MORE THAN A CURRICULUM:
THE POLITICAL PROJECT OF RADICAL LABOUR EDUCATION

by

Nicholas Bonokoski

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Graduate Department of Sociology Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Nicholas Bonokoski 2011
Abstract

This thesis analyzes the experiences of participants of the Canadian Labour Congress and Saskatchewan Federation of Labour radical labour youth activist training program “Solidarity Works.” The theoretical work of Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire is used to analyze why radical labour education is important. The theoretical work of Michel Foucault is used, in addition to the work of Gramsci and Freire, to examine the complications of radical labour education. The essential argument of this thesis is that radical labour education programs like Solidarity Works produce an activist subjectivity that ultimately comes into conflict with the institutionalized politics of the labour movement. Solidarity Works is a model radical labour education project, its challenges and successes warrant analysis so those lessons can be used for future radical labour education projects.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Natasha Goudar, Nrinder Nindy Kaur Nann, all of the people who agreed to be interviewed for this thesis, Lara Bonkoski, Simon Enoch, D’Arcy Martin, and Peter Sawchuk.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................... iii

Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 1
  Methodology .................................................................................................................. 3
  Structure ....................................................................................................................... 6

Chapter 1 - Theoretical Foundation: Gramsci, Freire, and Foucault ......................... 8
  Antonio Gramsci .......................................................................................................... 8
  Paulo Freire .................................................................................................................. 14
  Michel Foucault .......................................................................................................... 18
  Gramsci, Freire, and Foucault ..................................................................................... 22

Chapter 2 - Literature Review ....................................................................................... 25
  Mainstream and Radical Labour Education ............................................................... 25
  The Three Contracts .................................................................................................... 30
  Equity and Education in the Labour Movement ....................................................... 33
  Solidarity Works and the Struggle for Equity in the Canadian Labour Movement ... 36

Chapter 3 - Solidarity Works ......................................................................................... 38
  What Produced Solidarity Works ............................................................................... 39
  Solidarity Works .......................................................................................................... 40
  The Classroom Component ......................................................................................... 47
  The Placement Component ......................................................................................... 49
  Participant’s Activism after Solidarity Works ............................................................ 52

Chapter 4 - Analysis of Solidarity Works as a Radical Labour Education Project ...... 57
  Heterotopia and Solidarity Works ............................................................................... 58
  Pastoral Power, Confession, Technologies of the Self, and the Youth Activist Subject 61
  Circuits of Power and the Youth Activist Subject ....................................................... 67
  Gramsci, Freire, and the Complications of Radical Labour Education .................... 70

Conclusion ...................................................................................................................... 76
  Bursting Bubbles ......................................................................................................... 76
  Lessons for Other Radical Labour Education Projects ............................................... 80
  Closing .......................................................................................................................... 81

Bibliography ................................................................................................................... 83
Introduction

I first participated in the Solidarity Works youth labour education program in 2001. It was my introduction to both the labour movement and community activism in Saskatchewan. After Solidarity Works I continued in both community-based activism in Saskatchewan as well as labour movement activism. I was involved with the Canadian Federation of Students at the University of Regina, and on various anti war organizing efforts in Regina. I became the first Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) Youth Vice President and worked on the CUPE National Young Workers group.

After I finished university I worked for the SFL in a one-year term position. As part of the work for this position I was involved with the SFL young workers’ committee. I also did some campaign work and was responsible for an education project for high school students on occupational health and safety issues. Due to my relationship with the young workers committee I was responsible for fundraising for Solidarity Works and for the facilitation of the program in 2004.

It was while I was doing this work that I started to think about how some people who had participated in Solidarity Works had become involved in their unions and how some had not. There were people who had participated in the program who had been deeply involved in both their unions and the labour movement due to their participation in Solidarity Works.
Despite this initial enthusiasm, some had simply dropped out of labour movement activism altogether. The varying impact and the range of experiences of people who had participated in Solidarity Works intrigued me. I felt the need to investigate this further.

Solidarity Works has benefited me in a number of ways. My work with the labour movement has been fulfilling. There are complications though. I have many issues with the structure of the labour movement, its lack of equity, and the way it perpetuates the inequities of capitalism at large.

At the same time I am committed to labour movement activism and am committed to radical labour education. It is this commitment that has led me to investigate the tension between what participants learn in radical labour education and what they experience working within the labour movement in general. There are participants, like myself, who have received a great deal of support and opportunities within the labour movement. However, there are also participants who simply came to a point of burnout or frustration and have left the labour movement altogether. In order to understand these disparate experiences I felt that it was appropriate to look at Solidarity Works as a case study of radical labour education within the labour movement in Saskatchewan.

The essential argument of this thesis is that radical labour education programs like Solidarity Works produce an activist subjectivity that ultimately comes into conflict with the institutionalized politics of the labour movement. The theoretical work of Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire is used to elaborate the necessity of radical labour education.
The theoretical work of Michel Foucault is used to analyze the promises and challenges of radical labour education. Solidarity Works is a model radical labour education project, its challenges and successes warrant analysis so those lessons can be used for future radical labour education projects.

**Methodology**

In order to investigate the experience of Solidarity Works participants I contacted the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour and they allowed me to access the evaluations of Solidarity Works for the four years it ran in Saskatchewan, from 2001-2004. After reviewing the evaluations, which were very positive, I realized that I needed more information than the evaluations provided. I was not solely interested in how people felt about Solidarity Works (SW) after their time in the program ended, I was also interested in how they felt about it having had some time to reflect on their experience.

Moreover, I was not only concerned with participants’ experience within the program, but also what participants had done since Solidarity Works. In particular, I wanted to know what activism – if any – they had done within the labour movement our outside the labour movement. For those that were still involved in activism, I was interested in whether Solidarity Works continued to inform their activism. For those that had discontinued their activism within the labour movement, I was interested in their decision and rationale for leaving.
I interviewed 5 people for this thesis. 48 people participated in Solidarity Works from 2001 to 2004 so my sample accounts for just over ten percent of the people who participated in Solidarity Works. I wanted to make sure the people I interviewed were indicative of the diverse group of participants that had made up Solidarity Works between 2001 and 2004.

In order to accomplish this I interviewed people who had been involved in labour movement activism before Solidarity Works, and those who had not. I also interviewed people who had been involved in community activism before Solidarity Works and had little to do with the labour movement. Furthermore, I interviewed people who participated in Solidarity Works and who facilitated Solidarity Works. Lastly, I interviewed participants who had become increasingly active in their unions after Solidarity Works and those who had ceased their labour movement activism altogether.

I interviewed four women and one man. Far more women than men participated in Solidarity Works. I made sure that there was diverse representation in the interviews as in regards to racialization. All the people who were interviewed are referred to by pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity. A condition of Solidarity Works was that you had to be 26 years of age or younger to participate, so all people who were interviewed were young workers when they first participated in Solidarity Works.
Cynthia is a white woman who was involved with her union youth committee and was a VP on her union’s executive based on her position as chair of her youth committee before Solidarity Works.

Emily is a mixed race woman who was involved with the SFL Summer Camp before participating in Solidarity Works.

Jenny is a white woman whose local supported her attending Solidarity Works and continued to support her after Solidarity Works was over.

Maria is a latin american woman who wasn’t involved in activism, other than attending events, before she participated in Solidarity Works.

Robert is a First Nations man who was heavily involved in activism around issues facing First Nations youth before he participated in Solidarity Works.

I would like to thank all of the participants whom I interviewed for discussing their experiences at Solidarity Works and after with me. It was an enriching experience.
**Structure**

The thesis is split into four chapters. The first chapter addresses the theoretical foundation of the thesis. The work of three theorists, Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire, and Michel Foucault, are discussed. They each bring a key piece to the analysis of *Solidarity Works* and the tension between radical labour education and the mainstream labour movement.

The second chapter reviews the scholarly literature concerned with labour education. The review looks at both mainstream and radical labour education materials, including what both of these types of labour education material share in common and what makes them different.

The third chapter charts the genealogy of *Solidarity Works*, reviewing the circumstances that led to the creation and dissemination of the program across Canada. Following this brief review, the interviews as they related to each section of *Solidarity Works* are presented and discussed. The interview material is analyzed in greater detail in the final chapter.

The final chapter of the thesis utilizes the work of Gramsci, Freire, and Foucault in order to better analyze the experience of the participants I interviewed for this thesis. The interviews experience, and the theoretical contributions of each theorist, both make contributions to the overall conclusions reached in the thesis. Each theorist, and each interviewee, contributes to the thesis in different ways but I believe they work to
complement each other and serve to foster greater understanding of the program and its relation to the wider labour movement in Saskatchewan.

I have and continue to believe that radical labour education is a necessity if we are to have a vibrant, diverse, and effective labour movement in Saskatchewan and in Canada. The labour movement in Saskatchewan and Canada face many of the challenges that unions throughout the world are facing right now. The stripping away of workers’ rights and the assault on good working conditions that is a hallmark of corporate globalization is as relevant to Canada as it is to the rest of the world.

If we are to equip workers in this country to fight against these forces and for broader social justice they need to be provided with the tools to accomplish this. Radical labour education is the means by which this goal can be achieved. It allows workers - both union and non-union, paid and unpaid - to realize that they have a common interest in a better world where workers come first.

