Explorations in Adult Higher Education

An Occasional Paper Series

Learning In and Out of the University

Cover and inside art by Steven Phillip Harris

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Cover: *Sphere Studies III,* 2014, Unique gelatin silver print, 20" x 24"

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The ideas expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of SUNY Empire State College.

Table of Contents

Water's Edge (Razorbill), 2015, Unique gelatin silver print, 43" x 24"

Change and/or Normalization

Alan Mandell, Editor

… I believe that … one of the meanings of human existence – the source of human freedom – is never to accept anything as definitive, untouchable, obvious, or immobile. No aspect of reality should be allowed to become a definitive and inhuman law for us.

– Michel Foucault (in an interview by M. Bess, 1980)

The terrain of higher education is shifting before our eyes. In the United States and around the world, tertiary education today would be almost unrecognizable to someone taking a look in 1950 or 1970, or perhaps even in 2000. Could it be, for example, that someone could imagine that the Bangladesh Open University, which now serves more than 400,000 students, didn't exist in its present form until 1992; or that since its start in the early 1970s, almost two million people have studied at the Open University (U.K.), or that in the United States right now, there are more than eight million college students over the age of 25 and that women are more likely to have a bachelor's degree than men? What a shift! What changes!

Still, as Martha Kanter (who recently served as Under Secretary of Education in the Obama administration) so vividly pointed out in her webinar that served as one of the bases for this publication, today, many Americans are still not being served by higher education and the promise of access to publically-supported college/university study has not been fulfilled. There is just too much that we have not yet done and, particularly at this moment, when anything "public" is taken to be tainted, when budgets are being slashed and tuition dollars are the coin of the academic realm; when the academic and personal supports that students need to succeed are being squeezed or are often not available at all; when college teaching itself has become precarious employment for so many; when U.S. student debt is in the trillions; and when access to university has not created a more economically equal society – in such a world, it's really necessary to temper our celebration of the openings that *have* taken place in higher education.

We are lucky to have Kanter's insights into the history of American higher education (we need such a context in order to better see where we stand right now, and to understand what actions we need to take) and to have the reflections of colleagues Peggy Tally, Gina Torino and Joseph Moore, who raise questions that lead us to ask whether an even more powerful commitment to

higher education and to "learning in" the university would do anything other than normalize what we claim to know and what we already do, and thus reproduce the status quo.

As part of our 2015-2016 webinar series, were also were honored to welcome Aziz Choudry of McGill University, who pushed us in another direction by asking about the limitations of even the most accessible university system to hold within it all the knowledge that current and potential students bring to the table. What do people learn *outside* of the formal university setting? What are the tensions between a higher educational system (even one in such obvious transformation) and the kinds of questions and critical insights that those on the outside (particularly those in the community and in the trenches of social movements) can offer? What do we do with such new knowledge? How can we better listen to and even cherish what is "outside"?

Choundry's turn to "the intellectual work of activism" reminds us not only about the constructedness of what is deemed important to learn, and about how particular kinds of knowledge gain legitimacy and power, but about the very act of learning. As the reflections included here from Jacob Remes, Heidimarie Hayes Rambo and Lynne Wiley acknowledge, activism and discontent are often major stimuli to learner agency, the encouragement of which is a central theme within the adult education tradition.

In effect, all of the contributions in this fourth volume of our *Explorations in Adult Higher Education* occasional paper series demand that we confront the big questions: Can the systems of higher education in the United States and around the world ever contribute to bringing about a truly fair, just and humane society? Can higher education ever be a true "source of human freedom"? These are perhaps the most radical questions we can ask ourselves, especially when the promise of higher education has animated everything we and so many educators across time and place have tried to accomplish.

We are very appreciative of the support that SUNY Empire State College has given to this ongoing webinar and publishing project. We thank Martha Kanter and Aziz Choudry for their insights, their participation and their patience, and to our six colleagues from ESC and beyond who have provided such valuable looks into the possibilities of and impediments to higher learning today. And finally, thanks to all of our colleagues who helped organize and participated in the webinars, and in so doing have encouraged all of us "never to accept anything as definitive, untouchable, obvious, or immobile."

Water's Edge (Horseshoe Crab), 2015, Unique gelatin silver print, 43" x 24 ¼"

Water's Edge (artist proof), 2015, Unique gelatin silver print, 20" x 20"

Advancing the Promise of American Higher Education in the 21st Century

Martha Kanter

When I think about the future of American higher education, I often look to the past. Too many times in today's world, we don't take stock of the past. We may take a quick look, but we rarely apply the hard lessons learned from our history to help guide our present and future decisions.

In this spirit, I wanted to first take us back to the past in order to look at American education in general, because I don't see higher education as disconnected from all of education's history in this country and globally. I believe that the United States has a special responsibility to educate not only Americans in this country – and I do not think we have done a very good job of that today – but we also have a global responsibility. I was reminded by NYU's President John Sexton that there are 70 million children in the world who have never met a teacher. So, I think about the first schools in the United States centuries ago, and the fact that it was not until 1870 that all states had free elementary schools, and that it took until the early part of the 20th century to actually make high school available to every American. You can look at Indiana, Florida and Texas, and Alaska, which made high school available in 1897, 1915 and 1929 respectively, to see how long that took – and we're not even in 2029 yet, so it's less than a century ago that a high school education was even possible across this country. That's what it took to give a basic education to everyone. And frankly, one of the challenges for higher education in this country today is: We do not have enough people who really have acquired a basic K-12 education.

When you think of when and how we go forward, today we have 93 million Americans – at a minimum – who don't have any college, and that's about 47 percent of American adults. Thus, we have an undereducated population. But, if we look back 50 or 100 years, that 47 percent is a lot less than it was years ago.

So the good news for the country is that we're moving in the right direction. The bad news is that we have too many people who are undereducated throughout our nation.

I think a lot about the phrase "college for all." People say, "Well, college isn't for everyone." I say, "Well, have you asked parents whether they want their kids to go to college? And do you know that 'college' could be a one-year technical certificate, as well as a two-year or a four-year degree, as well as a graduate degree?" There are multiple ways to think about advancing beyond high school, but certainly, as a country, we have got to get people educated through high school as step 1; step 2, at least through some college; and then step 3, to get the best educated society that we would like to see in the 21st century. *That's higher education's job.* So we've got a lot more work ahead of us.

Again, we need to look back at our history in order to understand where we are as a society today. We need to look at the realities and the role of education in the pre-Civil War and post-Civil War eras, and the 19th and 20th centuries. And we need to look at what was a significant national commitment to expanding opportunities for a growing nation after two world wars. The passage of the GI Bill in 1944 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 made a significant difference in our recognition as a nation of the importance and role of "education for all," and in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, we saw a dramatic expansion of higher education across the country. For example, almost 500 community colleges – where I spent a lot of my career – were started during those decades.

Still, today we have an estimated 800,000 veterans between the ages of 18 and 30 who have completed little or no higher education, even though they have done one or more tours of duty to protect our nation here and abroad.

More broadly, how can we really play a role in advancing American higher education for underserved populations? That really has been my quest since I started my career in education as a high school teacher in the basement of a church in Lexington, Massachusetts many years ago.

Right now, we have to confront the challenges of how to educate a much more diverse society than any of us have ever known in the last 10, 20, 50 years or more, particularly at a time when we have a tremendous need for oversight. If I hear more about "accountability," I'll go a little bit crazy because I think we've gone off the deep end in our quest to count everything and make everything

metricized, so I spend a lot of time thinking about the human side of education, as well as the side focused on "counting numbers" and making sure that we make ends meet at a time where every 10 years we go through a fluctuating financial system: We're in a cycle – five years of downturn, then five years of upturn, and again, and again; why can't economists do a better job of helping us to predict the economic fluctuations so that we have "rainy day" accounts and other ways to take us through the hard times? We don't plan ahead and we don't learn from the past, so we reinvent this every 10 years. And sadly, the depression – the so-called "recession" that we've just gone through for the last decade – took longer than any of the other ones before. The cycles are getting longer now, which, in itself, is a little bit frightening. All of our social services, especially education, are the victims of these economic realities.

Beyond our economic fluctuations, in America right now, we have much more diversity and we have huge numbers of first-generation students coming through the doors of higher education, as well as students whose parents were born elsewhere, and we've got too many people who are academically underprepared and underserved in higher education. At the same time, a lot of us are talking about: "What is the public purpose of higher education today? Is there still a public purpose? Or should we be privatizing and commercializing everything that we're doing?"

Here is an example from the past that could be instructive. Elon College opened in 1889 in North Carolina. The 1913 Elon College application asked how much you knew and "Have you read any Homer?" (Wolfman-Arent, 2014). There were the required subjects: English, Latin, German, mathematics, Greek, French, history and science. And soon after, they had an enrollment downturn as the economy picked up, just like we have one of those periodic national enrollment downturns right now. So, in response, Elon added two questions to its application: Elon asked if your health was good, and if you could pay tuition (Wolfman-Arent, 2014). Before that, tuition was free, and men made up the population being served. Elon decided that many people, by nature, were "better fitted to do handwork than headwork" – that was in their bulletin in 1922 – so they added the practical arts, and the household arts. Professor John Thelin, from the University of Kentucky, commented that Elon would really take anybody " … who could reasonably do the work, especially if they could pay" (Wolfman-Arent, 2014, 1922's Application section, para. 4). And Harold Wechsler, my colleague at New York University, said: "Every college loved to have its own independence … " and that is true today, 100 years later, " … and

the big occupation before 1920 was trying to figure out how to standardize things … so the high schools and private prep schools wouldn't go crazy" (Wolfman-Arent, 2014, 1913's Application section, para. 4). They would have the freedom and autonomy to become the institutions that they had always strived to be.

Today, two out of three college students get their education at more than one institution. Do we even acknowledge that? Only one out of every four students is a so-called "traditional" student; so, three-quarters of the American population in college today are "nontraditional" students. Given this reality, I don't even call them "nontraditional" anymore; I call them "21st century students." *These are our students.* Twenty-five percent of them have dependent children, and so many of them work at least part time; many full time. And we don't understand the dropout rates at all because we don't understand the necessity for students to work in the 21st century. It's not the way it was when college was free and you were wealthy and had the time to be a full-time student and you were usually a man.

Given these considerations, I think ahead to 2050. The country is going to grow; whether you like it or not, we are going to be more crowded. The Pew Research Center (Passel & Cohn, 2008) and the Center for Immigration Studies (Camarota, 2012) showed us the growth trajectory: We're at about 323 million Americans today, and we're going to grow to over 400 million. Depending on immigration reform and regulations, we might go as high as 450 million, or we might stay around 400 million, or go as low as 340 million if immigration is slowed down. Whatever the specific number, we are going to have more people coming into the entire K-12 system *and,* of course, into higher education. And even as I earlier talked about the veterans and that 800,000 number of people who have not yet been served by higher education, we're going to have many, many more students, and they are going to be from all walks of life.

How are we going to serve them in the 21st century? First, we have to ask: What exactly is U.S. higher education? I ask my students about this in my graduate class at NYU. We have over 7,000 institutions of higher education in the U.S. and more than 4,500 are degree-granting (IES NCES, n.d.). And that means these institutions can access federal student loans and grants, which, on average, account for about 75 percent of their revenues. The loan program is big business. I can tell you that I have fought for many, many years

to advance the Pell Grant program – it's on a trajectory now, and I'm happy to say that Congress, in its wisdom, has supported the Pell Grant program in the last eight years, and is now engaged in active discussions at the federal level about restoring the summer Pell Grant. So, what's great is that we've got 7,000 institutions of higher education. What's difficult is that we have tremendous variation across the country in the *quality* of education that institutions are providing to their students.

I talk about five sectors of education at the undergraduate and graduate level: 1) Private, Not-for-Profit, Independent Colleges and Universities; 2) Private, Not-for-Profit: Research 1 Universities; 3) Public Community Colleges; 4) Public State Universities and Research 1 Universities; and 5) For-Profit Colleges and Universities, Career Schools and Proprietary Institutions. If you ask those 7,000 institutions (students, administrators and faculty), "Why are we doing this? Why are we educating the country? What's the purpose?" in response, we hear too much about economic prosperity, and not enough about higher education as the anchor for social prosperity, social mobility, quality of life and responsible citizenship.

As a country, we need to think about this central "why" question not only in terms of the economy, but in terms of the larger society. We have got to leverage the entire education system to have the kind of citizenry that's going to drive decision-making for the country for the better. So, we must increase not only economic prosperity but also increase "social prosperity" and "social mobility." And we don't have these equally distributed, so we're at the biggest economic and social divide we've seen in a long time. There is a lot of frustration in K-12 schools; we've still got a major achievement gap since the first schools cropped up more than 100 years ago. There is a lot of focus on world-class research, solving the biggest problems that we're facing as a country (for example, climate change) – all of which I love and treasure. But, frankly, if we don't address the racial and income disparities throughout the education system and throughout our communities, we're going to fail as a nation. I use this one statistic that I believe is so important: Fully 96 percent of students from the highest-income quartile complete high school, while only 63 percent from the lowest-income quartile do (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2012). So we've got a serious academic divide regarding who completes high school and, accordingly, who completes college, and that doesn't even include all of the people who dropped out along the way.

We have tremendous challenges, including the fact that we do not adequately recognize or address the diverse needs of Americans. The U.S. high school graduation rate is at the highest it has ever been – 82 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) – but we still have an enormous achievement gap in who gets a high school diploma and who is actually prepared for college study. And, we have more than 50 percent of students who are leaving college for lots of different reasons, mostly because of college costs and the fact that the majority have to work their way through college. We don't talk enough about "the working student" and how making money is a huge component of their lives in addition to raising a family and all the other things that people do, like tours of duty in Iraq, that take away from students' ability to be the full-time students that made up the vast majority of college students from the 1920s to the 1980s. So we have a very different environment, and we have a new majority that is going to be 51 percent Latino students. In fact, if you look ahead to 2050, Latino students are going to be the majority of the graduates of our colleges and universities. Right now, if you look at 2027 – and that's not very far away – one-quarter of the graduates of our colleges and universities will be Latino. We've got to prepare for these changes. This is a tremendous opportunity for the country (Prescott & Bransberger, 2012).

