LEARNING, PARTICIPATION AND POWER
THE COMMUNITY TRAINING PLAN AT THE TORONTO COMMUNITY
HOUSING CORPORATION

by

Katherine L. Jeffery

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Department of Sociology and Equity Studies
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Abstract

Workplace learning and training is often explicitly or implicitly planned to serve the economic interests of the organization. Furthermore, training planning and processes are generally determined by managers, instead of those who will be engaging in the learning. What happens to learning in the workplace when workers themselves determine its content and methods? As seen in the Community Training Plan (CTP), implemented at the Toronto Community Housing Corporation in 2003, control over workplace training by frontline staff has resulted in profound changes in many facets of working and community life. Using testimonials from a recent participatory evaluation of the CTP as well as a series of promotional videos, all of which were created by participants in the CTP, I demonstrate that the CTP has created new forms of engagement and participation; new learning foci; new spaces in the workplace; and finally a sense of staff ownership over learning.
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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Frederick W. Taylor “...did not recommend reliance upon the ‘initiative’ [ie. the best endeavours, hardest work, all traditional knowledge, skill, ingenuity, and good will] of workers. Such a course, [Taylor] felt, leads to the surrender of control [by management]...” (Braverman, 1974, p. 2).

Formal workplace learning and training is often explicitly or implicitly planned to serve the economic interests of the organization first and foremost, and the learning agenda is almost always set by people other than those doing the learning. However, like any material or symbolic resource, the ability to construct and validate knowledge in the workplace affects the ways in which power manifests itself in those spaces. Control over the resources of knowledge production, whether it be in the planning of formal training or in the creation of spaces in which working people’s interests and standpoints are centered and applied, changes the relationships of power in the workplace and beyond.

By approaching workplace learning as a site of potentially conflicting interests, one can begin rethink how determining both workplace learning practices and curriculum has been constructed unproblematically as the responsibility of management. What happens to work, knowledge, people, and relationships when workplace training is planned by and for the people working on the frontlines of an organization, instead of by people in managerial positions?

The Community Training Plan (CTP) at The Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) is an example of how democratizing workplace learning, in terms of both the practices and formal training content, can positively affect the communities in and around the workplace. The CTP is a model developed in collaboration between management, union locals and staff whereby the learners themselves identify long and short term learning needs using discussion and deliberation. They also elect volunteer committees from amongst themselves to co-ordinate trainings, develop curriculum and select trainers.

This thesis begins with an exploration of some of the dominant conceptions of workplace learning in Chapter Two. With particular attention given to how various dynamics of power are infused in all learning and training, discussions are proposed relating to the ways learning at work is constructed as the naturalized domain of management. New management practices, known as ‘Post-Fordist’ trends, are investigated, followed by an
exposition of how these new practices create situations where the requirements of the workplace are increasingly invasive, pushing beyond an interest in skills and technical labour and into the emotional and social lives of workers. From there, the predominance of capitalist rationalism in organizational decision making relating to learning and training is considered, followed by a general critique of the absence of power from most workplace learning.

Chapter Three provides an overview of some alternative ways of thinking about workplace learning by drawing from the fields of progressive labour and workplace education, participatory democracy, and participatory action research. Participatory methods and the role of knowledge and power are explored, leading to the definition of a new form of workplace participation called “influential participation”. This definition enables an understanding of workplace participation that is both formalized through permanent procedures and organic in how it can elicit a real sense of influence and creativity in participants.

By way of introducing the empirical contribution of the thesis, Chapter Four details how a relationship and eventually this research developed between myself and the Training Unit at the TCHC. Then a specific outline of the methods applied and considerations taken while collecting and analyzing the materials used for the purposes of this work. Chapter Five offers some context to the CTP, including a brief history of social housing in Canada, the recent creation and development strategies of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation, and some details regarding the working conditions of the majority of participants in the CTP.

Chapter Six begins with the provision of an in-depth explanation of the structures and processes of the CTP, followed by an analysis of the preliminary outcomes seen in the videos and evaluation report produced by the staff participants in the training model. The sub-themes developed in this second part of Chapter Six are the kinds of changes and trends experienced by individuals and groups and described in the materials made available for analysis. They include: New Engagement and Participation; New Learning Foci; New Spaces in the Workplace; Staff Ownership of Learning. Finally in the concluding Chapter
Seven, an overview of the research conducted for this thesis is followed by proposals for future inquiry.

Through the CTP, staff at the TCHC are coming together to actively change their experiences of work. In many ways, I see the CTP as a way for people not only reclaim what they learn at work, but also to reclaim the work they are doing. The learning and growth emerging from the formal content of the CTP, and informally through participation in the model, have not only created change for individuals at work: the changes have been noticed amongst the staff, in relationships with tenants, and even outside the physical spaces of work, such as at home and in the community.
CHAPTER 2 – A CRITICAL REVIEW OF WORKPLACE LEARNING LITERATURE

This chapter offers a preliminary overview of themes in workplace learning literature that emerge from the relationship between power and knowledge in the workplace. It will examine current trends in workplace learning, as well as trends in how they are written about. It attempts to ask key questions and pushes for more critical answers than those generally provided by those writing in the field, whether they are business consultants, adult educators or academics. A central component of this chapter will be to problematize the ways in which learning and work are so often written about and done as if they existed outside the multiple forms of conflicting interest, including but not limited to traditional class conflict. By highlighting the existence of multiple versions of the existing and potential effects of learning at work and the ways in which the conflicts between these versions are silenced by the managerial perspective and discourses, a space will be carved out where people seeking change might begin to take action.

How can we understand the apparent contradictions that arise during the production of goods and services, when the relationships between people working together simultaneously manifest themselves as co-operation and conflict? Peter Sawchuk (2006) explains that there exists a “pragmatic, shared, and generally co-operative orientation by both workers and management toward the intrinsic, practical usefulness of the service or product” (p. 604-5). He describes this orientation as being toward the “use-value” of work or human activity, part of which includes a “shared interest in maintaining a reasonable environment of human interrelation (i.e. use-value in terms of friendship, recognition, respect, identity formation, etc.)”. However, he goes onto explain that “...none of this precludes the conflict that necessarily emerges as use-value generation comes into relationship with the over-arching need to generate ever increasing levels of exchange-value and profit, in the classic analysis of antagonistic relations of production, subversion, resistance, sabotage and so on” (p. 604). As a consequence of these antagonistic relations, critical researchers in the field of learning and work have pointed to the importance of recognizing multiple and competing interests at stake. Tara Fenwick (2003) describes a case study conducted by Bowerman and Peters (1999) that “demonstrates the inevitable conflict between organizational expectations ... and the nature of learning experienced by participants” (p. 622). Bruce Spencer (2002) states that “[o]nce we acknowledge that there
are different interpretations of workplace learning and that organizations are not ‘unitary’ (with everyone in the organization sharing exactly the same goals) but ‘pluralist’ (with different interests sometimes coinciding, sometimes conflicting) in nature, we can begin to examine different interests and outcomes” (p. 301). Such approaches stand in contrast to what I fear is a much more of common one, whereby ‘co-operation’ (supported by a discourse of capitalism) is described, sought, and advocated. David Boud (2003) provides an example of this approach in his introduction to an edited collection on learning at work. He explains that “different emphasises” in the study of work and learning have created “much misunderstanding” between researchers, their clients, and employers, and he exclaims that there is a perception “...on the part of employers that research on workplace learning is not oriented to their interests and on the part of academic researchers that business is not interested in learning!” (p. 7). To say nothing of the absence of the interests of working people in his discussion, his exclamation suggests to me that he finds it absurd that there could be conflicting interests in the study of work and learning – that any detection of this can be relegated to a mere ‘perception’ or illusion, and that through better communication, agreement will emerge.

It is interesting and perhaps significant that workplace knowledge (and hence learning) is recognized as a key interest for those who manage others at work. In the 1970s, Harry Braverman explained that Scientific Management or ‘Taylorism’, an early but still significant brand of managerial practice, explicitly states the importance of controlling knowledge for ‘effective’ management. Braverman writes that Taylor “…did not recommend reliance upon the “initiative” [i.e. the best endeavours, hardest work, all traditional knowledge, skill, ingenuity, and good will] of workers. Such a course, he felt, leads to the surrender of control [by management]...” (1974, p. 102). With knowledge a key way in which management can gain control over the work process, if not working people themselves, the metaphor ‘education as invasion’ (Head, 1977, cited in Foley, 2001, p. 75) takes on a less metaphorical, more real quality.

The intention of the sections to follow is to re-politicize how learning and training happen in the workplace by demonstrating the ways in which current practices silence and ignore the role of knowledge as a resource, in which groups with conflicting interests all
have a stake. This will later enable an appreciation of those aspects of the Community Training Plan at the TCHC which run counter to the dominant trends in the theory and practices of learning at work.

**Trends In Conceptualizing Learning At Work**

**The Naturalized Domain of Management**

Approaching work and learning literature with an interest in power/knowledge in the workplace has been a sobering experience. Non-formal and informal learning, whether it be in terms of writing curriculum, structuring learning activities, determining learning needs, are overwhelmingly represented as the naturalized domain of the nation state, adult educators and more than either of those, of management within the business organization. An example of this narrow representation can be found in the introduction to Garrick and Boud’s edited book entitled “Understanding Learning at Work” (1999). They write: “[t]he imperatives of work mean that an understanding of learning issues is needed at all levels. *Educators and managers* have to find a way of communicating about this” (emphasis added, p. 2). Garrick and Boud’s “all levels” excludes the very people (and their interests) whose learning is of such importance. It begs the question of whose interests and agendas will determine the definition, direction and nature of the learning needing “understanding”, and to what extent those interests will run contrary to those of the learners. Candy and Matthews (1999), in describing management strategies within ‘knowledge-creating companies’, discuss how knowledge and skills created and shared between every level of the enterprise must be ‘consciously and continuously’, and ‘carefully and deliberately’ managed (p. 55). My interest in looking at these examples of literature is less related to the ethics or wisdom of particular management strategies than it is to how these strategies present learning at work as the naturalized responsibility and legitimized purview of management. Why must it be so, and whose interests are ultimately being fulfilled?

Interestingly, many adult education perspectives on learning in the workplace present a similar bias, where there are groups of knowers and groups of learners and the former has the authority to make decisions that affect the latter. For instance, Bierema (2002) writes that educators are required to “...question power dynamics in the learning
setting to assess whether and how power should be shared with the learner...”. This article was written for managers, and covered the importance of understanding diversity and the social context of learning in the workplace. However, Bierema reaffirms the privilege, if not of managers directly, of educators as the ‘knowers’ in the workplace by leaving the question of the distribution of power up to their discretion.

**Post-Fordist Management**

While some writers place the rise of post-Fordist management in the aftermath of the Second World War, others identify the 1980s as the decade when this apparent shift really took hold. In characterizing this perspective, Bratton, Mills, Pyrch, and Sawchuk (2004) explain that “competitive survival depended upon greater labour flexibility and the enlistment of workers’ creative agency”, which could be achieved through engaging workers in problem solving and “quality decision making” (p. 13). This was perceived as a departure from the Taylorist/Fordist principles of managerial control over every aspect of the labour process in the interests of efficiency. However, Bratton, Mills, Pyrch, and Sawchuk (2004) point out that “Taylorism is not a failed ideology...”; they argue that “Taylorism is being ‘resurrected’ and ‘re-packaged’ ... under the total quality management label”(p. 22). This is especially true, they argue, in the high technology sector. Forrester, Frost and Ward (2000) describe “the learning organization” as centering on the concept of “human capital” (p. 484). They argue that such organizations seek to advance corporate agendas through horizontal structures of co-ordination, decentralization of management systems, people-focused activity, empowerment, personal growth and reciprocal trust. Paul Thompson refers to the “qualitative intensification of labour” when explaining how “in the labour process, companies are now much more concerned with identifying the tacit knowledge and skills of employees ... and extracting and utilizing them on a continual basis” (2003, p. 363). “Total Quality Management” is one manifestation of this new management style, which seems most prevalent in the service sector. Knights and McCabe (2000) explain that “total quality management” is a departure from the bureaucratic processes which “often stimulate resistance” on the part of employees (p. 421). However, they explain that control is exerted in different ways, despite the discourses around decentralization. Control
under total quality management and other post-Fordist management styles is exercised through more normative means of employee self-discipline (Knights and McCabe 2000, p.412). Edwards and Usher (2002) use Foucauldian theory to examine the nature of this form of control, and suggests that it resembles Foucault’s concept of “pastoral” power. He explains that pastoral power is

... exercised through ‘confession’, where the self is constituted as an object of knowledge, self-regulation, self-improvement and self-development (Foucault 1981). ... For example though appraisal and training, employees might be said to become more subjectively aligned with the goals of the organisation, thereby requiring less direct supervision. (p. 45)

In the same vein, Spencer (2002) describes what he calls “Forrester’s trap” as a situation in which workplace learning, with its “capturing” of employee subjectivity and re-combining of hand and mind in the workplace, is a new form of oppression and control (p. 299). Knights and McCabe (2000) paint a similarly bleak picture, whereby certain management systems, under euphemistic names such as ‘total quality’, enable managerial control to “enter areas that employees may previously have considered ‘their’ own private domain” (p. 433). This brings us to the next trend in contemporary workplace learning: the increasingly ‘invasive’ reach of management into new spheres of working people’s lives.

**Increasingly ‘Invasive’**

Total quality management, alongside similar programs and increasingly ‘humanistic’ learning models, have been described as “increasingly invasive” insofar as they attempt to enlist parts of employees lives and selves previously considered private or personal. While this trend would most likely be of interest to anyone looking critically at trends in learning at work, I have not read as much about this trend affecting work experiences outside the service sector, such as manufacturing. In keeping with the Foucauldian principal of ‘pastoral power’ described above, Edwards and Usher (2002) write that “[t]hrough certain practices and techniques, such as those of human resource management, people’s inner lives are brought into the domain of power – technologies of the self are interlinked with technologies of power” (p. 46). Interestingly Edwards and Usher (2002) associate the shift from trade union activism to ‘counselling’ (p. 46) with this interlinking of ‘technologies of
the self’ with those of power in the workplace. They perceive the connection as being based upon how exploitation and bad working conditions are channelled into the individual and dealt with as “stress”. Governance in the workplace, they explain, is no longer through force and repression, but through ‘educating’ and ‘empowering’ people to govern themselves” (p.46). As such, the reach of control of management and human resource developers within organizations expands, and it does so under the discursive guise of benevolence and employee empowerment.

Tara Fenwick writes about how organizational learning demands “explicit confessional critical reflection” of employees, whereby the most private aspects of individuals’ worlds are “conscripted” for the organization’s purposes (Fenwick T. J., 2003, p. 623). However, it is not only personal or private realms that are being “tapped” for the purposes of the organization: for instance, informal social networks amongst employees are also perceived as potentially useful for the purposes of the organization. Paul Thompson (2003) argues that the performance criteria required by the labour process is being stretched and broadened as employers move away from “a predominantly technical and task-based definition of skills in favour of a broader range of social competencies” (p. 363). For instance, Knox Jr. and Walker (2003) advocate identifying leaders from within the people paid hourly wages in an organization, and providing them with leadership training. Their argument is based on the productivity benefits of providing leadership training to management and executives within the same organization. In this article, informal social networks and leadership are uncritically called “untapped resources” (p. 40). Mojab and Gorman (2003) also argue that the concept ‘the learning organization’ not only commodifies and appropriates some forms of learning happening in an organization, but also some of the informal social interactions that develop between staff. This, they argue, further separates workers from each other and from themselves (p. 237).

Finally, I’d like to associate the implications of “increasingly invasive” forms of management and learning in the workplace, especially as they appear under the more euphemistic labels, with the tools of control in the workplace. Fenwick reminds her readers that the “worker is always visible” to management, and as such is always “vulnerable to discipline and subjugation by being known” (Fenwick, 2003, p. 626). The extended demands
of the labour process relating to the social and emotional lives of employees are accompanied by the supervisory gaze of management, with implications for job security. Paul Thompson explains how the increasingly invasive demands of new management styles are not met with an increase in job security which may have been born out of demonstrations of loyalty and participation by employees. By citing Burchell, et al. (1999), he summarizes this situation as resulting in a “collectivization of effort and decollectivization of risk” (Thompson, p. 364-5). Furthermore, this “visibility” is more or less pronounced for certain bodies relating to race, age, gender, class, immigration status, sexuality, ability, etc. As such, as the reach of power and privilege extends further into the individual life in these increasingly invasive forms of management systems, it results in greater vulnerability of some groups vis-à-vis other groups and social institutions.

