter who marries the prince. Or does it?

The condition under which the steward's efforts will make a good story is that, to the degree that the context of the union is understood only by insiders, that context has to be made explicit and natural. This is not easy to do, either for insiders or outsiders of the labour movement. The most natural telling

of a contemporary union story that I have come across is Timothy Sheard's (2002) novel, *Some Cuts Never Heal*; right behind it is Barbara Kingsolver's (1989) story, *Why I am a Danger to the Public*.

2. THERE IS GOOD AND EVIL, WEAKNESS AND STRENGTH, BUILT INTO THE SITUATION

The existence of the union is predicated upon there being an essential conflict between capital and labour, in which capital tries to extract surplus value from labour and labour organizes itself to resist and to retain as much surplus value as it can. This conflict is never far away, whether it is the nurse who is denied overtime, the foreman who pushes for speed-up, the corporation that distinguishes between regular employees and permatemps, or the cap on the number of apprentices who can be admitted to an apprenticeship program because of the need to provide work for the entire union workforce. If you're in a union, you learn to discern this conflict in its many manifestations. But if you're not in a union, that conflict has many ways of being masked. In creative writing classes that I have taught with non-union adult students, workers or not, the conflict often has to be drawn out from the shadows, sometimes with great difficulty, in order to construct a plot. Sometimes drawing it out can't be done.

3. THERE ARE PLENTY OF CHARACTERS INVOLVED IN THE STORY

The stories written by these students are peopled with characters in action. Not one was a meditation on a solitary experience. There were always coworkers, more experienced workers, less experienced workers, bad and good supervisors, union reps or union members, people at home who depended on the worker to keep her job. The union activist writing about a union experience immediately summons up a situation in which an array of people are engaged in helping, teaching, cooperating with, competing with or fighting with each other. There is no difficulty naming these people or bringing them into the narrative in a living way. They all have something to say, just like in real life. Again, this is not always the case in creative writing classes, where it is common to find people writing stories with only one character or where the plot has to do with a memory or re-framing an important issue, all done mentally, with no contact with even one other person.

4. THERE IS A SEQUENCE OF THINGS TO BE DONE

The grievance process, or an organizing drive or an application process, all lay out in the abstract a sequence of things that need to be done. There are deadlines, communication devices that have to work properly (faxes, emails), offices to go to, emergencies, interruptions, meetings that have to happen. All of these create a railroad track for the story to run on and move the plot

along. If an inexperienced writer has a hard time figuring out what happens next, the dispute resolution procedures of the union will provide him / her with the answer. A writer who has never been in a unionized workplace may describe a bad situation that seems suspended in time or eternally deteriorating and not seem to have any sense of "what comes next" except quitting.

5. HAPPY ENDINGS CAN HAPPEN AT MANY LEVELS

Newsworthy victories occur, of course – winning an organizing drive, an election, or a strike. But my students did not write about those big victories. In the stories they wrote, someone is accepted into a program; someone learns something; the rookie steward becomes a good steward; a bad boss learns a painful lesson; an abused worker sees herself being effectively represented; a bad policy is revised. These are the small day-to-day victories, the ones that keep a union rep busy answering the phone. It's the small, incremental steps that move toward justice or at least hold abuse at bay that constitute happy endings in these stories. Even when there is a big loss, like losing an organizing drive, there is some comfort in the collective sense of purpose that remains after the sacrifice is finished. The collective reframes individual defeats as times when we say "We'll live to fight again."

6. AS CHARACTERS, UNION WRITERS SEE THEMSELVES AS AGENTS, NOT AS PASSIVE OBSERVERS

The social context of the union is also a moral context. People who are working within that context see themselves, no matter how small or peripheral their role is to the main conflict of the union, as agents of the overall moral purpose of the union. They are agents of justice. They have the overview and sense of purpose, the ability to select details and make an argument, of people who believe themselves capable of making the wheels of something larger turn in the right direction. Their work involves making moral choices and they know it. They do things, and what they do matters to other people. Even small choices, like which phone call to return next, are moral choices, not trivial ones.

7. THE UNION ITSELF IS A TEACHER

The union itself not only structures the human relationships of work, it teaches people about them. Fairness is made concrete. Disparate treatment? This gives racist or sexist behaviour a label. People know what it means, can recognize it and base a defence on it. A few years as a union activist and you see things differently because you have been shown things differently and you've learned to do things differently. The practice of labour union activism articulates the conflict between labour and capital in concrete, specific ways. Good and evil, justice and injustice are made visible and identifiable. This conflict is

dramatized. This drama becomes embodied in people who act it out. In order to carry out the work of the union, people learn to see this drama. The step from seeing the drama to writing it down is not a big one.

WHY AREN'T MORE STORIES LIKE THIS IN GENERAL CIRCULATION?

Union activists know stories already, because they enact them. Union situations, adequately described, fully told and nicely embellished, easily make as good reading as detective or crime situations. A union steward is just as interesting as a detective. What union activists need to learn, in order to write these stories, is fairly simple. They need to put in a lot of description, follow plot lines all the way through to the end, and not be afraid to make things up a little in order to get at a larger truth (which starts with using the third person instead of the first person). A little encouragement makes this happen.

But very little good union fiction is out there. When preparing the reading list for this class, I had a hard time finding literature that reflected the life that we know as union activists. Stories about work, yes, and the life stories of people who have various kinds of jobs. Stories about poverty and debt. Stories about class, yes — often suffused with despair and anger. In fact, stories identified as "working class" are often mainly about how miserable it is to be working class. The working-class character is depicted as a bit grotesque, unredeemable or cartoonish. The majority of working-class literature depicts poverty and injustice but does not pick a fight with either. When it does pick a fight, it's an individual fight, not a collective fight. There were a few exceptions, including Suzan Erem's (2001) *Labor Pains,* John Steinbeck's (1938/1989) *In Dubious Battle,* and Robert Tressell's (1955) *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists*, in addition to the writing of Timothy Sheard and Barbara Kingsolver mentioned above. But these all together do not add up to a full literature about working union, which takes up at least eight hours a day for at least thirteen million people in the United States.