I have benefitted a great deal from Solidarity Works. I feel that one weakness of the labour movement in Canada is that there isn’t enough attention paid to analyzing both our successes and failures. I am hoping that through this analysis of this unique program, can make a small contribution to the struggle for social justice in Saskatchewan.
Chapter 1 - Theoretical Foundation: Gramsci, Freire, and Foucault

This thesis will use key theoretical insights of three important 20th century intellectuals. The first two were most certainly activist intellectuals: Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire. The third is Michel Foucault whose work on heterotopia provides the theoretical framework for addressing the promises of radical labour education, as theorized by Gramsci and Freire, as well as the challenges.

This thesis is concerned with the radical labour education project named Solidarity Works! The purpose of this thesis is to examine why radical labour education is both important and challenging. I believe each of these theorists speak in important ways to this purpose.

Antonio Gramsci’s thoughts on the importance of education, both as a means of challenging capitalist hegemony and ensuring a stable Communist Party, is covered in the first section of this chapter. Paulo Freire’s work on education, which is the foundation of popular education, makes up the second part of the chapter. Michel Foucault is the theorist who figures most prominently in this thesis. His work on heterotopia and confession is the topic of the final section of the chapter.

Antonio Gramsci

Antonio Gramsci was an Italian Marxist involved in Italy’s Communist Party for a number of years and imprisoned by Mussolini for his involvement in the Party. Gramsci made a number of important theoretical contributions to Western Marxism. The portion
of his work that is addressed in this thesis is his theorizing on education, within the Communist Party, and for the working class, as an essential element of a revolutionary project.

As Gramsci was so active in the Communist Party it is of no surprise that much of his writing was geared towards positioning and advancing the interests of the Party. Gramsci felt that the following three elements had to converge for there to be an effective Communist Party. The first is the “mass element,” which requires leaders.\(^1\) The second is the “principal cohesive element,” the leaders.\(^2\) The third is the “intermediate element,” the element that makes up those who will eventually be in the principal cohesive/leadership element.\(^3\)

Gramsci argued that the Communist Party could not be destroyed by formal means when the principal cohesive element saw that the mass element “necessarily forms the [intermediate element].”\(^4\) This conception is top down but it is certainly a hierarchy that provides opportunity for movement among each element of the party. Gramsci stated that this movement was not only possible but necessary. He felt that “organic intellectuals” were the people who would lead the Party and that they could provide members with the tools to take over leadership positions when that was required.\(^5\)

---

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 153
5 Ibid., 17.
Gramsci argued that each class had its “organic intellectuals.” Those committed to the bourgeoisie engage in preserving and shifting hegemony in the interests of the dominant class, and those who are committed to the proletariat engage in counter hegemonic praxis. Gramsci’s conception of “ideological hegemony” – a term referring to the forms of bourgeois ideological and cultural domination – was the “conceptual matrix” with which to discern the factors shaping proletarian subjectivity and consciousness that had led to a reformist, pragmatic outlook rather than a revolutionary one.

Gramsci’s concept of ideological hegemony was attached to how he viewed the state as the “entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules.” The state becomes “educator,” in Gramsci’s words, presenting itself as the representative of universal values, independent of narrow economic, social or class interests. It is Gramsci’s position that “every relationship of hegemony is necessarily an educational relationship.”

As Gramsci explains, the average working class individual possesses a “contradictory consciousness,” in that while they may express a great deal of agreement with, or at least passive acceptance of, the dominant conception of the world on a general and abstract plane, they may reveal not outright dissensus, but a reduced commitment to the

---

6 Ibid., 12.
7 Carl Boggs, *The Two Revolutions: Gramsci and the Dilemmas of Western Marxism.* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 156.
8 Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks,* p. 244
11 Ibid., p. 332-335.
bourgeois ethos because it is often inappropriate to the realities of their lived class position. The existence of contradictory consciousness, the gulf between what hegemony promises and what capitalism delivers, gives the organic intellectual no shortage of options when deciding on what sort of topics to address in an educational project.

Gramsci was no stranger to the struggles of workers. Gramsci’s focus on “Taylorism” in the The Prison Notebooks was the result of the attempted introduction of that type of industrial organization in the cotton plants in Turin. Gramsci saw, through two massive strikes in Turin, the first by non-union workers and the second by union workers, that the working class was the real enemy of the Northern Industrialists. Gramsci argued that “all men are philosophers” but that monotonous industrial work only provides the opportunity for a “minimum of creative intellectual activity.”

Gramsci saw revolutionary education as the way to allow workers the opportunity to move past the intellectual limits of the state, bourgeois hegemony, and monotonous industrial production. One reason Gramsci felt it was strategically important to work with trade unions was because he believed that changing work would make it easier for

Joseph V. Femia. Gramsci’s Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness, and the Revolutionary Process. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 45. Indeed an example of this is Justin Lewis’ study of American public opinion, that brilliantly illustrates how Americans hold highly conservative notions when asked abstract questions on liberty, individualism or free enterprise, but hold entirely contradictory opinions when asked questions of a more concrete nature, such as health care, aid to the poor, etc. See Justin Lewis, Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elites Do What they Like, and Why We Seem to Go Along With It. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).


Ibid., xxvi.

Gramsci, The Prison Notebooks, 323.

Ibid., 8.
workers to become organic intellectuals. Gramsci felt that without Marxist education, workers would feel “replaceable” due to a “perfect division of labour.”

The point of education by Marxists at the factory was to provide workers with the opportunity to become “the collective worker” who would view their work as “a producer of real objects and not of profit.” Once this was accomplished, through “the organisms which represent the factory,” the subaltern class would be “demonstrably on the way to emerging from its subordinate position.” This understanding would not simply be a national one, “the ‘collective worker’ understands that this is what he is, not merely in each individual factory but in the broader spheres of the national and international division of labour.”

One can see quite clearly why Gramsci is of great interest to anyone who believes that radical or revolutionary education within the trade union movement is important. Gramsci saw hegemony as establishing itself in a number of different ways, but work was clearly one of those ways. Therefore, it made sense to organize and educate workers so they would be able to understand the “contradictory consciousness” that takes place within a capitalist system.

---

17 Ibid., 8.
18 Ibid., 202.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
The education of workers envisioned, and practiced, by Gramsci was “not a question of introducing from scratch a scientific form of thought into everyones individual life, but of renovating and making ‘critical’ an already existing activity.” Gramsci had a great deal of respect for the ability of workers to move beyond the constraints of their work via radical education.

Surpassing the constraints of work was a absolute necessity for Gramsci because he felt that the Communist Party needed to ensure a democratic centralism within the Party. Gramsci described that centralism as “organicity,”

a matching of thrusts from below with orders from above, a continuous insertion of elements thrown up from the depths of the rank and file into the solid framework of the leadership apparatus which ensures continuity and the regular accumulation of experience.

Gramsci was concerned with recognizing the abilities of people that had been stifled by dominant hegemonic practices within both work and culture, as his views on everyone as a potential intellectual demonstrate. Tactically, this was of great concern to Gramsci, due to his belief that the Party must be able to not rely on its directive element, but to operate in a manner that allowed for the other elements of the party to move into a directive position.

However, it was not solely of tactical importance for Gramsci. His critique of ‘spontaneous’ organizing, awareness, or revolution, was linked to his belief that

---

22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., 188-189.
revolutionary organizations needed to be democratically expansive in as many ways as possible.

While Gramsci referred to ‘organic intellectuals,’ the imagery of a living organism was very much present in his theorizing of how the party was supposed to function as a growing revolutionary organism.

Gramsci felt that hegemony could shift and maintain itself, as long as none of its essential elements were compromised. Gramsci viewed the Party as a counter hegemonic grouping, as an organization that needed to shift itself as well. Towards this end he viewed the party as consisting of three elements with the requirement of mobility between the disparate groupings (mass, intermediate, and leadership) for the party to survive.

**Paulo Freire**

Paulo Freire was one of the most influential educational theorists of the 20th century. Freire worked on a national literacy campaign in Northeast Brazil while he was a professor at the University of Recife in the early 1960s. It was at this time that he developed his theory of literacy, which became the foundation of his later theoretical

---

24 Ibid., p. 161.
25 Ibid., p. 152.
writings on pedagogy. After a military coup in Brazil in 1964 Freire was arrested and later sent into exile. He returned to Brazil in 1980 after amnesty was declared in 1979.\textsuperscript{27}

Freire, like Gramsci, was an intellectual committed to liberatory praxis. This commitment bore itself out in Freire’s work and writing on pedagogy. Freire, like Gramsci, saw dominant forms of education, what he described as “banking education” as a manner in which a dominant class could assert control over a subaltern class. Freire was comparable to Gramsci in that Freire realized that groups or organizations challenging oppression needed to implement a form of education that challenged the dominant power relationship between teacher and student. Freire insisted that dialogue in education was essential to change the teacher-student relationship to a teacher-student and student-teacher relationship.

In ‘banking education,’ narration and memorization become a form of depositing and this depositing is framed as a gift that is bestowed on the student.\textsuperscript{28} Therefore, the Teacher is a narrating subject, and the student is a listening object.\textsuperscript{29} This objectification through education leads to a situation where, for the passive student, “words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienate, and alienating verbosity.”\textsuperscript{30} Dialogue was essential to changing this relationship.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
Dialogue for Freire’s pedagogy serves the purpose of changing the teacher-student (subject-object) relationship to a “relationship between two subjects.” This dialogue allows student-teachers to become active participants in their own education, and consequently, active participants in their own liberation. We can see here the emphasis Freire placed on the necessity of the agency of the oppressed in their own education, the “pedagogy of the oppressed is forged with and not for…in the struggle this pedagogy will be made and remade.”