**Dominance of Capitalist Rationalism and its Effects on Knowledge in the Workplace**

The demands of the market, productivity and board members are often the central consideration in decision making in the workplace. This includes decisions relating to learning and training made within organizations. Elaine Butler (1999) argues that the “…very situatedness [of work-related learning] within capitalist discourses of paid work and the materiality of workplaces enhances the potential for the cooption of ‘learning’ continually to improve productivity and profits” (p. 133). This “cooption” is in opposition to the possibilities of work-related learning as a site of struggle for equity. Garrick (2002) explains that it is the “financial and numerical performance indicators” (emphasis added, p. 6) that determine the “value” of workplace learning in capitalist workplaces. He explains that “[i]f something cannot be shown to be effective, it becomes dubious. Dubious corporate overheads are not carried for long…” (p. 6). This economic rationalism that dominates in corporate settings is extended to other sectors, explains Spencer (2002). He writes of the “imposition of business rhetoric on non-business organizations…[where] [s]cant regard is paid to the notion of the “public good” or the quasi-democratic structures that govern these organizations and distinguish them from corporate capital” (p. 301).

Mojab and Gorman (2003) explain that the convergences between the state, not-for-profit organizations and the market are blurring the lines between these sectors, the result of
which can be the co-option of “feminist and class consciousness” by the “unending corporate quest for capital” (p. 238).

Knowledge in the workplace, at least insofar as how it is identified and constructed, is often inevitably affected by economic rationalism. The distinction between knowledge as it exists and knowledge as it is identified and constructed in the workplace is significant. While I discuss the implications of this construction in a subsequent section of this thesis, I wish now to simply bring attention to the links of how knowledge is constructed by and for the purposes of the organization based on economic rationalism. Sawchuk (2006) writes that labelling, constructing and rewarding knowledge and knowledgeable workers, despite the demonstrated difficulty in quantifying actual “skilled and knowledgeable behaviour”, is associated with the organizational desire to enhance individual productivity (p. 599).

Individualizing practices in the workplace are another manifestation of economic rationalism or capitalism in the workplace. Not only do they influence how social relations are conceptualized, but also the ways knowledge and learning are constructed. If in the workplace “knowledge is commodified, packaged, differentially valued and costed, not so much as a public (or even private) good but as a traded good” and “learners/workers as human resources/capital”, (Butler 1999, pg 137) any ideas about the ways knowledge exists as a common good within groups are lost. The process described by Butler above, whereby ‘knowledge’ comes to be represented by degrees, diplomas, certificates and other forms of accreditation, not only individualizes knowledge but also fosters competition between people. Furthermore Butler’s conception of knowledge is interesting insofar as how it relates to more ‘local’ knowledges developed between people working together. Not only might such knowledges seem difficult to ‘differentially value and cost’, but also, as discussed below, they are seldom recognized by organizational decision makers or formal educational institutions.

Garrick (1998) writes that, considering the connections between power, knowledge and control, “…the possible outcomes of market forces determining “valid” knowledge become disturbing” (p. 6). He uses the example of how human resource managers have taken up a very limited notion of experiential learning defined by its contribution to “learning about the most efficient outcomes sought. If it does not, it is discounted” (p. 51).
Furthermore, Garrick cites Methchild Hart (1993) who argues that “the contemporary valuing of workplace knowledge through skills and competencies is ‘oriented towards maintaining or restoring the economic status quo...’” (p. 20). Workplace knowledge and skills are also valued as a marketable commodity in so-called “learning organizations”, explains Mojab and Gorman (2003), the value of which is determined by competition. The result of which is that learning is alienated from the learners, something which is significant when the demands of the labour process increasingly extend to personal growth, thoughts, emotions and experiences (Mojab and Gorman 2003 p. 235).

Constructing knowledge based on definitions and forms (e.g. “measurable competencies”) conducive to economic rationalism creates a hierarchy of knowledges and knowers. Therefore, any critique of the construction of “valid” knowledge must include a critique of how certain knowledges, knowers and learning processes are valued over others. Barnett (2000) speaks of how “worthwhile” knowledge is a historical construction that shifts overtime, yet maintains a language of categorizing knowledge based on worth or value. His discussion of what ‘counts’ as knowledge is not accompanied by a questioning of who is doing the counting. As such, he reinforces the power structures which create a hierarchy of knowledge and knowers.

An interesting manifestation of this constructed hierarchy of knowledge and knowers is the investment organizations make in education and training. Spencer (2002) explains that “most organizational education/training budgets are biased in favour of professional workers – fewer corporate dollars are spent on those workers with little or no formal education” (p. 301). He explains that if workers with little or no formal education do receive training opportunities, they are limited to workplace health and safety issues or training and orientation.

**The Absence of Power**

The absence of any discussion of power is closely connected to the naturalization of learning in the workplace as the domain of management. The project to depoliticize workplace learning, carried out through practices and trends such as non-bureaucratic management styles, increased invasions of management into the lives of working people,
and ranking of knowledges and knowers based on economic rationalism, is a project that hides conflicting interests and the exploitative relations of power that give rise to them. By relations of power, I am not simply referring to the explicit distribution of power based on the hierarchical classification of jobs. Power manifests itself in the workplace along intersecting boundaries of age, race, immigration status, class, gender, sexuality and ability. As a result, one’s social location in the workplace is determined by these relations of power in much the same way as it is determined outside the workplace. Certain people know a degree of social and material privilege in the workplace irrespective of their job classification, while others experience negative sanctions as a result of the same processes. Depoliticizing the workplace, linked to the ways in which individuals are generalized or homogenized, serves to also obscure and thereby sustain the privileges of class, gender, race, immigration status, ability, ability and sexuality.

Typical of the invisibilizing of power and conflict in workplace learning are depoliticized statements such as: “[i]t is increasingly clear that individuals, teams, entire workplaces, and even society at large are bound together by a common concern for and commitment to learning” (Candy and Matthews 1999, p. 61). Tara Fenwick (2006) explains that such “conventional apolitical approaches” are critiqued based on how they “...ignore the power relations that determine hierarchies in what learning is most valuable, what counts as skill, and what knowledge remains marginal or unnamed” (p. 289). This positioning of workplace learning within broader contexts of power reflect the close connections between processes within organizations and those existing in other social spheres.

Fenwick (2006) goes on to write that “[k]nowledge or skill [in the workplace] has as much to do with what is actually recognized and mobilized as it does with workers’ performed and observed capability (p. 298). Implicit in this statement is the authority of some to ‘recognize and mobilize’ knowledge and skills. Not only is the authority strategically removed from groups of workers based the principles of management, but there is the secondary consequence arising from the fact that most managers use capitalist, economic rationalism and other oppressive ideologies in their decision making. Peter Sawchuk (2006) links the project to “label, construct and reward knowledge and knowledgeable workers” to
the valuation by organizations on individual productivity and competition, whereby people are “constructed as individuals vis-a-vis a labour market”. This, he argues, ultimately serves “...the need by one social group to control and appropriate the efforts of others” (Sawchuk, 2006 pg 599). This analysis can be enriched when the intersectional understanding of social groups is applied, whereby individualizing discourses erase multiple sources and experiences of shared struggle. This critical approach to workplace learning re-politicizes the multiple ways in which ‘knowledge’ in the workplace can be used in the interests of some and to the detriment of others.

**Trends In Writing About Learning And Work**

This second section continues from the first, although relates more specifically to how learning in the workplace is discursively framed and conceptualized in organizational and academic spaces, and the particular consequences of such discourses on practice and experience. The frames and conceptualizations identified include the way learning and work is frame by the current, usually global, trends in the nature of work; the de-politicization of learning in the workplace; and the neo-liberal project to not only conceptually homogenize or generalize workers, but also to individualize them.

**Framing**

There are some academic and corporate writers who, when beginning discussions of learning and work, use broad, sweeping statements about the changing nature of work, of what are considered ‘useful’ skills, and of pressures arising from global competition. Framing learning and work in this way can do at least two things: offer ‘explanations’ for the decisions of organizations that affect working people negatively, and b) normalize certain experiences of work and workplace learning while erasing others. Peter Sawchuk (2006) explains that industrial and post-industrial theses since World War II argue that routinized work (and particularly physically exhausting and/or repetitive work) is year by year being replaced by new technology and work systems that require greater use of information, knowledge, greater discretion, smarter workers and symbolic analysts, all fuelled by advanced education and training: like the dinosaurs, it was argued, ‘bad jobs’ were to simply become extinct. (p. 595-6)
Such theories describing the increasing demand for these new skills and ‘advanced’ training further the erasure and subsequent marginalization of other kinds work and skills. More attention needs to be paid to the implicit intent and perspective of writers based on the way discussions of work and learning are framed. The approach to any issue – usually in the form of a question or problematic, says a great deal about how the issue will be analyzed and solutions proposed. Often, economic or organizational perspectives, whether in corporate or academic writing, are used as neutral frames or approaches in workplace research (Wilpert, 1998, p. 41). This framing “neutrality” is works in tandem with the other ways in which learning and work is de-politicized in writing.

Learning and work, it can be argued, falls at a nexus of multiple social and individual phenomena relating to power, including those involving work, identity, knowledge, production. Yet despite its importance relative to these phenomena, workplace learning has not frequently been taken up as part of this broader context (Garrick, 1998, p. 3). Tara Fenwick (2008) conducted an analysis of academic journal articles relating to workplace learning and found that,

> [g]iven the importance of power in relations of individual–collective learning, the low attention paid to power in these articles is significant. Only around 15 percent touched upon power relations in any way, including politics of microsocial relations, knowledge and identity, organizational hierarchies and recognitions. Gender issues were addressed in less than 10 percent of the material and race or class issues in less than 5 percent. Those articles that discuss power in any depth are almost exclusively theoretical in nature (Huzzard, 2004). In empirical studies where power is mentioned the reference is often kept general or focused on the micro-politics of the organization rather than systemic analyses of how power functions to position people and practices, promote interests, recognize some knowledge and ignore others. (p. 238-9)

The absence of power in the bulk of discussions of learning and work, whether the power be manifested along lines of race, gender, class, age, ability, immigration status etc., is “significant”. Academic writers create as they write; as such, writing about people or experiences without consideration for intersecting relations of power creates an illusion of unproblematic interactions, of sameness where there is diversity, of agreement where there is conflict. Even when emancipatory models are brought into the workplace, visions of
collaboration across an organization, untempered by consideration of the effects of historical, entrenched relations of power, are described by Fenwick as “...not only delusional, but [as also perpetuating] the myth of unitary interests and ideologies which historically has generated worker alienation” (2003 p. 626). Similarly, Spencer (2002) describes the works of Lowe (2000) and Kincheloe (1999) as “refreshing” in so far as they both acknowledge the existence of inequalities of power in their discussion of work and learning, but suggests that they do “suspend this understanding in their enthusiasm for advocating collaboration and change” (Spencer, 2002 p. 300).

The Generalized Conceptions of the Individual at Work

Similar to the way that learning and work can be implicitly imagined in narrow ways through framing, the individual worker is also imagined in ways that suggest a normalized body, job, culture, and life. This is part of the project to depoliticize the workplace in writing, as well as in practice as seen in earlier discussions, where diversity of experience, circumstances and perspectives are erased. Butler (1999) writes that “…workers [are] represented in workplace learning texts as compliant and disembodied…” (p. 136). Probert (1999 referencing Acker, 1990) explains that “the ‘closest a disembodied worker doing the abstract job comes to a real worker is the male worker whose life centers on his full time, lifelong job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and his children’” (p. 102). While clusters of critical literature have emerged within the field, general and homogenous conceptions of the individual worker remain largely unquestioned in the mainstream literature.

Relating more specifically to learning in the workplace, part of the way in which workers are constructed in the workplace related to understandings of skill and knowledge. There exist normalized distinctions in academic writing between workers who are legitimate knowers or learners, and those who are not. Such distinctions “…function to secure the continuing privilege of those who already are the most educated, [as they will go on] enjoying most access to learning opportunities (Fenwick 2003, p. 624). The privileges associated with having one’s perspectives and understandings and skills recognized in the workplace work in conjunction with the privileges of other intersecting forms of power
relations in the workplace. This political complexity (so often omitted in writing on the topic) points to the irrelevancy of trying to create a “level playing field” where conflicting knowledges might be ‘judged’ by supposedly neutral decision makers. Constructions of knowledge and knowers in the workplace, as seen in several other places in this thesis, serve the interests of some, and perpetuate relations of exploitation.

Not only do these omissions ignore the multiple and intersecting power dynamics in the workplace and silence diverse perspectives, but they go onto create a separation between the workplace and other spheres of life. Furthermore, knowledge arising out of the experience and position of marginality are never expressed and anti-democratic relations of power in the workplace continue to shape how people work, learn and live.

**Individualizing Discourses**

The way learning is written about is often times reflective of a broader neo-liberal agenda that centers analysis on and valorizes the individual. Successes and failures are seen to be based upon individual ability and effort, while the influence of social location and context, of institutional factors and of social groups, are downplayed or ignored. Tara Fenwick draws attention to the individualistic tendencies of much of the writing on learning and work, especially in the field of human resource development. She argues that

> [individualistic and acquisitive learning theories are ... highly limited, usually apolitical and acontextual, lacking historical and sociological analysis of knowledge generation, ignoring cultural psychology and geography, and unable to account for the dynamic and often contradictory interactions of individuals with and in the turbulence of everyday activity (2006, pg 297).](#)

In addition to determining the learning theories applied in the workplace, individualistic conceptions of learning at work also shape how the benefits of learning at work are represented. For instance, Garrick and Boud (1999) explain that they perceive the importance of workplace learning as being to organizations and to “individual workers/participants” (p. 3). No mention is given to how learning might be useful and important to groups within an organization, especially groups formed around divisions of power in the workplace and in broader society. Such groups might include labour union locals or informal networks centred around particular social groups such as women.
Learning and knowledge takes on a certain political relevance when considered in the context of groups, something lost when writing and analysis focuses solely on organizations and the individuals within them.

Furthermore, the way in which people’s capacity for resistance is represented in workplace learning literature is often individualizing. In keeping with neo-liberal notions of individuals as empowered to change their own reality, the trend in research seems to be away from resistance through collective action and towards resistance through individual subjectivities. For instance, Billet, Smith, and Barker (2005) argue that individuals construct “inherently individual” meanings and goals, which enable them to resist and manipulate regulatory practices of the workplace (p. 224). Knights and McCabe (2000) discuss how individual interpretation and reflection are ways in which the people can resist the ‘regulatory practices’ of the workplace and retain “discretionary autonomy” (p. 422). Interestingly Knights and McCabe qualify their focus on individual avenues for resistance by stating that “…individualisation is the effect of the power of a humanistic discourse that elevates and celebrates the autonomy of the self in contrast to the communality of the social” (p. 424). In an unusual way, they recognize that the individualistic basis of their own argument is itself the result of a historically constructed discursive project. At any rate, and without denying the relevance of their argument, I maintain that it is at best partial. A more complete analysis, which includes how individuals constitute and are constituted by the various groups and communities to which they belong, is required.

**Conclusion: Toward Critical Conceptualizations of Learning At Work**

As we have seen in the preceding sections of this thesis, workplace learning is being increasingly if still insufficiently recognized as an important component in shaping individual lives and broader social dynamics. Nicky Solomon (1999) writes that

> [a]s workplace learning becomes increasingly integrated into everyday work practices and further away from discrete classroom training programmes, the socializing of people to be certain kinds of workers is accompanied by a complementary socialization to be certain kinds of learners. (p. 123)
If people’s learning is dominated by the interests of the organizations which employ them, and these interests are steeped in dominant, intersecting and oppressive ideologies such as in economic rationalism and neo-liberal understandings of the individual, the effects will be felt in individual lives, within families, in local communities, and in society as a whole.

