Social Movements and The Practice of Citizenship: Learning in the Canadian and Global Context

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About the authors

Pramila Aggarwal was born in India and began her career as an educator and activist there. She came to Toronto 1980s to pursue Doctoral studies at the University of Toronto in Sociology of Education. Soon after her arrival in Toronto she began working as a worker's rights activist with a focus on immigrant workers. She has continued her work locally, nationally and internationally on issues of participation, citizenship, workers' rights, human rights and community development for over 20 years. She teaches in the Community Worker Programme at George Brown College in Toronto.

Budd L. Hall has been working in the field of adult education since the early 1970s when he began his career at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. He was the co-founder of the Participatory Research Network in 1977 and later joined Dr. Rajesh Tandon in the building of the International Participatory Research Network. Budd worked for many years with the International Council for Adult Education and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto and currently works in the Faculty of Education, University of Victoria in British Columbia.

Pramila and Budd share a common interest in the role of learning as part of and in support of social movements. This paper is an exploration of how both their common and diverse experiences and perspectives might provide a useful means of deepening their own understanding of learning, citizenship and social movements. We want to make sense of how people learn to participate in social movements and how they become

citizens. As both authors make their living in the academe and are involved in different social movements, they consider themselves to be scholar-activists.

Social Movement Learning and the Practise of Citizenship

Social movements are intensive sites for the practice of democracy and citizenship. Learning, often taken for granted in social and political theorizing, is a critical element in both the understanding of social movements and the practice of citizenship, and as we will argue in the strengthening and sustaining of such practice. The authors explore the discourses of social movement learning, of citizenship as well as notions of participation. In spite of the obstacles put into place by the powerful to limit citizenship to elite players, workers, marginalized peoples, and in other ways oppressed women and men in Canada and elsewhere in the world continue day after day to organize against injustice in all of its forms. We will first speak to Social movement learning.

Social movement learning refers to several interconnected phenomena:

a) Informal learning occurring in persons who are part of a given social movement;

b) Intentional learning that is initiated and encouraged by the social movements for its membership; and c)formal and informal learning that takes place amongst the broad public, the citizens, as a result of the activities undertaken by the a given social movement.

We will expand on each of the above. Informal learning by those who are members of a social movement may be about new understandings of the issues of the movements themselves. For Example, those interested and involved in protecting the environment may acquire knowledge of the impact of global warming on the biosphere or the impact of the building of a dam. People who care about peace in the world , begin to see the relation between the proliferation of small arms in Africa and the huge profits for the arms industry.

In addition, informal learning may take the form of specific organizational skills, which are needed to reach social movement goals. These skills could include working with the media, creating web sites, raising funds or engaging in public speaking. In Toronto for example, the organization TOFFE (Toronto Organizing for Fair Employment) has provided opportunities for its members to learn the kinds of skills they

need to make their needs known. Some members were very intrigued and keen on learning to speak to reporters while others wished to learn to present their views to policy makers, government bureaucrats and politicians. Still others practiced calling into radio talk shows on the subject of employment law.

Intentional learning constitutes educational efforts to stimulate learning. These may take the form of internal "educationals" for members or public education or public information activities. Some social movements pay more attention to intentional educational activities than others. The peace movements, the cooperative movements, the environmental movements of late 20th century and early 21st century have quite elaborate formal or intentional education activities to community groups, schools and the general public. In the case of the labour movement, a considerable financial and personnel investment goes into intentional education of its membership. For instance, in 2003, the Ontario Federation of Labour held a day -long meeting of its affiliates to discuss the issue of precarious employment. This event was held both to support the work of TOFFE but more importantly to bring the issue home to its members who may have to deal with these new forms of employment. Members were presented with well researched information which was followed by a strategy session.

The third understanding of social movement learning is the learning that happens to those outside of social movements as a result of the activities of the social movements themselves. For example as a man, Budd has learned much about dimensions of power and perception amongst women and men from the women's movement even though he has not considered himself to be part of the women's movement.