When we think about the future and about advancing higher education and look at the socioeconomic distribution of "Where are the students today?" we see that we've got too many students who are unequally distributed across those 7,000 institutions. Bastedo and Jaquette, as well as Carnevale and Strohl, really help us see the distribution of undergraduate enrollment across selectivity on the basis of income (as cited in Bensimon & Witham, 2015). When you see which students attend which sectors of American higher education and why, we see a dramatically skewed distribution across the institutions. We also need to look at who is coming up the pipeline. We need to think about the pre-K through 20 trajectory of education as an intergenerational system. So parents are educating kids; kids will be educating the next generation, and so forth. If we look at the numbers today, I throw up my hands saying: "Well, who has access to the best math and sciences courses in the country? Just look at the distribution by ethnicity, and then when you look at urban, rural and suburban populations, you see even worse divides. Some are calling this educational segregation.

We've got a tremendous achievement gap in terms of preparation for college and career readiness, and we've got a tremendous divide when students are going through higher education. We do not have enough students graduating, first; and then if you look at the income, or ethnicity outcomes, we see the tremendous variation I described. Thus, while we're at the highest graduation rate in the country's history, we've got more of the wealthy students in the most selective schools; and we've got a problem in the community colleges because we don't have enough students staying and graduating and moving on to the four-year colleges, and we've got almost half of undergraduates in the two-year college system (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011).

As I have tried to emphasize throughout this talk, there is a lot of work to do in our colleges and universities in order to advance the promise of American higher education. While we need to be more aware about the realities and ramifications of a stratified higher education system, we cannot forget the issue of funding. States have removed on average 20 percent of funding from the public system of higher education – that's 80 percent of higher education in general – the State University of New York system, the City University of New York system, the state universities of California and Texas and Florida – that's more than a third of undergraduates in the country in those four states. (For example, in 2003, state funding provided about 31 percent of public institutions' total revenue; in 2012, that number was about 22 percent; and it is still lower today [U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2014].) And we've got an escalation of tuition, so it's becoming less and less affordable for the students who have the least means. The public higher education system has had to find other ways to generate revenue to survive. And then, just today, I received an email about how Germany is opening up four years of an undergraduate education to any American for free. Shame on us as a country.

We have to place all of this within the context of all of the rhetoric, scripts and traumas we're going through in higher education to address the challenges I've highlighted: Too many people are not earning their college degrees or certificates; America's students are taking too long to graduate from college (only half of undergraduates earn their baccalaureate degrees in six years!); students need to work; and the majority must attend college part time. We need to tackle these challenges.

I just want to return for a moment to the historical record, to the historical context in which these challenges are taking place. None of this is happening in a vacuum. The Truman Commission published its report on "goals for higher education" in 1947. These were some of the values that, now about 70 years ago, were identified as critical to the design of higher education for the next century: "a fuller realization of democracy in every phase of living"; a capacity for "international understanding and cooperation" (we call it "globalizing our institutions" today); and a focus on applying the "creative imagination and trained intelligence to the solution of social problems and to the administration of public affairs" (Truman Commission, 1947, A Time of Crisis section, para. 10). What is their significance today? Why do some of these goals seem still to be so out of reach?

I ask my students at NYU, and I ask all of us, to look at the challenges facing American higher education today: Are we going to be completely privatized? Are we still going to have a public option? (Or as Deborah Stone [2011] framed it, are we going to be a "market model" or a "polis model"?) What are we going to do about debt and tuition and all of the financial sustainability challenges we face? Are we going to get more students finishing college so that they can move into higher levels of employment and higher levels of civic and social responsibility? How are we going to deal with a tremendous under-preparation problem? What will be our responses to an obsession with accountability and to what has become a burdensome regulatory environment? And how about public perception and consumer confidence in the university system, about faculty morale and about the flexibility and innovation that higher education needs to respond to today's students, our economy and society at large?

Why at this time did I sign on to architect a College Promise Campaign (www. HeadsUpAmerica.us and www.CollegePromise.org)? Because we had a promise 100 years ago. The promise was that anyone who wanted the opportunity could go to college. I have so many people I know in my generation, who had the National Defense Student Loan Program, or were helped by a Pell Grant in the '70s – the Pell Grant paid for two-thirds of the cost of college in the '70s, two-thirds of people actually went for free, and those who didn't were able to make ends meet without the burden of huge student debt. So, we're starting with America's community colleges on this. We've got 108,000 people who have signed on to support the concept that a high school diploma is not enough anymore. And so that's what we're focused on in the campaign. We've got

over 100 College Promise Programs around the country and they're actually providing college opportunity with accountability for hardworking, responsible students who are making progress to earn their degrees and certificates. In many of these programs, you must graduate from high school, benefit from a mentor, carry out community service, and then enter and make progress in college. You have to stay on track – in some programs, you don't have to be full time, but you have to get through. College Promise legislation has been introduced in more than 10 states. That's really exciting. Three states have already initiated College Promise programs: Tennessee is leading the way, with Minnesota and Oregon, as a start. And these programs are beginning to address the larger questions about the future of American education: Do we want a middle class in this country? Are we going to have a middle class that is prosperous? Are we going to help people with the least means move into the middle class? One hundred years ago, we made high school available to everyone. Guess what? We were first in the world a generation ago for college graduates, and now we're 12th in the world.

A College Promise is not a hand-out, but a promise should be a promise. We were able to make this promise in the past. We have countries around the world that can make this promise. We should be able to architect the kind of promise that will propel our nation forward. Fifty American billionaires could fund a College Promise for our nation; together, they would still be among the richest people in the world. Frankly, we pay for what we value. So the College Promise concept is a value proposition. I truly believe we can do this. What kind of country do we want to become? What is the role and responsibility of American higher education to get us there? We are not there today. But we need to do all we can to support the College Promise and, thereby, restore the American dream for all.

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Martha J. Kanter is executive director of the College Promise Campaign in Washington, DC, and senior fellow at New York University. Her academic interests include: the confluence of access, equity and excellence; the intersection of policy and politics in American higher education; and the contributions of America's community colleges to the nation's social fabric, civic future and economy.

From 2009-2013, Kanter served as the U.S. Under Secretary of Education, with oversight responsibility for all federal postsecondary statutory, regulatory and administrative policies and programs for the U.S. Department of Education, including the $175 billion annual federal student aid programs, higher education, adult education, career-technical education, international education and six White House initiatives. Kanter and her team were singularly focused on increasing college access, affordability, quality and completion to implement President Barack Obama's goal to have the best educated, most competitive workforce in the world by 2020. She oversaw the successful implementation of the Direct Student Loan and Pell Grant programs that resulted in a 50 percent increase in college enrollment for low-income students, growing from 6 million to more than 9 million students. Previously, Kanter served as president of De Anza College in California, and then as chancellor of the Foothill-De Anza Community College District (Silicon Valley, California) for 16 years. She began her career as an alternative high school teacher. She holds a B.A. degree in sociology from Brandeis University, an M.Ed. from Harvard University and an Ed.D. from the University of San Francisco.

Education for the Social Good: Supporting Our Students Today

Peggy Tally

Martha Kanter's recent talk to the SUNY Empire State College community was a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the changes that have been occurring not only in our own college, but also in American higher education more generally. Drawing on a historical, comparative and economic analysis of the institution of higher education in American society, Kanter focused on both the promises and the challenges higher education faces if it is to remain relevant as a social and cultural force. While she was forthright about the issues and concerns that we are encountering as educators right now, her assessment was ultimately optimistic, looking at the promise of higher education as a means for social good. Alternatively, there was the sense that unless we pay close attention to the changes that are occurring in America, and unless we embark on changes in our system of higher education, we will not thrive as a society.

At the end of Kanter's presentation, we were left with a number of critical questions: What changes are necessary in higher education? What can we retain and, ultimately, what are the ways that we can best serve the population of the United States in the 21st century? What are the fault lines that we will need to identify? What are the strategic changes that will allow us to maintain our relevance? How can colleges and universities remain viable economically? How can we honor our social mission? What is the place for the humanities in this new educational configuration? How do we accord a proper role for professional schools? How do we ensure that institutions of higher education play an essential role in reflecting and shaping our deepest values as a people? As I see it, Kanter was arguing not only that we have to address these questions, but that the specific responses we provide must allow us to reframe our contemporary institutions of higher education in a way that will ensure that higher education remains a vital part of civil society.

Kanter's presentation helped us to begin these conversations by discussing such specific topics as how to increase college access and affordability. She noted how both the State University of New York (SUNY) as well as the City University of New York (CUNY) have the unique opportunity to serve as leaders, especially in the field of distance learning. When I heard her speak about how

SUNY has such an opportunity, I was encouraged, yet discouraged. One of the things I have noticed is that as our own college has become more focused on issues of retention and graduation rates, we haven't yet sufficiently grappled with the reality that many of the students who come to us (whether at the undergraduate or graduate levels) have basic deficiencies in their academic skills that impact their ability to complete their studies. ESC's faculty mentors, tutors and skills specialists have done a heroic job in trying to support these students, but the reality is that even with the addition of learning coaches, directors of academic support and others, we as a college have not confronted the full weight of the this major challenge that we are facing and that we will continue to face.

At the same time, while CUNY, as well as other institutions across the country, have designed innovative, and often comprehensive, programs to support first year students in intensive college preparedness studies, in our own college, for the most part, we continue to ask our faculty and academic skills professionals to perform this work on a one-to-one basis. For example, like CUNY, Empire State College has many students in the downstate area who graduated from New York City public high schools. As we and other institutions have found, graduating from high school and passing Regents Exams do not necessarily mean that students are prepared for college-level classes. In fact, as recently reported in *The New York Times,* over 74 percent of students who graduated from New York City high schools and who enrolled in CUNY's six community colleges in the New York area were found to need remediation in at least one subject, generally in reading, writing or math. It was also found that those students who needed remediation in all three subjects were at the highest risk of not completing college.

In order to address this critical issue of student readiness for college, CUNY began a program called "CUNY Start,"[1] which requires full-time students to engage in these three subjects for five hours a day, five days a week (Winerip, 2011).

According to CUNY's Office of Academic Affairs (2013), the CUNY Start program was created because the system recognized that, consistent with national trends, over one-half of all entering community college students are underprepared for college-level work and have to take some kind of remedial course. Despite taking such courses, the majority of students don't complete the remedial sequence, or courses in English or math. CUNY, which serves over

90,000 students in associate degree programs, found that in the fall of 2012, for example, 82.5 percent of their entering students were placed into remediation, based on their scores on the CUNY Assessment Tests in reading, writing and math. More disturbingly, "a study of CUNY's remedial education course-taking patterns and student outcomes by the Community College Research Center (CRCC) found that only 38 percent of students placing into remedial math completed the required courses two years after matriculation, and just a fifth passed a gatekeeper math course. A higher proportion of students completed remedial writing (approximately two-thirds), but only a third successfully completed a gatekeeper course in writing" (CUNY Office of Academic Affairs, 2013, p. 1).

With CUNY Start, students are identified when their CUNY Assessment Test scores reveal remedial needs, and they are offered the chance to improve on the test results. CUNY Start costs students $75 for the entire semester, and includes a weekly college success seminar. While the program does not result in college credit, it offers students the opportunity to improve their skills so that they can pass their future classes that are for college credit, and use their financial aid for those credit-bearing classes.

After reading about CUNY's efforts to create a "bridge" program for entering students, I wondered: Why don't we have a similar kind of program available for ESC students? While most ESC students may not be New York City high school graduates, like other CUNY schools, Empire State College has students who are working while going to school, have attended high schools that may have graduated them without adequately preparing them for college, and will be at risk for not completing college unless some kind of intervention is staged at the beginning of their college careers. Despite this, we have yet to implement a large-scale program – a system – to address these students' remediation requirements. That is, we have yet to provide the kinds of resources necessary to address this problem on a scale commensurate with the magnitude of the problem, impairing our students' chances to succeed academically.

Again, this is not in any way to deny the incredibly committed and gifted academic staff we are privileged to have and who have done an unbelievable job of supporting students on an individual level at ESC – I can attest to the level of commitment, talent and alacrity with which our academic support colleagues have offered assistance to the graduate students I have referred to them. The creation of the director of academic support positions across the college, as well

as the Front Porch Project and Bridge Program that were initiated over the last decade to focus on assessing and responding to the level of student readiness, attest to the fact that many people around the college are trying to address this very issue. However, with so many other initiatives seemingly taking precedence, it is too easy to overlook the central importance of addressing the crisis in the academic level of many of our incoming students.

My sense is that it is unfair to expect our academic support professionals, as well as other committed faculty, to bear a disproportionate responsibility for what are larger, structural problems. This requires not simply financial resources, but a recognition of who our students are right now in 2016 – what challenges they face, both academically and financially – and putting our political and human capital where it is most needed. This may mean making tough decisions about where to put our resources. Do we continue to develop new programs while not sufficiently attending to the needs of students we already have? Are we taking a risk of becoming too attracted to new populations of students at the expense of supporting the students already enrolled in the college? More disturbingly, do we deny our students the chance for academic success by not giving them the tools they need at the beginning of their college careers?

These kinds of questions thus feed directly into the issue of those students Empire State College is presently serving, and how this may be changing in the face of increasing competition. For example, it is now clear that our ESC model of online learning, as well as credentialing previous experiences and learning gained outside of the academy, are now being used by many other colleges. Where we were once one of a few institutions routinely doing this kind of work, we are now living in a highly competitive environment in which a student could easily apply to any number of schools to get the same mode of learning options, as well as evaluation for prior learning.