If control over learning in the workplace could be reconfigured, how might knowledges which are otherwise shared informally amongst people, emerge and fill a legitimized and more valued role within organizations and in the broader community? Peter Sawchuk writes of the importance of informal learning especially to “subordinate groups who find it a refuge where their social standpoint and culture can find positive expression” (2003, p. 638). What if these social benefits could be given more importance in the business agendas of learning and work, and more consideration when representing learning and work in academic and corporate writing? Furthermore, what if recognition and importance were given to the learning that results from “...workplace unionism, collective struggles, and community activism [where] groups of men and women [challenge] power structures which control workplace or community decision making” (Bratton, Mills, Pyrch, & Sawchuk, 2004, p. 70)? How might this be of interest to those seeking to strengthen democratic processes, broaden perspectives, and bring about social change?
CHAPTER 3 – KNOWLEDGE, POWER AND PARTICIPATION

At the conclusion of the previous chapter, a question was asked regarding the significance of the learning which emerges from spaces and actions of workplace resistance within the broader movement for democracy and progressive social change in the workplace and beyond. This is especially relevant if one is to understand the nature and outcomes of learning models in the workplace that attempt to change how knowledge gets built, valued and shared. In this chapter, participation, and more specifically what I call “influential participation” will be proposed as a procedural mechanism for fostering this form of learning and social change. After providing a definition of influential participation in the workplace, combining ideas of formal structure, subversiveness and the element of power, the focus will move towards the broader relationship between knowledge and power. Specifically, questions about the strengths and challenges of participatory research and influential participation in the area of workplace learning will be posed, with an overall understanding that the two activities ought to be far less differentiated from each other than they generally are.

Participation

What does it mean to ‘participate’ within organizations as an employee in ways that increase democratic distributions of power and enhance the experience of work for oneself and others? In the context of the workplace, there are different, albeit intersecting, categories of participation which have been named, each referring to individual participation but differing in terms of purpose, relationship with institutional structures, degree of influence, etc. As such, it is important to clarify what is meant when, in the context of this thesis, we talk about people “participating” in the workplace. According to the Dachler and Wilpert framework, as seen in McCaffrey, Faerman, & Hart (1995, p. 606), participative systems in the workplace are defined as follows: firstly, “participation is a formal intervention strategy usually manifested through management policy or mandate”. Secondly, “participation includes the direct involvement of parties as opposed to their representation”. Thirdly, “the role of the involved parties is more than advisory; they have the right to make, or heavily influence, the final decision”. Fourthly, “the participative systems engage important issues, and the parties involved regard the issues as important”.

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Fifthly, “the participative systems attempt to involve a wide range of stakeholders in problems”. McCaffrey, Faerman, & Hart add a sixth point, that there is “an aspiration to move through these systems toward a higher level of mutual regard and respect”. While this definition offers a strong basis for the particular form of workplace participation upon which this thesis focuses, the element of power and the challenges participatory processes can pose to the status quo are largely missing. Sherry Arnstein’s (1969) “citizen participation” offers a definition of participation in civic governance which highlights how the redistribution of decision making power can create progressive social change. She explains that

...[C]itizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future... In short, it is the means by which they can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society. (Arnstein, 1969)

Because the focus of this definition is on process, it could be argued that citizen participation in civic society might bear commonalities with similar initiatives in other spheres of social life. George Strauss (2006) defines participation simply as a process whereby employees influence their work and working conditions. He stipulates that there is a crucial difference between actual influence, and the feeling of it, and that further, participation as “influence” is an active engagement, where as participation as “involvement” is passive (p. 779). In this way, his definition reflects the form of participation upon which this thesis is focused. Dachler and Wilpert, Arnstein, and Strauss’s descriptions of participation might apply equally to research, governance, municipal budgeting, training planning in the workplace, etc. In the workplace, these definitions taken together might translate into a redistribution of decision making power that would enable non-managerial staff to have influence within the organization, whereby the various benefits of the organization might be more equally shared. However, the term “participation” alone doesn’t seem to adequately convey what this particular form of participation is and does. As such, for the remainder of this thesis, I’d like to use the term “influential participation” to refer to participation in formal decision making processes by those typically excluded
from them in a way that centers their interests and perspectives, empowers them to act despite hierarchical structures of power, and unsettles the control elites exercise over knowledge production.

The actual redistribution of power described by Arnstein is only one aspect of the possible benefits of this kind of rethinking of participation in the workplace. As mentioned above, engaging in influential participation systems bears substantial opportunities by which people can learn about (and enhance) their agency, as well as learning about other rewards and possibilities of participation. I’d also like to add that refusal to participate, because it represents the choice of an individual or group, is also a form of participation, even of influential participation. Resistance, including everything from strikes to soldiering to disengagement to mistrust, ought to be conceived as an active expression of the interests of an individual or group.

By breaking down the arguments for participation into three categories, George Strauss (1998a) discusses what he describes as the ‘cases for participation’ (pg 8-10). These include humanistic reasons, or the psychological and social development of the individual; ideological and moral reasons, based on an understanding of the injustice of traditional relations; and organizational reasons, which see participation as a means to increased efficiency and better decision making. I would add to the weight of the second point, arguing that ‘social justice’ is not only a moral or ideological reason for participation. Largely omitted from Strauss's breakdown are the benefits that participation (and democratic practices) might bring to the communities that exist in and around the workplace. Influential participatory systems bring bodies, knowledges and perspectives to the decision-making table that wouldn’t otherwise be there, and thereby facilitate the advancement of the interests of diverse communities to the ultimate benefit of all. As such, it is not simply morally ‘right’ to balance the traditional power inequities, but leads to positive change for all concerned.

Bernhard Wilpert (1998) discusses the consequences of ‘participation’ as falling into three similar categories: individual, organizational and societal. In discussing individual consequences, he describes satisfaction, rising aspirations, competence acquisition, career implications and ‘learning transfer’ or spill-over effects into other areas of the person’s
private life (p. 61). His description of the consequences at the organizational level includes “organizational climate”, culture, organizational identity and image, productivity and quality (p. 62-63). Finally, and only briefly, Wilpert addresses what he calls the ‘societal’ consequences of participation, ambiguously and very briefly describing “democratic environments”. Again, the interests of groups and communities can be located within each of these categories but somehow fall between them and are downplayed as a result.

Beyond Wilpert’s minimal treatment of what he terms the ‘societal’ consequences of participation, the field of participatory democracy and citizenship learning suggests that participation by people generally excluded from decision making processes fosters skills and attitudes that create a range of benefits for society. While this field of study focuses mostly on participation by citizens (broadly defined) in public governance, much of what is written about participation in such contexts remains relevant in the context of the workplace. Daniel Schugurensky (2003) argues that

...participatory democracy not only contributes to the construction of more transparent, efficient and democratic ways of governing, but also provides a privileged space for civic learning and for the redistribution of political capital. ...[T]hrough participation in deliberation and decision-making... ordinary citizens develop not only a variety of civic virtues (like solidarity, tolerance, openness, responsibility, and respect), but also political capital. Political capital implies the capacity for self-governance and for influencing political decisions. (p. 326)

Influential participation, whether the focus of the participation be research, learning or governance, enables the individual and group learning of skills and attitudes (“civic virtues”) which strengthen democracy, and increases the capacity of groups to engage in and influence future decision making (“political capital”). By borrowing from this field of study, I argue that influential participation in the workplace might re-conceptualize relations between people in organizational settings. Using terms like ‘citizen’ might denote a community of people linked together by rights and responsibilities, as opposed to the individualistic relations born out of the capitalist labour process. Furthermore, relevant workplace learning might be imagined to include a much broader spectrum of skills and attitudes thereby linking what is learned at work with other spheres of social life.
Having loosely defined “influential participation” in the workplace, and looked at some general benefits and consequences of such systems, I’d like to add the dimension of knowledge to the discussion of participation and power. Because of their relationship to knowledge production and power in society, it could be argued that research and learning are the two sides of the same coin. A comparison of the literature on participatory action research and influential participation in the workplace in the specific area of learning and training demonstrates that many parallels exist between the two bodies of literature, and in fact the distinctions between the two become less clear through such a comparison.

Research and learning, and their importance in society, are not as different from each other as they are commonly constructed. The parallels between them broaden our understanding of the strengths of worker-centered learning models like the CTP, especially as they relate to power and knowledge. It is useful to think of influential participation in workplace learning planning as bearing much resemblance to participatory action research— not only do both offer alternative processes for building knowledge, but they place the relationship between power and knowledge in the centre of decisions about objectives, methods and analysis. In both areas of practice, there are individuals and groups attempting to re-root each practice back into the experiences of people by having people reclaim the practice for themselves and their community.

**Knowledge, Power and Participatory Systems**

This section will first examine the relationship between power and knowledge and the ways participatory research and influential workplace participation are defined, and then it will examine the parallel strengths and weaknesses of each kind of model. However, it is important to bear in mind throughout that while there are many similarities between participatory research processes and influential participatory learning models, there are at least a few key differences. These mainly emerge as logistical considerations: people’s availability to participate in projects at work depends on very different conditions relative to people’s availability outside the workplace. Furthermore, because workplace learning projects are being carried out at work, where people’s jobs are at stake and where hierarchies actively delimit what is tolerable behaviour in the workplace, it might alter how
the processes of participation and decision making by workers are carried out. Finally, illusions of democracy do not exist in the same way in the workplace as they do outside of it. Attempts to make the voices of those occupying the lower levels of this hierarchy heard, therefore, emerge perhaps from a different need; one shaped by the conditions of labour and work.

Knowledge and Power

Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) offer an interesting summary of what they designate as the four approaches to the power and knowledge relationship: firstly, they describes a pluralist, open society “...in which power is exercised through informed debate among competing interests” (p. 71). In this view, knowledge is seen as a resource that divergent ‘interests’ can compete for, presumably equally. The second element, however, suggests that this pluralist vision is inadequate, because power has an unseen function of exclusion: “the hidden face of power was not about who won and who lost on key issues, but was also about keeping issues and actors from getting to the table in the first place” (p. 71). It sees knowledge as a source of empowerment insofar as it challenges not only what is known but also “…who participates in the knowledge production process in the first place” (p. 71). The third element discussed by Gaventa and Cornwall is based on the ideas of Freire and others: namely they focus on the production of knowledge by oppressed groups, and consciousness-raising. However, they move on from these three elements, which they describe as mostly negative, zero-sum sides of power, to the work of Foucault and Donna Hayward: Hayward (1998, in Gaventa and Cornwall 2001) explains that

[knowledge, as much as any resource, determines definitions of what is conceived as important, as possible, for and by whom. Through access to knowledge and participation in its production, use and dissemination, actors can affect the boundaries and indeed the conceptualization of what is possible. In some situations, the asymmetrical control of knowledge productions of others can severely limit the possibilities which can be either imagined or acted upon; in other situations, agency in the process of knowledge production, or co-production with others, can broaden these boundaries enormously (p. 72).

I have reproduced this entire quote because I feel that it combines the structural and systemic constraints around knowledge production with the agentive power of individuals
and groups to ‘broaden the boundaries’ of possibility. Every day, individuals and groups experience the ways in which the forces of social relations shape what is known. The knowledge and experience of some become validated, heard, generalized, institutionalized, implemented and raised up as truth, while the knowledge and experience of others gets denied, buried, ignored, anomalized and distorted. However, as described in the quote above, the generation of knowledge throughout the lived experiences of people can counter the structural and systemic processes of knowledge construction.

Defining Participatory Research

Marika Morris of the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW) created a publication entitled “Participatory research and action: a guide to becoming a researcher for social change” which compiles information gathered over a series of forums. Based on input from participants of the forums, the publication provides a definition of research, describing it as “a systematic way to gather information; giving voice to experiences; finding out what the community needs and wants and working out solutions that people will support” (Morris, 2002, p. 8). Research is a way of creating knowledge with the understanding that knowledge has a purpose beyond itself. They explain that “research can do many things: educate, train, bridge, and lead to action”. These functions of research show it to be a tool, and those who design and use the tool do so with particular functions in mind; at the very least such tools through their design can be seen to support some applications and not others. Access to the resources necessary to do research, or make the “tools”, is of prime importance.

Who gets to do research is the second question asked in the CRIAW book. The responses include: people who have funding, who are “established”, “government policy people”, and finally “everyone”, only it’s not always called ‘research’ (Morris, 2002; p. 8). What emerges from these statements is the perception and reality that ‘research’, with all the status that is constructed around the term, is something reserved for a privileged few. This situation arises either from access to material resources such as funding, social resources such as institutional legitimacy, or symbolic resources such as the ability to name knowledge as research. The CRIAW publication goes on to explain that most often, people
affected by the research “have no control over the process or how it is used” (Morris, 2002; p.9). As such, not only are some groups prevented from participating in producing knowledge generally, but they also have no control over how knowledge is produced about their own experiences, nor over how such knowledge affects them. By way of conclusion, CRIAW eloquently writes that “[k]nowledge is power and whoever generates knowledge has power. It’s time for communities to generate our own knowledge on our own terms based on our own priorities and understanding” (Morris, 2002; p.9). Again, this speaks to the central importance of having access and opportunities to participate in knowledge construction by communities.

Participatory action research (‘PAR’) is an alternative research method that attempts to bring the relationship between power and knowledge to the fore, as well as other aspects of the research process. In PAR, those whose experiences are being researched “decide the research objectives, research question, methodology, are involved in data collection and analysis, reporting ... determine the uses of the research [and]... own the research” (Morris, 2002; p. 10). Further, the action component implies that “…research conducted for the purpose of social change, often with a specific action or actions as the goal” (Morris, 2002; p. 10). But PAR is more than an alternative way of gathering and acting upon information: it sees the research process as

... a transforming act for those who participate: PAR can be a two-way exchange of information. Participants can learn new information and skills, can take advantage of networking and support opportunities, and can develop self-confidence in learning and acting on lobbying, media relations and other skills. (Morris, 2002; p.10).

As such, a more holistic vision of research is offered – one that reveals learning through participation as an additional source of empowerment to participants. Not only do participants create, own and act upon knowledge in the form of research, but they create knowledge in the form of useable skills, understanding of themselves and their communities, and of the channels to institutional power. At this point, I will leave the discussion of participatory ‘research’ aside, and shift towards participatory ‘learning’ before detailing the parallels between them.
Influential Participation in Workplace Learning

This section will elaborate on the working definition of influential participation in the workplace by further exploring its significance in terms of workplace learning. Tara Fenwick (2003) explains that “action learning” (AL) embraces a variety of approaches, but that they share several common characteristics: namely, that a group of people “collaboratively” try to address an “organizational dilemma”, and with the assistance of a facilitator, analyze the problem, collect data, strategize action and reflect on the process (p. 621). She cites Marquardt (1999) when she explains that in AL, individuals create both knowledge and solutions for the organization, while forming social networks that can continue generating knowledge (p. 621-22). She also uses the work of Herbert (2002) to describe the “five facets of empowerment” for participants in AL processes. These include building the capacity of workers to produce outcomes most valuable to them; augmenting workers’ ability to facilitate and control the AL practices and processes; learning how to better advocate for themselves; illumination of how one’s own abilities and knowledges can improve work life; and finally, increasing participants’ power over matters that affect them in the workplace (p. 626). In this way, action learning bears much in common with the benefits of participatory democracy (i.e. the development of ‘civic virtues’ and political capital’) as described by Daniel Schugurensky and detailed above.

Influential participation in workplace learning, as mentioned above, does not benefit only the individual or organization. Benefits to individuals and organizations can have repercussions in broader spheres of social life. I have pulled three points of central relevance to the topic of this work from Michael Lebowitz’s discussion of The Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (2005). In discussing human development, Lebowitz provides useful expressions of where adult and union/labour education have brought us to today, as well as where they might lead in the future. The first point is the centrality of participation in personal (and social) transformation. He explains that participation is the way in which “overall human development” can happen, and references Marx’s “stress upon human activity as the way people transform both circumstances and themselves” (p. 67). Contrary to the managerial tradition of Human Resource Management or development, Venezuela’s Constitution sees overall human development as not ‘dropping
from the sky’: “it is the result of a process, of many processes, in which people transform themselves” (Lebowitz 2005: pg 67).

The second point I wish to discuss here is the way Lebowitz (2005) speculates about the perceived ‘costs’ of overall human development: he suggests that if we considered the ‘price’ of human development as the ‘cost’ for living in a just society, decisions might be made differently. He adds that employers are currently allowed to purchase people’s labour at a price that does not reflect the real impacts of employment in hierarchical, anti-democratic, capitalist workplaces and that decisions might be made differently if the ‘price’ of such labour reflected the cost it incurs on individual and social development (p. 66).