Social movements are the places where new knowledge is created as people in positions of less power attempt to understand and change the world in certain directions. The tools of social movements and tools of citizenship which includes poetry, marches, protests, and political theatre are designed to reach beyond the movements themselves to people at large. For instance, the Pride Day parade in Toronto (a celebration of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, trans gendered and transsexual life) has evolved over the last 20 years into the largest annual event in the city. It draws thousands of participants from all over North America. Politicians who shied away from being seen near it now go out of their way to be seen in it. The Pride Day event has brought the issues of this community to

everyone's doorstep. It has informed, changed and affected both the apathetic and hostile alike. Such is the power of social movements to reframe our thinking and change the world.

The Practice of Citizenship

Citizenship is commonly understood in terms of a legal status of an individual in a nation. Each nation state decides who can be a citizen and who can have full citizenship rights. Most countries confer citizenship upon those individuals who are born in the particular country. But there are countries where neither birth nor long residency accrue citizenship status. Not only is this denial of citizenship is a serious contravention of an individual's human rights it also reduces and diminishes individuals and deprives society of their active participation.

For the purpose of this paper, we look at citizenship in its more expanded form. In this interpretation, citizenship implies engagement and participation of individuals in the making of decisions. We contend that the ability to participate is dependent on the power relations between those who control material resources and those who do not. In most societies, dominant groups whose composition is based on class, caste, race and/or gender place impediments in the way of ordinary people to prevent them from exercising citizenship rights These barriers are embedded in institutional structures, societal traditions and practices and result in limiting the avenues of participation of certain individuals and groups. When an individual or a group has been actively and deliberately excluded by the dominant group from meaningful participation in society, there is a tendency for these groups and individuals to become disaffected and alienated.

However, we will demonstrate that despite the impediments and barriers to participation, people have continued to press for their vision of a fair and equitable world. In this paper we document the "cultivation of an active and informed citizenry ". We will present the struggles of marginalized peoples such as immigrant workers and their efforts to get mobilized and organized to confront "bad bosses", corporations and the Canadian state. These marginalized actors are seeing some success in bringing their issues to the attention of lawmakers and to the larger community. This is a powerful illustration of

participatory citizenship. In these instances workers learnt about their rights and their own power. They are practicing citizenship, are able to speak up and speak out.

Setting the context: Canada

Canada's population is roughly 35 million people. It considers itself to be a liberal democracy with a strong sense of the importance of social policies and enjoys the reputation of being moderate and neutral in the international arena. Canada is a member of both the Commonwealth and Le Francophone. It is also a member of both the G8 and the G20. The first peoples in Canada, the Aboriginal peoples were nearly destroyed by nearly 500 years of genocidal policies and practices. In spite of this over one million Aboriginal peoples have not only survived, but are playing an increasingly active role in the reclaiming of land. They are working hard to retain their ancient languages, culture and in the recreation of Canadian culture.

A handful of families control most of the resources and wield incredible influence over public and social policy, over the last two decades, the life of ordinary Canadians has become harder. Canada is faced with a growing gap between rich and poor due to privatization, subsidies to corporations and public policy measures, which favour the wealthy. The once working class is now 'the working poor". It should be unimaginable that a person who works 40 hours a week and 12 months a year cannot provide for their everyday needs. A partial explanation for this phenomenon is the contemporary employment patterns which have been restructured away from full-time tenured forms of work--- towards flexible forms of employment in a "just-in-time" economy. Over 52 per cent of Canadian workers earn less than $15 per hour. Thirty seven per cent of working single mothers earn an annual salary of $18,200 based on 35 hours workweek. Three million three hundred thousand people are structurally excluded from the labour market as they are either unemployed or significantly underemployed. Forty five per cent of the Canadian work force have precarious employment situation.. It is the last category of workers that constitutes a disproportionate number of women, new immigrants and people of colour or "visible minorities".

Visible Minorities" Now you see them, Now you don't!

It is often said that Canada is a nation of immigrants. Furthermore it prides itself in nurturing and upholding democratic values. Most important amongst them is the

notion of equality for all. However, some people are less equal than others. Immigrants, by and large do not have equal rights, privileges and status. While the earlier white immigrants have been able to construct themselves as settlers not conquerors or usurpers, immigrants of colour have been eyed with much suspicion and some times with disdain. The Canadian establishment, through the it ruling elite has very effectively divided the population into "us " for some and "them" for most. The processing of "othering" is complex, layered, and dynamic. The "us" wields both the power to include and exclude.