If we now face a new set of circumstances in which we have to actively compete for students, might it be that some of them have not been accepted into more competitive institutions? While welcoming them to Empire State College does fulfill our mission of relatively open access, what it also means is that we may have a pool of students who need *even more* academic and personal support than earlier ESC cohorts may have required. Combine this with the fact that our students are working adults with full- and part-time jobs and oftentimes family

responsibilities, and you have a very challenging student population to support. Are we – are other institutions of higher education – as prepared as we must be to provide what these students need?

As Kanter points out, it's also important to recognize that the need to support our students also comes about in an environment of decreasing resources from the state and federal levels. In a recent article by Niraj Chokshi (2015) titled "The Economy's Bouncing Back. But Higher Education Funding Isn't," the author made the point that the spending per student in higher education is below the pre-recession levels in 47 states. These levels are a result of years of cuts in spending to public colleges and universities. Chokshi further noted that, based on a report by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities,[2] even as colleges have responded to these public cuts by raising tuition and cutting programs and staff, they still haven't been able to cover the shortfall brought on by years of cuts in public funding for higher education.

All of public higher education has been living with this fiscal situation for several years now, but this has been especially difficult for our adult students in terms of paying increased tuition just when they are also facing crushing bills to fend for themselves and their families. This might explain why, in part, there is such an extended time to graduation for many adult students, but more importantly, why higher education needs to think more holistically about the ways that we can address not only our students' academic but also their financial needs. I recently had yet another heartbreaking note from a graduate student who told me that while she wanted to continue in our graduate program, she was unable to do so because of the overwhelming debt she still carries from her undergraduate studies.

Kanter echoed these challenges when she explained why we have such a high college attrition rate in this country, with over 50 percent of students expected to step out or permanently leave college at any one time. How can our students engage in their studies when they are also working so many hours to survive economically?

For a public institution like Empire State College, these statistics are not just theoretical; they are part of our lived experience as educators. As ESC and other public colleges face increasing budget gaps, our tuition continues to rise at exactly the same time that our students can least afford it. This has created not only attrition rates that are sobering, but even for those who are able to

complete their degrees, it has come at the cost of taking much longer than it would have in earlier periods. While other countries such as Germany are now offering free college, our country is looking at a staggering amount of student debt – estimated to be over a trillion dollars! This is why Kanter advocates for what she describes as a "fuller realization of democracy" – one that would offer the opportunity for us to creatively reimagine how we might fund and academically support the increasing number of students who will be requiring a college education in the 21st century, in order to realize our dream of social mobility and an educated citizenry.

In the end, Kanter challenges us to think of the questions around higher education as being fundamentally a "value proposition." What is it that we as a society value most and are therefore willing to pay for? Who do we want to be as a society and how can we, as educators in higher education, help to create that kind of society?

At Empire State College, this is a call to action for us to rethink how we support our students. What is our social mission in this day and age? What is the connection between our academic goals and the strategies that we hope to execute to meet these goals? What is the social mission that these goals will help us to realize?

For the graduate program in which I work, this has been a chance to think about the importance of graduate school for our students today. Whereas it was once a kind of luxury for students to get a master's degree, in the current job market, it has become a necessity for more fields; many of the jobs that once required either a high school or undergraduate degree now require a master's degree as well. And this is not just for master's degrees directly geared to professional preparation. Rather, students are finding that in order to be a fully functioning member of society and to be able to find jobs in this job market, they must additionally possess critical thinking skills, an understanding of the larger social and political context in which they work, social and historical insights they can draw on to make their work life more meaningful, and so on.

For these reasons, I believe that graduate programs at ESC are critical to serve as a pathway for our undergraduate students. This pathway can support them as they move from their undergraduate studies, identify what their greatest needs are, and apply them in a learning environment that will support them the whole way through. As educators, we need to be meeting with people in

a variety of institutions outside the university system, identifying what the greatest needs are for workers and citizens, and shaping our curriculum to be sensitive and useful to these different constituencies. In this way, we will not only be able to offer a "value added" degree for our students; we will be making a real contribution to the overall health and success of all of our citizens. This is our social mission and our responsibility and really, our challenge as a college moving forward. Kanter has helped us identify this challenge, and for that, we are incredibly grateful.

In the end, while Kanter raised a whole host of challenging issues now facing us as an institution of higher learning, she also offered us a sense of optimism that we can draw on as we try to rethink our own practices. As was so evident in her presentation, the status quo is our biggest barrier. The challenge, which Kanter so eloquently raised, is that we need to move beyond a deficit model and realize that there are so many Americans who have so much talent but haven't yet had the opportunity to realize that talent in a meaningful way. In this sense, it is a very exciting time to be an educator, and her vision made me feel both slightly overwhelmed at what lies ahead of us, but also intrigued and ultimately energized to be part of that transformation.

Notes

[1]   More information about CUNY Start can be found at http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/24/education/24winerip.html?_r=0.

[2]   The 2015 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities piece by Mitchell and Leachman, "Years of Cuts Threaten to Put College Out of Reach for More Students," can be accessed at http://www.cbpp.org/research/years-of-cuts-threaten-to-put-college-out-of-reach-for-more-students.

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The Human Side of Education: The Past, Present and Uncertain Future of Higher Learning

Gina C. Torino

Introduction

In her talk, "Advancing the Promise of American Higher Education in the 21st Century," Martha Kanter discussed several important issues related to the current state and the future of adult learning in higher education. She emphasizes the need to reintegrate the "human side" into higher education. In this piece, I will discuss how we as educators might reconcile the human side of higher education with current trends in competency- or skills-based higher education. Such an integration might enable all those seeking a college degree to achieve, as Kanter termed it, "social prosperity, social mobility, quality of life and responsible citizenship."

Historical Overview

Over the past several decades there has been a blossoming of community colleges, satellite campuses and specialized degree-granting institutions throughout the nation. Thanks to the internet, "distance education" has also evolved in the U.S. (and, of course, across the globe!) from a handful of correspondence courses late last century, to a plethora of online classes offered by a large number of U.S. colleges. Through the global reach of the internet, students are increasingly making use of online technologies and flexible online educational opportunities to meet their educational needs (Windham, 2005). Without doubt, these developments have widened access to postsecondary education.

The recent increase in the college-bound populace is not, as it has been in the past, primarily a function of race, gender, nationality or class, but rather of *age*. The term "traditional student" refers to an age group: those 18 to 22 years old; this has long been the most common age group seeking a college degree.

But now, 48 percent of all postsecondary students are 25 years of age or older (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015) and this percentage is only expected to rise.

This increase is explained by some to be the result of a shift from an industrial to an information economy, and since information and the technology that is used to process it are constantly changing, there is a marked need for updating the skills of employees across their working lives. But during the 1970s, when the need for retraining corporate America was exigent, American universities were slow to respond (Bronner, 1997).

Perhaps we can gain insight into the sluggishness of the American university system to meet the practical needs of the country by reflecting on a report written almost two centuries ago, "The Yale Report of 1828." The report, written by Yale faculty members, stated: "From different quarters, we have heard the suggestion, that our colleges must be *new-modelled;* that they are not adapted to the spirit and wants of the age; that they will soon be deserted, unless they are better accommodated to the business character of the nation …" (Yale University, 1989, p. 172). To this call for change, the Yale faculty writing the report emphatically answered "No!" For that faculty, such a change would lead to a "partial or superficial education" of the young (Yale University, 1989, p. 172).

But today, the age range of those who want a higher education has widened to such a degree that telling all students that they need to learn the "Yale way" seems unreasonable. The Yale Report was written for college students in need of "the foundation of a superior education: and this is to be done, at a period of life when a substitute must be provided for parental superintendence" (Yale University, 1989, p. 172). Yet the principle of *in loco parentis* hardly applies to those who are themselves parents and who have full-time jobs. As Kanter stated in her talk, 25 percent of college students today have children of their own and/or work part or full time. Thus, the recent popularity of education for adults has perhaps begun to challenge the unqualified relevance of The Yale Report.

Discussion of the Historical Trend

Over the past century or so, we have witnessed a grand turning from the elitist educational vision of such documents as the 1828 Yale Report (Brooks, 1997). The category of what could be described as "eligible college student" has

progressively become more inclusive. Such inclusionist thinkers as Catherine Beecher, Andrew White and Booker T. Washington, and legislation like the GI Bill, have helped put college degrees in the hands of huge numbers of people who had previously been excluded. Now, those so-called "nontraditional" students, whose characteristics cut across demographics, are increasingly seeking higher education.

In this democratization of education, the vote for how a college does business seems to rest with those adults (now both younger and older) who are being educated. For example, many gainfully-employed nontraditional students are voting with their dollar. The recent increase of adults in the workplace who wish to attain postsecondary degrees has introduced *en masse* a new kind of student who demands a new kind of higher learning institution; in many cases, one where nonprofit, public institutions partner with businesses. Today, many higher education administrators regularly refer to their colleges becoming "client-centered" or "customer-centered," and want to show that the students get their money's worth (Brooks, 1997; Pan, Sivo, & Goldsmith, 2016). With universities relying more and more on student tuition to operate (Hemelt & Marcotte, 2016), it appears that the shrewdest policy might be to adopt the business motto: "Keep the customer satisfied." If many administrators are right about what working adults want, then a liberal arts offering is not likely to appeal to the adult education market. But perhaps we need to wait and see just how successful the partnerships like those between liberal arts colleges and corporations turn out to be.

It is worth noting that many corporations have taken the problem of retraining the workforce into their own hands. They have seen the benefits of providing their own in-house education to meet their workforce needs. There are even some companies that offer certified degree programs to their workers (Hemelt & Marcotte, 2016). These companies can attract desirable employees with these convenient career-advancing opportunities and can quality check their own education and training programs. One might wonder: Why do these companies need the university at all?

Consequences for Higher Education

What do those of us who are in academia think of these changes? If, as The Yale Report holds, the object of a college is to "lay the foundation" of a lifetime education (Yale University, 1989, p. 174), perhaps there is a need to build upon

that foundation. This can be done, some argue, if we move from the more reflective character of the liberal arts and sciences toward applied education, i.e., from liberal studies to professionalization (including credentialization) (Brooks, 1997; Hemelt & Marcotte, 2016).

Perhaps we should think of colleges suited to the older adult as wholly different entities from colleges suited to the young adult. These new types of institutions can be seen to serve a different need in higher education. When we consider age, we really see two strikingly different groups of students with two strikingly different motives for seeking education. Many 18- to 22-year-olds feel they are required to be in class and so are not particularly motivated to learn. Older students tend to have a different set of experiences that brings them to the classroom. Adults tend to be there with a purpose.

Today, colleges suited to the adult learner often model themselves on the for-profit universities, i.e., privately owned businesses that seek to make profits by providing higher education. Many traditional faculty (perhaps still echoing their Yale forebears) claim that for-profit universities are not as academically rigorous as traditional institutions (Hoover, 1998; Pusser, 2008). Some academics at traditional institutions question whether faculty at for-profit universities can keep up with the research within their fields when they work full time elsewhere (Leatherman, 1998; Pusser, 2008). In addition, universities are increasingly relying on part-time practitioners, not scholars, in their field to teach the majority of their courses.

Although the academic integrity of for-profit higher education organizations is under scrutiny by those whose very livelihood is threatened by the for-profit model of education, no one is questioning the model's popularity. There are even some nonprofit universities that – realizing the attractiveness of the model to older students – have decided to compete with the for-profit university and its ilk. Many nonprofit institutions have announced plans to create for-profit subsidiaries that develop and sell online courses to other colleges, corporate training organizations and individual students (Pusser, 2008). The goal is to put the products of professors' research on the market in order to fund the nonprofit courses. These plans are a direct result of the rise of corporate academic institutions.

So, metaphorically speaking, it seems that the for-profit university has built a steel skyscraper to compete with the ivory tower of academe for the new adult education market. However, the professors at traditional colleges and universities might have seen this coming. Indeed, they have seen it coming for a long time.

It is clear that there is a similarity between the 19th century Yale faculty's negative reaction to highly practical education and the reaction of many faculty today. As The Yale Report noted a theme commonly observed (and criticized) by many academics today: The goal of higher education seems to have become not so much civic as economic.

While some think that more than just turning out productive employees, the for-profit-style university is creating better citizens, others, like the University of Phoenix's former Senior Vice President for Government Affairs Charles Seigel, have stated: the goal of the University of Phoenix is "to be a company like any other company, which has to meet a demand and provide a service" (Howe, 1998, p. B01).

Are these two views compatible?

It seems that, due to a higher mean age of postsecondary students, the answer may be "yes." There appears to be a blurring between the goals of corporate training and traditional postsecondary education. Community colleges have long been known to pair with businesses to educate adults. More recently, four-year schools (e.g., Central Michigan University) and Ivy League graduate schools (e.g., Teachers College, Columbia University) have entered into partnerships with corporations to design adult education programs (Pusser, 2008). Even liberal arts colleges have joined hands with businesses in the hope of success in the new adult education market. So it does seem that corporate training and traditional education are becoming more and more alike. How should we as academics or as a society respond to this trend? Should we embrace the change? Even if it seems inevitable, is it worth considering how we might resist the change or perhaps propose an alternative direction?

A More Humanist Model

There is hope for a more humanist model of education. We are living in an era of globalization, in which there is a growing number of interdependent social, economic, political, cultural and technological networks across many continents. Twenty-first century globalization is a multidimensional process, linked by the nexus between communication, information, economic activity, and culture, which is transforming the way people around the world live (Keohane & Nye, 2000).

Perhaps the Jeffersonian democratic requirement of an educated citizenry may also apply to an educated 21st century workforce: Modern educational practice would do well to take account of students' academic preparation for a changing world. Students will have to develop flexible knowledge and skills in order to live in an increasingly complex society (Adams, 2002). They will need to have a "[m]astery of a range of abilities and capacities …" to help them " … maneuver in and shape a world in flux" (AAC&U, 2002, p. 22).

In this increasingly globalized and complex world, the ideal 21st century worker would be one who can handle unexpected and complex problems and can work effectively with other members of an increasingly culturally diverse workforce. These workers must have a more extensive understanding of the interconnected world and must cultivate the values, knowledge and abilities that will facilitate their interactions with many diverse others (Adams, 2002). They must be prepared to work in a knowledge-based economy, in which problems of work are often unstructured and complex (Carnevale & Strohl, 2001).