Finally, Lebowitz (2005) argues that real participation is a necessary step towards social change with knowledge construction taking a prominent role. He writes:

Through social forms ... such as self management, co-management, cooperatives in all forms ... people develop capabilities and capacities. This process of transformative activity, though, is precisely the process of developing the knowledge required for [an] alternative society. That information cannot come from markets, from surveys nor negotiations at the top ... It is through democratic discussions and decisions at every level that we can identify our needs and our capabilities. The creation of democratic institutions is precisely the way in which we expand the quality and quantity of knowledge that can make a society based upon unity and the recognition of difference work. How can we understand the needs of others without hearing their voices? (p. 67)

The last line speaks to the power of listening to all voices, and the necessary commitment to collective awareness and responsibility. It is anti-hierarchical, especially in terms of what defines legitimate perspectives and valuable participation.

In Brazil, the Programa Integrar (PI) provides real insights into possibilities for learning and human development. Initiated by a metalworkers union in response to the country’s ruling social democratic Workers’ Party offer of public money to fund vocational training, the PI was a “radical departure” (Fischer & Hannah, 2002, p. 97) from the standard forms of vocational training, even those implemented by unions. It “incorporated a strategic vision of the construction of the citizenship (‘cidadania’) of the workers” (Fischer & Hannah, 2002, p. 97) through their participation in public policy decisions, mainly relating to “the creation of work, wealth and education and in the unions’ role in their negotiation”
(Fischer & Hannah, 2002, pg 97). The PI connects workplaces and vocational training with participation and citizenship development. It takes a radical stance against the status quo of power hierarchies in capitalist organizations. Fischer and Hannah write that “there is no intrinsic reason why vocational education should be restricted to a narrow, instrumental approach” (Fischer & Hannah, 2002, pg 97), like they so often are when directed by management or even the state. Interestingly, they link the work of both Paulo Freire and John Dewey to the principles underlying the Brazilian PI initiative: that is, Freire’s call for general training as opposed to training that is strictly vocational; and Dewey’s emphasis on democratic learning through participation.

**Influential Participation in Learning and Research**

As we have seen, influential participation in the workplace not only provides a variety of opportunities for learning, but the use of influential participation in making decisions about learning and training generates specific consequences. Many of these consequences are once again similar to the advantages and challenges of participatory action research due to each system’s relationship to knowledge and power.

Participatory action research or participatory learning in the workplace can be a mechanism for communities to build for themselves a kind of culture of learning, whereby their ‘local’ knowledges, which are typically marginalized in power laden or hierarchical settings, can be privileged in a way that does not separate the knowledge from the knowers or their experiences. Peter Sawchuk (2003) suggests that there is a real economic and social benefit in working people having “access to stable cultural communities that recognize and build upon the social standpoints of their members, which in turn provides a voice, opportunities, and power for these communities” (p. 4). This base of knowledge, derived from the standpoint of the community, is a source of internal strength, whether amongst workers in the workplace, or in any other community.

Another parallel strength of influential participation in research and the workplace is in the creation of overall human development opportunities. As discussed above, the process of participation, regardless of the task at hand, involves learning, whether it is formally acknowledged or informally occurring. CRIAW (Morris, 2002) explains that the
participatory research process is “a transforming act for those who participate” where participants “can learn new information and skills, can take advantage of networking and support opportunities, and can develop self-confidence in learning and acting on lobbying, media relations and other skills” (p. 10). Learning, in this way, is seen as positive and empowering for participants. Peter Sawchuk (2003) explains that informal learning in the workplace “is composed of self-directed or collectively directed learning projects,” (pg 638) and Bratton, Mills, Pyrch, & Sawchuk (2004) describe informal learning through participation in ‘resistant’ activities in the workplace as particularly profound (p.70). Both models offer marginalized individuals the opportunity to understand the nature of their oppression through collectivizing the issues and, as a group, applying a critical analysis to the trends that emerge. Tara Fenwick (2003) describes an emancipatory approach to action learning in the workplace, where, beginning with a critical analysis of one’s own experiences, participants link “this analysis with a critical examination of larger cultural forces, to help make critical sense of personal experiences” (p. 627). Whether arising from engaging in participatory research, informal learning or influential participation, opportunities for human development are created because of the collectivizing, critical, skill-building way in which activities are carried out.

There is also the element of action that is present in both PAR and participatory workplace learning models. In PAR, it is the direct application of the participants’ research by the participants to make change. Research becomes purposeful and change oriented through PAR. Learning models in the workplace that are based on the self-identified needs and interests of the workers are knowledge transformed into action themselves: information about the needs and desires of the workers is used in curriculum planning and design. The action component is the learning, the gathering for training sessions of their own choosing, and the possible increase in demands and expectations that engaged and invested workers make with their new skills, knowledge and power.

Finally, I argue that both PAR and influential participation in learning in the workplace create an opportunity for groups and individuals to build upon their common interests. Peter Sawchuk (2006) writes that management and workers share an orientation to the value of their work, which accounts for why a “reasonable environment of human
interrelation” can exist in the workplace notwithstanding the antagonistic relations based on the fact of labour-wage exchange (p. 604-5). Similarly, other participatory projects might bring people together because of an orientation they share despite day-to-day relations of adversity or antagonism. However, this argument can only be made when people engaging in influential participatory systems recognize and actively address the effects of the relations of power in which they are embedded. In the workplace, these relations of power are not limited to those between “management” and “workers”, but include those based on gender, immigration status, race, class, language, and ability. If facilitated with intersecting power relations and the shared orientations that bridge them in mind, participatory research and participatory learning models offer the opportunity of bringing groups together in a way that is constructive for all.

While these two models share many strengths – more no doubt than I have listed here – they also share many of the same pitfalls. Like the strengths, the common pitfalls are often the result of the existing relations of power influencing how people participate and the outcomes of the activities.

Because both participatory research and influential participation learning models in the workplace emerge from within powerful structures of control, the authority that dominates the symbolic and material resources of knowledge production and legitimation might co-opt process of participation and resulting knowledge, and reproduce the pre-existing power inequities. For instance, Kassam (1998) writes about how a participatory evaluation of a development project enlisted the participation of what he terms the ‘beneficiaries’ of the development work. However, this evaluation was not directed or controlled by the participants, nor was the knowledge outcomes of their participation. The information derived from their participation was removed from the community, and used to satisfy the needs of the international development funders. Kassam writes that “participatory evaluation produces insights and perceptions that, at the very least, represent value added. Knowledge produced by participatory evaluation transcends the statistical silhouette of reality and presents a project’s “flesh and blood”, as it were, thereby giving a more intimate feel of the “pulse” of a project” (p. 109). In this quotation, the unidentified, knowing referent is the distant funder. In a similar way, participation in the
workplaces face similar possibilities of co-optation, whether it be around worker centered learning alternatives or otherwise. McCaffrey, Faerman and Hart (1995) write that

...managers and other leaders espouse participative systems because they seem to offer solutions to real problems, at first at reasonable cost. Upper executives, in particular, are drawn to the idea of using information from all points of the organization, and tapping the energy that comes from aligning individuals' commitments with organizational tasks. (p. 604-5)

When “tapping” or, in the words of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), mining of local knowledges, is the goal of participatory research or learning, there is a connotation of resources being uncovered and removed, and perhaps refined for profit. The metaphor of natural resources and extraction ceases to be metaphoric because knowledge IS a resource, either to a community or group, or to those who wish to take ownership and control of it. The goal of ‘tapping’ suggests that individuals and institutions other than those contributing knowledge or participating are co-opting the process, and seeing their interests take precedence.

In participatory action research, barriers to community identification of and control over the research agenda can arise from collaborations with other individuals like academic researchers, whose own standpoints affect the direction of the research. Determining whose interests are reflected in the research decisions requires a complex analysis; including how the discussions are facilitated in the group and how stakeholders and interests not represented in the participatory process nevertheless shape decisions. This is also apparent in participatory situations in the workplace, such as action learning settings: Fenwick (2003) explains that “questions about voice and authentic participation are suspect when the fundamental power inequities driving organizational decision making and supervision – including the processes of AL – remain intact” (p. 624). Examples of this kind of power inequity might include situations where participation and decisions are tempered by the need to garner approval from others in supervisory positions, or where the desire for inclusion, belonging and solidarity within the participating group (say a group of ‘staff’) comes at the expense of respecting the group’s diversity of experiences. Furthermore, what is considered “legitimate” knowledge, whether in an organization or in society more broadly, may shape how research, learning or training is done. McCaffrey, Faerman, & Hart
(1995) explain that participatory systems in the workplace have not been able to produce “proof” of their value to organizations in a way deemed ‘legitimate’ (p. 607). Furthermore, the question of who is providing material resources for the research or workplace project can be a pitfall of any participatory system, whether relating to research or learning, as the interests of the funder can shape the direction, results and of course the nature of the ownership of the entire project.

Ownership is another key component of participatory action research and participatory learning in the workplace. Ownership, however, goes beyond determining the issues or research/learning agenda. The workplace offers unique challenges to the question of ownership because participation in a project at work is done by people while they are being paid by an employer. In this way, one could argue that the employer is funding whatever occurs in the workplace. As such, perpetuation of the participatory project and even the employment of the individual can be contingent on the employer’s or organization’s perception that their/its interests are being served. Furthermore, an organization can often veto results or actions that it perceives as counter to their interests. As such, the extent to which employees own the process or outcomes of their participation in the workplace remains ultimately contingent on the employer.

The ability to act – to make concrete change – is a pillar of influential participation in either research or workplace projects. Without it, participation becomes tokenistic and illusory, and mistrust can build. This ‘ability’ can be limited because of less-than-complete community ownership of results, or as can be easily imagined in the workplace, the maintenance of managerial decision-making rights. Often the name ‘participation’ can be applied to situations that do not adequately change how decisions are made, and so trust and influence sharing fail to develop. Strauss (1998b) explains that “[p]articipation schemes often run parallel to the main decision-making processes, deal with less crucial issues, and therefore fail to show what influence-sharing behaviour could achieve” (149). Having management relinquishing power may ultimately be the greatest challenge of participation in the workplace. I’d argue that power and control over workplace activity is what defines the role of management: if workers assert their ability to management themselves and their work and learning through influential participation activities in the workplace, does not the
role of management become somewhat redundant? At any rate, in order for organizations to build the trust necessary for worker participation, managers must be prepared to relinquish their decision making rights to the authority of the group. Another side of the ‘ability to act’ coin that I would argue might manifest itself both in PAR research projects as well as influential participation learning models is that the individuals might face negative sanctions from others in the community or beyond, and such a risk might constrain action. As Tara Fenwick (2003) explains, in the workplace, “the worker is always visible... [and] vulnerable to discipline and subjugation” (p. 624). This is especially true for workers particular workers, such as those marginalized by racism, ableism, immigration status, gender, etc., who might self-censor as a strategy for avoiding additional sanctions from peers and employers. This might include disclosing information about themselves and their experiences selectively. The potential gains of participating honestly and fully in the workplace may be tempered by the threat of sanctions from employers and others, especially if the empowering workplace project is seen by some to be contrary to their interests.

Finally, there is the question of power dynamics within PAR projects or influential participation in the workplace. In the PAR literature, especially feminist participatory research (see Maguire, 1987), there has been a great deal of work on how power dynamics persist in PAR settings. These can manifest themselves amongst community members, or between community members, funders, representatives of services providers and academic researchers. Power dynamics shape who gets heard, whose voices translate into practice and method, and what knowledge is ultimately produced. The extent to which these dynamics, based on ableism, racism, nativism, sexism, classism, heterosexism and other forms of oppression, are named and addressed will do much in determining the level and nature of participation of all involved. One area of study that is especially interesting to me is how the need for or the privileging of solidarity within communities (be they based on geography, history, class, ethnicity, race, gender, ability or sexuality) prevents or inhibits reflection on the kinds of oppression arising from within the community. One might ask which workers and their experiences find themselves located closer to the center of influential participation, and are able to exert more influence throughout the process. This
question might become significant in new or fragile participatory settings where diversity amongst participants is underplayed in favour of the perception of commonality.

In concluding this section of the chapter on participation, knowledge and power, it might be useful to recall the earlier statement of how participatory systems of research and learning are very similar kinds of activities. As we have seen in both kinds of systems, the strengths offer marginalized groups an opportunity to validate and build upon their knowledges, and to seek new knowledge in areas where they perceive the need. Furthermore, the participatory process lends itself to learning and skill building, as well as a degree of politicization and empowerment. However, with these similar strengths come similar challenges. These are predominantly characterized by the resilience of intersecting inequities and oppressive ideologies either in the workplace or community.

**Conclusion**

In summary, this chapter proposed and defined the specific kind of participation upon which this research project focuses. ‘Influential participation’ refers to participation in formal decision making processes by those typically excluded from them in a way that centers their interests and perspectives, empowers them to act despite hierarchical structures of power, and unsettles the control elites exercise over knowledge production. Central to this definition is the intimate relationship between knowledge, learning and power in the workplace, as well as the potential it offers for bridging civic understandings of the value of democratic participation in society with the social and economic needs of the workplace. It reflects a tradition of analysis in work and learning that does not take as sacrosanct the boundaries between the sphere of paid work and the many spheres of social life that also contribute toward making it what it is. These aspects of influential participation were delineated through a discussion in which participatory research systems were used to draw out the nature of the processes and possible outcomes of influential participation in workplace learning. It was with this understanding of the nature of influential participation and its relationship with power and knowledge that I came to be interested in the Community Training Model developed by the Toronto Community Housing
Corporation. The following details how a relationship developed between myself and the Training and Development Unit, out of which the content of this research project emerged.
CHAPTER 4 - RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND METHODS

The Story Behind The Research

I was first introduced to the Community Training Plan (CTP) at the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) through a class on citizenship learning and participatory democracy, offered by Daniel Schugurensky during the fall term, 2007. Professor Schugurensky had invited the Training and Development Unit to present the CTP to his class, and in addition to two Training Unit staff, one staff member who had been part of the CTP committees and courses was able to attend. Between the three presenters, the basics of the CTP were covered, as well as the personal story of one of the Training Unit staff who had first become involved with the CTP as a learner and committee member. This presentation made a significant impression on me as I felt it represented an instance of people making real change for themselves and their communities. Following the presentation, I asked the Training Unit staff member who had presented her own story to us if I could have her email address. She gave it to me, and gave me permission to contact her if my interest in the CTP grew.

It wasn’t until several months later that I contacted Professor Schugurensky, stating my interest in contacting the Training Unit and ultimately forming a thesis project focusing on the CTP. He emailed my request to the Training Unit, with a note of support for my project and an offer to set up a meeting. His contact in the Training Unit responded positively, and a meeting was planned for an afternoon in February.

The meeting took place in the university building where the professor’s office was located. Two members of the Training Unit (the same two as had presented to my class the previous semester), my professor and I were in attendance. The meeting lasted about an hour, with Professor Schugurensky introducing me and explaining his own interest in seeing this project develop. Then the Training Unit staff provided an update regarding their current projects, which included a participatory evaluation of the CTP. Finally, I provided an explanation of how I envisioned my work and relationship with the Training Unit developing. My sense was that this meeting was meant to assess whether I was worthy of an initial level of trust, something that would be necessary for them prior to inviting me, an outsider and an academic, to attend their meetings and take part in their projects. Sensing
this, the central to the message I sought to communicate as my desire to make the relationship between myself and the Training Unit mutually beneficial, and my research ultimately useful and relevant to those involved with the CTP. This included being ideologically aligned with the interests of the learners and working people involved in the CTP. I could tell that the two staff members from the Training Unit were listening carefully to what I was explaining, especially my answer to their question ‘so, why are you interested in the CTP?’ This is an interesting and important question that researchers must ask themselves, especially if they are conducting research as an outsider. At any rate, the meeting concluded with the staff from the Training Unit promising to check in with the two other unit members as well as other staff currently involved in Unit projects.

A week or so later, I received an email confirming the approval of the Unit, with an invitation to attend a meeting in March at the large apartment complex where the Training Unit had offices and meeting rooms. I arrived at the location nervous, early and out of breath from the long uphill walk. However, when the time came for the meeting to start, I was quickly put at ease. The main meeting room was furnished with comfortable couches and chairs and bright paintings that hung on the walls. Spring sunshine poured in the windows. For the first time, I met all four Training Unit members. They were all very friendly and good-humoured. The meeting began with me introducing myself and briefly describing my academic background, followed by a basic conversation meant to refresh and clarify the details of the CTP for me. I took notes simply to help me remember these details, but was kidded about this when someone joking began writing furious notes when I began speaking. I quickly explained that my note-taking was more a student’s habit than anything, and the notes were mostly meant to help me remember the meaning of the many acronyms. I had not yet begun work on my thesis, and so attended this meeting and those to follow as a potential volunteer. At this first meeting, I was asked to participate in developing and conducting their ‘roadshow’ tour, where they’d be bringing the information from the participatory evaluation back to the staff for feedback and analysis, as well as promoting the CTP to people unfamiliar with the model. These road shows ended up being fun and dynamic events, where activities were planned using the materials from the evaluation in order to encourage the staff to think about and engage with the ‘data’ by providing
feedback and through discussion. The Roadshow Handbook, as seen in the Materials section to follow, was developed to give participants the opportunity to read testimonials from the interviews as well as some synthesized summaries of the main findings.