This shift serves a number of purposes for Freire. He felt that people “are fulfilled to the extent they create their world,” therefore, “[work] which is not free becomes an effective means of dehumanization.” In order for education to not be similarly dehumanizing it needs to be set up in a manner that allows students to actively set the agenda for the education they are going to engage in. People, who are oppressed, through work or colonialism (or both), or any number of other manners of oppression, have their options constrained. This affects their ability to engage in stimulating intellectual exercise because, “interpretation results from the capacity to make choices and to transform that reality.”

Of course transforming an oppressive reality is the point of the pedagogy of the oppressed. Freire emphasizes praxis to the same extent as Gramsci. Freire says that situations that generate dialogue in the classroom must be grounded in the real oppressive

---

33 Ibid., p. 141
situations that student-teachers are involved in. For this problem-posing education to be effective “we must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response – not just at the intellectual level, but at the level of action.”\(^{35}\)

Once student-teachers have engaged in this dialogue they are equipped to address and overcome what Freire calls “limit-situations” through a term that Freire borrows from Vieira Pinto, called, “limit acts.”\(^{36}\)

Freire’s own words on the relationship between the pedagogy of the Oppressed, limit situations, and limit acts, is worth quoting at length

[People]… exist in a dialectical relationship between the determination of limits and their own freedom. As they separate themselves from the world, which they objectify, as they separate themselves from their own activity, as they locate the seat of their decisions in themselves and in their relationship with the world and others, [people] overcome the situations which limit them: the ‘limit situations.’ Once perceived by [people] as fetters, as obstacles to their liberation, these situations stand out in relief from the background, revealing their true nature as concrete historical dimensions of a given reality. [People] respond to the challenge with actions which Vieira Pinto calls ‘limit acts’: those directed at negating and overcoming, rather than passively accepting, the ‘given.’\(^{37}\)

Here we see the point of a critical pedagogy, to allow people to understand their context as context, as opposed to an unalterable reality. Once this happens, once student-teachers are able to analyze the situation they are in, that situation becomes a limit as opposed to a prison.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 89.
\(^{37}\) Ibid.
Then the work of the student-teacher centres around what sort of work is required to move past this limit situation. bell hooks, describes this as Freire’s emphasis on “the important initial stage of transformation – that historical moment when one begins to think critically about the self and identity in relation to one’s political circumstance.”

The radical education of Freire culminates in those who participate in it being able to implement praxis, “reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed.” Clearly praxis is an ongoing process.

Reflection on what is being accomplished, or is not being accomplished, and what types of action would produce similar or better outcomes are essential elements of radical organizing. Praxis should be the point of any radical political project, and this is why Freire is an essential theorist for anyone writing about Radical Labour education.

**Michel Foucault**

Foucault was an activist in his own right, though not as dedicated to a radical praxis as either Gramsci or Freire. Therefore, his inclusion as the key theorist for this thesis could be somewhat confusing. Foucault’s theories add essential nuance to the analysis of radical labour education.

Neither Freire nor Gramsci were dogmatic or sectarian. Both of them felt that you needed tactics that were tailor made for the given ensemble of relations that constituted

---

39 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 120.
the terrain of your struggle. Foucault argues for that sort of rigorous analysis of our own organizations and selves as we involve ourselves in certain struggles, or work, or whatever it is that we do. Foucault’s emphasis on self-analysis and politicizing and investigating what brings us pleasure and satisfaction complements the projects of revolutionary organizing that Gramsci and Freire hold so dear.

Furthermore, Foucault allows us to delve into what are perhaps unintended or unexplored effects of radical labour education. We can start with Foucault’s discussion of the two forms of subject – “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.”40 Freire and Gramsci both take the position that the oppressed need to transcend, via praxis, the hegemony of the dominant class. For this praxis to possibly occur a critical consciousness needs to develop through some form of education.

Foucault’s observation on the two types of subject indicate that in this educational exercise there is going to be some subjugating as the term subject itself suggests a form of power that requires subject making. There will be a power relationship at play in the radical education of Gramsci and Freire. Where there is a power relationship there is a necessity for a nuanced analysis of how that power relationship will affect both, to use Freire’s terms, the teacher-student and the student-teacher.

---

Gramsci and Freire advocate the creation of an educational space where future radicals can build their knowledge and skill. Foucault argues that there are two types of spaces “that have the curious property of being connected to all the other emplacements, but in such a way that they suspend, neutralize, or reverse the set of relations that are designated, reflected or represented by them.”\(^{41}\) These two spaces are heterotopias and utopias. Utopias are “society perfected or the reverse of society” but they are “fundamentally and essentially unreal.”\(^{42}\) Heterotopias, however, are real “utterly different emplacements.”\(^{43}\) Heterotopias either create “a space of illusion that denounces all real space,” or they are a real space “as well organized as ours is muddled.”\(^{44}\)

In his article “Different Spaces” Foucault lays out a “heterotopology” that is a “systemic description” that studies, analyzes, describes and reads heterotopias – it has six principles.\(^{45}\) First, heterotopias are a constant in every human group/culture.\(^{46}\) Second, “each heterotopia has a precise and specific operation” and this operation is contingent on the culture it is operating in and changes within that culture.\(^{47}\) Third, it is a single space where multiple ‘incompatible emplacements’ coexist.\(^{48}\) Fourth, “heterotopias are connected with temporal discontinuities.”\(^{49}\) Fifth, heterotopias require a system that

\(^{42}\) Ibid.
\(^{43}\) Ibid.
\(^{44}\) Ibid., 184.
\(^{45}\) Ibid., 179.
\(^{46}\) Ibid.
\(^{47}\) Ibid., 180.
\(^{48}\) Ibid., 181.
\(^{49}\) Ibid., 182.
permits “opening and closing.” Finally, heterotopias have a functional relation to all remaining spaces.

I believe that the radical education suggested by Freire and Gramsci, and the type of radical labour education that takes place in Solidarity Works, constitutes a heterotopia. I will delve into this later on but if we look at Freire’s assertion that education must start with the situation that the oppressed find themselves in we can see how the concept of heterotopia is fruitful. Heterotopia is a useful concept for the analysis of progressive educational programming because it reminds us that such spaces are real and created and they are tied to dominant cultures, institutions, and discourses.

Freire sees dialogue as the way to move past a student – teacher relationship to more of a fruitfull exchange between equals. This dialogue necessitates people discussing the contexts that they are organizing to change. For Foucault confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a power relationship for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires confession. Even though Freire intends to have the dialogue to produce an equitable exchange that exchange can become a confession. This is not to say the dialogue model is flawed, but we do need to be conscious of the effects of all forms of power so that we may do as much as possible to level all power relationships.

---

50 Ibid., 183.
Foucault discusses the confession in relation to his analysis of pastoral power. Pastoral power is a “form of power that assures individuals salvation in the next world.” Pastoral power also cannot be exercised “without knowing the inside of people’s minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it.”

This turn to salvation has always been a concern of mine in regards to radical education. When heterotopias are involved salvation can be sought in another space because a heterotopia “transforms the individual who belongs to it.” When people go through a radical education program, there is the sense that they have been trained as an activist and big changes are going to be made in their lives, and the lives of others.

**Gramsci, Freire, and Foucault**

This chapter is intended to give the reader an understanding of how I have come to analyze the challenges and possibilities of radical labour education. The work of Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire, and Michel Foucault has played an integral role in shaping my analysis of radical labour education. Each theorist has made incredibly important contributions to social justice through their work and I think they provide valuable insights into the work that radical labour educators do.

Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire both discuss the necessity of radical education. The ‘alienation’ that workers feel as a result of the ‘contradictory consciousness’ of modern

---

53 Ibid.
54 Charles Burdett, “Journeys to the other spaces of Fascist Italy,” *Modern Italy*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2000, p 7.
capitalism will not be addressed without radical labour education. The banking education discussed by Freire fulfills Gramsci’s conceptualization of the educational nature of hegemony. In order for another world to be advocated for and understood, education that disrupts the banking form of education is a necessity.

Solidarity Works implements much of the educational theories of Gramsci and Freire. It is a radical education project that aims to empower young workers, allowing them to surpass the ‘limit situations’ that they face in their communities, and workplaces. Solidarity Works becomes, in Foucault’s words, a Heterotopia.

Foucault’s work on subject making, confession, and heterotopia allows us to take a thorough look at the type of education that occurs in Solidarity Works and to address the effects it has on participants as they work to make change. The point of Solidarity Works, like the point of all union education, is to create union activists. There are complications and stresses that come with union activism, and as we will see throughout this thesis, many of those challenges arise based on the tensions within unions.

Gramsci, Freire, and Foucault provide the theoretical foundation of this thesis because they allow us to look at why we do radical labour education, how we do it, and what problems can accompany that form of education. This thesis utilizes more of the work of Foucault because its focus is on what happens to participants after radical labour education as opposed to why the education is necessary.
The foundation of the thesis is that radical labour education is necessary for providing activists the tools to work towards a better world and better unions.