Integration of the "Human Side"

The Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF) is the United States' oldest organization of senior business and higher education executives dedicated to understanding best practices in U.S. education, as well as workforce challenges. It is composed of Fortune 500 CEOs, prominent college and university presidents, and other leaders. BHEF addresses issues central to global competitiveness. This organization is committed to helping to bring alignment between education and the workforce.

BHEF completed a recent study and found that it is advantageous for 21st century employees to have not only competencies related to specific jobs but also "deeper learning" to enable them to be able to relate to others effectively, operate within a multicultural framework and solve problems creatively (BHEF, 2013). They describe these employees as "T-shaped," one that has both breadth and depth. According to their research, the T-shaped professional stands in contrast to the I-shaped employee, an individual who specializes in one field and whose skills may come to be devalued following changes in technology or market conditions (BHEF, 2013). They concluded that corporations today have placed a higher value on deeper learning but claim that many recent college students display deficiencies in areas such as critical thinking, problem-solving, analytical reasoning, communication and working in multicultural teams. In other words, potential hires for the workplace exit the education pipeline lacking the kind of balance between technical skills and workplace competencies that employers increasingly want and need. For example, several of the companies included in the BHEF study reported that they seek college graduates with stronger communication competencies, notably, written and oral communication skills (BHEF, 2013).

Here is an interesting and relevant detail: It has been found that many individuals who major in philosophy go on to become "successful" business leaders (e.g., George Soros) (Nisen, 2014). Research has demonstrated that these philosophy majors graduate with creative problem-solving skills, which provide them with advantages over business students (Lam, 2015). In other words, the liberal arts help you to think better and to learn how to think better. This seems in accord with 21st century business-desirable characteristics and skills: flexibility of thinking, adaptability in a rapidly developing global context, and so on. That is, perhaps the idea of specific economic and technological skills, e.g., certification (e.g., badges) in how to program in Java, are really nothing other than soon-to-be-outdated business practices. It is far more important (even in terms of worker productivity) for the employee to be able to think critically and creatively. There is a tension between here-and-now service-education and providing students with the built-to-last furniture (and appliances) of the mind. To use another metaphor, there's a difference between a child learning one song on the piano by rote and taking piano lessons that enable that child to play whatever sheet music he or she chooses.

It may be possible to combine both approaches. Students can participate in short-term education (e.g., business, computer programming, nursing) and long-term education (e.g., logic, critical thinking, general skills, appreciation for the good life). In this respect, it may be worth quoting a piece called "What is a Generally Educated Person" by Jerry G. Gaff (2004):

> When an institution's faculty and other constituencies are asked what is most important for their students to learn, they typically put the liberal arts and sciences – their content, methods, and perspectives – at the top of the list. For example, they commonly decide to emphasize knowledge of history and culture and of science and mathematics; skills such as logical and critical thinking and communication; and knowledge about diversity, intercultural skills, and engagement in the local community. Indeed, there appears to be a convergence about what used to be called the 'marks of an educated person' across a wide variety of groups. Leaders of the professional accreditation bodies for business, education, engineering, and nursing have declared the qualities of liberal education to be central to the successful practice of all those professions. They and their colleagues in regional accrediting and in several educational associations have agreed that students should acquire the following attributes: breadth of knowledge and capacity for lifelong learning; abilities to analyze, communicate, and integrate ideas; and effectiveness in dealing with values, relating to diverse individuals, and developing as individuals. (para. 4)

Why are liberal and general educational outcomes valued so highly today? In part, it is because the United States has moved from an agrarian economy, through an industrial economy, to a knowledge-based economy. Labor economists have determined that, for a knowledge-based economy in which many people work on solving unscripted problems, a liberal education is excellent preparation for the best careers (Carnevale & Strohl, 2001). These views reverse the hard-edged shibboleth, derived from the time of the industrial economy, that liberal and general education are impractical, irrelevant or unnecessary, and that only professional preparation is of value. Indeed, a liberal or general education may be the *best* preparation for a knowledge-based career.

Nevertheless, some academics may believe that all this talk about the mutual benefit of for-profit enterprises and higher education is really *papering over a chasm.* It is worth considering whether the aims of higher education and those of business are by definition incompatible. Perhaps what has heretofore made

higher education great is its dedication to research, to teaching and to service as ends in themselves, with no hidden proviso that learning must in some way turn a profit (i.e., financial gain, return on investment, earnings, etc.) for the students, for the faculty members or for the institution. Certainly, a for-profit enterprise competing in the education market can justifiably claim that it is interested in these same pursuits – but not for their own sake: No business that is indifferent to the bottom line can be expected to prosper. It is extremely unlikely that any partnership between higher education and the for-profit sector will result in businesses renouncing the profit motive. Is the same true of academia's commitment to higher education as an end in itself?

Conclusion

It seems that we can continue to promote – as Kanter emphasized in her talk – the "human side" of education. If higher education becomes solely skill-based, it will prove unable to offer students a well-rounded, character-based education. If this is the case, then the students we educate may be less able to think critically, to develop strong oral and written communication skills, to function in a racially- and culturally-diverse world, and to solve problems creatively. It is up to us as academics to decide whether liberal education and the capacities it endows will survive the gauntlet of a radically-altered student demographic, the profit paradigm and the globalization of modern education.

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Higher Education Reflecting Income Inequality

Joseph Moore

There has been little to distinguish the Barack Obama approach and the George W. Bush approach to American higher education. Over the past 16 years, we have seen:

- more federal regulation
- a hesitancy to control financial abuses in the for-profit sector
- an attraction to higher education "scorecards" to protect consumers
- a continued shift from federal grants to loans
- the charging of excessive interest rates for student loans
- student loan profits being applied to offset the federal budget deficit
- the misleading of the public with statements that most future jobs require a postsecondary education.

As we anticipate the final months of the Obama presidency, Martha Kanter's presentation at SUNY Empire State College in March 2016 might be viewed as an "inside the Beltway" perception of the challenges facing American higher education.

Kanter began with a brief overview of American education history to demonstrate the country's steady progress on educational access, from mid-19th century compulsory school laws and free elementary schools to the present. She stated that knowing the past is important for creating our future. True enough. But the portrayal of the past as a march of steady progress toward ever-increasing educational opportunity can reduce public awareness and scrutiny of new challenges that may lack much historical precedence.

There are at least four such contemporary challenges:

1. *Economic markets* now favor the wealthy and the powerful at the expense of the majority and, as Joseph Stiglitz (2012) pointed out, our political systems are proving unable to restrain such markets.

2. The deepening chasm of *income inequality* in the United States is feeding inequality within American higher education enrollment.

3. Rapidly *changing demographics,* especially race, ethnicity and income, are deepening stratification within American higher education.

4. Policymakers and political leaders are misleading the public about the *actual jobs of the future,* keeping the policy focus on higher education and not on the increase of poverty and income inequality.

Economic Markets

Kanter and others suggest that higher education is an essential part of our country's economic health. The key economic role for higher education, they argue, is to create an educated workforce. She asks why highly-selective universities with huge endowments aren't opening their doors, and notes, too, that there are not enough spaces in public community colleges. In asking these questions, she frames the issue as a *capacity question:* How can the United States move more people through the educational pipeline? This approach reinforces the notion that capacity building is a higher education problem. This is often where the public conversation begins.

However, two barriers precede questions about higher education capacity. Because of income inequality and changing demographics, fewer citizens can afford college and fewer are academically prepared for college success. Average family income declined for seven years following the recession. The percentage of the population matching the definition of "middle class" has declined dramatically. State appropriation support for public colleges and universities declined and will never return to pre-2008 recession levels, so more costs are being passed on to students. Pell Grants cover a declining percentage of college costs. And the federal student loan system charges excessive interest rates, just as the banks did prior to the implementation of direct lending.

Stating that we need more people to earn degrees to fill the jobs of the future and that American higher education must move more people through the educational pipeline shifts the economic and political focus (and blame) to colleges and universities. It also shifts the focus away from our country's disinvestment in poor communities, low-income individuals and families, and

the increasing number of low-pay, low-skill jobs. Economic markets have a bias toward self-interest, not the public interest, and want individuals to be responsible for themselves. Those markets are driving public policy.

Income Inequality

Income inequality must manifest itself. If we look beyond income levels, income distribution and the number of children in poverty, where do we see the effects of income inequality in American higher education? Consider Moody's Investors Service's (2015) report on the "financial and strategic outlook for private colleges" in early January 2015. It noted that:

- price sensitivity is constraining new tuition revenue growth
- few private universities will exhibit strong net tuition revenue growth
- more than half of all public universities will experience weak tuition revenue growth
- there is wide disparity in state appropriation support among the 50 states
- there is an increasing differential between the earnings of college and high school graduates.

Through most of the 20th century, steadily increasing family income fueled the American economy and distributed wealth more evenly than is now the case. The vast majority of American colleges and universities are not highly selective, and through most of the 20th century, the economic growth of the middle class generated the tuition for most private institutions and many public institutions. That is no longer the case. Fewer people can afford college, public or private. The declining middle class, reduced state financial support for public institutions and the shift from grants to loans are the effects of extreme market forces and signs of increasing income inequality. Low-income students dominantly attend low-expenditure (nonselective) colleges and universities, while most wealthy students disproportionately attend high-expenditure (selective) colleges and universities.

Unchecked economic markets dominate, rendering political discourse as symbolic only. Ironically, the wealthiest students attending the high-expenditure universities receive the largest subsidies. These students benefit from institutional expenditures per student beyond the cost of full tuition. These additional expenses are financed by institutional endowment-draws that

benefit all students, regardless of income. These substantial subsidies are rarely acknowledged or debated, while poor students receive smaller, declining public subsidies that are often debated. American higher education is not a solution to income inequality. It reinforces it.

Changing Demographics and Higher Education Stratification

Students born into families whose income is in the bottom family income quartile have a less than 10 percent chance of earning a bachelor's degree, while students born into a family whose income is in the top quartile have an 80 percent chance of earning a bachelor's degree (Mortenson, 2012). National and state policies to extend access to and success in postsecondary education for students from all income levels are failing. However, to blame this failure on American higher education is to ignore economic inequality and the difficult questions of race, ethnicity and immigration that correlate with high levels of poverty.

Public school enrollment (K-12) for whites is going to decline by 6 percent by 2022, increase by 2 percent for blacks, increase by 20 percent for Asian/Pacific Islanders, and increase by 33 percent for students who are Hispanic (Hussar & Bailey, 2014). The 2014 poverty rate for whites was 10 percent, for Asians was 12 percent, for Hispanics was 24 percent, and for blacks was 26 percent (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2015). There is little public discussion about the correlation between race/ethnicity and educational attainment, about the causes of inequitable education and poverty outcomes, and about the relationship between public investment in education and a vibrant democracy.

In denial of these national demographic trends, many colleges and universities have chosen to pursue a higher ranking in the *U.S. News & World Report* college rankings by recruiting and enrolling wealthier and less diverse students. Family income is positively correlated with college access and college completion. Recruiting such students means the institution receives a minimum of four years of tuition and fees, as opposed to lower revenue projections from students who have financial challenges, more academic needs, and contribute to lower retention and degree completion rates.

The evidence for this is the declining representation of low-income students, and specifically, Pell Grant recipients, among the public flagship universities and highly-selective private institutions. Fewer poor students and fewer students of color are attending higher-expenditure (selective) colleges and universities. And while more selective institutions have sufficient demand from students from high-income families, market forces influence them to grow demand (applications) even further. It is *not* because they want to enroll more students. They want more applications while keeping constant the number of accepted students, because more applications means more students are rejected, which statistically makes the institution more exclusive (selective) and thus more highly rated. The markets reward institutions that accept few students from their growing applicant pool.

At the other end of the higher education stratification spectrum, community colleges are the country's vital postsecondary access points, but they are increasingly challenged by appropriation reductions, tuition freezes, operating budget stress and increasing demand by a diverse range of lower income students – including many first-generation college students and those with needs for remedial education. Kanter showed a graph that illustrated the "socioeconomic distribution of undergraduate enrollment by institutional selectivity" (Bastedo & Jaquette/Carnevale & Strohl as cited in Bensimon & Witham, 2015, p. 8); this further showed that the more competitive the institution, the larger the disparities between socioeconomic statuses. This trend of unfettered markets matching low-income students with low-expenditure institutions became more pronounced over the past eight years.

Actual Jobs of the Future

In her presentation and the discussion that followed, Kanter said:

- "We don't have enough people with enough education."
- "Too many people are undereducated."
- "We've got to get everyone through high school and some college."

She noted that the goals of education are both economic and civic, and while most of us might agree about these goals, there is dominant emphasis these days on the economic goal. The economic function of higher education is supported by the argument that most future jobs require some postsecondary education. This places the focus on the *individual* and not on our economic systems and

policies. It goes something like this: *If you can get to college, you can get a good job. You need to make the effort and the colleges need to have capacity for you to succeed because the jobs are there.* This perspective is reinforced by occasional economic reports quoting a few employers who say they have good, often technical jobs, but not enough college-educated applicants for those jobs. This sustains the illusion that a strong national economy will result if each individual would just be responsible enough to get an education. The rationalization of income inequality requires that the dominant political discourse focus on individual effort, not on systemic biases, that keep millions in poverty either unemployed or in low-skill, low-wage jobs.

The statement that most jobs in the future require some postsecondary education credential is just *not true,* but there are political benefits to promoting the misleading statement, as it:

- provides a powerful rationale for individual, public and private investment in higher education (college as key to the economy)
- offers a reasonable context for escalating tuitions and student debt levels
- reinforces the ideological belief (especially for those with wealth and influence) that individuals determine their own destiny
- shifts the focus away from living wages, access to health care, poverty levels and growing disparities among communities segregated by income, race/ethnicity and environmental conditions.