I was able to attend the second of two roadshow planning meetings in late March, where I met several CTP committee members who had been involved in the evaluation. I took a small part in discussions, sat as an audience for preliminary run-throughs of the road show activities and helped prepare materials. Unlike the first meeting, I did not have a pen and paper in hand. I did not wish to reinforce the idea that I was observing and extracting information for research, but was instead an ally who wished primarily to contribute to the CTP and learn from the meeting, and secondarily to exchange information based on our different knowledges and receive guidance for future research. The committee members I met during those small meetings were eager, however, to share their experiences and perspectives with me, and their excitement regarding the CTP was infectious. I never left a meeting without feeling renewed inspiration regarding the potential of the CTP.

In the end, I was only able to attend two of the six roadshow events. The first of the two I attended, which was also the first overall, occurred shortly after the planning meeting and was more of a trial run with all the committee members. It took place during the afternoon, and lasted several hours. I was introduced as a student interested in the field of learning and work. I had requested that the name of my school not be included in the introduction, but immediately following the introduction, someone shouted out ‘what school does she go to?’, and I answered him at that point. Throughout the remainder of the roadshow, my participation and activities were carefully checked by myself and unit members: no one wished to break from the spirit of the CTP by privileging an outsider as a result of my status as a (white, Canadian, English speaking, able, middle class) grad student. There did seem to be a desire to challenge these status constructions, whether explicitly or implicitly. At one point, a committee member made a joke about not discriminating against me because I was of a ‘different’ class.

The second roadshow I attended happened several weeks later, and was the last of the roadshows. Unlike the first roadshow I attended at the apartment complex, this roadshow presentation took place in the central building that housed the head office of the
TCHC. This roadshow was for the administration staff working for the central departments, and was much smaller and quieter than the first. Also, there were people who attended who were not familiar with the CTP. This was of course not the case with the first roadshow for committee members, but would have been similar to the others. Furthermore, the responses and input offered during this event were much more mixed than the earlier roadshow I had attended. However, after the roadshow was over, I was able to bounce ideas around with the Training Unit about some of what I had been reading and thinking about, and they reciprocated. These discussions, like the meetings, helped give my research direction, focus and enthusiasm. The four other roadshows were: one for Community Housing Unit staff in the east, one for Community Housing Unit staff in the west, one for managers and finally one for community agencies.

In July, I was invited to a meeting to review the final evaluation report, which included a one-page opinion piece I had been requested to write. There were several members of the Training Unit, including a few staff members I had never met before who had been part of the evaluation process. The final report had been written up by the Training Unit, and they were seeking feedback before submitting it to management. One of the staff members I had only just met that day said that I had captured the essence of the CTP well in my description, which gave me confidence that my analysis rang true with those most intimately involved with the model.

In September, I met with my main contact person in the Training Unit to discuss my developing thesis work, including the materials the Unit would be able to procure for my research, and the ethics process we’d undertake with the university, the TCHC and within the CTP itself. She explained that there was a process required before external researchers could conduct research within the TCHC. The application form was later submitted and accepted without issue. Beyond this formal process, however, both my contact in the Training Unit and I were both concerned about ensuring that the people who contributed to the creation of the materials were both protected as well as respected in how their contributions were used and recognized. The following day, I visited the Training Unit offices in order to discuss a small task that the Unit wanted me to take on. I also began to transcribe one of the videos they’d offered for my research.
Methods

I write this thesis as an advocate for the CTP and ally of those who have created, participate in, own, and benefit from it. Unlike so many academic or corporate writers, I make no pretence to neutrality, nor do I wish to delineate ‘other sides of the story’. However, I am an outsider, with only a nascent relationship with those whose experiences I write about. Furthermore, ideological alignment is not sufficient grounds for trust; as such, I must continuously monitor my actions and work, and ensure they remain accountable and honest, respectful and useful to those I am working with. As I prepare my thesis and write out the chapters, I bear the four members of the Training and Development Unit in mind as members of the audience for this work, partly because I am beginning to know them better but mostly because I know they, as people very familiar with the Plan, will be my most important critics. Furthermore, my interests in the CTP have been significantly shaped by those aspects identified as most interesting and relevant by the Training Unit. It is my hope that this research will explore the CTP model and its outcomes in such a way that the Training Unit and other staff might find it useful moving into the future.

One challenge of this project has been the tension between protecting anonymity and providing a degree of specificity so as to avoid generalizing the experiences of some individuals. As it stands, this research will provide a brief overview of some of the outcomes of the CTP as experienced by individuals, but will provide no critical analysis based on the effects of social location such as gender, ability, class, race, immigration status, sexuality, language or religion. So much of the richness of the model, and possible potential for its future development, comes from its relevance to people marginalized by intersecting forms of oppression in the workplace. Much of this has been lost in the context of this thesis due to the constraints of time and the nature of the materials being used.

Materials

The materials for this work were selected by the Training Unit based on their perception of what would be useful for my purposes as well as what would be appropriate to share with an outsider doing academic work. In total, they provided me with three videos, a copy of the Roadshow Handbook, and a copy of the Evaluation Report. The materials being used, while providing a good overview of the CTP, are largely promotional
(and as such highlight the strengths of the model without addressing its challenges), and are often highly condensed. There is great deal more to the CTP than could be incorporated into an evaluation or short video; however, these materials offered provide a good starting point for an overall analysis.

The videos were mostly created by Training Committee members with the support of the Training Unit and some external hires. The purpose of the videos was for in-house promotion as well as a way of recording the events and history of the Community Training Plan. They were given to me in video formatting, but I created transcripts prior to analyzing them. In the transcribing process, all names were omitted as well as other details that might reveal the identity of the people in the videos. I transcribed the oral aspects of the video, as well as any wording that appeared in print. At times, I also transcribed a few details about the scenes being captured.

In the first video, the focus is the pilot of the Community Training Plan, which took place in one Community Housing Unit in 2003. The video is entitled “Community Training Pilot”, and involved a Training Committee of 11 people. One manager, several union people, one labour relations consultant, one director, one senior executive, one training instructor and one training and development manager were interviewed in addition to six staff members, five of whom were committee members. In the video, the details of how the CTP started and the steps the Training Committee and Training Unit undertook are outlined, with commentary from those being interviewed about the strengths and challenges experienced along the way.

The second video is entitled One Team and was created in 2005 during the annual two day Training Committee retreat at an off-site location as well as in the same building where the Training Unit is housed. According to the video itself, it was produced and filmed by Toronto Community Housing Corporation Maintenance, Admin & Health Promotion Staff, with the Training Unit staff, community facilitators, and other external partners. This video contained footage of the forum activities as well as testimonials from committee members. Strongly emphasized in the forum and video is learning and expressing oneself through creativity and art, such as song writing and dance. Once again, the impacts and challenges of the CTP are shared, as well as footage of the presentation of certificates of
recognition awarded to committee members by other committee members. This activity involved extensive personal testimonial regarding how participation in the CTP and the relationships arising out of it had impacted people.

The third video was created in 2007 and was entitled *This is Leadership This is Change*. Like the previous video, it was created at a two day leadership forum for Training Committee members. The focus of this video was on leadership and mobilization strategies for encouraging participation in the CTP. Guests were invited to speak, and discussions were held amongst the committee members and a facilitator from major union in the area regarding the characteristics of leadership.

Aside from the videos, I was also given permission to use the *Roadshow Handbook* distributed during the road shows which following the collection of data for the CTP evaluation in 2008. The Handbook was created in order to provide those who attended the road shows a way to review the findings of the evaluation. The handbook contained twenty pages, nine of which were of quotes or testimonials taken directly from the interviews. These quotes were selected based on how they reflected the predominant messages expressed throughout all the interviews. In addition to the quotes, there were sections summarizing the CTP, the evaluation methodology, keywords and common themes from the evaluation, the strengths and challenges of the CTP and ideas for the future.

The final item that was used in this thesis was the Evaluation Report. This document was 13 pages long. Strongly emphasized in the Evaluation is the centrality of staff views and experiences in their own words. The Evaluation was meant to explore the learning and community outcomes of the CTP from 2003-2007. Beginning in October 2007 and reaching completion in 2008, it was conducted by a team of frontline staff hired for a 6 month placement within the Training Unit. The approach used to guide the evaluation is outlined in the Report as follows:

> We have relied on the advice and expertise of staff ways of knowing to grow an organic and unique workplace training program. In the evaluation we followed a similar process by hiring a team of front line staff to work with the Training Unit team. (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 2)
The team of frontline staff were trained in participatory research methods, and they conducted over 100 interviews, 6 focus groups and 50 staff surveys in 8 working CHU’s, with 18 senior managers and 3 union executives. A training inventory, staff focus group and manager interview was also conducted in 4 dropped or never-participated CHU’s. Two Training Unit focus groups and 2 Training Committee focus groups were also carried out.

Overall, 80% manager sample and 85% staff sample gave positive responses (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 2). Contained in the final evaluation report are a backgrounder on the evaluation and CTP, evaluation objectives, evaluation methodology, evaluation findings, a section on units that did not participate or stopped participating in the CTP, testimonials from “workplace learning experts”, recommendations and conclusions.

This thesis is written mostly based on the information derived from the materials, however, some of what is shared in this thesis is from my own knowledge of the Plan, which was gained during the times I spent volunteering with the Training Unit in CTP activities. This additional information only supplements, clarifies and/or enriches what is contained in the materials. As a check both on my interpretation of the materials as well as on my understanding of the plan based on my experiences, and also as an important ethical step in this research, the entire thesis was submitted to the Training Unit, with comments, critiques and suggested changes solicited from them at that time.

The four sub-themes identified in the analysis chapter of this thesis were tentatively sketched following a preliminary reading of the materials. Then the materials were re-read with information slotted into each sub-theme according my understanding of their relevance. The sub-themes were reanalyzed and re-arranged and some of the information redistributed in order to increase my arguments’ clarity and effectiveness.

The day that I first heard about the CTP and began formulating ideas for how this thesis might develop, I wanted to conduct the research in a way that was aligned with the values underlying the CTP itself, with staff perspectives and interests determining its purpose and analysis. I began to envision doing the thesis with staff from the TCHC as co-authors. However, as the program requirements became clearer, I quickly realized that I would have to be a sole author. Furthermore, the materials I planned to use were materials
created with specific purposes in mind and offered a particular angle of understanding of the CTP and its outcomes. I also didn’t have the permission of those who appeared in the videos or contributed to the evaluation, nor could they have known that their words might be used by someone external to the TCHC for academic purposes. As such, I sought to protect the identity of the participants, and treat the words found in the materials with respect born out of an understanding of the privilege of having access them. By respect I mean interpreting the material as humbly and honestly as possible. It also meant constructing a thesis highlighting the strengths and challenges of the CTP in a way that might bring benefit to the Plan and to those involved with it.

The extent to which participatory models succeed or do not is dependent in part on the particular historical moment and social context. This chapter puts forth a brief and largely descriptive overview of the context, both broad and specific that may have influenced the development and outcomes of the Community Training Plan to date. To begin, a short summary of the recent history of social housing in Ontario is offered, which is necessary for understanding the pressures experienced not only by tenants and organizations providing social housing, but also by staff working on the front lines. Then, a short history of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation is given, including some of the more unique executive choices made since its inception almost 7 years ago. These too are important for understanding the experiences of staff working and learning within the organization and social housing community. Following this, the TCHC’s latest Community Management Plan (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p.) is examined, particularly those aspects directly affecting staff and staff learning. In this section, attention is drawn to some of the tensions which appear to be inherent in a ‘community management’ plan. Furthermore, questions about how knowledge, power and skill are represented in the CMP are introduced.

Social Housing

In the Canadian Policy Research Networks’ research report, published in 2007, Nathalie Pierre paraphrases Sharon Chisholm (2003) in defining social housing. She explains that it refers to “housing where rent is kept at an affordable level for residents, specifically subsidies targeted to reduce rents to 25-30% of household income”. She describes the material importance of social housing in the contemporary context, where “…the cost of rent often far exceeds the norms of affordability for many individuals and families, especially in large urban centres” (Pierre, December 2007, p. 2).

Canada’s national statistics on social housing show that 14 percent of total households are in need of basic housing (CMHC, 2006). Furthermore, Pierre (2007) explains that a range of social changes have increased the demand for housing emerging within certain populations more than others (Pierre 2007, p. 19). She outlines ten sources of

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change which have created increased need for social housing, most of which relate to increasing poverty levels of certain populations of migrants, disabled people and young people, and increasing population numbers amongst vulnerable groups in urban areas such as seniors, “Aboriginals” [sic] or indigenous people, and lone-parent households.

However, governments in Canada have been reducing social housing programs instead of increasing them. In the 1970s, social housing was managed at the national level, under one program. However in the 1980s and 1990s, the federal government devolved responsibility for social housing to the provinces, and in Ontario, social housing was again devolved from the province to the municipality. Over the last three decades, explains Pierre (2007), social housing has “bounced around various levels of government with a general devolution of responsibilities to municipalities” (p. 2). Currently, “…the situation presents itself as a veritable Gordian knot of complicated multi-layered bureaucracies and large expenditures” (Pierre 2007, p. 2). Not only do the various levels of government find themselves mired in bureaucracy and trying to devolve responsibility, but the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) ranked Canada low on “…its commitment to ensure that everyone is adequately housed” (Pierre paraphrasing Adema, 2001). The decades-long failure of the federal and provincial governments to commit to providing adequate social housing has resulted in an accumulation of need in this sector.

Pierre explains that “[a]lready waiting lists are in years, not months, in many cities (Pierre 2007, p. 2). She goes on to cite other policy decisions by the governments (provincial and federal) as contributing to increased demand for social housing. These include reducing the capacity of or closing health care institutions without creating community capacity to support individuals, and increased focus on “short term solutions”, such as shelters (p. 9). In terms of this research, the demands on front line staff in the social housing sector have not only increased quantitatively due to reduced funding and increased need, but also qualitatively as the specific needs of those populations forced to rely on social housing services change.
History of the TCHC

Created on January 1st, 2002, the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (also known as “Toronto Community Housing” or “the TCHC”) is the product of a merger overseen by the city of Toronto, between the Toronto Housing Company and the Metropolitan Toronto Housing Corporation (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2008).

According to its website, today the TCHC is “the largest social housing provider in Canada and the second largest in North America”. It houses approximately 164,000 low and moderate-income tenants in 58,500 households. (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2008). The TCHC derives its revenues from rental, non-rental and subsidy revenues. (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 8). Funding for housing subsidies comes from three sources, and is paid through the City of Toronto. The sources of funding include: the City of Toronto (47%), federal funds (37%) and the GTA Cost Share (16%) (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 6). Housing subsidies allow the TCHC to set rent levels at about 30% of tenants’ income, which is called ‘geared-to-income’ rent. However, revenue from geared-to-income rent has been “flat or declining” over the past five years (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 7).

The TCHC is governed by a board of 13 directors, all of whom are appointed by the city. These 13 positions are filled by three city councillors, the mayor or her/his representative, and nine citizens, including two TCHC tenants (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2008). Pierre (2007) identifies that a current trend in social housing in Canada is, through the reduction in roles of federal and provincial governments, there is an increased role for local and grassroots involvement and responsibility (p. 20). This is reflected in the TCHC’s commitment to local governance, manifested in programs of participatory governance and participatory budgeting by tenants. This commitment to local involvement and local responsibility is also evidenced in the organizational support for the Community Training Plan and staff ways of knowing. However, as seen in previous chapters, the extent to which this commitment is able to withstand the pressures of the capitalist market and state cuts to funding brings into question its long term sustainability. These questions are raised later in discussion portion of this thesis.
Part of the community management model at the TCHC was its structural organization around Community Housing Units, or “CHU”s. Each of the 27 Units was responsible for its own property management and community development. According to the CMP, this localized model stood in contrast to previous ones, where public housing was centrally managed (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 3).