Gramsci and Freire are committed to forms of education that will allow people to engage in radical praxis. Praxis is an ongoing relationship between action and reflection: action is subjected to reflection, which in turn affects continued action. Both, Gramsci and Freire, hold that this relationship is necessary for effective organizing - which is a difficult conclusion to dispute.

Foucault provides us with tools to not only analyze the power imbalances that benefit the dominant class but power in and of itself, wherever it is exercised. Therefore, we can turn our praxis not only against whomever it is that we are struggling against but towards ourselves, and our own organizations. We can conclude if we are doing the right things, and if we are doing them in the right way.
Chapter 2 - Literature Review

This literature review examines the differences between mainstream labour education and radical labour education as well as what those two forms of labour education share in common. The underpinning of all labour education is that a strong labour movement requires labour education. Mainstream and radical labour education share this assumption, but the content and intent of that education is quite different.

This literature review also examines the struggle for equity within Canadian Unions. This is an important piece of the review, and of the thesis, because Solidarity Works itself, as an educational for young workers, exists in large part because of the struggle for equity within Canadian Unions. The fact that a program like Solidarity Works exists is a testament to what union activists can accomplish when working to surpass the ‘limit situations’ they struggle within their unions.

The intent of this literature review is to situate Solidarity Works within the Canadian Labour Movement. Solidarity Works is a radical labour education project. It is the result of the struggle for equity within Canadian Unions. That struggle for equitable and democratic unions is not an easy one to engage in as we will see in the next chapter.

Mainstream and Radical Labour Education

This literature review uses two terms used by Michael Newman to differentiate between the types of labour education literature that exist. The first is labourism and the second is
radicalist. Michael Newman describes labourism as follows, “a gradualist, politically
centrists, and pragmatic orientation. It is based on the assumption that a strong labour
movement will gradually improve the conditions of workers, and therefore society,
through negotiation with employers and employer bodies, through the good offices of the
Labor party and fair-minded Labor Governments, and through the legal and statutory
machinery such as the Industrial Relations Commission.” Newman is from Australia
and his writing focuses on Australia. However, the labourist description applies equally
as well to Canada if you simply replace the references to the labour party with references
to the New Democratic Party.

Michael Newman describes radicalist as follows, an “idealistic, essentially revolutionary,
orientation. It is the term used to denote the grouping of beliefs espoused by union
officials and activist who argue that capitalism should be replaced by a fundamentally
different social system.”

The following statement is an example of a quote where the authors of an article on
labour education, who practice radical popular labour education, set out the purpose of
their labour education:

“for us, progressive union education can be recognized by the degree to which it
consciously and skillfully builds democracy, class consciousness, and organized
capacity and contributes to the greater good.”

55 Michael Newman, The Third Contract: Theory and Practice in Union Training, (Sydney: Centre for
Popular Education, University of Technology 2002), 221.
56 Ibid.
57 Barb Thomas and D’Arcy Martin, “Worker Educators and Union Transformation: A Canadian
The point of contrasting mainstream labour education (I use the term mainstream in place of Newmans term labourist) with radical labour education is to illustrate that both forms of labour education share a basic premise in common: unions require activists, and those activists require education. The difference between radical and mainstream labour education literature is that the premise of radical labour education is based on the understanding that the right kind of education can create union activists that will change their unions for the better.

In Education for Changing Unions, the authors, begin their book by stating, “for all of the writers of this book, six threads hold together the fabric of our work: community, democracy, equity, class consciousness, organization building, and the greater good.”\textsuperscript{58} The description of the democracy thread gives a clear indication of the types of activities that the authors believe progressive popular labour education can create: “unions are strengthened by increasing member involvement. Despite efforts to move from servicing to mobilizing and organizing models of unionism, this participation is far from integrated throughout our movement. We cannot continue to call for worker empowerment in the workplace while blocking it in the union.”\textsuperscript{59} The goal of popular labour education, then, is to empower members to improve their “limit situations” inside and outside their unions.

Let us compare the previous quote to a quote from The Third Contract, “if a unions training is successful, then it will gradually equip active rank-and-file member and

\textsuperscript{58} Bev Burke et al, Education for Changing Unions, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002), 3.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
workplace representatives with the necessary knowledge and skills to play an increasing role in the affairs of the union.”  

Now let us consider the following quote from Labour Education Today, a review of dozens of labour educationals delivered in Canada by the Centre for Work & Community Studies at Athabasca University from 2001, “labour education includes all union and independently provided education designed to strengthen union representation, activity, and culture.” Clearly all three of these quotes, from very different kinds of texts, indicate that the point of labour education is not simply education for its own sake, but it is education for the good of the union. In fact, each quote, in its own way, makes it quite clear that unions cannot exist without labour education.

Radical Labour education with a focus on popular education is an appropriate focus for the literature review component of this thesis because Solidarity Works is a radical popular education project for young workers.

There are tensions between those who want to radicalize the labour movement, and those who do not. Michael Newman sums up this tension nicely, “if union trainers draw on the ideas of practices of [radical] education to any large degree, we are likely to come into ideological conflict with the unions we are working for.” The conflict arising from that tension, and the complications that conflict creates for those who deliver radical labour education is, the reason for this thesis.

---

60 Newman, The Third Contract, 37.
61 Ibid., 222.
Let us turn to radical labour education literature so we may compare it to its mainstream counterpart. Radical Labour Education owes a great debt to the theoretical framework of Paulo Freire, as described in the previous chapter. Popular Labour Education uses the spiral model that is well described by Bev Burke et al in *Education for Changing Unions*.

The spiral starts with the experience and knowledge of participants; the second step involves identifying patterns; the third is “to add new information and theory linked to the patterns in what people know;” the fourth is to practice skills and strategize, and plan for action; the fifth and final step is “apply what’s been learned in the real world.”

Clearly the spiral model focuses on integrating the experience, knowledge and skill of its participants into the education in which they are participating. This allows people to feel empowered in the educational because they are able to shape the very education they are receiving. They are able to shape it by injecting it with their own experiences. The ability to discuss their experiences also makes the education concrete as opposed to abstract.

The method is a concrete way of putting Paulo Freire’s vision of education into practice. This empowerment is necessary to equip members with the tools to fight against management, but it is also, and arguably even more so, important to allow them to work for change within their unions.

---

Radicalizing the labour movement is not the intent of authors of mainstream labour educational texts. The point of mainstream labour education texts is to provide people with the best tools, or the ability to create their own tools, to convey the information they need so that their members will have a particular set of skills. This skill set is to be used within the union structure in order to accomplish goals that are set out by the leadership of each particular union, or grouping of unions.

**The Three Contracts**

In the *The Third Contract*, Michael Newman, explains the labour education relationship in an inciteful way. The three parties involved in labour education are the union, the trainer, and the participants. There is a contract between the union and the trainer, between the trainer and the participants, and, somewhat uniquely in the adult education realm, between the participants and their union. The contract between the trainer and the union and the contract between the trainer and the participants dominate particular stages of the labour education process.⁶³

The contract between the trainer and the union dominates the planning stage of the process because the trainer delivers the training based on the direction of the union.⁶⁴ The contract between the trainer and the participants dominates the actual delivery stage of the labour education process as those are the two parties participating in the education.⁶⁵ The contract between the participants and the union is somewhat more

---

⁶⁴ Ibid. 32.
⁶⁵ Ibid. 33.
complicated. Newman states “it could be argued that this contract has the most profound influence on the way union training is conducted.”

Newman uses the phrase “the members are the union” to preface his description of the contract between the participants and the union. Newman refers to this contract as “the Third Contract” and this is based on the fact that unions, as democratic organizations, are structured such that the participants involved in union education are also involved in their union, and therefore, have a say over how the union conducts itself. The manner in which the union delivers education is one of the activities that the participants should have a say in.

Newman positions the third contract as the most important relationship in the labour education process because it allows the participant/members to have some say over the education they receive. If they find the education useless they can inform their union representatives of this. The participants are able to shape the education they receive through their participation in their union.

Newman argues that this contract is so important because when it is broken, “the union becomes the boss, telling the trainer what to do, and the trainer become a propagandist, peddling a non-negotiable line to the participants.”

---

66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., 37.
Newman cites two examples where based on a particular move by the upper echelons of union leadership certain content became a requirement for every single educational delivered by the Trade Union Training Authority. The required content had nothing to do with the courses themselves, allowed for no feedback from the participants, and forced the trainers to function as propagandists as opposed to educators. Newman states this led to the participants feeling “anger and confusion” and it impacted their trust in both their union and the trainer.\(^68\)

The point of Michael Newman’s argument is that a facilitator has a responsibility to the participants with whom he or she is working in the educational but the facilitator also has an obligation to the union providing the workshop. Furthermore, each participant has their own set of relationships within the union that they are concerned about.

Newman’s book is not a radical one but it is extremely helpful for analyzing the difficulties in delivering radical labour education and we will address this more in the following chapters.

The Third Contact is an important analytical tool for those who look seriously at radical labour education because it allows us to see what gains are made through putting this education into practice. The gains made within unions around questions of equity are an example of this. The struggles of workers of colour and feminists within the labour movement have led to concrete gains that have impacted the type of education that is offered by unions and the content of that education.