So there is a lack of union fiction, and a need for it, and it appears to be not all that hard to produce... so what's the problem?

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CARINA HENRIKSSON. *Living Away From Blessings: School Failure as Lived Experience.* London, ON: The Althouse Press. (2008). 155 pp. $29.95 (paperback). (ISBN 978-00920354-67-4).

Carina Henriksson's book is an inquiry into Swedish students' lived experiences of school failure. The author incorporates students' oral and written descriptions of how they experience failure in Swedish schools due to educators' insensitivity or indifference. Henriksson's main argument reveals that students' experience of failure is not limited to low grades but can be ascribed to feelings of disappointment, distrust, marginalization, boredom, time-pressure, inferiority, insecurity, embarrassment, non-recognition and loss of human value. Drawing on hermeneutic phenomenology, the author presents experiential accounts of students' failure; these failures deny students further educational opportunities or successes, which she, significantly, calls "blessings." Henriksson's figurative use of blessings emphasizes the ways in which education can alter students' life trajectories. To be blessed by education underscores the important role that educators should play in guiding students on a path of educational development and achievement so that they can reap from academic benefits. She delineates that educators must be armed with phenomenological sensitivity and educational psychology in order to interpret learners' behaviours and vulnerabilities since indifference or offensive reactions could lead students to suffer lifelong scars.

The book has twelve chapters and is organized around Henriksson's research project with youth who are institutionalized or had previously left school. The text comprises interviews and vignettes which Henriksson rearranges into three categories: anecdotes, short stories volunteered by participants; "conecdotes," coherent stories of transcribed interviews; and "synecdotes," an amalgamation of interviews and written lived-experience descriptions of participants. In situating her methods of data collection and analysis, Henriksson includes rich descriptions of participants through specific examples of students' "lived-experiences". In one anecdote, a student recalls being ridiculed by his teacher and peers because he did not understand the concept of temperature, declaring

his scarred degradation in his own words: "For fifty years I have felt so stupid, a complete failure" (p.42). In another, Henriksson shares a lengthy interview with Ken, who refused to obey school rules and was expelled for getting into a fight with his teacher, punching the headmaster, and throwing a chair at the school counsellor. Later, the author opens dialogue on bullying and its effects by introducing Pierre, who was forced into deviant behaviour, truancy, and ultimately educational failure.

Despite a focus on the negative (school failure), Henriksson also juxtaposes positive lived experiences of students. For instance, her participants highlighted stories of caring teachers who went above and beyond the call of duty to foster an environment of pedagogical engagement, patience, and intellectual growth. Moreover, Henriksson endorses the assumption that every child has a right to education from which s/he should be equipped with basic skills and a feeling of trust in developed abilities. She notes that each child calls upon us as educators, and our initial duty is to respond to the call: not just to teach the basic skills of reading and writing, but to promote social and cultural integration and to honour students' democratic rights. Henriksson wraps up her conversation by asserting that if academic institutions function as barriers to students' educational success and perpetuate the loss of human value, then this is school failure which "forces children to live away from blessings" (p.155).

Henriksson presents institutional bureaucracy as one factor in barring students from success. Much time is expended on Ken's misdeeds, which the author suggests were initiated because of school rules. Henriksson seems to imply that, as represented by Ken's rebelliousness in chewing gum and wearing a knitted hat, students become victims of institutions with their unaccommodating and trivial rules. Blame, therefore, seems to rest mainly with the school, overlooking other areas where a child's formative development may occur, including their experiences at home. Yet by the end of the book, Henriksson declares that she does not condone students' bad behaviour. Another weakness in the text is Henriksson's injection of repetitive vignettes; a mere reference would suffice, as repetition renders such episodes monotonous.

The currency and relevance of issues dealt with are the book's major strengths. The author addresses crucial problems in schools that are presently being debated, such as marginalization and bullying. The issue of bullying is one of global concern (Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 2003) and Pierre's story is significant as many students can identify with some aspects of it (Smith & Sharp, 1994). Pierre, a marginalized student was constantly tormented- physically and mentally- by his peers because of his obesity; and since the teachers turned a blind eye, he soon joined the 'gang' to avoid being bullied. As a result, he became the worst 'terrorizer' in the class before quitting school. Thus, Henriksson charges teachers to reexamine their pedagogy, which requires sensitivity to students' feelings and behaviours. The author paves the way for an important

conversation that school seems to be the dominant cause of students' failure instead of indiscipline or lack of parental guidance. Her argument is mostly well-structured; highlighting pressing issues in schools which are hard to ignore. The discourse presented should encourage educators to engage in pedagogical reflections on the relationships forged in the classroom and to reexamine whether they are contributing to students' successes or exacerbating the rift between children and their educational opportunities.

Irrespective of its shortfalls, *Living Away from Blessings* is a useful guide for pedagogical engagement in the classroom. Therefore, the book is highly recommended for teachers and administrators, as well as for students—who are often insensitive to the repercussions of bullying. Henriksson's discourse is edifying, touching on practical and pertinent issues critical to students' lived experiences in school settings which can produce lifelong scars and propel them into dismal futures. The writer asserts that when we as pedagogues allow students to feel or become insignificant, bored, marginalized or embarrassed, we often bar them from an abundance of future blessings. As such, teachers must be mindful of the relationships they foster with students as they often have the power to make a difference in the lives of those who are placed in their charge.

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