**Working for the TCHC**

A brief overview of the kinds of jobs held by the main participants in the CTP and job conditions experienced by TCHC employees will provide an important component of the context of the CTP. The frontline CHU staff are not the only staff who participate in the CTP (there are staff working in the central offices who have recently also implemented the Plan) but they do compromise the majority of participants. These staff work in three broad areas: maintenance, which is the largest group and includes cleaning, repairs and administration of the housing units; tenant service co-ordinators, which is the second largest group and includes tenant support; and community development workers, which is the smallest group.

In a recent rating of employers in Canada, the TCHC ranked in top 100 for 2009 (Eluta.ca, 2009). Highlights identified include the provision of benefits, a healthy workplace plan, three weeks’ vacation for new employees, and in-house training initiatives and support for continuing education through tuition subsidies. Training and Skills Development and Community Involvement received the highest “grades”.

Finally, the report back from the Community Management Plan staff consultation workshop also points to aspects of people’s experiences working for the TCHC: in the “What’s Working” section of the Report Back (p. 2), the community model, workplace diversity, decentralization, and healthy workplace / safety awareness, Community Training Plan, and several tenant initiatives were listed. In the section listing the issues needing to be addressed, the issues prioritized as the top five include: 1) CHU and Unit Staffing model; 2) Tenant Mental Health & Isolation; 3) Youth Initiatives; 4) Community Safety; 5) Budget. Staff Training, and specifically the CTP, is identified by staff as the best ways to address the top two issues.
Based on the information available from these sources, training and development is a central component of working for the TCHC, as both a strength and an area needing improvement. The TCHC’s ‘community’ orientation also appears to be a strength that figures prominently for people working for the organization. This orientation is captured in what the TCHC calls its “Community Management Plan”.

**The Community Management Plan**

Part of the TCHC’s efforts to improve the provision of social housing is the creation of the Community Management Plan (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007). Available online to the public, the CMP for 2008-2010 is only the latest of a series of plans, and is meant to “...make sure the organization’s objectives are being met, to respond to new issues and to take advantage of new opportunities” (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 1). The organization’s objectives are based on the value it claims to place on providing good places to live, supporting engaged and empowered communities, creating healthy organizations, and sustaining an asset for present and future generations (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 1). The CMPs are three-year strategic plans, the latest just over 100 pages long, and are developed out of consultations with “tenants, staff, community partners and other stakeholders” (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 1).

There are two main foci in the CMP: Buildings and Communities. A great deal of emphasis in the CMP is placed upon improving “the cost effectiveness of its operations” (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 5) and investing in repairs and maintenance of the buildings (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 4). This has been a particular challenge for the organization due to inadequate financial support from the provincial and federal governments, but their efforts are not without critique from community groups (Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, 2008). However, aside from issues relating to the TCHC’s deteriorating buildings, the CMP does demonstrate how other information gathered through community consultations is incorporated into its planning for the creation of “safer and healthier communities” (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 37). Two examples include its identification of the racism and issues
of mental health and social isolation faced by the tenants. In the section of the CMP dealing with anti-racism, the TCHC explains that it recognizes and pledges to address the racism experienced tenants and staff, according to the testimonies offered during the community consultations (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 40). “Anti-racism study circles” is the pilot program developed to begin to take action in this area. The circles are composed of staff, tenant representatives and “other tenant leaders”, and meet in order to “learn more about racism and the impacts that it has on individuals and communities” (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 40). The ultimate goal, according to the CMP, is “increased recognition of racism and the emergence of practical, constructive strategies on how it can be addressed in Toronto Community Housing” (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 40). Similarly, with regards to mental health and social isolation, the particular impacts of poverty, unemployment and the lack of accessible and appropriate health services are brought to attention in the CMP. Three pilot projects have been developed to address these issues, which at this point are described as exploratory (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 38). In addition a “mental health framework” is planned, which would include identification of resources, the development of relationships, the provision of staff training, and the creation of mental health policy and protocols (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 39).

In the case of the TCHC, it states that its “structure, policies, processes, responsibilities and accountabilities” have been aligned with “the community model”, which allows the organization to “provide community based management and decision making” (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 76). After 5 years of operation with this model, the TCHC claims that “there is positive feedback from all stakeholder groups on the improvements and progress that the organization has made” (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 76). Interestingly, the organization describes its self-assigned roles as leader (because of the responsibility it has to resolve issues); catalyst (initiate responses to issues); convenor (bringing people together); and as participant (“representing the needs and interests of Toronto Community Housing communities, tenants and staff”) (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 72). By giving itself
roles beyond economic or financial management, it creates a window of opportunity for individuals and groups to hold the organization to its pledges.

What roles do staff learning and knowledge occupy in the CMP? Does the discussion of knowledge position the management in an organization as the knowers, or are tenants and especially staff imagined as legitimate bearers of knowledge? Pierre (2007) discusses how planning, when it comes to social housing, is not an “exact science” where a successful model in one setting can be easily applied to other settings. She explains that “there are many approaches and many initiatives that [...] succeed more often by dint of community know-how, hard work, and creative fundraising than adherence to established program protocols (p. 2). As social housing becomes a more locally planned industry, questions about who community stakeholders are, and what their roles might be, arise. How might community plans and community planning manifest themselves amongst the bureaucracies of government and the demands of capital? Further, when Pierre speaks of hard work and community “know-how”, how central or important does this make the work and skill of front line staff? TCHC makes a clear statement that as an organization it does not have “the expertise [...] to address all of the issues that influence the achievement of its mandate” (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 2). However, it also seeks to be “...structured in a way that nurtures talent and knowledge...” (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 72) in order to be better equipped in serving the social housing community’s needs.

In the CMP, the TCHC describes itself as being a ‘learning organization’ since its inception (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 81), and has been developing an internal research capacity, which support research and evaluation conducted within the organization, and connect it with external research projects and information sources (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 82-3). Furthermore, in its discussion of strategies for building “organizational capacity” (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 72), skills development (implicitly referring to the skills of staff) is the first of a list of five areas of focus. Assessment, evaluation, and performance management figure prominently in this discussion of skill development. It is also in this section that the Community Training Program (CTP) is first named and outlined. However, very little detail is
provided as to what the CTP is, save “[t]he Community Training Plan framework allows staff to be the primary decision makers related to specific training needs that fall over and above job requirements” (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 73). However, it is not presented in the CMP as the organization’s only skills development plan: an additional skills assessment is announced as running alongside the CTP’s evaluation, which will “inform and complement” the CTP (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 75).

Interestingly, the CMP does describe in more detail a new “performance management system”, whereby a “data warehouse” will be created to capture performance statistics (Toronto Community Housing Corporation, 2007, p. 94). “Current performance in key indicators” will be displayed on a “dashboard” on the computers of every “business unit”. The CMP explains that this new performance management system will “...enable managers to drill down as the indicators are changing to identify trouble spots and to put in response measures quickly”. The CMP adds that this new system will see an additional investment of $50,000.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, a brief overview of social housing in Toronto, the short history of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation, and the Community Management Plan for 2008-10 has been provided. The intention behind this chapter was to provide some context to the development of the Community Training Plan, however it would be impossible to provide all relevant background information, especially since a great deal of does not involve the organization itself, but instead relate to the informal relations and the lived histories accumulating since long before the TCHC came into existence. However, the institutional and industry related contexts such as national and provincial trends in social housing, participatory governance for tenants, and reorganization and revitalization projects do bear upon the emergence and development of the CTP, and upon the role, effects and success of the training plan in the lives of staff. The broad social changes discussed, many either created and/or exacerbated by government decision making, have meant that additional responsibilities and challenges have been added to the day-to-day front line staff in the housing sector. Furthermore, the newness of the organization and the
direction in which it is taking social housing in the city (which I would summarize as walking the line between community governance and increased privatization), shape the development and sustainability of the CTP, the relationships between groups and individuals at work, and the nature of service provision on a day to day basis. Finally, the creation of the CMP has provided a framework out of which a training program with the qualities of the CTP has grown, although the wording and content of CMP presents both possibilities and limitations for change.


CHAPTER 6 - THE CTP: STRUCTURE, PROCESSES AND PRELIMINARY OUTCOMES

Introduction

As seen earlier, Nicky Solomon (1999) described how the workplace project of socializing people to be certain kinds of workers was being broadened to include a socialization to be certain kinds of learners. Because of the intersecting and often downplayed relations of power found in places of work as well as the increasingly invasive nature of managerial practices into the lives of working people, important questions are raised regarding the direction these trends are taking into the future. In the struggle between people working together within an organization, workplace learning has become an important resource both for management and, as seen at Toronto Community Housing, for staff. What “kinds of learners” people are becoming depends not only upon what people are learning, but also upon how the learning emerges. The Community Training Plan (CTP) demonstrates the potential value to working people and the community of a worker-owned learning plan in the workplace, whereby the processes are based on influential participation. Influential participation, once again, refers to participation in formal decision making processes by those typically excluded from such processes in a way that centers their interests and perspectives, empowers them to act despite hierarchical structures of power, and unsettles the control the privileged exercise over knowledge production. Recalling a message from Venezuela’s Constitution referred to earlier, human development in such contexts is the result of a series of processes whereby people might transform themselves.

In previous chapters, the CTP was introduced and described as far as its basic elements are concerned. However, this chapter will provide a much more detailed description of the structure and processes of the plan, followed by an analysis of these structures in the context the workplace learning literature and participation theories presented earlier. Preliminary outcomes of the plan will be incorporated into this analysis in order to enrich our understanding of the lived experiences of this unique training plan.
Part One: The Community Training Plan

Origin

The idea for the Community Training Plan at the TCHC emerged when the newly formed organization identified the need for a training needs analysis for frontline staff working directly with tenants in the housing units across the city. Using the participatory community model of planning and governance already being implemented at the TCHC in tenant councils, the plan developed as a partnership between the staff, union locals and management (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 5). The details of the model itself were informed by participatory educational methodology and participatory structures of governance (Training and Development Unit p. 5). The plan was first piloted in the winter of 2002-3 (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 2) in one community, and has steadily been established in other communities ever since. By 2008, 20 communities were involved (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 2).

The Process

Needs Analysis

When someone from a Community Housing Unit wishes to establish the Community Training Plan (CTP) in their workplace, the Training and Development Unit approaches the manager then the staff for approval to move forward. If the desire to implement the CTP exists, a needs analysis is conducted. This involves two workshops during which staff decide through discussion and deliberation what training they need and would like to see. This deliberation happens amongst staff first grouped according to specific job categories, and then as a large group including all Community Housing Unit staff. Long lists of trainings are created, and then the topics are prioritized through ‘dotmocracy’. All staff are given a number of votes, which they distribute in the form of ‘dots’ amongst the trainings they most wish to have. There are two ways in which priorities are identified. The first category is called “skills training”, and is based on job categories. This category of trainings is intended to help people “do their job better”. The second category is called “all-staff training”, and includes those trainings identified which help the staff as a whole either work
better as a team or better understand the communities in which they work (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 5).

**Training Committees and Training Plans**

When the CTP is being established in a Community Housing Unit, a Training Committee is also created. The members of this committee is elected by the staff, and composed of people from each Community Housing Unit job category: custodians, custodial maintenance, handy-workers, superintendents and office staff. The role of the committee is to take the trainings identified by the staff and design the Community Housing Unit’s Training Plan. The training plan is a long term proposal detailing the rational for why the trainings are important for tenants, the organization and staff, as well as a proposed budget for each Training Plan. Participating Community Housing Units create a new one every two to three years. Once the plan is laid out by the committees, it is presented back to staff for approval and then presented by the committees to the unions and managers. Meeting once a month, the training committees develop and monitor the budget, rational, timelines and class lists for each of the trainings. The committees, with the support of the Training Unit, also select trainers and design the curricula. They also evaluate programs, recommend changes, and build their own leadership skills during annual retreats.

**The Training and Development Unit**

The Training and Development Unit, usually referred to simply as ‘The Training Unit’, is a small group who supports the capacity building, curriculum development work and leadership of the training committees “at every stage” of the CTP process (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 2). It also “ensures training is on track” (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 5). The Training Unit is housed in the Human Resources Division.

**Kinds of Trainings**

An important aspect of every stage of the CTP process is the ways that the Training Unit gains and maintains the trust of potential and currently participating staff. In the video describing the pilot project, the Training Unit gained this trust by eliciting artistic engagement through a drawing activity and also by having the staff elect representatives.
for each job category (Training and Development Unit, 2003). This step, of establishing the trust and interest of staff, was recognized by the participants as being a particularly vital moment. Over the course of the CTP’s short history, the establishment of trust and the discussion and deliberation process has yielded a creative range of training and learning possibilities. These included job-related trainings which often go beyond the specific job descriptions (such as plumbing, weatherization, computer training) and Understanding Our Community Better (“UOCB”) trainings, which include topics very seldom seen in the workplace (such as Mental Health Issues, Domestic Violence, Understanding Racism, Understanding Poverty, etc).  

Another significant component of the CTP process is curriculum development. The curriculum is most often and ideally developed in-house as opposed to importing trainings from outside the organization. The rationale behind this is that it increases the relevancy of the training for the learners, and secondly, that it adds to the sustainability and continuity of the CTP and the knowledge accumulated therein. The curricula is worked upon, developed and kept over time by staff participants as a group, and the knowledge and energies are not lost when individual facilitators change.

**The CTP and Influential Participation**

Briefly before proceeding to a more complete and in-depth analysis of this structure as outlined above, I’d like to highlight how the CTP is a strong example of an influential participatory system. The CTP is a formal process in the workplace whereby the staff themselves name, prioritize and collectively make decisions regarding their training and learning needs. This formal staff decision making process sees decisions being made by those typically excluded: previously, and in CHUs where the CTP has not been initiated, managers usually identified the workplace training needs of frontline staff. The discussion and deliberation process in the needs analysis phase (and informally, throughout), as well as the internal development of curriculum, center the interests and perspectives of the staff by providing respectful and validating spaces for these interests and perspectives to 

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1 See Appendix A for a more lengthy sample of the training sessions offered.
emerge. Furthermore, the CTP empowers staff to act within certain structures of power found in the workplace: not only does the Plan include components designed to establish and maintain the support of management and union locals, but within the plan itself, staff are encouraged to build their own confidence levels, as well as their confidence as a group, in order to act upon their knowledge. Finally, the very existence of this model at the TCHC, along with the redefinition by staff of training needs and procedures, and the staff’s collective ownership over curriculum content, works to unsettle the control over knowledge production previously held by management. These general conclusions will be further examined in part two of this chapter, where some preliminary outcomes of the model will be considered in light of the workplace learning and workplace participation literature seen earlier.

Part Two: Analysis and Preliminary Outcomes of The CTP

The first part of this chapter explained the basic structure of the CTP and highlighted the ways in which it presents the opportunities for influential participation in workplace learning. The second part will discuss why this model is unique, and propose connections between these features and some of the outcomes identified in a recent internal evaluation of the Plan. This section will be divided into four sub-themes, some of which, as discussed in the methods section in Chapter Three, emerged from my analysis of the materials, while others were identified over time during discussion with the Training Unit and Staff Committee members. The sub-themes are based upon what I understand to be the underlying values of the CTP, manifested in different components of its structure. The four sub-themes include: New Engagement and Participation; New Learning Foci; New Spaces in the Workplaces; and Staff Ownership of Learning. These sub-themes are developed more or less strongly depending on the extent to which they were explored in the CTP materials I used. However, as they evolved in the writing of this chapter, I realized just how intimately the sub-themes were connected to one another: the particular value underlying one sub-theme, and the outcomes arising from it, are related to the values and outcomes of other sub-themes, and likely could not have arisen in isolation. It is also important to understand, however, that the materials being used do not provide any
information regarding how the outcomes vary according to the social location of the staff who are participating. Without being able to incorporate the complexity of the intersecting social location of participants into our understanding of the outcomes of the CTP, the outcomes discussed below will remain largely abstracted from the lived experiences of staff participants.