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 38.
Equity and Education in the Labour Movement

One of the six strands in Education for Changing Unions is equity. The authors define equity as “recognizing and challenging the historically built-in barriers experienced by some groups and the privileged position of others...The struggle for equity recognizes unequal starting points and unequal power in a society in which classism, racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, and heterosexism shape the ‘normal’ ways of doing things.” One important accomplishment in the struggle for equity within the Canadian Labour Movement was the 1997 Canadian Labour Congress Anti Racism Task Force.

The work of the task force culminated in a report, “Challenging Racism: Going Beyond Recommendations.” That report called upon “the CLC and its affiliates to develop an anti-racism plan of action which would include the integration of anti-racism analysis into existing courses, development of anti-racism courses and materials, self education packages for leadership and staff, and regular delivery of anti racism courses.”

Here we can see a case where the third contract, between union members and the labour central, which is composed of the unions to which those members belong, successfully directed the labour central to ensure that anti-racism is a component of all CLC courses. Solidarity Works is an example of the type of labour education that can take place when unions take equity issues seriously.

---

69 Burke et al, Education for Changing Unions, 3.
Achieving the recognition of equity issues in all CLC educationals indicates that Equity issues have become an important element of union education. Radical Popular education takes equity as a fundamental piece of the struggle for social justice; the struggle for equity within unions is a necessary component of unions struggling for equity in the communities in which their members live and work. The struggle for justice in our communities involves organizing workplaces to spread the benefits of unionization.

A portion of literature on anti-racism or equity issues within unions usually focuses on the fact that unions need to organize to increase their strength. The growth of the service sector in Canada means that this is a sector that unions cannot help but attempt to organize. Janice Foley states in her “Advancing Equity in Canadian Unions” paper, “a major issue is that many of those who work in the service sector are youth, minority group members or women whose need typically differ to some extent from the those of the prototypical union member, a middle-aged white male.”

Unions need to be reflective of the communities that they are attempting to organize. The work to ensure that unions are equitable, and that union leadership reflects the diverse populations that unions hope to represent, is difficult work.

It is important to point out that the struggle for equity within Canadian Unions is far from over. As one of the people interviewed for Foley’s, “Advancing Equity,” paper states, “[w]e had so many difficulties, barriers, fights, struggles, over several resolutions that dealt with constitutional changes that would bring about, or at least encourage, a bit more

71 Janice Foley, “Advancing Equity in Canadian Unions” (paper presented at ASAC, Banff, Alberta, 2006).
opportunity for equity seeking groups.”72 The simple fact is that the leadership of Canadian Unions, that of elected officials and staff, is overwhelming white and disproportionately male.

The disconnect between union policy and reality within unions can create a complicated terrain for individuals working on equity struggles within their unions. A very important book for people dealing with this struggle is Dancing on Live Embers: Challenging Racism in Organizations by Tina Lopes and Barb Thomas. Lopes and Thomas sum up the key issue for those struggling for equity in the first three sentences of their book

“Over the past twenty-five or more years many organizations have made some attempt to advance racial equity in their operations. Yet many of these same organizations are not more anti-racist or equitable than they were before they tried to change. Indeed, some of our work may have given organizations the language they need to better mask the same old inertia and resistance to really tackle racism.”73

Throughout the rest of their book Lopes and Thomas go through a number of examples of struggles for equity within all different kinds of organizations, some of which are unions. The book provides a summary of how the CLC Anti Racism task force mentioned above came to exist. The book is an example, like Education for Changing Unions, of a text that makes a valuable contribution to the struggle for justice within unions because the authors personalize how difficult that struggle has been for the authors themselves and the activists they have worked with.

72 Ibid.
73 Tina Lopes and Barb Thomas, Dancing on Live Embers: Challenging Racism in Organizations, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006), 1.
What is lacking in radical labour education literature is the recognition of the complications of attempting to change unions. Members who are radicalized by radical labour education rarely work on an executive, or in a local, with people who share the same convictions. This leads to feelings of isolation, which is the opposite of what radical labour education strives to achieve for its participants.

**Solidarity Works and the Struggle for Equity in the Canadian Labour Movement**

The three contracts outlined by Michael Newman provide a useful tool for anyone who does labour education. It provides the educator with a framework to establish if the education that is being delivered is of benefit to both the union and the participants. Solidarity Works differs from most labour educationalists, and even most radical labour educationalists, in that non-union workers are participants in the program.

This may strike some as an unessential element of the program. I think it is essential as it is a result of the program being part of the struggle for equity within unions. We have seen in this chapter the link between Solidarity Works and the struggle for equity that has taken place within Canadian Unions. Solidarity Works also takes place because Unions recognize the lack of young workers in their activist ranks is of concern. The absence of young union activists is not attributed to lack of interest; it is, rather, reflective of the small and shrinking unionization rates in the areas of the economy where young workers are over represented.
Solidarity Works occurs as a result of both the struggle for equity within unions, and the lack of representation of an equity seeking group - young workers - within the union itself. Due to the absence of a great deal of young activists, it makes sense that you would have the option for non-unionized youth to participate in Solidarity Works, because ideally those workers would try to unionize their workplaces, or become involved in their union if they found a job at a unionized workplace.

Here we see the tension of the Third Contract for those who deliver radical labour education. Often times the education exists because of the necessity for the labour movement to increase activism in the union itself, but that does not necessarily make the union a more equitable space. I participated in Solidarity Works, and I have facilitated Solidarity Works, and that introduction to the labour movement was a great privilege and has allowed me to accumulate a great deal of labour activist experience.

Not all people who participated in Solidarity Works were able to accumulate the same experience, in fact many felt dejected and simply stopped working within the labour movement. It is those different experiences arising out of the same educational that is the motivation for this thesis.
Chapter 3 - Solidarity Works

Solidarity Works was a three week paid youth activist training education program created by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) as part of an effort to address the issues of young workers in a meaningful way. The creation of Solidarity Works was premised on the struggle for equity within the labour movement and was designed to achieve gains for youth as an equity-seeking group within the labour movement.

This chapter will describe what led the Canadian Labour Congress to create Solidarity Works in 1999. After a brief overview of the program, this chapter will consider the experience of labour movement activism as understood by the participants and facilitators within Solidarity Works.

Solidarity Works (SW) was both a youth activist training program and a radical labour education project, designed to address the barriers to full participation in both unions and in wider society for members of equity-seeking groups. Different participants had varying experiences both within Solidarity Works and after leaving the program.

For instance, there are participants, such as myself, who became active in the labour movement and have remained so. On the other hand, there are participants who were initially active in the labour movement and have subsequently left the movement. Finally, there are participants who have chosen to become active in their community rather than through their union. How those experiences relate to radical labour education
and what those disparate experiences mean for radical labour education will be the primary focus of the following chapter.

**What Produced Solidarity Works**

The Canadian Labour Congress, which represents over 3 million unionized workers, and is the umbrella organization for dozens of unions, provincial federations of labour, and regional labour councils, passed a resolution at their 1996 convention to address the issues of young workers.\(^{74}\) That resolution called for, “youth to become a central outreach and organizing priority for all union affiliates.”\(^{75}\)

As a result of this resolution, and others like it passed at the conventions of large and small unions, provincial federations of labour and labour councils, the issues of young workers are now considered an equity issue within the Canadian Labour movement. In response to the resolution, unions have developed specific programs for youth, launched advertising campaigns directed at youth, created youth committees, funded youth conferences, and created youth vice-president positions on their executive councils.

Solidarity Works was one such program created by the CLC to address both the issues of young workers and to create a cadre of young labour movement activists. Through the provision of initial seed funding by the CLC, provincial labour federations were encouraged to launch Solidarity Works programs within their respective provinces.

---


Solidarity Works as a youth program ‘emerged’ due to the efforts of Nrinder Nindy Kaur Nann, the CLC’s first national representative on youth issues. There are numerous reasons for the creation of the position and the hiring of Nrinder but as an Our Times piece on her new job says “it became clear the CLC needed a national representative on youth issues when it held a conference this year addressing youth and only one person under 30 was in the room.”

The language used within the Our Times piece focuses on the need for “growth” of a “vibrant” labour movement followed by a discussion of organizing numerous workshops and conferences across the country. This piece is indicative of how youth issues are portrayed within the labour movement.

Young people are a population, and something needs to be done about the conditions of young workers, including chronically low unionization rates, rising tuitions, lack of pensions, double shifting and their higher rates of deaths and injuries at work.

Unions viewed themselves as the principal actor responsible for improving the working conditions of young workers in Canada. It was amid this youth-focused labour movement discourse that Solidarity Works was launched.

**Solidarity Works**

I myself became active in the labour movement, the student movement, and social justice community organizing through my initial participation in Solidarity Works in 2001.

---

Subsequently, I facilitated a session of Solidarity Works in 2002, hosted placements for Solidarity Works in 2003 and coordinated and co-facilitated Solidarity Works in 2004. My participation in Solidarity Works has numerous positive consequences. It is a program that I value and this is why I want to examine it.

Solidarity Works is advertised as a “paid activist youth training program.” The program pays participants $500 a week for three weeks. Between 12 and 15 participants were accepted into the program every year it took place in Saskatchewan. The poster for Solidarity Works stated that applicants had to be “committed to a worker centered, anti-racist, feminist, youth empowered, ability inclusive, and queer positive vision of social justice.” Applicants also had to be committed to working with the labour movement after the program was over. Finally, applicants had to be 26 years of age or younger.