The primary source for this supposed correlation between future jobs and higher education is data produced by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015a): "Fastest growing occupations, 2014-2024." Eleven of the 15 occupations with the highest *percentage* growth in number of projected jobs require some postsecondary education.

The first occupation identified on the "fastest growing occupations" list is wind turbine service technician. It requires "some college, no degree." In 2014, there were just 4,400 jobs in this occupation and the projection for 2024 is 9,200 jobs, a growth percentage of 108 percent. This is the fastest growing occupation in the country – *by percentage.* The actual projected net new jobs are just 4,800. To see how the public is led to believe that there are significant employment opportunities in wind turbine service, see *Parade Magazine,* April 7, 2016 (McCleary, 2016). The 15 occupations in this table, the "fastest growing occupations," are projected to add a total of 689,900 new jobs by 2024.

To get a more accurate view of actual job growth, one must look at another BLS table, one that most policymakers don't reference because it shows that the vast majority of actual new jobs *do not* require college: "Occupations with the most job growth, 2014-2024" (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015b). This is not about *percentage growth* in an occupation, but the actual number of projected jobs over the next 10 years. In this list, nine of the 15 occupations generating the most new jobs require no postsecondary education at all; two require some postsecondary education, but no credential; and four require a bachelor's degree. This list is a more accurate picture of our low-wage service economy with millions of jobs.

The first occupation on the "occupations with the *most job growth*" is not wind turbine service technician, but personal care aides. It requires "no formal educational credential." In 2014, there were 1,768,400 jobs in this occupation (not 4,400) and the projection for 2024 is 2,226,500 (not 9,200), but a growth percentage of just 26 percent (not 108 percent). Net new jobs are 458,100 (not 4,800). The 15 occupations in *this* table of occupations with the most job growth are projected to add 3,553,800 new jobs by 2024 (not 689,900), and 75 percent of these new jobs do not require a college credential. This is why most speakers don't use this job growth data: The accurate data creates dissonance with the popular narrative declaring a strong correlation between postsecondary education and future jobs.

It does not serve the interests of American higher education and most policymakers to describe accurately the minimal educational requirements for most future jobs. However, our acceptance of political language stating that most future jobs require postsecondary education reinforces power and privilege in our market economy at the expense of millions of people in jobs that do not require any postsecondary education. While these are people and jobs our economy needs, we promote the tight correlation between jobs and higher education, at least in part, to avoid responsibility for implementing effective policies supporting living wages, access to health care, effective public transportation systems, decent housing, and healthy living and work environments for citizens and workers without college degrees.

Conclusion

Higher education stratification reflects the nation's increasing income inequality. Unfettered markets, increasing income inequality, changing demographics, higher education stratification and inaccurate statements about future job growth are not inevitable trends. We can track these trends over the past 40 years and are now far enough from the 2008 recession to see how financial excesses and unchecked greed on a massive, systemic scale were manifestations of a steady ideological shift from the public good to private profit.

To change these trends, the nation will need to:

• be honest about the vast, increasing number of jobs that do not require a college education

• adopt living wage legislation and constrain the excessive private profit of corporations, their boards and executives

• develop practical reinvestment plans that enhance the quality of life in poor communities, from safety to housing, jobs to public transportation, and schools to parks

• design a need-based higher education grant program that generates sufficient financial support for a student to earn an associate degree with less than $5,000 in loans

• design a "Part B" need-based higher education grant program that generates sufficient financial support for a student to earn a bachelor's degree at a public college or university while averaging less than $5,000 per year in loans

• change the federal student loan interest rate to make it more competitive, such that the program sustains just enough revenue to finance the operation of the loan program itself, and nothing more.

Finally, we must find and support policymakers and political leaders who are financially responsible, can make tough decisions to constrain the excesses of private profit, and who can articulate the investment in initiatives that serve the public, democratic good.

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Joseph B. Moore recently retired after nine years as president of Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Prior to his appointment at Lesley, Moore served from 2000 to 2007 as the president of SUNY Empire State College, as provost and vice president of academic affairs at Mansfield University in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, and as director of academic affairs and planning in the Office of the Chancellor at the Vermont State Colleges. He began his educational career 39 years ago as a high school English teacher.

Untitled Translation II, 2014, Gelatin silver print, 28" x 42"

Untitled (Anomaly), 2015, Unique gelatin silver print, 42 ¾" x 27"

Taking Struggle Knowledge Seriously: Critical Adult Education, Social Movement Learning and the Intellectual Work of Activism

Aziz Choudry

I work in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University's Faculty of Education in Montreal. Most of my academic work is about knowledge production and learning that happen outside what are usually accepted as *formal* places and spaces of learning, whether it is through community organizing, in social movements, activist groups or trade unions, etc. That interest comes out of my own history, as somebody who has been an organizer and an activist in a number of different places including Aotearoa/ New Zealand and in the broader Asia-Pacific region. So I have been an educator of some sort for a long time in the course of my activism, but a formal educator in the university setting for a much shorter time.

I want to begin by discussing learning, and linking that to adult education, before going on to mention struggle knowledge, knowledge production and other related topics. The idea that learning occurs beyond formal institutions and programs is not really a new or radical one. Much scholarship on adult education – that includes humanist, experiential, community, feminist and workplace learning perspectives – agrees that significant learning occurs outside classroom settings. I think it's interesting to think about that, because, as somebody who works in an education faculty, I am very aware of the ways in which ideas within universities often end up in these kinds of disciplinary silos. People (including some within the faculty in which I work) sometimes say to me: "So, what is it you do about education, exactly?" Well, all of it, actually, has educative aspects, and I think it's a challenge to think beyond the particular ways in which people's activities are often compartmentalized, whether in

university settings, in community organizing or in the broader public arena – places where people think. It's not a nice, neat "oh, this is activism over here; this is research over here; this is learning over here." So that's very much the theme of what I'm continuing to document and think through after three decades of being involved with various political and social justice struggles.

All forms of learning are fraught with tensions and contradictions, but broadly speaking, and as several scholars have noted, there are two major strands in the evolution of adult education.

The first strand is about domesticating learners. It's about strategies for individual self-improvement. Essentially it's about adjusting minds to adapt or conform to a capitalist society. This strand tends to embrace market capitalist ideas about learning as an individual responsibility. So like other forms of education, much adult education is oriented primarily toward acquiring credentials that benefit economic growth.

The second strand is concerned with emancipation. It concerns the ways in which learning, education and knowledge, democratic reflection and action, through a critical identification of issues, can help people overcome educational disadvantage, address social exclusion and discrimination, social inequality and injustice, and challenge political and economic injustice.

It is this second strand that interests me – the strand that understands that learning is very much a social process and that people's everyday practices and struggles against injustice can help to build alternative forms of knowledge and tools for political praxis.

In his 2002 book, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination,* historian Robin Kelley wrote that "too often our standards for evaluating social movements pivot around whether or not they 'succeeded' in realizing their visions, rather than on the merits or power of the visions themselves" (p. ix). Kelley suggested that "[s]ocial movements generate new knowledge, new theories, new questions." He emphasized the need for "concrete intellectual engagement" with the movements confronting the problems of oppressed peoples (p. 8). Education is always, wherever it happens, inherently political, and nonformal learning certainly is no less so. Many forms of nonformal learning are connected to and draw upon a diverse range of struggles and visions of social, political, economic and environmental justice.

Sometimes the contribution of nonformal learning to education and society is seemingly recognized, validated and endorsed by dominant institutions that range from government ministries to major intergovernmental organizations like the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) and the World Bank. But many critical educators, scholars and activists caution that the current celebration of nonformal learning in some official circles must be understood in a context of cuts to resourcing public education in many countries. In the global south, that has typically meant the squeezing of policy space and resources to provide accessible education and other basic services, which is often being facilitated through aid conditionalities imposed by international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and pressure from donor governments, as well as by domestic elites who insist that market forces are the solution to everything, and locked in by trade and investment agreements.

In the global north, cuts to education and community funding, alongside broader impositions of market-driven policies, have undermined many gains to equitable access to education. Indeed, these concerns are very much at the forefront of popular mobilizations against the current policies and politics of so-called "austerity," which, in my view, is yet another word used by elites so that we can avoid using the term *capitalism.* As an aside, having been involved in various kinds of popular/activist education and organizing for a while, I've seen time and time again how words like "neoliberalism," "austerity" and "globalization" are terms that people adopt and use – sometimes intentionally, and sometimes not – in ways that prevent us from actually identifying capitalism as the overarching system/set of relations. Rather than more precisely clarifying the forms or phases of capitalist relations, these terms can often serve to stand in for, and even obscure the processes of capitalism and imperialism.

However, it is on some of the more critical contexts of ideas and practice concerning formal and nonformal learning that I want to focus. As Robin Kelley suggests, some of the most profound critiques, understanding and theories about the world (its power structures, dominant ideologies and its fragile ecology) and indeed, some of the most powerful visions of social change emerge from ordinary people coming together and working for such change. U.S. adult education scholar John Holst (2002) wrote that adult education scholarship often tends to regard social movement practice as "political and not educative," and tends "to dismiss informal education in everyday life" (p. 80-81). Yet social movements are not only significant sites of struggle for

social and political change. They also represent important, albeit contested and contradictory spaces of learning, knowledge production and research. Acknowledged or not, social movements have made important pedagogical, theoretical and political contributions to the field of adult education – and schooling more broadly.

In the university setting, we can think about the ways in which different disciplines and fields that have been forced onto campus by the mobilization of people who have been challenging the dominant ways in which university disciplines are taught. So here, I'm thinking about some indigenous studies programs, feminist and women's studies programs, African-American studies programs – all of which (at times, at least) have been directly linked to broader mobilizations for social change. We are also seeing (in different ways and in different places) demands for universities to be relevant and accessible to *all* people in society, not just a privileged handful. We are seeing that happening across the planet – maybe not always in as great a form or in as visible a form as in some previous moments in history, but there have been some important movements going on that we need to think about as people who are in the university regarding the future of the institutions in which we work – thus, for example, recent student strikes and major mobilizations in Quebec, Chile and South Africa.

When I first read Australian adult educator Griff Foley's (1999) book, *Learning in Social Action,* I said "Ah ha! This is actually somebody who gets it." And he "gets it" because he is coming partly from the hurly-burly of organizing rather than solely from an academic background of abstraction and disconnection from the material world of everyday struggles. Foley took the time to try to tease out and excavate the incidental learning that takes place in the course of social struggles and community organizing. Looking at examples from Australia (as well as a bit about Brazil and Zimbabwe), he argues that although learning through involvement in such struggles can transform power relations, it can also be contradictory and constraining. In keeping with Foley's orientation, and drawing from my own experiences, my view about social movements and learning, and about knowledge being produced from different social struggles, is a sympathetic but not a romantic one.

We cannot neglect the tensions within activism and organizing for change. There are tensions over the co-optation of grassroots struggles, and there are tensions about who gets marginalized and who is in or out of this nebulous

thing called "civil society" or "global civil society." Indeed, maybe this is what should be called "uncivil" society, given the ways in which "civil society" has been constructed to largely include or privilege professionalized nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and perhaps some academics who may or may not have any accountability to movements and struggles on whose behalf they sometimes claim to speak.

So we have to recognize that sometimes struggles for social justice can *reproduce* rather than disrupt dominant power relations. But critical consciousness, rigorous research and theory can and do emerge from engagement in action and organizing contexts, rather than from ideas developed elsewhere by disconnected NGO professionals, consultants or supposedly detached and neutral academics. I am also very conscious of the significance of intergenerational learning, and personally straddle the critical period between politics, education and organizing traditions that were forged in the Cold War on the one hand, not to mention older forms of insurgent internationalisms and anti-colonial resistance and liberation struggles that often get written out of history. And on the other hand, we live with more recent kinds of communication and political engagement, for example, the burgeoning social media and "techno-utopian" claims about liberation and movement-building through Twitter or Facebook, etc. that raise concerns about the ways in which we, and especially young people today, are being sold an idea that in order to make social change, it's about what we as consumers do and don't consume – a kind of entrepreneurial, individualistic, professionalized approach to social change. Alongside that, there is "NGOism," as Patrick Reinsborough (2004) termed it – a conceit that enough NGO staff can save the world.

I think it also can be instructive and sobering to reflect on how ideas, positions and causes that were once viewed as radical or subversive can sometimes become mainstream, and perhaps on how that can go the other way. In an undergraduate class I was teaching at McGill a few years ago, a student raised a question about nationalizing a number of services and industries that had at one point been public in the Canadian context – hardly a radical idea, and in a settler-colonial state based on the dispossession of indigenous peoples, not without its own contradictions as a progressive position. And yet, a lot of students didn't know what "nationalizing" referred to; but even when some did, it just seemed so far off the planet that they really struggled to understand that even less than 40 years ago, nationalization or public ownership was not something that was seen as being a radical or crazy idea. We can think of other

examples of things that people take for granted (notwithstanding the fact that often those very gains were achieved through labor and other struggles that fought for and demanded certain kinds of rights from the state), even while we have to acknowledge the fact that, today, those advances, like in universal health care, working conditions, pensions, parental and health benefits – where they exist – are often being rolled back even further and are under attack in the name of austerity and fiscal restraint.

But claims about the apparent newness of some contemporary challenges, more recent mobilizations and forms of activism, can sometimes pull us away from thinking more deeply about continuities and change in the social, political and economic systems around which people struggle. Thus, the present day can often be disconnected from its relation to older histories – including concepts and lessons learned from earlier periods of struggle – in such ways that we essentially see all collective struggles everywhere as failures, and openly or implicitly accept that, as we lurch from one crisis to another at a planetary level, there is no real alternative to capitalism.