Central to all the sub-themes discussed below are a few key points that I wish to briefly identify. Firstly, in the processes of the CTP, workplace learning ceases to be the naturalized domain of management. Staff learners are constructed and recognized, and recognize in each other, knowledgeable and skilled workers who have both an interest and a right in determining workplace learning agendas and procedures. Furthermore, as identified in the Evaluation Report, the idea of a ‘healthy organization’ (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 3) seems to carry between the sub-themes. When people are able to transform their spaces of work and the nature of their participation, and training is determined by the lived and shared experiences of work, a kind of healthy balance seems to grow within the organization. Finally, as identified by a community partner from the Labour Education Centre (Toronto) in the second appendix of the Evaluation Report, the CTP is about politicization and the development of a community of participating citizens (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 12). Each of these themes is developed within the sections below.

**New Engagement and Participation**

The CTP opens up genuine possibilities for new ways for staff to engage in workplace through influential participation in training and learning. ‘Building staff engagement’ is identified as a top overall finding in the CTP Evaluation Report (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 3), in contrast to testimonial in the *Roadshow Handbook* explaining how prior to the CTP, staff did not participate, but “sat back” (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 12). In almost every stage of the CTP, active and creative forms of staff engagement and participation in the workplace are encouraged and valued, instead of discouraged or limited. As seen above, the workshops whereby the ideas for Learning Plans are developed involve discussion and deliberation of training ideas in small
groups based on job categories and in larger staff-wide groups. In particular, the technique of dotmocracy gives all staff at these workshops the opportunity to influence the prioritizing of trainings ideas. Staff Training Committees offer staff the opportunity to be more directly involved in the logistics and leadership of planning the training. Finally, the task of producing an evaluation of the CTP was taken up by a group of staff. With the support of the Training Unit, this group of staff developed data collection and analysis techniques, and carried out a complete and in-depth participatory evaluation of the first 5 years of the CTP. This evaluation, like the rest of the CTP, was driven by staff input, engagement and perspectives.

As such, frontline staff are re-conceptualized as valued knowers within the organization, especially in their role as learners. By actively participating in developing and implementing learning plans, staff enable the provision of more relevant and “real” learning. As such, these new forms of engagement and participation in the workplace are closely related to the New Learning Foci sub-theme, where it is seen that what is learned is being transformed under the CTP. Furthermore, the nature and outcomes of staff participation in learning, especially influential participation, is also intimately connected to the sub-theme of Staff Ownership of Learning. Not only does increased influential participation create a sense of collective ownership and pride in the outcomes, but staff ownership in the workplace might also inspire new and growing forms of staff engagement and participation. However, opportunities to participate and engage do not always apply equally to all staff: intersectionality and social location will temper how individuals feel they can take advantage of the CTP’s opportunities for engagement, as well as the outcomes of whatever form their participation takes.

Outcomes of New Engagement and Participation

There are specific outcomes that have arisen because of the participatory methods developed in the CTP. Through my reading of the evaluation and roadshow materials, as well as the CTP videos, I have identified three broad, concurrent outcomes of participation in the CTP: personal growth and greater openness to learning, increased appreciation of diversity in the workplace, and increased participation in other spheres.
Positive personal experiences of growth and learning are perhaps the most salient outcomes of the Plan seen in the videos and evaluation materials. These outcomes are represented across all sub-themes, whether directly as in the New Learning Foci, or indirectly as in the others. The quality of the experiences is determined by many factors, but the fact that they emerge in participatory settings is certainly an important one. By participation, I am referring to both influential participation in formal decision making but also to the ways in which people relate with others in the spaces created by the CTP. Furthermore, the growth experienced through participation exists in several ways prior to the content of the learning and training provided through the CTP. It is the experience of personal growth that is common to participation in democratic structures, be it in the field of research, civic governance or the workplace. Whether this personal growth is described as learning, development, change or transformation, people at the TCHC testify that their participation has affected them and their relationships at work, at home and in other spheres of community life. Participation in the CTP has given some people, particularly training committee members, a sense of leadership in the area of training amongst their peers. One training committee member explained that their participation in the CTP had bolstered their confidence and friendliness, and they felt pride in being a committee member and in their volunteerism in the workplace (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 14). Another committee member said that their leadership role had given them a sense of pride and satisfaction with their work, particularly insofar as they could tell people outside of the workplace about their contributions (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 14). In the overall ‘Evaluation Findings’ section of the Evaluation Report, “learning how to participate” was listed third overall (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 4). These positive experiences of personal growth, especially as they relate to the acquisition of participation skills and competencies, is part of the process described in Chapter Three using the work of Herbert (2002) and Marquardt (1999) (in Fenwick 2003), and of Daniel Schugurensky (2003), who argues that participation fosters the development of civic virtues and the building of political capital. Furthermore, the learning and growth outcomes of participation in the context of the CTP are similar to those discussed in the context of Participatory Action Research, as a result of the relationship between participation and
ownership over knowledge building activities, and simultaneously the “two-way exchange of information” (Morris, 2002; p.10). The kinds of growth associated with PAR, such as learning new things, networking and support, development of self-confidence (Morris, 2002; p.10), are seen in the outcomes of this sub-theme and throughout the others as well.

In a similar vein, many also identified the development of personal confidence in participation aptitudes (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 11), with several people attributing this personal change to the germination of the desire for further participation and engagement in other spaces (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, pp. 8, 16). As such, participation in the CTP has facilitated and inspired participation in other initiatives and programs, suggesting that not only are competencies and confidence being developed but also an appreciation for engagement by people and desire for stronger more democratic communities. One community training partner attributes the form of engagement practiced by participants in the CTP as being “what community is all about” (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 11). Part of what this training partner identifies as being central to this form of engagement are understanding and taking action towards social change in the intersecting forms of oppression people experience, which is the final outcome of participation to be analyzed.

Participation in the CTP facilitates an understanding of the diversity of experiences and perspectives in the workplace, especially the differences arising from one’s job position within the organization. Staff participation highlights how front line staff have different perspectives and understandings of issues in the workplace relative to management and external trainers (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 11). This has been a central principle of the Plan from the outset, but has been demonstrated by the innovative trainings over the course of its development, in the pedagogical strengths of participatory method (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 10) as well as the other learning outcomes detailed in the proceeding sub-theme. In Chapter Two, the practice whereby dominant workplace learning literature privileges and normalizes particular people as knowers in the workplace was identified (see Fenwick 2003). Such practices were also discussed in the context of research, whereby participatory action research reversed the dominant practice of privileging certain perspectives over others. Participation in the CTP by
those typically excluded from the category of knowers legitimizes their perspectives and makes space for them to be heard and acted upon. Testimonies from participants in the Evaluation Report describe learning about the perspectives of others through role playing exercises and dotmocracy (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 10, 2008b, p. 11). Furthermore, a Training Committee member describes how everyone ‘steps up’ and speaks, and no one person takes a leadership role (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 15).

More broadly, the Evaluation Report’s main findings state that the CTP encourages “independent thought which builds inclusion” (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 4), and explains that one of the biggest lessons arising from the CTP is that “a community training plan model ensures participation and equity through a balancing of each job group having access to training through a needs analysis and scheduling suitable of OU needs” (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 10). The extent to which equity is fostered along the intersecting forms of social oppression in the workplace, that is, beyond job categories, is however not fully developed in the Evaluation Findings. This raises some questions regarding how the effects of social location are reproduced in participatory settings when not named and addressed head-on. Nevertheless, testimony in one video describes the growth of the “CTP family”, where respect, kindness of heart, compassion and courage are used to enable the participation of all (Training and Development Unit, 2007). Perhaps through participatory processes and discourses of community, opportunities to name, legitimize and confront diversity amongst staff and job categories are created. This possibility is captured by Michael Lebowitz (2005) when he asks “how can we understand the needs of others without hearing their voices?” (p. 67). In creating spaces where people might meet and share their experiences, and where practices are established whereby the perspectives offered by individuals are listened to respectfully by the group, opportunities to address those issues often silenced by a fear of diversity and difference might be taken up.

New Learning Foci

Secondly only to participation, the creation of new learning foci is a central principle and outcome of the CTP. It is, however, also intimately linked with participation. In Chapter
Two and Three, questions were raised regarding the reasons that workplace training is predominantly restricted to narrow, economic rationalist approaches (see Fischer and Hannah 2002; Lebowitz 2005). The CTP enables a broader and more relevant conception of what skills are needed in the provision of social housing services, whether it is structured into formal trainings, facilitated informally through participatory structures or through some combination of both. Concretely, new learning foci emerge from staff gatherings for deliberation and discussion of training needs, annual leadership trainings for committee members, internal development and maintenance of curriculum, informal learning outcomes of participation (as discussed briefly in the previous sub-theme, but expanded upon below), and the creation of strategic, long term learning plans. As seen in Chapters One and Two, the definition of skill and knowledge, and consequently of learning needs, in the workplace is an important political and material power. Gaventa and Cornwall (2001), for instance, explain that access to knowledge production, as well as its uses and dissemination, affects the boundaries of what is considered possible. It not only transforms the experiences of people and groups who are participating in the training, but also affects the communities and spheres of social life in and around the workplace. The training needs of the workplace, when determined by those doing the work on the frontlines, are shown to be broader than those dictated by economic rationalism, capitalism, liability. More training and a broader range of training topics are considered necessary. When needs are identified in this way, workplace learning also becomes more relevant: the trainings taken can be directly applied to the work of the learners, and groups can collectively respond in creative ways through training to the stresses arising from the lived experiences and needs of work.

What has emerged from the CTP to date in terms of new learning foci? The very existence of new learning foci is in itself an outcome with important consequences in terms of empowering the staff who have participated and developed a sense of collective ownership in the plan. However, what have been the specific learning foci and outcomes to emerge from the CTP?
Outcomes of New Learning Foci

Personal development figures very prominently in the outcomes represented in CTP materials. There is an entire section of testimonials in the Roadshow Handbook dedicated to ‘staff personal development in the CTP’ (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 8). In fact, it is the first section of testimonials. From this, I would argue that personal development is not only a “happy side effect” of participation in the CTP, but is seen as a priority for those involved. Examples of the personal development identified by staff include: the ability to “stand up for myself” (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 8), confidence (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 8), learning to be more vocal (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 8), more calm (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 8), developing higher self esteem (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 8), finding oneself being a better person (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 8), establishing better relationships with children and grandchildren (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 8), becoming a team player at home and work (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 8), knowledge of rights and the corresponding ‘avenues to take’ (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 8), increased ‘understanding of life – how to live a better life’ (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 8), acceptance that mistakes are O.K. (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 10), dealing with emotions and “not bott[ling] them up” (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 11), and learning to listen and speak up with confidence despite shyness of speaking with an accent (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 12). Significantly, in the testimonials it becomes apparent that very few of the benefits of this ‘personal’ development stay within the individual; they are carried outward, beyond the person into the workplace, and then beyond the workplace into the community and home.

In-depth tenant service skills and useful technical skills that go beyond the formal job descriptions are also new or broadened foci of learning within the CTP. The second item under the Training and Learning section of the Evaluation Findings relates to skills training: the high level of training, the emphasis on safety, and the resulting confidence in undertaking more complicated operations in the workplace are identified. (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 3) In one testimonial section, an individual described the
utility of computer software training, whereby they came away with concrete ways of applying the software every day at work as well as a handbook for reference. (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 11) Not only are more useful skills trainings offered, such as identified by this person, but they are offered to more people, more often.

Beyond technical skills such as those referred to above, tenant and community service takes on a special focus. The CTP series of trainings entitled “Understanding our Community Better” (UOCB) is the number one evaluation finding under the Training and Learning section, where it is explained that the series improved customer service because it improved “understanding, [built] empathy and sensitization among staff teams and also ... work with tenants” (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 3). In the Roadshow Handbook, the entire second section of testimonials is dedicated to comments relating to Tenant Service. Staff identified improvements in understanding and communicating with tenants as a result of mental health and poverty issues training, (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 9) as well as the positive relationship between feelings of safety in the workplace and confidence (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 9). Not only were things learned formally through UOCB curriculum content, but new ideas and understandings about the community and staff groups were created through the discussions facilitated during the trainings (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 9). On several occasions, CTP trainings were attributed with helping staff cope with the stresses of working on the front lines of social housing; the training entitled ‘understanding death’ was identified as particularly relevant, and also as a testament to the kinds of new learning foci emerging from staff influential participation in workplace training (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 17). In the Evaluation Report, it’s explained that through the CTP, staff are developing a skills set for community building, respecting diversity and promoting of human rights in the workplace (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 4). Part of this involves challenging taboos, including issues surrounding gender and racism despite the tenseness of the discussions identified in one testimonial (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 12).

Not only is there a greater focus on tenant communities in the CTP, but also upon the community of staff. Greater understanding and sense of unity between people working
together as well as between people working in different housing communities performing similar tasks has emerged as an outcome both of formal curriculum, as well as in the informal gathering and sharing between staff in the spaces of the CTP. One testimonial describes how team building training enabled the group to “see the big picture”, create “positive attitudes all around”, “speak out”, all of which were seen as bringing staff together (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 11). Greater sharing and understanding amongst staff was described by another as giving “relief” (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 10), which speaks to the positive impact on people’s experiences of work and the overall health of the workplace created through the creation of strong staff teams.

Overall, a greater orientation towards the community is fostered through the CTP: staff use their knowledge and experiences on the front lines of social housing service provision to identify training and learning needs. As discussed in earlier chapters, influential participation in workplace learning enables an acknowledgement that people work and live in communities, and are linked to one another as human beings (as opposed to as service provider and client) as a result. This process not only improves the quality of service, but it also improves staff experiences at work, and establishes a sense of personal and collective ownership over the services people are providing. This however is elaborated in the final sub-theme.

**New Spaces in the Workplace**

As seen in Chapter Two, Sawchuk (2003) describes working people having access to communities in which their standpoints are recognized and shared as having social, political and economic importance. In a similar way to how communities offer people ‘spaces’ in which to interact with others, for the purposes of this sub-theme, ‘space’ refers to social settings. However, as mentioned in Chapter 4, the Training Unit has created physical spaces for the purposes of the CTP, and filled them with books, inviting furniture, colour and sunlight. The significance of these new spaces, as well as other forms of new spaces, is not explored in this thesis but does offer opportunities for interesting and fruitful future analysis. Returning to the new social spaces afforded by the processes and participation in the CTP, a key change is the creation of a certain degree of safety, where staff participate in
the workplace without fear of reprisals and sanctions from their managers. This would enable collective resistance to the managerial and organizational practices that isolate staff from each other. The extent to which these spaces are safe for workers is not only dependent on security from managerial sanctions, but also on security from sanctions from other staff. People in the workplace are not only socially and politically located based on their job category but also on the intersections of race, ability, immigration status, gender, sexuality, and age. As such, spaces must be safe in a way that does not privilege one aspect of people’s identity to the exclusion of others.

The new spaces created within the CTP are indicated by staff in so far as they describe feeling freer to participate and voice their opinions to facilitators and in discussion. Examples of such spaces might include the monthly Training Committee meetings, annual leadership retreats for committee members at a Toronto Islands location, the trainings themselves, including the informal, unstructured spaces in and around the trainings, in the discussion and deliberation workshops where training needs are identified and prioritized, and finally in interactions with the Training Unit staff. One person described how facilitators did not speak “down to” the staff because as a group, they were all equal. They went on to explain how easy it was to me “in an environment” where learning was happening, and people felt free to express themselves (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 10). Other participants explained how they felt comfortable and confident making mistakes and asking questions (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, pp. 10, 11). One person said that the trainings were good opportunities to “relax, unwind and learn”, while another person described how the CTP changed every time the committees met (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 17).

The Outcomes of New Spaces in the Workplace

Participants in the videos and Evaluation materials explained that, in meeting and working with other staff through the CTP they were able to hear the stories and experiences of others. This sharing was experienced as significant both when the stories were felt to be familiar as well as when they were different. In the video This is Leadership This is Change (Training and Development Unit, 2007), there was an exercise in which
committee members were encouraged to share their personal stories of leadership. Stories were shared of sexism and racism in the workplace, and how these individuals overcame these oppressive experiences. In the Roadshow testimonials, one person described how they had acquired new knowledge from others, and also that many of the stories were similar between participating staff (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 12). In addition to the value of the stories for building understanding and knowledge, it is also the activity of sharing, created in these new spaces of the CTP, that might be identified as an important outcome of these new spaces. Sharing itself promotes and strengthens the unity of the group. In a way, I would argue that the act of sharing one’s experiences is linked to building a sense of collective ownership of the diverse experiences and struggles of the group. Staff ownership in the workplace is discussed in greater detail in the final sub-theme section.