Delivered through the auspices of provincial labour federations, the program started with one week of on-site education, followed by two weeks of placements with a union or community organization and concluded with final two days of education. Solidarity Works has run in nearly every province in the country. The report from Manitoba’s Solidarity Works program in 2005 illustrates why the program is valuable for provincial federations of labour. There were five objectives for the Manitoba program.

The first was, “to create a diverse team of young activists in unions and local communities who have active connections to the labour movement in Manitoba.”

---

second was, “to provide a comprehensive union orientation program for young workers on the cusp of activism in their unions and communities.”\textsuperscript{78} The third was, “to use popular education and hands-on placements to develop organizing, group building, public speaking, and anti-oppression leadership skills for young activists.”\textsuperscript{79} The fourth was, “to provide a space for young workers to strategize how to increase awareness of workers’ rights, unions, and to stand up for their rights in the workplace, in unions, and in society.”\textsuperscript{80} The final objective was, “to provide and opportunity for youth to experience solidarity with working people and deepen their commitment to the labour movement.”\textsuperscript{81}

While Solidarity Works has run in several provinces, this thesis focuses on Solidarity Works in Saskatchewan. The course objectives for Saskatchewan were the same as those in Manitoba and for the rest of the provinces in which it was delivered, as the program was created by a single labour central, the CLC.

The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) provided me with access to the facilitators’ notes for every year that Solidarity Works took place. The description of the program is based on the facilitator notes for the Saskatchewan versions of Solidarity Works. There was some adjustment to content as far as updating articles and statistics from year to year but the template for the Solidarity Works educational stayed the same. The description below is for 2004, the final year that Solidarity Works ran in

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
Saskatchewan, but is quite similar to the educational delivered in each of the previous three years.

The first week of Solidarity Works is an on-site popular education program. This means that all participants stay in the same space, and eat meals together. Every year Solidarity Works ran in Saskatchewan this week took place at Wood Acres, Saskatchewan. There is one large room for workshops and a number of hotel-type rooms at the Wood Acres venue. Solidarity Works was designed as an on-site program because it provides a greater opportunity for participants to ‘create community’ with each other.

Popular education is an integral element of Solidarity Works. In short, popular education is a form of education that starts with peoples’ experiences and ends up with participants having engaged in a process where skills are acquired or improved through practice. Popular education relies heavily on individual participant experience as a way of ensuring the knowledge of the participant is a valued part of the educational process.

Solidarity Works was designed around the ‘spiral model’ of popular education as outlined in Chapter 2 of this thesis. The curriculum of the first week of Solidarity Works involves a wide variety of activities and themes. The first day consists largely of introductory exercises. These exercises allow people to get to know each other while learning about each other while integrating aspects of labour history and the history of struggle of first nations, women, and workers of colour. One of these exercises focuses on people remembering their earliest moments of standing up to someone in authority. It
asks participants to recall why they initially challenged authority and the consequences of their actions. This exercise sets the stage for the development of the youth activist subject by bringing participants to the realization that they have all engaged in some kind of resistance.

The next day’s activities focus on the reality of work for youth today. They provide people with an opportunity to discuss what their working lives have been like and allows comparison to the work experience of other participants. Actions taken by folks to illuminate the working realities of young people are discussed. While this is happening, people learn about their rights at work, and how those rights are often denied. After this, there is a workshop on unions, and people get a chance to discuss their experiences – good and bad – with unions.

The third day consists of activities that build peoples’ knowledge of unions and how to organize at their workplace. There are also some exercises on harassment and discrimination at work. These lead into a workshop called the ‘power flower’ where people examine who holds power in society, how that power is actualized at/through work, and how privilege works in both the workplace and other sectors of society.

The fourth day involves a workshop on globalization. This workshop was usually facilitated by an outside activist or a professional activist such as a staff person from the Council of Canadians, or a similar activist-oriented organization. The workshop deconstructs how globalization works and for whom it works for. The rest of the day
consists of a fairly in-depth analysis of anti-oppression through two related workshops.

In these workshops, being ‘anti-oppressive’ is framed as being anti-racist, queer positive, worker-centered, youth empowered, ability inclusive and queer positive.

The main points of the workshops are set out in the facilitator notes:

- Discrimination and inequity are more than just individual behaviours.
- You can also see evidence of inequity by looking at the unequal impact – women get paid less than men for work of relatively equal value; there are few Aboriginal People or People of Colour in the workplace, despite their presence in the community; almost all the union officers are white men.
- This does not mean that anyone intended to discriminate. But the normal ways of doing things and the hidden powerful ideas keep producing the same old inequities.
- What exists “out there,” in our society, will exist in our workplaces and unions until we actively challenge it.  

The final day allows people to practice ‘anti-oppressive’ organizing through practiced union organizing with other participants. The focus of the day is on organizing unions and community-based campaigns for social justice. Participants look at different ways of organizing and of different ways of analyzing how their union drives/campaigns are going, along with potential barriers to success and potential allies. This is the point where participants really get to put their work from the week into practice, though that is incorporated through the rest of the week as well.

Following the week of on-site education, participants in Solidarity Works are placed with either a union or a community organization for eight days. These placements are part of the program to ensure that participants get a chance to further practice skills they have

---

82 Facilitator notes, Solidarity Works 2004, Saskatchewan Federation of Labour
gained/developed in the first week. To ensure that placements are more than simply “pushing paper,” organizations have to apply to receive a placement. Their application outlines what the participants will do and whom the participants will work with. In my experience, placements range from valuable experiences to more mundane tasks, such as designing a leaflet for youth or something similar. Some people who have been involved with Solidarity Works feel that the placement portion of the program should be scrapped altogether due to placements that are neither rewarding nor challenging.

The final two days of Solidarity Works are a wrap-up popular education session and debrief of the placements. People get a chance to say what they enjoyed, or did not enjoy, in their placements with an emphasis on how the process can be improved. This is followed by a day and a half session directed at development of a particular skill. In 2004, the focus was facilitation skills.

As mentioned above the SFL allowed me access to the evaluations for each year of Solidarity Works. In reviewing the evaluations I was struck by how positive they were. The questions asked in each evaluation were the same. The evaluation questionnaire was broken down into five sections. There were pre-Solidarity Works questions, which focused on how people found out about the program and how they felt about the application process. There were logistics questions about the placements and the food at the facility where the first week was held. There were questions about the resource binder, and the popular education training, and finally a portion where people could leave general comments.
Overall the evaluations were very positive. There were few evaluations that were negative, which considering 48 people participated in the program is surprising. What was striking about the evaluations reviewed was how excited people were as a result of the training, demonstrating an increased sense of empowerment and commitment to social justice. There was also a trend in the evaluations where people lamented leaving the safe space from the first week of education. As one commenter stated “I am glad we had this training in a safe and comfortable environment first before ‘the real world’.”

In order to evaluate the effect that Solidarity Works had on participants after leaving the program, three former participants from Solidarity Works were interviewed. In addition, two persons who participated in one year and facilitated in another were also interviewed.

The interviews involved questions about four areas: the classroom portion of Solidarity Works; the placement portion of Solidarity Works; the individual’s political activism since completing Solidarity Works; and finally, how the individual now felt about Solidarity Works in hindsight, as I wanted to see how people felt about Solidarity Works after some time had passed since completing the program.

**The Classroom Component**

There were seven classroom days in total for Solidarity Works. The bulk of these took place in the first week of the program at Wood Acres in a large blue room. Unsurprisingly that room is referred to as “the blue room.” It was in this space at Wood Acres were Solidarity Works participants first got to know each other.

---

83 Anonymous Evaluation, Solidarity Works, 2004
Solidarity Works was an anti oppressive popular education program and the way participants felt about that kind of education was a focus of the interviews. Each person felt differently about the classroom section of Solidarity Works but as indicated by the evaluations everyone felt the experience was a meaningful and informative one. Jenny stated, “Without a doubt - yes I think that [Solidarity Works] helped with my union work.... Not so much in very specific ways but it gave me that base I needed. A well rounded idea of the labour movement as it touched on a lot of the principles that carry you through.”

Robert felt that “it was very dynamic, mixed up which I like, open, comforting, informal, but well organized, and placed with good timing.” Cynthia noted she “liked how visual it was. There wasn't just talking... you had to get up, walk around, do skits... I liked that. It makes some things more starkly apparent.”

Maria was fond of the conversations that took place in the popular education setting, “talking about unions people didn't just say I like them or don't and that was the end of it, they shared experiences they've have with unions which explained their view... it gives you a chance to discuss why people have different experiences, like the privileges they may have because they belong to a certain socioeconomic group, etc.”

Emily, one of the two interviewees who both participated in and facilitated Solidarity Works recognized that she “was somewhat transformed from the experience... I learned a lot about oppression, the labour movement, ways to organize. I was really energized to
bring it back home.” When asked about what made the experience a transformative one, she responded:

I think I went from just thinking about justice and inequality and being frustrated with patriarchy especially ... to meeting young people who were actually doing things to change the system...or try. I started to realize there was a space and a way to act on what I believed was important. Not just lip service, but doing. I also began to make some of those important systemic connections to capitalism and systemic oppression. I began to feel more angry and passionate about wanting to do something about it.