To illustrate that, I have a coffee cup here that was made in the early 1990s in Aotearoa/New Zealand, where I used to live, which says *Tino Rangatiratanga,* which is often translated as "Maori sovereignty" or "self-determination." In the early '90s when the term "globalization" was being bandied around in the media more and more, people were telling us: "Oh, it's a new thing." We had Fukuyama's (1992) book, *The End of History and the Last Man;* we had all of these proclamations about "a new world," after the Cold War was declared to be over along with capitalist triumphalism. Back then Maori friends and colleagues were saying that it was interesting for them to hear nonindigenous New Zealanders feeling disenfranchised and disempowered and fearing a loss of sovereignty, at a time when free market "reforms" were delivering many sectors of the economy, of society, into the hands of transnational corporations. Indeed, they pointed out that while that might have been a new experience for nonindigenous people, Maori were saying: "Now you know what we have been feeling for the last 150 years!" And this is important because if you look critically and carefully at the historical processes of colonialism and capitalism, one can get a better sense about the extent to which the claims of "newness" of a policy or a form of global governance ring true.

People struggle and can learn, educate and theorize wherever they find themselves. The forms that this might take do change and they're not always fully visible. As Foley (1999) noted really powerfully, you cannot always see the learning or educative aspects of what is going on in a community organizing setting. But people *do* learn: people learn over the photocopy machine making fliers or making posters; people learned in the old days sitting around a table where you would have three or four generations of people stuffing envelopes for fundraising mailouts; people learn on demonstrations. I overheard a conversation in the corridor a few years ago when I was fairly new at McGill that really stuck in my mind. Two people were talking about going on a demonstration, and one of them said: "Oh, you know, I used to go on demonstrations, but you don't really do a lot; you hold a placard, you walk around and kind of nothing changes anyway." And I thought to myself: "Well, that's interesting because when I think of demonstrations, I think about conversations, about connecting up with a bunch of people. Yes, sure, there is a mobilization, and perhaps it's about getting numbers on the street to try to build counter-power or to make visible opposition or support for something politically, socially, environmentally, but these demonstrations are places where we also learn!"

A concrete example of this learning was connected to the student strike here in Quebec. In 2012, there were, in a very real sense, universities-of-the-streets. You might hear people opposed to the strike dismissively saying: "Oh, don't these students want to learn? They should go to classes." And yet I've been on many of the nighttime demonstrations, and on the bigger demonstrations, and some of the teach-ins and other things that were going on, and there was a huge amount of learning happening. For some people, the learning was really profound, including the fact that, in confrontations with the state, in confrontations with the police, people – sometimes for the first time in their lives – realized that the state isn't necessarily your friend, and dissent is not always necessarily tolerated in countries that are supposedly liberal democracies. So what do you do with that kind of knowledge? How does that kind of learning compare with or relate to what takes place in more formal university settings?

Another example of that kind of learning comes from Neville Alexander, who was a great scholar/activist in South Africa who was imprisoned on Robben Island for 10 years with Nelson Mandela and others from across a number of the different liberation struggle-movements. And Alexander (as cited in

Magnien, 2012) spoke about the process of education on Robben Island under terrible conditions: "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 programs, but could actually teach each other 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" (Imprisonment on Robben Island section, para. 5).

There are a number of other places where we can find similar kinds of experiences, though more often than not they are not written down. But some of the ones we do know about include, for example, Italian Marxist activist Antonio Gramsci (2011) who wrote about some of the informal, nonformal, political education that was always linked to his activism in the party in Italy. Bobby Sands (1997), who died on a hunger strike in 1981 while in Long Kesh prison, organized political education with other Irish republican prisoners. There are many stories about the kind of political learning that has taken place in prison in so many different places and that occurred under difficult circumstances. These were very important places and spaces for political learning. People also are involved in study groups and study circles in different activist settings where intentional learning is taking place. And then there is all that informal, incidental learning that Foley and others have described in such detail. I think it is interesting to consider how these incidental forms of learning dialectically relate to more intentional kinds of political education, as well as how these relate to everyday experiences and social action.

I think it's important to emphasize that all knowledge is necessarily partial. That includes academic knowledge and knowledge that comes out of social movement organizing. All knowledge is *interested,* whether it serves to maintain or challenge existing relations of inequality. I don't want to set up a simplistic binary between those two things, but I don't buy into the idea that there is any neutral kind of truth or neutral kind of knowledge that one as an academic should strive toward and embody. I certainly come out of and was inspired by a tradition of scholars who (in different places and in different ways) came into the academic world from communities and movements with a commitment to remain accountable and relevant to those communities, political commitments and struggles.

I work in a public university. I see that it needs to play a role that is relevant to a broad section of the society. And I think that universities, internally and externally, need to have their feet held to the fire to actually deliver on promises and commitments to community engagement. I'm sure there are many examples and stories that some of you have from your own experiences. But I think that in an era of grave ecological and social economic crisis, efforts to bring different forms of knowledge and learning into educational processes alongside each other in conversations that arise from and relate to people's actual lives and struggles might not only be an "academic exercise," but are actually necessary and fruitful. Besides claims about whose knowledge counts, perhaps this process can raise uncomfortable but constructive questions that can lead to productive and necessary exchanges in order to change and reorient formal education in the 21st century to be relevant to and serve the needs of all sectors of society.

I recently wrote something for a newspaper in Guyana upon which many of these ideas are based (Choudry, 2015b). In passing, the piece deals with the life and work of Walter Rodney, who is a really important activist and intellectual, a Guyanese historian who remains a significant thinker still to this day. Many people know his book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Rodney, 1972). But I think Rodney's life also serves as a reminder of the work of someone whose academic and popular education activities continue to teach us that for action to be informed by deeper understandings of how and why we're in the state we're in today, we really need a critical historical perspective. It's important now and also points to future prospects for change, and so is the value that Rodney placed on the political relevance of everyday encounters outside of academia, both politically and pedagogically. For example, while lecturing at the University of the West Indies in the late 1960s in Jamaica, Rodney (1969) preferred communal discussions and exchanges of ideas of social, political and historical importance, grassroots reasoning or *groundings,* with poor people in Kingston's sports clubs, schoolrooms and churches, to socializing within a cocoon of the university scene. Indeed, it is exactly these kinds of learning and knowledge production experiences and their social and political dimensions – ones gained from the ground up, so to speak – that need to be taken and embraced far more seriously. As James Baldwin put it: "There is never a time in the future in which we will work out our salvation. The challenge is in the moment, the time is always now" (as cited in Standley & Pratt, 1989, p. 10).

In *Freedom Dreams,* Robin Kelley (2002) recalled speaking with U.S. university students who viewed the real world as "some concrete wilderness overrun with violence and despair, and the university as if it were some sanitized sanctuary distant from actual people's lives and struggles" (p. 8). Kelley challenges the idea that "dropping knowledge on the people" from universities will somehow generate social change and new liberatory social movements. Like Kelley, Rodney and many others – and without romanticizing these processes – I believe that community organizing and movements arising from ordinary people's problems and frustrations can and do generate new knowledge, theories and questions. They can also offer hope and a vision for a fairer society and world. Academics certainly don't have a monopoly on the production of knowledge or education. Theoretical and experiential forms of knowledge can enrich each other.

And here, it's important to think about this word "theory." For many people, theory is a scary word – and it's often used as a pejorative: "Oh, that's all very theoretical." But while I think theory is vital, we still have to think about how, where and under what conditions theory gets produced in ways that we actually recognize it as being theory – and the implications of this. In one of his articles, black Canadian historian David Austin (2009) (who, incidentally, wrote an important book called *Fear of a Black Nation* [2013]) talked about theory as being "congealed experience" (p. 115) – and other people have thought about theory in similar kinds of ways.

Theory does, whether we recognize it or not, circulate outside of the academic world; it does circulate in our organizing places; it circulates in our daily lives; it gets taken up in all kinds of ways. The notion that theory could also be produced by ordinary people outside of the "ivory tower" is not only a possibility, it's a reality. This is where many ideas and concepts have come from; perhaps they've become de-linked from their origins, but they've often come from collective struggles; they've come from collective ideas, and if you like, theorizing that at some point may have entered the academy (and sometimes, perhaps in part because of pressures and hierarchies that many of us encounter in the academy) becomes packaged or repackaged as somebody's novel new insight.

Probably nothing I say here is particularly new, and I'm OK with that: I'm not too sure whether there is anything new under the sun. I am certain that without daily struggles, larger systemic change cannot come about. I am not somebody

who thinks that formal education is unimportant, but I do think there is a danger in saying that formal education and education will change the world. Because without mobilization, without organizing and without the learning that comes from it, I don't see collective change actually coming about. It would be great if the world could change if only we had the right words and the powers of moral suasion in our statements, reports, and declarations and if, in response, transnational corporations or bankers or politicians were substantively transformed and overpowered. It actually takes community mobilization to bring about change. And it is in daily local struggles where people learn and reflect and strategize and act. They can build analysis, skills and strategies; they can build a base that is needed for a long-term, broader change. Again, this is not always the case, and can be a contradictory process, but it happens.

Adult education scholar, Paula Allman (2010), insisted on the significance of struggles for reform and on the kind of learning that I have been trying to describe:

> [W]hether these pertain to issues emanating from the shop floor, the community, the environment or any other site where the ramifications of capitalism are experienced … these struggles are some of the most important sites in which critical education can and must take place. Moreover, if the critical education takes place within changed relations, people will be transforming not only their consciousness but their subjectivity and sensibility as well. (p. 128)

In 2015, struggles for social, political, economic and ecological justice are really unfinished business. And indeed given that understanding, and extending Allman's ideas about where critical education takes place, perhaps the notion of freedom then becomes, as another activist/educator, Angela Davis (2007), suggested, "not a state for which one yearns, but rather an incessant struggle to remake our lives, our relations, our communities, and our futures" (13:36).

In my recent book, *Learning Activism* (Choudry, 2015a), I have tried to mull over, make visible and think through some of the dynamics of learning and education and the production of ideas and knowledge from different kinds of activist contexts. For example, such intentional and incidental learning has occurred within the student strike in Montreal, and in migrant worker organizing, which migrant and immigrant workers here in Montreal (and other workers across North America and elsewhere) have engaged in both outside of or sometimes inside or in collaboration with formal union structures (see, for

example, Choudry & Hlatshwayo, 2016). But in whatever context this is taking place, some of the organizing, critiques and analysis depend on the insights, knowledge and experience of workers themselves coming together. And given the difficulty of understanding and mapping so many aspects of society and the economy today, that kind of knowledge is incredibly important.

And here is where there's a critical challenge: How do you pull out and value the knowledge that people experience, people live, people develop through political, social and environmental struggles? When is it relevant to put this into dialogue with the formal kinds of knowledge that often circulate around the university settings? I probably have more questions than I do answers, but in closing, there is one aspect to our thinking here that I should again mention and that I take up in *Learning Activism* in a chapter on activist research. There I argue that there are different standards and models for this concept called "rigor" in doing research, and there are many examples of social movements in the Philippines, in South Africa, in North America and in other places, too, where people haven't necessarily had formal research training, but are doing their own research, whether on land grabs, mining corporations, the global textile/clothing/footwear supply chain and exploitation of workers, among other topics directly relevant to people's lives, and connected to organizing for change. These people talk about the processes whereby they produce knowledge in ways that do not necessarily lend themselves to being neatly packaged and labeled in a standard sociological kind of way. Nonetheless, in the very course of practice, theory and methodology are being developed. Further, I suggest that perhaps there are higher stakes on "getting it right" in such activist research for people in those movements than there are in the academic world where the pinnacle of knowledge production is the double-blind peer-reviewed journal, which some colleagues joke about being places where only about six people will read the article and where maybe only three and a half people will understand it.

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Books in the Basement: Formal Movement Learning and Turning Discontent Into Understanding

Jacob Remes

In 2007, after my grandfather died, I went through the room in his basement with old papers and reports from his political and legal career (Washington Jewish Week, 2007; Schudel, 2007). Hidden on a shelf behind a row of innocuous books, I found four or five red, hard-bound volumes: the two-volume *Short Course* on the history of the Communist Party; a text by Lenin; and others. These were books my grandfather had, apparently, obtained as a left-wing student in Virginia in the 1930s. If the underlining and marginal notes were any indication, he had not gotten very far in his communist education, but the books were a reminder of the formal apparatus of Communist Party schools. That the books were hidden behind other books in the basement was a reminder of the fear that gripped the American Left during the post-war Red Scare (Schrecker, 1998, p. 366).

My goal in this response to Aziz Choudry's essay is to broaden his focus on the informal education that happens in social movements, to formal social movement education. Formal social movement learning – from study groups to classes – helps develop activists by providing space and a theoretical apparatus through which they can move from their experiences and their dissatisfactions into building a better world. Choudry cites David Austin's (2009) definition of theory as "congealed experience" and insists correctly that it "circulate[s] outside of the academic world." But theory is more than just our experiences. Rather, it is how we make sense of our ideas, our experiences and our knowledge by helping us see a causal explanation of seemingly disparate phenomena. Theory helps us to reimagine the world and figure out how we are going to get to enact our dreams. This sort of theory requires not just the informal learning that Choudry celebrates but also formal movement learning.

I do not discount the importance of the learning Choudry describes. To take one small example: I learned things marching in illegal demonstrations in New York and Montreal that I could not have learned from books. In New York during Occupy Wall Street in 2011, I learned, rather to my surprise, that

when an authoritarian mayor wished to crush a social movement, my maleness, whiteness and middle-classness would not protect me from the violence of the police. (I was not arrested, but I experienced, for the first time in my life, a visceral fear of police violence from which my class, gender and race have generally insulated me.) The next spring, I visited Montreal to witness and support a student strike (Remes, 2012; Jaffe, 2012). There I learned experientially why police use horses to control crowds; something I had read about in books but had not understood the way I do now: when a police horse bears down on you, as happened while I marched down Boulevard Saint-Joseph, you have no choice but to get out of the way. But neither of these things I learned about the police would, in isolation, help me understand the police in a broader way. Do I take from those experiences that, as the slogan goes, "All Cops Are Bastards," or do I think that police are workers who need to be taught class consciousness? Do I decide that a race-conscious analysis of police violence is incorrect because they beat white Occupiers, or do I find common cause with those who face daily police violence because they are racialized? To answer these sorts of questions, I need analysis that, if not learned in a classroom, depends on the habits and skills I learned in classrooms. In short, I need theory.