The Canadian State policy of multiculturalism, not withstanding, the "diverse" population has very few means to enjoy or take pride in their own culture. It is usually the white folks whose world is now technicolour, because of all the people of colour, it is they who get to see the belly dances from Turkey, and eat *somosas* at the Toronto local Harbour Front festival of authors, and get their palms done in *hena.* In fact most people of colour remain invisible in the corridors of power and hidden working nights on the graveyard shift or cleaning offices.

For the last five years, TOFFE and Workers' Information Centre (WIC) have been assisting workers to get organized to speak up for their rights. Most of these workers are immigrants. They are employed in precarious employment situation where they experience insecurity of tenure, location, poor remuneration. Add to these insecurities harassment, discrimination, deplorable health and safety conditions, Some suffer more indignity and exploitation as they may not be able to speak English , or may not have legal status. They call or come to TOFFEE to recover unpaid wages, holiday pay or simply to ask questions. In the last meeting, 200 workers came to celebrate their struggles and solidarity. They participate in committees; make decisions about strategies and actions. These include hosting a show on the local Toronto Tamil radio and TV channels, organizing rallies and protests, confronting bad bosses, speaking at press conferences, and public forums.

How do the invisible become visible? How do the silenced get heard? How can the knowledge and wisdom of the people be used for strengthening of communities and society? For answers to these questions, we first turn to what we have learned from history and other scholars of social movement learning.

The two most cited figures in the academic literature on social movement learning are Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) and Paulo Freire (1921-1997). Peter Mayo(1998) has rendered the most succinct comparative analysis of these two intellectuals. Both Gramsci and Freire see the learning process most fully flourishing within social movement contexts. They both stress issues of commitment, agency, and political or structural change. While Gramsci contextualized his work in the notion of a working class movement of the early 20th century in Italy, Freire understood his work as relating to women and men in a wide variety of social movement contexts even though his own roots were in Latin America. The Freirean understanding of dialogue as a transformative educational practice, while powerful, is sometimes criticized for being silent on questions of gender, race or other forms of difference. What Freire does seem to get right is his emphasis on the importance of people writing their own history. In more recent times, a number of intellectuals, scholars and activists over the years such Mahatma Gandhi, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Jimmy Tompkins and Moses Coady of Canada, Myles Horton and Jane Adams of the US , Vandana Shiva and Medha Patkar of India who have planted the seeds of social movement learning.

Another notable initiative is The Transformative Learning Centre at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education has produced two useful contributions: Edmund O'Sullivan's *Transformative Learning, An Educational Vision for the 21'st Century* and O'Sullivan et al *Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning.* These rich writings carry the tradition of Freire into the 21st century and express a contemporary challenge for education to respond to calls for survival, critique and creation (p.13). The overall transformative learning framework sees learning as the core of the creation and recreation of community within an emerging global consciousness about planetary survival.

In addition, social movement learning is being actively explored in the adult education literature. Mattias Finger (1989), Michael Welton (1993) and John Holford (1995) have each put forward a kind of map of the linkages between social movements and adult learning. According to Finger, new social movements are the catalyst for personal transformation and the environment within which transformation occurs. They define the future topics of adult education. Learning within these movements is more

powerful than the impact of schooling. New social movements have a pedagogical perspective of 'learning our way out'. Matthias Finger and Jose Manuel Asun draw on the earlier themes by Finger in examining the tensions in contemporary adult education theory and practise in their book *Adult Education at the Crossroads.* This wide ranging study of contemporary trends in adult and lifelong learning theories draws a sharp distinction between the instrumental uses of adult education to assimilate community members into dominant structural life and the forms of adult learning needed for, as they say, "learning our way out."(p. 143). Social movement learning theory within the context of endogenous knowledge creation sees learning as a people's tool (political dimension); a democratic right (learning by all) and as learning from the world (epistemological dimension). This is contrasted to exogenous knowledge transmission which sees education as a tool of the system, a package for all, and education about the world

Welton argues that new social movements are both personal and collective in form and content. He sees them as 'privileged sites' of transformative learning or emmancipatory praxis. He asks the question, "What are adults learning?" in new social movements, but does not go much further than outlining some ways of understanding what the new social movements are responding to. He asks one of the key questions which we are trying to answer "Is something of great significance for the field of adult education occurring within these sites"?