One of the portions of Solidarity Works that made people feel impassioned was the focus on equity. Emily describes how and why this was so important:

[Popular education] methodology and theory is anti-oppressive education. Theoretically, the education is critical and challenging power throughout the process. So, whenever we worked on a subject we were trying to build critical analysis by asking people to ask why things were the way they were, how they got that way, what could be better, what was missing, etc. As far as specific curriculum, take the history section for example. I think traditional labour education would focus mainly on mainstream worker struggles that did not consciously include women's struggles, worker's of colour or aboriginal struggles. SW integrates all these struggles to understand a "People's history" of social justice struggles in Canada. We also ask participants to critically reflect on themselves and examine how power and privilege plays out in their lives. And then we can link this to systems of oppression, but also take this into consideration when we are building strategies to organize and make change. For example, thinking about ways to organize a union taking into account the identities of the organizers, and the identities of the organized, and considering ways to ensure we are organizing in a way that is inclusive and relevant and representative of the workers.

The Placement Component

Placements in Solidarity Works were made with two different kinds of organizations. The first, and obvious one, is unions. The second was with community based social justice organizations. An incredibly important part of Solidarity Works was that it
embraced activism in general as opposed to solely trade union activism. This is rare for a labour educational program.

This approach allowed Solidarity Works to connect to community-based organizations in a meaningful way. The evaluations of Solidarity Works, and the interviews done for this thesis, confirmed my feeling as a participant and facilitator of the program that the community based placements were the more meaningful of the two options. Participants worked in their placements for eight days. The placements were with a variety of union and community organizations. The incorporation of the placements into the program was to allow people to practice what they had learned in the classroom. Emily describes the rationale behind the placements:

Well they were supposed to provide them with the opportunity to apply the theory and knowledge and skills they gained in the education sessions to real situations. We wanted them to connect with real organizations that were engaged in social change. We also wanted to build relationships with community organizations to connect labour with community, for example the anti-poverty ministry and Council of Canadians had coalitions with the labour movement. We wanted to make sure we were making those connections. That labour had a social unionism component. We hoped that the participants would build confidence and skills that would encourage them to continue being involved in social justice work.

Maria, who was placed at *Briarpatch Magazine*, which “conspires to provoke, inspire and empower its readers in their efforts to build a better world,” describes her placement as follows:

Debra [Debra Brinn was a past editor of Briarpatch and a long time CUPW activist] said that if we had any ideas about the magazine to let her know what would make it more attractive to young people, so we did that. Also, they get books sent in to be reviewed so she gave us access to that and we did an article about the experience of [Solidarity Works] ... I did find that *Briarpatch* had similar political inclinations to SW. Skill-wise with the input part and the article I

---

think that was useful for the process. I remember Debra would ask a lot of questions like what do you want people to know, what do you think will grab them. I think that was really important for me, not so much the end product but how to go about doing something that involved.

Jenny did her placement at the Rainbow Youth Centre, which works with young people 11 to 25 years old in a variety of individual and group counseling, skill development, educational, recreational, and direct service programs. The Rainbow Youth Centre provided her with the opportunity to develop their Occupational Health and Safety Committee:

Well the Rainbow Youth Centre is situated in an old church and they had never formed an OHS committee nor had they assessed the building for hazards etc. They wanted me to establish a process for them and to get the ball rolling. So I went online and grabbed as much OHS stuff as I could. I also developed an assessment tool for the centre with the criteria I found online. Then I went through the centre and checked for hazards. I then created a report of my findings and presented it to the board and to the OHS committee they had formed. I also was able to spend a few hours with the staff explaining the basics of OHS and what rights and responsibilities they have. The committee was leery of me presenting the hazards I found in the centre but once I explained the staff have the right to know as well as participate they let me go ahead. I also created and presented I fire escape plan for the centre.

In addition to this, she had an opportunity to participate in some training that the staff at the centre received during her placement “as a bonus for me the staff were doing some learning with Saskatchewan Justice on resolving conflict - mediation classes and they allowed me to join in the sessions which has proven to be quite valuable to this day for me at work. I often run mediation type sessions with the members at work that are having difficulties.”

---

Cynthia’s placement was with a union. The placement involved her attending a pre-bargaining meeting. “It was interesting to see the pre-bargaining meeting, because despite my involvement in my union, I wasn't involved in the bargaining process.” The union also had her develop a questionnaire on member engagement and she attended an executive meeting. However, she conceded that she didn’t enjoy the placement overall. “Looking back, I regret doing it. I don't remember what the other options were, but I wish I would have done something community, not union.”

Robert, who was placed with a union, echoed similar concerns. One telling experience of his placement involved meeting the president of the union – by accident. “When the president came to meet me, well it wasn’t coming to meet me, it was just by chance he was walking down the stairs on his way out, he forgot something at the office but was on vacation, he shook my hand and said ‘well this is bad time, have a good placement though, bye.’” The interviewee was given a tour of the building, with a focus on the communications department at the start of his placement. I asked him if he felt like his work at the placement would have an impact after he left. He replied:

No, I did not think it would, it seemed that with all the summer vacation activity and the relaxed introduction I was given that my place was temporary and they were all biding what time they needed to in order to meet the objectives that were given to them... they were biding time out of courtesy it seemed to meet the obligations the organization had to take of this [person] that was placed with them it didn’t seem they thought that anything could be actually done in the time given.

**Participant’s Activism after Solidarity Works**

Maria was in university when she participated in Solidarity Works and was mainly active in campaigns on campus after Solidarity Works, such as “tuition campaigns, women’s
rights events, international solidarity stuff like when the United States started to invade places after the towers came down... a lot of the stuff I did was tied to school groups, but when [I would] hear about [Saskatchewan Federation of Labour] events I would go to those.” She stated “the thing SW did for me is it allowed me to gain more contacts, so I knew more people I could talk to, in that way it gave me more resources.”

Cynthia was involved with her union before participating in Solidarity Works and she says “I became even more involved after SW.” Solidarity Works helped her with her confidence. “I think I was more confident -- felt more entitled so speak up because I felt that I did know more...about everything in general,” she explained. Unfortunately she did have issues within her local. I asked her if Solidarity Works affected how she worked within her local and received a lengthy reply:

I was more vocal about constructed inequities that I saw, but I would never approach them directly. I remember flipping out at one meeting. After the meeting, I just said that I had something I needed to say, and I started crying right away. I said that I thought that we all needed to respect each other more, no more anger, no more trying to hurt each other, because life kicks us in the ass enough without us doing it to each other. Sadly, that didn't really work -- all of the people the message was meant for didn't get at all that it was meant for them. It was all about power. If during the elections process for my local someone else ran for any position, the person that had "historically" held it was pissed - they would win and then treat the person who ran against them like shit for the next couple months.

I asked her if the struggle within her local had an effect on her and she said “oh god yeah. I don’t do anything union anymore.”

In contrast, Jenny says that the year she participated in Solidarity Works she went to her “constitutional convention and I spoke with my local president. I told him that I was just
becoming involved and I knew that I had a lot to learn and I wanted to participate in as much as possible.” Due to the support she received from her local with Solidarity Works and with other labour education, this respondent is extremely active in her local and the provincial labour movement more generally. She describes her involvement as follows:

I moved up through the union ranks and 4 years ago was offered the position of grievance chair. So as it stands right now I am a branch president - grievance chair for the province - on the Executive for the SFL - chair of [an SFL] life committee. I also convinced my local to allow me to start a pilot project for a young workers committee which I completed and was successful - now I am too old to chair that committee but it is still going and is now a standing committee.”

In regards to how Solidarity Works impacted the work she did in her union, she replied:

I'm not sure how much of my work it has impacted, but I can tell you it completely opened my eyes in just my general life. It has really changed how I conduct my life and what is important to me. I think understanding capitalism has had the biggest impact - as it pretty much makes me sick and there are a lot of things that most people participate in society that I refuse to.

Robert admitted that he wasn’t all that interested in activism after the program ended. “I wasn’t in pursuit of that type of mode,” he said, “I slipped into a more domestic mode after the program, focusing on family, trying to finish school, but now I wouldn’t mind reconnecting, since my path is seemingly returning to that forum of movements once again.” Robert had been very active on issues facing Aboriginal youth before he participated in Solidarity Works. He had a very interesting observation on how Solidarity Works impacted his view of the labour movement in regards to the work he had done with Aboriginal youth:

In terms of the individuals in the program, yes I could see that allies could be gained in the general broader public, and then with various union movements that there is already a moving towards developing an understanding to other peoples struggles, here the aboriginal peoples struggles of Canada, as I see through the various documents that were
presented, like the CLC aboriginal papers or “Organizing on Turtle Island,” after looking at some of them I noticed the dates they were created, and it was around the same time that we were doing a lot of organizing with my past movements, and thought this would have been nice to have seen back then so that we could have made more connections, thus making our cause stronger for the youth. Then I thought, that yes now that I know I will be able to utilize this knowledge down the road and I have.

Emily was very active on youth issues in the labour movement. She describes her frustration with that experience as follows:

Well it's interesting because we've been talking about the actual program when it happens, but the work that is put into fighting to make sure it actually happens is the first struggle that starts every year at SFL convention in October, asking for money...and continues until May and June before the project happens. It's an ongoing fundraising challenge. Trying to justify why unions need to support this program. Why they should care. It's exhausting and frustrating because unions can be so self-centered. If they don't see what's in it for them directly and the short-term benefits, they don't tend to "buy-in". I felt like I was always wearing the political fundraising hat anywhere I went. I was always asking for money or talking about Solidarity Works. And then I became the "poster child" for anything youth...which was also exhausting. This is partly why I left. I am absolutely committed to youth participation, but to pigeon-hole one person and think that because you have one youth activist working on all of this stuff, then the "youth problem is taken care of"...I had a lot of access to power. And I tried to use it. But I also got blacklisted and punished for being outspoken and demanding radical change.