In the 1930s, a person like my grandfather who looked at the world and was dissatisfied with the economy or with white supremacy or with militarism could easily find a theory – Marxism – that could help him or her make sense of their grievance (Gilmore, 2008; Kelley, 1990). The Communist Party – along with communist and socialist groups that were not members of the Communist International – helped give structure to people's unhappiness. Its formal ways of teaching – Party schools, meetings, conferences and organizers – helped people understand the world they lived in and helped them structure and develop their dissatisfaction. So too did other parts of the organized Left, like union education departments and the Highlander School (Katz, 2011; Glen, 1988). These were organized, formal educational spaces within social movements, and they helped to shape the future of social movements. Betty Friedan's early political education came from the left-led United Electrical Workers (UE), and Rosa Parks developed her leadership and strategy at Highlander (Horowitz, 1998; Theoharis, 2013). Friedan intentionally hid what she learned at UE, claiming instead that she had learned her feminism purely experientially and informally; likewise it is not accidental that Parks' serious political commitments and organized political development have been erased from popular memory. Formal

education institutions and experiences helped to build not only the movements of which they were directly a part, but also the movements that succeeded them, and their erasure is likewise part of the legacy of those movements.

Today's Left has no unifying ideology or theory. Occupy Wall Street, for instance, was rooted in anarchist theory and practice (Schneider, 2013), but it did not have the full theoretical apparatus of its Marxist predecessors. In other words, "We Are the 99%" was a mobilizing slogan and perhaps even a trenchant description, but it was not a detailed or deep class analysis. There was surely much learning that happened in occupied Zuccotti Park, both formal and informal, but it was very intentionally not ideologically uniform. This was surely a strength – among other things, it means the park and the movement could contain anarchists, socialists, liberals and even Ron Paul-inspired libertarians[1] – but it was also a weakness. An Occupier was unlikely to find a cohesive theory to make sense of the failures of the political economy. It is unsurprising that in Occupy's aftermath, some leftists are rediscovering Marxist theory to help them make sense of the political economy around them and are building institutions to help them think through and build their own theories. Chief among these efforts is the increasingly popular magazine *Jacobin,* which, crucially, organizes readers clubs (Matthews, 2016). These clubs, which arose more or less spontaneously, echo the sort of Party school my grandfather must have attended, albeit with neither the party discipline nor structure that came with the Communist Party. In so doing, they suggest a yearning for more organized movement learning.

My own political leanings are more toward anarchism than communism, and I do not mean to suggest that formal learning depends upon party discipline or hierarchy. (Indeed it is worth remembering Kelley's (1990) argument that the American Communist Party of the 1930s was neither as hierarchical or disciplined as is often imagined.) Formal movement learning need not replicate the hierarchies and exclusions of either a party or of traditional schools and universities. As the *Jacobin* readers groups suggest, even socialists today seem to prefer less hierarchical formal learning experiences. Instead, the history of movement-based adult education offers clues for building formal education that is organized, intentional and planned, but also liberatory and undisciplined.

The priest-educators of the Antigonish Movement in interwar eastern Nova Scotia encouraged fishers, farmers and industrial workers to join study groups to identify their problems and come up with common solutions. The theory

James J. Tompkins and Moses Coady encouraged their participants to find and develop – in keeping with their social Catholic roots – was cooperativism. They hoped students would come to understand that they were poor and dissatisfied because their economic and social isolation put them at the mercy of capitalists, and that the way out of their trouble was through organizing cooperative banks (that is, credit unions), cooperative stores, cooperative canneries and cooperative housing. Students would join a self-directed study group, identify their problems, discuss solutions and then spend a year planning for that solution – for instance, learning how to organize a credit union and then doing so.[2] The Antigonish Movement was intentionally and explicitly counter-revolutionary, in that it sought to provide a Catholic counterweight to a growing radical union movement in the region (Remes, 2010). Nonetheless, it helped its participants make sense of the world around them and improve it, and it did so in a way that built power for its participants.

At roughly the same time that Tompkins and Coady were developing the Antigonish Movement, Fannia Cohn was building the education department of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) in New York City (Katz, 2011). Cohn and her cohort of union leaders were Jewish refugees from the failed Russian revolution of 1905. Their experiences in the Russian socialist movement had taught them that in a multiethnic empire like Russia or the United States, each national group needed to develop itself linguistically, culturally and politically in order to defeat the ruling class that sought to divide them. In interwar New York, Cohn and her colleagues urged their fellow Yiddish-speaking Jews to learn their own language, traditions and culture, and they did the same with their Puerto Rican, Italian and African-American co-workers. The ILGWU education department developed and trained leaders, encouraged political development, and provided formal social and cultural space for other, unexpected lessons. Crucially, they included interracial recreational activities like dancing and sports, which not only enacted the union's politics but created a social space for what James C. Scott (1998) called mētis: informal, experiential and socially learned tacit knowledge. In the case of the ILGWU, as Katz (2011) argued, the mētis learned in basketball and dance transferred directly to confrontational picket lines.

These union schools taught explicit and implicit lessons, and they created formal and protected spaces for the more informal movement learning Choudry celebrates. In this way, they were not unlike black Baptist and immigrant Catholic churches that informally and often unintentionally trained parishioners

for secular political life through their participation in church organizations (Higginbotham, 1994; Sterne, 2003). During and after the Red Scare, New York communists built schools and summer camps to impart a progressive culture to their children (Teal, 2012). These formal institutions were not about imparting theory – if anything, campers and pupils arrived with theory before they had grievances – but nonetheless created safe space in which to develop politically. It is no accident that the Port Huron Statement was written at "a distinctly Old Left space" (Teal, 2012, p. 8), a United Auto Workers resort. As they did for Friedan and Parks, formal educational and recreational institutions helped bridge the Old and New Lefts.

Following Choudry's call to take seriously the learning that happens in social movements and the histories I recount here of formal movement education, I contend that we need to build radical educational spaces – ones that teach and develop theory, do not replicate the hierarchies and unfreedoms of traditional pedagogy, and respect and amplify the mētis of movement-building and working-class lives. For those of us housed in the formal and traditional – that is, tuition-charging and credit-granting – academy, the task is even harder: to build networks and connections with our extra-academic colleagues, and even to create in our own classrooms and colleges those experiences and spaces that emulate movement learning. Our core task, especially but not exclusively when teaching adults, is to help students understand what they have learned in their lives, and to help them find a theory through which to make sense of it.

Notes

[1] Another strength was the focus on direct action. Two of the most important outgrowths of the Occupy movement were Occupy Homes, which physically blocked foreclosure evictions (see, e.g., Elliott, 2011), and Occupy Sandy (Shepard, 2013; Ambinder & Jennings, 2013), which provided solidaristic aid after Superstorm Sandy. In both cases, what mattered was the direct action of blocking foreclosure and delivering aid, not a unifying or doctrinaire theory or ideology.

[2] For a brief introduction to the Antigonish Movement, see Stabler, 1986.

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Cultivating Learner Agency

Heidimarie Hayes Rambo

Working as I do in graduate leadership programs designed for working adults, I reflected on Aziz Choudry's appeal for "universities … to actually deliver on promises and commitments to community engagement" in a personal way. I asked myself, what are we doing to deliver on these promises? And specifically, how do my programs (M.A. in teaching leadership and Ed.D. in educational leadership at Saint Mary's College of California) measure up?

Both of these programs have been designed to promote transformational learning for working professionals – in particular, K-12 teachers, community college instructors, school administrators and leaders in community. Both programs offer alternative ways to meet admissions criteria, recognizing a student's past experiential learning in lieu of degrees. Both programs offer learners the opportunity to collaborate with other learners outside of their work silos and to immediately apply their learning within their work settings, whatever those may be. And I believe, in both programs, we see rich evidence that, as Choudry says, "[t]heoretical and experiential forms of knowledge can enrich each other" in the ways that learners from diverse backgrounds engage in class discussions and research projects, and most importantly, in the ways that our graduates carry our institutional mission of social justice into their workplaces and continue to work to challenge systems of inequities.

In particular, the opportunity to demonstrate how one's life experiences have provided knowledge and skills equivalent to a college degree in order to meet admissions requirements for a graduate program certainly allows some individuals who might not otherwise have been eligible, access to graduate education.

One example comes to mind from our doctoral program: An individual came to us with significant leadership experience but without a master's degree, and was admitted to the program through the alternative admissions pathway. In another case, an individual used her considerable professional experience to challenge the admissions requirement of a bachelor's degree in order to be admitted to one of our master's programs. Taken at face value, our programs thus provide a pathway for some people to "overcome educational disadvantage," as Choudry describes it, and allow learners from diverse educational and

experiential backgrounds to come together in a learning community. As a result, each new cohort of learners is a unique constellation of personal and professional experiences that provides a crucible for the transformative learning of its members.

And yet, institutions of higher education exist within an organizational structure that is not only dependent on stakeholders having the appropriate educational credential, but also on tuition and other forms of financial subsidy. Arguably, the greatest impediment to overcoming educational disadvantage is the cost of higher education. The price tag associated with a college or university education in the United States is significant, and the costs associated with graduate education is even more so. Most students who enter our graduate programs in education, for example, must pay for them with loans, regardless of their background. Access to graduate education becomes a question of access to the financial resources. We can create alternative pathways for learners to be admitted to the academy; pathways that break down the barriers to the ivory tower. But while applicants with a wide array of experiences are admitted to our programs, sadly, many find that they cannot pay for them. Student loan debt in the United States is a soul-crushing $1.1 trillion, and a recent report suggests that a significant portion of that amount has financed graduate education (Bidwell, 2014). Whereas the average student debt of a college senior is slightly under $30,000 – a concerning figure by itself – graduate student loan debt makes this amount pale in comparison. About 25 percent of graduate students owe nearly $100,000, and an additional 10 percent owe more than $150,000 (Bidwell, 2014, para. 6). So, while we have created some more expansive admissions policies, we may only be paying lip service to the way our programs provide equal educational opportunities because, having not lifted the financial constraints, we may simply reinforce the existing economic structures and systems of inequities that allow some people access to education and not others.

Some universities, notably Harvard and Stanford, have made efforts to support educational equity by offering free online courses known as MOOCs or "massive open online courses." These courses are available online to an unlimited number of participants and are offered without tuition. When educators started to notice these courses, for example, with Thrun and Norvig's 2012 Introduction to Artificial Intelligence course offered through Stanford University (Marques, 2013), they shone with promise – anyone, anywhere, could learn from notable scholars as long as she or he had an internet connection. The shine, however, has worn off. Although the *idea* of the MOOC – free college

courses to all – is laudable, the reality is pretty discouraging. These courses aren't credit bearing, which means that universities don't award university credit for their completion; and, with few recent exceptions, learners cannot use them to earn college degrees (see, for example, Masterson, 2013). A person may learn from them, but socially, politically and economically, she or he is unlikely to reap benefit. I would suggest that those who gain the most from MOOCs are the institutions and instructors who offer them. MOOCs allow the universities who host the courses and the instructors who teach them to cultivate public awareness of – and public regard for – both the institution and the individual, which may strengthen the organizational brand, thus increasing demand for its tuition-bearing offerings. In other words, the university's open online courses may be described in terms of what Paulo Freire (2000) called "false generosity," where the university develops practices that seem on the surface to be devoted to educational emancipation but, in truth, only reinforce the existing hierarchies within higher education.

My first reaction, therefore, to Choudry's appeal for universities to have their "feet held to the fire to deliver on promises" is a cynical one. How can universities be part of dismantling the very system that ensures its continuance, the system that determines that the knowledge created within its environs is the knowledge that has value in the world?

Fortunately, cynicism is not my only reaction. We need to maintain "critical hope" (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) to be educators in our politicized world. For me, the source of hope is the emancipatory potential of "action research," which is realized when practitioners conduct systematic inquiry to create the knowledge and tools in order to solve their own personal and professional challenges.

Action research is the foundation of the graduate programs in which I teach. In these programs, we propose that action research is the form of research that best supports organizational and systemic change. All of the courses that I teach seek to develop learners' knowledge and skills to carry out different forms of action research. In a typical action research project, the learner begins with a local "problem" or situation that challenges the effectiveness of his or her practice, reads professional literature related to the problem, discusses possible solutions with colleagues, develops a plan of action that incorporates strategies that the learner believes will address the problem, collects evidence of the impact of the action, and through reflection determines his or her next steps.

Choudry points out that "some of the most powerful visions of social change emerge from ordinary people coming together and working for such change." This statement aligns well with the goals of action research, where practitioners committed to change explore approaches, methods, processes and strategies that may lead to improved praxis. In terms of our graduate programs, learners use their struggles within their workplaces, exactly as Choudry describes it, to "build alternative forms of knowledge and tools. …" Often, these alternative forms of knowledge have vitality and worth within the learners' organizations because they emerge by virtue of an authentic application of learning by an ordinary person within the organization.

In one notable example from our Master of Arts in Teaching Leadership program, a student conducted an action research project within her own school where she implemented a peer tutoring program, pairing fourth-graders with first-graders to build emergent literacy skills. The results of the project suggested that the peer tutoring program promoted literacy skills for both the tutor and tutee; as a result, it was adopted, first by other teachers within the school and then across the school district.

Regardless of the impact of the action research on the learners' work environments, we have found that the action research process is transformative for learners because the process develops the individual's sense of personal and professional agency: Students learn that they can solve their own problems, answer their own questions.

One challenge is to help learners embrace the belief that they can produce their own knowledge – a challenge foundational to the emancipation sought after by Choudry. In a recent class on developing research topics for their action research projects, I asked the learners – in this case all K-12 teachers – to consider ways that they already conduct research in their lives. After a few minutes of buzz at their tables, one group of teachers turned to me and observed that, with the internet and hand-held devices, they research about everything – where to go on vacation, where to work or live, what strategies to use to promote academic language development, what political candidate to support. Moreover, they proposed that they contribute to the existing knowledge about these issues by posting their experiences on social media sites like Facebook, Pinterest and Twitter.