The new spaces in the workplace created by the CTP have not only facilitated the sharing of stories and knowledges, but they also created stronger team relations between staff. A growing sense of group unity and of the importance of equity has emerged through participatory methods and staff-centered spaces. Words like ‘bonding’ (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 15), ‘closeness’ (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 15), ‘comfort’, (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 15), ‘rich pool of friends’ (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 15) and ‘family’ (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 12) are used. One participant attributes the trainings with having built morale and increased the familiarity and closeness of the staff to one another (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. pg 12). Another participant explains in the video entitled One Team (Training and Development Unit, 2005) that the best part of being on the Training Committee had been the relationships with co-workers that developed as a result, and hypothesized that the ‘real benefit’ of the CTP for the staff was the time they spent together.

**Staff Ownership of Learning**

This sub-theme has been left until the last because I feel it might ultimately be the most significant if one’s agenda is to change the distribution of power in the workplace. By staff ownership of learning I am referring to both the experience and assumption of
collective ownership over human development, and knowledge as well as its recognition by the organization formally and in practice. Ownership must be full as well, where processes of participation and decision making by staff do not run parallel to other decisions making by management, which might undermine the decisions of the staff either symbolically or otherwise. Ownership in the workplace as well as in other spheres of participation (such as research and governance), is a fragile relationship which must be continuously reinforced, particularly through the building of trust. As discussed in Chapter Three, there often exists the risk for co-option of the participatory process or results by dominant groups. This might be extended to include premature closure of a program as well. I would contend that the existence of trust and ownership reinforce one another: real ownership by participants, whereby they control the processes and outcomes, is required for trust to build between participants and management or other dominant groups. However, trust is also a prerequisite of collective ownership insofar as ownership requires a certain voluntary investment by staff prior to engaging in programs like the CTP.

Staff ownership and trust are established and maintained by various important components of the CTP structure. Firstly, there is a commitment to the CTP by the management of Toronto Community Housing Corporation. In the evaluation findings, in the ‘Organization’ section, the fourth point is: “the CTP shows the company believes in our staff by putting resources there. We INVEST in staff and give them ownership of learning” (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 4). Collective ownership is also established through planning, insofar as the 2-3 year long training plans have ensured that trainings actually happen (see “Our biggest lessons” section, (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 10). In this way as well as in others, collective ownership can be considered synonymous with control. The responsibilities undertaken by those participating in identify and prioritize learning needs, as well as those volunteering in the Training Committees, establish and reinforce the experiences of collective ownership and control and ultimately the sustainability of the CTP within the organization. Staff control over the Community Training Plan budget has also been strengthened since the inception of the CTP, with the Training Committees proposing budgets and keeping the expenditures of the Training Unit accountable to the staff. Control over the budget might also reinforce the trust that the
staff have in the longevity of CTP and the commitment of the organization to its staff-centred principles. Another example of how collective ownership over learning is manifested in the CTP through the emphasis on the internal development of courses and curriculum.

**Outcomes of Staff Ownership of Learning**

In the overall Evaluation Findings section the Evaluation Report, “builds staff empowerment” is listed fourth (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 3). In the same section, “staff especially OWN the program and feel a sense of pride – they have built the program” is the seventh finding (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 3). The establishment of staff ownership of the CTP has been facilitated by the building of trust: in the *Roadshow Handbook*, a staff member describes how at first they were unbelieving and questioning the involvement and intentions of their managers. However, over time, they were able to see how through the provision of ‘real’ opportunity, staff have really been helped (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p.16). Emerging out of the establishment of staff ownership of the CTP, but not unconnected to the other sub-themes, are several interesting outcomes. One participant describes how the staff have “taken ownership”, and established the CTP as their “own, independent, beautiful thing” (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p.17). The wording ‘taken ownership’, as opposed to ownership being ‘given’, is an interesting choice, suggesting that the staff have actively created collective ownership of the CTP. Describing the CTP as independent, and perhaps linking the independence with beauty, is also an outcome of collective ownership, speaking to the sense staff have of what they have created in their place of work. In one testimonial, a staff member explains how some job groups that were considered “traditionally quiet” now, as a result of the CTP, speak up (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 14). This suggests that expressing one’s opinions in the workplace is facilitated by ownership (like entitlement, or a sense thereof). Significantly, as suggested in this last testimonial, the ability to express one’s opinions is not only contingent on formal designation of ownership, but also upon the creation of spaces which are safe for people’s full participation, as discussed in the previous sub-theme.
Another staff member specifically indicates that staff ownership of the CTP is linked to staff “having a say” (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p.17), and goes on to explain that ownership has resulted in “the power to plan and implement” with no “barriers” (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p.17). This speaks to the ways in which collective ownership and control of the CTP has been allowed to fully develop thus far, with the perception being that the organization recognizes the legitimacy of staff decision making.

Staff ownership over the CTP, arising from both the ways in which the staff have taken control for themselves and from the structural designations of the organization, has enabled many of the outcomes seen in the previous sub-themes. This includes the trust necessary for new forms of participation, the energy and creativity necessary for imagining and developing new learning foci, and creation of safe spaces wherein staff can share, grow and resist as a team and as individuals. This was observed by one community facilitator, who described how the CTP allows “an individual to feel a sense of integrity, a sense of value and the ability to contribute on a level that is probably unprecedented in this area of work” (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 11). My interpretation of “allows” suggests that it is the collective ownership and control that is enabling these outcomes.

In the videos and evaluation materials, there were indications that the sense of staff ownership fostered within the CTP extended beyond these spaces: a sense of ownership over one’s work was also being established or reinforced. Being able to perform basic repairs oneself, instead of having to ask for assistance from others or from contractors, was mentioned by some staff (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p.10). One person described how staff were “becoming more involved in making positive changes with the way we run our business...” (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 14, emphasis added). Their choice of words strongly conveys a collective sense of ownership over the services front line staff are providing in their communities. This question of how ownership over training and knowledge might translate into a sense of ownership over one’s work would require further development, especially to ascertain whether staff felt ownership over the services they were providing prior to their involvement with the CTP. However, I would argue that the creation of spaces in which staff are thinking about long term,
community oriented training needs, together with positive experiences of personal growth and team building, would at least strengthen the sense of staff ownership over their work.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This chapter, divided into two sections, offers an overview of the CTP at the Toronto Community Housing Corporation followed by an analysis of four unique sub-themes and their preliminary outcomes of the Plan. In the first section, a detailed description was provided of the main structures and procedures of the Plan, including the needs analysis workshops, training committees, training plans, the Training and Development Unit, and the different kinds of trainings offered. Part One also included a sort discussion of the CTP and influential participation, as defined earlier in Chapter Three. Part Two went onto identify and define four sub-themes of the CTP which emerged out of the evaluation materials produced by a team of Training Unit and front line staff. These sub-themes are New Forms of Participation, New Learning Foci, New Spaces in the Workplace and Staff Ownership. Each of these sub-themes are ways of understanding the key organizing principles of the CTP: they are ways of doing learning at work that have begun to produce positive outcomes amongst the participating staff at the TCHC and the communities in which they live and work. Interestingly, the sub-themes emerged as they do, along with the outcomes assigned to each, largely because of each other. For instance, participation would not have been as widespread and enthusiastic had staff ownership and control not been established, or if learning methods and content were less relevant, or even if the spaces created by the CTP had been less relaxing and staff-friendly. However, staff participation in the CTP was part of what established their collective ownership of the plan, enabled the development of new learning methods and courses, and the created staff centered spaces.

There are some themes, as seen earlier in this chapter, that run through all components of the CTP, such as the re-conceptualization of who can and ought to be making decisions about training in the workplace, the effort towards creating ‘healthy organizations’, and an underlying awareness of how the CTP empowers staff in the workplace. In a similar way, the outcomes which have emerged to date all seem to bear a common link: through the CTP, people are creating moments whereby they might
reconnect with some of the most basic components of their lives. Through sharing knowledge and growing as a community in practical, artistic, communal and personal ways, the staff are reconnecting with themselves, their personal and collective agency, with their work, their families, and with those they work with. One community facilitator in One Team (2003) states,

And I believe that if you have artistic moments in your life, you can make better work. You can be more creative in your work, and more respectful to people. I think these events make us more humans and more in touch with ourselves. (Training and Development Unit, 2005)

How have the processes and outcomes of the CTP brought more ‘artistic’ moments into the workplace, or other kinds of moments wherein positive experiences of learning, growth and creativity ripple outwards and enhance people’s lives? How has the CTP, considering some of the outcomes delineated above, made the participants more ‘human’ and more in touch with themselves? One training committee member describes how one of the first activities of the CTP pilot in 2003 in the following way:

Having the workers come together, drawing the kind of stuff – the pictures – that you’ll probably see at some later time: doing it was fascinating to see and I really believe it drew the interests of everybody that was on board. (Training and Development Unit, 2003)

Using art and creativity to earn the interest and trust of the staff during those earlier stages of the CTP was successful, perhaps because it showed how the CTP was structured around an understanding of staff as being agentive, creative, living beings as opposed to service employees within a large organization. In the Roadshow Handbook, one person is quoted as saying “CTP bring out the goodness in people. I had not seen the goodness – the hidden love – I saw it.” (Training and Development Unit, 2008a, p. 11) Because the structure of the CTP reflected a more holistic understanding of the staff, their knowledge and the work they do, as well as having instituted and elicited staff ownership of the Plan, the staff were able and sought to participate in ways involving their whole selves. As a group, they created for themselves and their communities a culture of compassion and caring, and of learning and growth.
In an earlier chapter we saw how individuals in the workplace are both constructed as individuals in the neo-liberal tradition, as well as generalized or homogenized based on experience, skill and life circumstances. The result, I argued, created a separation between the workplace and other spheres of life. In other words, the ways in which people are treated and how they interact in training contexts at work are thought to have little effect on the rest of their lives. The CTP, with the outcomes seen above, would suggest otherwise. They demonstrate clearly that people’s lives are changed when the content of their learning and circumstances of their participation in the workplace are altered.

The social value of the CTP, as seen in some of the outcomes (especially under the sub-theme of New Spaces in the Workplace) suggests a range of additional questions which might be addressed through using those bodies of research that have been most concerned with the way that groups engage in or otherwise play a role in bringing about significant forms of change, such as social movement theory. Areas to explore might include participation rates, the means and outcomes of networks, informal and formal learning strategies, shared sense of grievances, politicization of groups, the impacts of resistance on building group unity, inclusion and exclusion within social movements, as well as other aspects. Understanding of course that the CTP exists in a localized workplace setting, social movement theory might nevertheless be used to reframe the outcomes of the CTP in way that adds or strengthens the political understanding of what the staff are doing at the TCHC. Whether the staff would be interested in or willing to have the CTP reframed in this way, however, is a vital question to pose prior to proceeding.
CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to provide its readers with a picture of a workplace training model that has put into practice many of the ideas and innovations that most of us only end up speaking about. In order to put into context the ways in which the Community Training Plan (CTP) at the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) has challenged traditional ways of doing and thinking about workplace learning, a summary and critique of the dominant trends in the field was outlined in Chapter Two. In Chapter Three, understandings of knowledge, power, participation in the workplace and society were discussed, particularly in terms of how social change can begin at the juncture of these three phenomena. A new term, “influential participation”, was proposed, and applied to forms of participation whereby participants typically marginalized from decision making exert real influence in areas deemed important by participants. This form of participation is a formally instituted process and can serve as a catalyst of change in power relations.

Chapter Four provided the ‘story behind the research’ as well as the methodological considerations that became important as the research developed. Chapter Five gave an account of the historical context of the CTP, pertaining to social housing in Toronto, the recent development of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation including an overview of their Community Management Plan, and finally a brief look at the kinds of jobs and working conditions of the majority of participants in the CTP.

Chapter Six addresses the CTP in its entirety, explaining how the model works and the roles participants play. From there, analysis of the material is carried out, whereby the preliminary outcomes of the CTP, as described in the CTP videos and evaluation materials, are explored using 4 sub-themes: New Engagement and Participation; New Learning Foci; New Spaces in the Workplace and Staff Ownership of Learning in the Workplace. Across these sub-themes and arising from them, personal testimonies recounted the impact of the CTP on individual and family lives, social relationships at work, people’s relationship with work, and overall participation and volunteerism increases.

With this conclusion I hope to address some interesting points from the materials that were set aside in this research but that do suggest fruitful future investigation. Specifically, I have not left space to consider areas of future development identified in the evaluation materials. In the Evaluation Report, there is a section detailing some of the
suggested areas for improvement based on participant responses. These include more personal choice in trainings, more consistency in attendance, the possibility of documenting the history of trainings and keeping statistics, more recognition and incentives for volunteering, better representation on committees, and increasing sustainability through more frequent evaluations, keeping better track of the historical progress of the CTP and using learning from the evaluation during training strategy sessions (Training and Development Unit, 2008b, p. 8-9). In what ways do these suggestions align with the participatory model and notions of collective ownership, thereby ensuring its development remains true to the model, and in what ways do they indicate new directions? Do these suggestions perhaps speak to what George Strauss (2006) calls the “life cycles of participation”, where enthusiasm rises to great heights after the initial hurdles are surmounted only to drop off as the novelty is lost and activities and processes become routine and the old structures of hierarchy are re-established, although perhaps with different people occupying the positions (p. 783). Furthermore, what is the effect of research such as this that explores positive outcomes of one participatory model on the perceived outcomes of future projects? Wilpert (1998) warns that the success or failure of participatory models “…is a function of expectations and when academics as well as practitioners set very idealistic goals, disappointment is an almost inevitable consequence” (p. 144). In what ways have the successes of the CTP be born out of its novelty and the initially low expectations of the staff involved? I believe these are questions commonly posed in relation to participatory models. In the end, I would argue that they place a certain responsibility on participants to constantly be innovative and creative in order to ensure the sustainability of the model, and the on-going participation in it.

In keeping with the desire to find ways of growing the CTP in new and better ways and ensuring its sustainability, there are a few questions that developed over the course of the preparation of this work that I feel would be worth drawing attention to once again in this concluding chapter. The first relates to the on-going barriers to participation and the possibility of disparate outcomes being experienced by participants based on systemic, institutional and overt dynamics of power and privilege. In other words, an important question to ask within any participatory model if one seeks to promote its sustainability and
strength is whether or not the opportunities and advantages of participation are distributed equitably between all possible participants. Part of this, I would argue, might be an evaluation process that takes social location into consideration.

Participatory models alone cannot break down the inequities of power in the workplace or beyond it. Not only do such models require innovative input from participants but they also often require high commitment levels from the organizations or funders under which they operate. Certain flags have been raised about the precarity of progressive management initiatives in the workplace (Thomson 2003), and the traditional role of management is still considered a vital way of ensuring efficient tenant service. To what extent do Taylorist principles of management, as described in the quote that opens this thesis, still apply even after influential participation models are implemented and supported by management?

These cautionary thoughts and questions do not in any way take away how the outcomes of influential participation in workplace training bring forth deep implications for creating everyday spaces that challenge the dominance of capitalism, its contemporary organizational forms, and its discourses. Like those working in the area of participatory research (Morris, 2002; p. 10), there is a sense of a critical mass rising whereby people are demanding access to the privileges of knowledge construction, legitimation and application in the institutions of society. Furthermore, the spaces of work and “the rest of society” are being melded back together through the CTP, with possible implications regarding what are acceptable forms of human relations in the spaces of work previously constructed as distinct. Lebowitz (2005) spoke of participation as transformative activity, which is “precisely the process of developing the knowledge required for [an] alternative society” (p. 67). The possibility of alternatives, together with the personal and collective development of skills and consciousness evidenced in the outcomes of the CTP suggest that systemic change can and does start in these local, creative ways of ‘doing things differently’.

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APPENDIX 1 – CTP TRAININGS

The following is a list of trainings offered in various Community Housing Units at the TCHC since the inception of the CTP in 2003:

- Stress Management
- Community Safety
- Understanding Mental Health
- Landscaping
- Introduction to E-mail
- Electrical
- Conflict Resolution
- Understanding Our Community Better
- Understanding Resettlement Stress
- Customer Service
- Teambuilding
- Safety In Our Workplace
- Understanding Poverty
- Understanding Domestic Violence
- Understanding Sex and Gender Issues
- Understanding Race and Culture Issues
- Plumbing
- Computer Skills 101
- Organizational Skills
- Time Management
- Understanding Death
- Weatherization
- Computer Skills – Excel
- Computer Skills – Powerpoint
- Minor Repairs


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