Holford takes a somewhat different approach in finding much of importance in the work of social movement theorists Eyerman and Jamison (1991) who speaks of social movements as a location of "cognitive praxis". Eyerman and Jamison suggest that it is "through tensions between different groups and organizations over defining and acting in that conceptual space that the (temporary) identity of a social movement is formed." Through the notion of "cognitive praxis" they emphasize the creative role of consciousness and cognition in all human action, individual and collective. They look at social movements through the complex lens of social theory of knowledge that is both historically and politically informed. They focus simultaneously on the process of articulating a movement identity (cognitive praxis), on the actors taking part in this process (movement intellectuals), and on the context of articulation (politics, cultures, and institutions). What comes out of social movement action is neither predetermined nor

completely self-willed; its meaning is derived from the context in which it is carried out and the understanding that actors bring to it and/or derive from it. Eyerman and Jamison emphasize that social movements are not merely social dramas; they are the social action where from new knowledge including worldviews, ideologies, religions, and scientific theories originate.

There has been considerable research into the informal learning of adults as part of the work done by David Livingstone and his team at the University of Toronto within the New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL) research network (ref - website). Through work carried out in this network we have learned that all adults learn, by their own recognition, 8-10 hours per week through informal learning processes. This work empirically underscores the powerful learning capacities in each of us; the creative meaning making that we engage in as we go about our lives. Some of the specific studies undertaken as part of the NALL project has documented the rich learning environments in such social movement settings such as trade unions, community-based environmental groups, ex-psychiatric survivors (Martin, Clover, Church).

Social movements define themselves through the creation of new knowledge, new thoughts and new ideas. They are a socially constructive force and a fundamental determinant of human knowledge. As such they have profound implications for learning theory. Social movements are far more than 'sites of learning', but lie at the heart of the content of learning itself.

Learning in Social Action by the Australian Griff Foley may be the most thorough study on the theory and practise of informal learning within the context of a variety of social movement settings such as an environmental campaign, a neighbourhood house, a Brazilian women's organization and an African liberation struggle. His work illustrates how a social learning framework can help us understand complex socio-political environmental settings such as we found in the CCBWM project. He notes that informal learning emergences as well as advances social action. Examples of informal learning in one of his case studies draw attention to learning about: alternative organizational forms; links between spiritual and political action; the power of a small group of committed people; expertise can be acquired from outside; direct action is learned on the job; social ac Clover, Follen and Hall in their study, *The Nature of Transformation*, have articulated

the key principles of environmental adult education. These include: the need to passionately re-connect with the rest of nature through all out senses; the need to critically examine unjust power relations behind contemporary social and environmental trends; beginning to learn from where we are; taking responsibility for personal and collective action in our communities; transcending the limits of top-down educational models and learning through the creativity of music, poetry, story-telling and more. Carole Roy of Trent University has done an important study on the learning dimensions of Canada's "Raging Grannies" (Roy, Montreal: Blackrose Books, 2004). The Raging Grannies are older women who turn the stereotypes of old age upside down as they sing satirical and well researched songs of political protest on the steps of the legislature while dressed in old fashioned bonnets and dresses. Luc DeKeyser of the Katholic Universtet in Belgium has looked at 10 years of learning in social movements in the Netherlands and Belgium. Daniel Shugurensky of the University of Toronto has done much writing on learning and citizenship with a special emphasis on the participatory democracy experiences in Porto Alegre Brazil.

Conclusions

For those who are interested in deepening the practices of democratic citizenship whether in Canada or India; for those interested in broadening participation in local, regional, national or global social movement; or for those who dream or a world which is more just, more playful, more loving or more sustainable; we call for more attention to the learning, the educational dimensions of our work. If we can, together with those who support better understand how we learn to change the world; if we can learn how to provide more intentional opportunities for women and men to learn the skills they need to take their rightful positions in a democratic society; if our educational work can be filled with imagination, hope, insight and determination; the world which we want.

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