The assertion of these learners seems dangerously close to confirming Choudry's claim that " … we, and especially young people today, are being sold an idea that in order to make social change, it's about what we as consumers do and don't consume." On the contrary, I would argue that we should not dismiss the role of social media in the creation of knowledge simply because some of the conversations there are commerce-driven. Rather, I propose that social media – Facebook, Twitter, forums, blogs - are sites of the new sociopolitical demonstration. Mobilization may be reinterpreted as subscribers and followers who, in Choudry's words, " … make visible opposition or support for something politically, socially, environmentally … "; the fact that " … demonstrations are places where we also learn" may be evident, then, in terms of "likes" and "comments." The Black Lives Matter movement is an excellent example of how social media can support activism. Educators in the academy must not dismiss the learning and knowledge that is created on social media because it creates opportunities where ordinary people can, as Choudry himself describes it, " … learn and reflect and strategize and act" across all sorts of borders, including national, ethnic, gender, class, age and ability.

At the same time, social media is a site where people are vulnerable to the manipulation of the " … processes of colonialism and capitalism … " that Choudry importantly discusses. Thus, people must have the knowledge and skills necessary to resist the manipulation of rhetoric and emotion, while retaining the motivation to change existing systems of inequality. As a society, we are faced with two immediate challenges in response to the advent of social media. First, how can opposition or support for something politically, socially or environmentally move from online discourse to social action and social justice; and second, how can we create learning environments, both in and out of classrooms, where the learners' capacities for critical thinking – abilities to evaluate sources, to recognize and be able to create sound arguments, to use sources– are nurtured and developed?

Responding to these challenges will be hard work for all educators, regardless of the teaching context. I would argue that the key lies with cultivating learner agency – the learner's belief in his or her own capacity to solve a problem. Toward this goal, the graduate leadership programs at Saint Mary's brings together learners from diverse backgrounds to develop their capacities to build relationships, practice empathy, resolve conflict, interrogate systems and use action research to engage in systematic examination of their own praxis,

with the hopes that we will empower our graduates to carry these capacities into their work and life spaces, continuing to practice their own agency while inspiring it among the learners with whom they live and learn.

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Bridging Learning Activism and Critical Adult Education

Lynne M. Wiley

I recently taught a seminar on ethics where each of the participants was asked to present a final paper analyzing a subject in which they were interested from the point of view of the main theories discussed in the class. One young man presented a very cogent analysis of the ethics of using torture to save lives. When pressed to explain how far he would go, generally, in harming others or providing relief from harm, he admitted that he would need to rely on being a person of good character to make sound choices with regard to such questions. "While I might not give relief to a dying murderer on death row," he said, "I would in most other cases." "What's different about the murderer on death row?" I inquired. "Is he or she in some way less human than other people to whom you would provide assistance?" That question produced a long pause on his part and vigorous debate among the rest of the group.

As I reviewed "Taking Struggle Knowledge Seriously," I was struck by the similarity between that exchange with my students and a variety of issues that Aziz Choudry raises directly and implicitly in his talk. They include the nature and parameters of critique itself, including the deeply ethical nature of critical theory and critical pedagogy: The fact that the questions posed by theorists, practitioners and students play out in an unseen but highly-charged political context; The varying perspectives of participants based on their positions in the systems of domination and control that critical theorists call into question; The recognition that, as Choudry contends, one's own knowledge or perspective is necessarily partial. Also included are questions central to the pedagogical process: What methods are best suited to providing students with the ability to critique oppressive circumstances and form a desire to undertake social change? What does it take to get students to unmask hidden assumptions, or truly "take the position of the other" (the philosophical version of Mezirow's [1981] "perspective taking")? Finally, with questions about "knowing" itself: What of the content covered in an ethics seminar might we say is truly "known"? What does knowing entail? When and how does what one learns in the course of community organizing and activism become "knowledge"? By what method or by whose assessment?

Choudry is largely concerned with epistemological questions in this talk – with what counts as knowledge, where it is produced, how it becomes joined with other forms of knowing to create new understandings, and how that process of learning leads to broader change. He clearly believes that the work of activism produces legitimate knowledge: Choudry's lengthy involvement with social movements and the struggles of various disenfranchised groups for equity and inclusion have taught him that serious intellectual work is produced within these circles. Now a professor at McGill University, Choudry finds himself in the somewhat unenviable position of straddling two worlds, however: one based on his direct experience fighting against forces that constrain people's ability to learn freely, unencumbered by "traditional education"; and the other immersed in a social institution whose ties to social reproduction and the transmission of knowledge by dominant elites to the malleable young has long been acknowledged. Although more characteristically a purpose of public education at the K-12 level, higher education's role in preserving particular social and cultural ideals while defining what counts as valuable knowledge is as old as civilization in the West.

No wonder, then, that he finds vexing the tendency of some in higher education to devalue learning that occurs outside the academy, if not in concept then in application. As Choudry (2014) noted, " … many people – including some academics and university students – still tend to see activism as practice, and learning, education, theorizing, knowledge production and research as occurring elsewhere – in schools, colleges, and universities" (pp. 256-257). That kind of dichotomous thinking is unfortunate. Choudry's position is not extreme: He wants to bring different forms of knowledge and learning together in complementary ways. In his talk, he asks: "How do you pull out and value the knowledge that people experience, people live, people develop through political, social, and environmental struggles?" "When is it relevant to put this into dialogue with the formal kinds of knowledge that often circulate around the university settings?"

Certainly a philosophy of adult education that is avowedly political, concerned with addressing issues of power and control in order to achieve more just societies, must place a significant emphasis on action and experience. So, too, must it be integrative. However unusual this process may appear to some in higher education, its principles (if not aims) have been widely discussed and implemented. When, for example, Choudry (2014) asserted that " … it is through action that people create experiences from which they learn – the

action is what educates, the doing, reflecting on the practice is the sources of new ideas …" (p. 284), he is all but channeling John Dewey, whose focus on experience and the democratizing effects of democratic learning methods seems to me to be too often overlooked in these discussions. Notwithstanding the fact that Dewey's chief concerns were not radically democratic or "critical" in the Marxist sense, his entire corpus focused on how experiential, learner-centered forms of education could lead to the betterment of society. Regarding the necessity of experience in education, for example, such as the social experience obtained in community organizing and activism, Dewey (1916) stated that:

> … all communication (and hence all genuine social life) is educative. To be a recipient of communication is to have an enlarged and changed experience. One shares in what another has thought and felt and … has his own attitude modified. Nor is the one who communicates left unaffected. Try the experience of communicating, with fullness and accuracy, some experience or another, especially if it be somewhat complicated, and you will find your own attitude toward your experience changing. … To formulate requires getting outside of it, seeing is as another would see it, considering what points of contact it has with the life of another. … It may fairly be said, therefore, that any social arrangement that remains vitally social, or vitally shared, is educative. … It enlarges and enlightens experience; it stimulates and enriches imagination … the necessity of this teaching gives an immense stimulus to reducing experience to that order and form which will render it most easily communicable and hence most usable. (pp. 5-6)

In this passage, Dewey not only makes an important pedagogical point, but draws attention to concepts fundamental to the practical business of connecting what individuals know and learn from experience with a process that leads to social change. As recent critical theorists have demonstrated, that nexus is one that has remained problematic in efforts to further Mezirow's conception of a critical theory of adult learning. Indeed, the methodology of social change, including the manner in which peoples' lived experiences of social action can be merged with formal opportunities for reflection and theorizing to inspire new understandings, is a central concern for Choudry and many other theorists. The pedagogical issues are complex. As Dewey (1916) observed,

> One of the weightiest problems with which the philosophy of education has to cope is the method of keeping a proper balance between the informal and the formal, the incidental and the intentional, modes of education. To

avoid a split between what men consciously know because they are aware of having learned it by a specific job of learning, and what they unconsciously know because they have absorbed it in their characters by intercourse with others, becomes an increasingly delicate task with every development of … schooling. (p. 9)

As a consequence, foreshadowing, in part, the work of today's critical theorists, Dewey ended up advocating for the kind of pedagogy that consists in continuously learning, unlearning, and reconstructing knowledge gained from experience – whether in formal or informal settings.

In these ideas, Dewey was not far removed from the philosophical and oratorical educational traditions developed by Plato, Aristotle and Isocrates. One refers to the origins of the "grand narrative" of Western, rationalist human experience with trepidation, but the linkages between the methods and aims of the Greeks and those of contemporary critical theorists are instructive. Both give pedagogical prominence to the value of engaging others in conversation (if only some others, in the former case). As Goldstein (2014) noted, "Plato wrote about philosophy with misgivings. He worried … that philosophical writing would take the place of living conversations, for which, in philosophy, there is no substitute" (p. 10). Both are concerned with examining, reflecting upon and potentially unlearning commonly held beliefs, aware that without constant critical examination our thinking might become too comfortable with itself. Like modern theorists who value the benefits of discourse communities, Plato gave as much thought to the processes most likely to teach and inspire others to engage in inquiry as to the central questions of philosophy itself. Perhaps most importantly, the concerns of both groups are fundamentally ethical: with what makes an individual human life worth living, what conditions are most conducive to creating just societies, what kinds of educational processes will best ensure human and social flourishing for generations to come, and how to act morally in service of those ideals. When Brookfield (2005) wrote that "Adults who learn to conduct this kind of critique [i.e., critical thinking informed by a critical theory perspective] are exercising true reason, that is, reason applied to asking universal questions about how we should live" (p. 350); or when Choudry quotes Angela Davis (2007) musing that freedom is "not a state for which one yearns, but rather an incessant struggle to remake our lives, our relations, our communities, and our futures" (13:36), they echo the work of many who have come before them.

Building on these ideas, it is perhaps not surprising that the methods that dominate critical adult education are dialogue, critical reflection, and perspective transformation. Wilson and Kiely (2002) discussed the limitations of each of these approaches in a paper asserting that the promise of Mezirow's transformation theory, including what came to be seen as its attack on Welton's (1995) "andragogical consensus," had not been met. Citing empirical work that illustrates the gap between the critical and emancipatory potential of transformation theory and its effectiveness in leading adults to actually engage in economic, social, political and environmental activism, Wilson and Kiely concluded that " … without a practical theory of critical learning, the profession of adult education will become increasingly irrelevant to and ineffectual in addressing the increasingly complex demands of adult educators to broker knowledge/power relations in their practice" (Cervero & Wilson as cited in Wilson & Kiely, 2002, p. 5). The authors see dialogue in the same light – as a method for increasing self-awareness that itself has been uncritically accepted as part of the process of social transformation. Noting that the kind of learning that induces adults to question long-held assumptions and challenge existing power structures is both overtly political and emotionally debilitating; and that further empirical work must be undertaken to analyze what it really means to resist and transform oppressive circumstances, Wilson and Kiely suggest that critical adult education must broaden its theoretical perspective.

Like Choudry, then, Wilson and Kiely are directly concerned with what Choudry calls "the intellectual work of activism," i.e., with the manner in which experience gained through involvement in social struggles or study can contribute to critical consciousness, producing better theory and more effective practice. I am reminded of two principles that Dewey (1938) thought essential to judging the contribution of direct experience to an educational program: the immediate benefit or "agreeableness" of the experience, and whether the experience could live functionally and materially in subsequent life experiences. "It is not enough to insist upon the necessity of experience, nor even of activity in experience," he said. "Everything depends upon the *quality* of the experience" (p. 27).

So, what might constitute a quality educational experience from the point of view of a critical theorist of adult learning, keeping in mind the diverse skills, perspectives and outcomes sought from that process? What are the steps one needs to undertake from the first position onward if one hopes to take a relatively unaware, uninitiated student and transform them into a

person who not only *perceives* the structures dominating his or her life, but develops a *commitment* to overcoming those forces, and subsequently *acts* on that commitment? Clearly, both experience and habits of mind and heart are important. I would also urge consideration of the idea that in addition to critical reflection, and going beyond perspective taking, the ability to understand the dimensions of moral action – that is, the multiple factors involved in acting on an ethical principle – is central to the development of such a program.

In a more recent paper, Kiely (2015) cited research of his own confirming the significance of this point. After assessing the practical and epistemological links between "critical" and "reflection" in an effort to understand the diverse traditions underpinning critical engagement, he observes that reflection itself is not inherently critical. Tying this idea to the possibility of transformative learning, Kiely stated that:

> … the longitudinal research I conducted demonstrated the value of critical reflection as a necessary but insufficient learning process for students' perspective transformation in [global service learning], and its connection to individual and social action. However, as this study indicated, students who engage in critical reflection *along with* [emphasis added] deeply visceral, relational and connected ways of learning often experience perspective transformation or profound shifts in their worldview that are personal, ethical, political, cultural, intellectual, and spiritual. (p. 11)

Herein lays a potential bridge between learning activism and the theoretical and pedagogical impasse that has afflicted critical adult education in recent years. Of that impasse, allow me to affirm that formal and informal learning are both forms of learning: universities have no monopoly on it, however much some may wish that to be the case. Moreover, I believe that an educational experience aimed at creating what is fundamentally an ethical motivation – a moral action undertaken in the belief that doing so is both necessary and, in this case, the best means of effecting social change – *must* bridge both the internal and external worlds of the learner in order to produce understanding, commitment and action.

Choudry himself provides us with perhaps the best recipe for conceptualizing the linkages between formal and informal moral/political education in a paragraph describing how the Workers' College of Durban, South Africa recognizes struggle knowledge as a form of prior learning. Beginning with students' experience, the college encourages them

> 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. … (Bofelo, Shah, Moodley, Cooper, & Jones as cited in Choudry, 2014, p. 282)

When, in addition to validating learning and providing important foundational knowledge, universities also show students how to practice what they learn (for example, Choudry teaches a graduate seminar at McGill on organizing nonformal learning), the likelihood that they will undertake direct moral action increases substantially – whether we're talking about students marching in the streets of Quebec or those residing in a seminar room, attempting to parse the hidden assumptions behind their sense of what's human and inhuman about the way we treat one another.

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