This comment is indicative of some of the difficulties that those who struggle for radical change within the labour movement face. As we will see, that tension between the objectives of radical labour education and the political realities of the labour movement will be the focus of the next chapter.

The previous chapter provided the reader with the background within the labour movement that led to the creation of Solidarity Works, the content of Solidarity Works,
and the experiences of some of the young workers who participated in Solidarity Works. The experience of those young workers was not limited just to Solidarity Works itself, but to their activism after their participation in the program ended. The point of Solidarity Works was to produce young labour movement activists. It is clear from the interviews that while some Solidarity Works participants became and stayed labour movement activists, others did not.

The next chapter will examine what factors might explain why this happens and the tensions that arise from producing radical labour activists in today’s labour movement.
Chapter 4 - Analysis of Solidarity Works as a Radical Labour Education Project

To reiterate, there were three theorists mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis whose analysis can help us better understand the function of radical labour education. Antonio Gramsci was included because of his contribution towards understanding why radical education is necessary in a capitalist state. Paulo Freire was included to provide insight into the importance of considering how radical education is developed and disseminated, so that it can challenge and liberate subjects from the assumptions that underpin the “banking system” of education. Finally, Michel Foucault was selected so that we could turn our minds to the complications of radical labour education and to give us a framework for analyzing both the promises and challenges inherent in the practice of radical labour education.

As this thesis is more about the challenges of radical labour education Foucault is the theorist whose work is dealt with most extensively in this chapter. I believe that Gramsci and Freire are both very important and both theorize in different ways on the importance of radical labour education. The work of Foucault is well suited to an analysis of Solidarity Works given all the forces that lead to the creation of Solidarity Works and the issues that its participants faced after the educational was over.

This chapter starts with a heterotopology of Solidarity Works. This is followed by an examination of the role of confession as it relates to the heterotopia of the radical labour education project. There is then a discussion of the circuits of power within the labour
movement and how those relate to the youth activist subjectivity produced by Solidarity Works. To conclude, there is a discussion of how Gramsci and Freire instruct the lessons I have learned from Solidarity Works.

Heterotopia and Solidarity Works

In the preceding chapter we heard from the participants of Solidarity Works. They described their feelings about the two components of Solidarity Works; the education and the placements. They also described their activism after Solidarity Works and how the program informed that activism. In this chapter I will draw upon the combined theories of Gramsci, Freire and Foucault to analyze the participants’ experience with Solidarity Works and the broader challenges of radical labour education.

Heterotopia is a useful concept for the analysis of progressive educational programming because it reminds us that while such spaces are real and created, they are also tied to dominant cultures, institutions, and discourses. Going through five of Foucault’s six criteria, which were outlined in Chapter 1, we can engage in a heterotopology of Solidarity Works and see what it gives us in terms of understanding how progressive praxis ‘work,’ what Solidarity Works does, and who it does it for.

The second principle of heterotopias is “each heterotopia has a precise and specific operation” and it is contingent on the culture it is operating in and changes within that culture.86 Solidarity Works definitely has a precise and specific operation. There is one week of education, on site, that has an agenda, a large binder of resources, and facilitator

notes that are a constant reminder of the purpose of the educational component and each of its exercises. The dependence of Solidarity Works on union culture and discourse goes beyond simply support from within the labour movement for the program to how ideas get talked about in the space of Solidarity Works. What current events or popular culture ‘monuments’ are widely talked about come up in the space of Solidarity Works, and shape the discussion.

The third element of heterotopology is a single space where multiple ‘incompatible emplacements’ coexist.\(^{87}\) One way this element occurs in Solidarity Works is through a wide range of activities that require “role playing” or “skits.” There is an injection of heterogeneity in the single space of the large blue room where all of Solidarity Works educational activities take place. This relates to Foucault’s conceptualization of the cinema for heterotopia as a space where a three-dimensional space is projected onto a two dimensional space.\(^{88}\) Through skits and role-playing, peoples’ personal experiences related to work, racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism and discrimination are ‘performed,’ as a certain kind of projection in Solidarity Works. Instead of space being projected and reduced by a dimension, as in the cinema, time and space are altered and emplaced in this process. This relates to the fourth principle of heterotopia.

The fourth principle of heterotopia is, “heterotopias are connected with temporal discontinuities.”\(^{89}\) There is a wide range of temporal discontinuities in Solidarity Works. For one, history is dealt with through timelines where major events in the history of

\(^{87}\) Ibid., p. 181.
\(^{88}\) Ibid. 181.
\(^{89}\) Ibid., p. 182.
workers, workers of colour, aboriginal peoples, women, the differently abled, and queer people are discussed. As well, peoples’ personal timelines of resistance are also discussed. These timelines involve a lot of paper and tape and art and they are posted. This is somewhat like Foucault’s relation of museums and libraries to this principle in that history and time are framed through a process and posted for view. Throughout the first week of Solidarity Works all the timelines and art are visibly posted. A good portion of it is packaged up and posted in the room where the last two-day session takes place.

Fifth, heterotopias require a system that permits “opening and closing.” This happens in the first week of Solidarity Works in numerous ways. First and foremost there is an application process to participate in the program. This opens the process to some and closes it to others. In addition, it has a beginning and an end. This very much relates to heterotopia as “transitory space.” This fact is most evident in what has been discussed as the ‘bursting bubble’ when people leave the educational space of Solidarity Works and become involved in their placements, or go back to work, or other more mundane daily tasks. Former feelings of safety and solidarity that were inculcated in the Solidarity Works space are ‘burst’ when people had to leave the safety of Wood Acres and Solidarity Works.

Finally heterotopias are related to all other spaces in that they create “a space of illusion that denounces all real space,” or they are a real space “as well organized as ours is

---

90 Ibid., p. 183.
It is the former that best describes the space created by Solidarity Works. Ideas and events are discussed in the program and linked together in ways that usually do not happen within other “educational spaces” – such as secondary and post-secondary schools. The pedagogy of popular education has a real impact on how people grapple with concepts and the material.

The deconstruction that takes place in Solidarity Works denounces the ‘real space’ of Canada as stolen aboriginal land and it denounces the image of Canada as a peace-loving middle power that protects human rights. It is a direct challenge to the dominant image of Canada that is produced daily through cultural and educational institutions. It challenges dominant discourse around issues of work, quality of employment and actuality of rights, thereby challenging the dominant liberal discourse of rights-based equality through its focus on power relations.

**Pastoral Power, Confession, Technologies of the Self, and the Youth Activist Subject**

The first week of Solidarity Works has many heterotopic qualities as attachments to dominant discourse get played out in this first week. A large portion of Solidarity Works involves what could be described as confessional knowledge production.

For Foucault confession is “a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a power relationship for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is simply the interlocutor but the

---

92 Ibid., p. 184.
authority who requires confession. Confessional power induces its subjects to come to accept that “you will seek to transform your every desire into discourse.”

From the moment the introductions begin, personal experience becomes a focus of the popular education process in Solidarity Works. People discuss their experiences with very difficult events in their lives, including experiences of racism, harassment at work, sexual harassment, violations of rights at work and the effects of poverty. All these experiences are addressed through participants sharing their experiences. These experiences are voiced through confession and they are also performed in exercises that require skits or role-playing, in what could be deemed a confessional performance.

One example of this is a line-up exercise where people are asked questions about their past such as “do you trust the police?” or “did your family ever have to move while you were growing up because of a lack of money” and walk forward or backward depending on their answers. Emily commented on this exercise:

I have heard from people who have experience multiple systems of oppression that the last thing they want to do is step forward based on their oppression. Privileged folks start to feel uncomfortable stepping forward to demonstrate their privilege. The debrief of this exercise is interesting. People really start to understand who benefits from certain systems, i.e. patriarchy, white supremacy...and how in turn it impacts the person sitting next to them. I think this builds a certain amount of collective shared experience in going through this process. You hear people discussing it after the session. People are really processing it with each other. And it's interesting to have for example an Aboriginal male from a lower class background share his experience and thoughts with a white middle class kid who is coming to terms with their privilege.

---

94 Ibid., 14.
Obviously the discussions that arise from such conversations are of an intense and personal nature. While such conversations can create tight bonds between participants, they can also lead to feelings of exclusion. The requiring of voice in this process is not problematic. However, we must realize what forms of power require voice and what kind of circuits of power voice flows into and through. Instructive on this front, and especially in relation to heterotopia, is Foucault’s work on pastoral power. Pastoral power happens in the instance where power spreads through a wide range of positions, professions and disciplines. For example, religious power can move to places where it previously was not. This concept is important to this thesis because it shows us how power needs voices.

According to Foucault, pastoral power is a “form of power that assures individuals salvation in the next world.”95 Foucault continues that such power “cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people’s minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it.”96 This kind of power operates in Solidarity Works through confession, through this requirement of knowledge of people’s minds, and it is through confessing and confession that people can achieve salvation.

When heterotopias are involved salvation can be sought in another space because heterotopias (and I would argue Solidarity Works) “transforms the individual who belongs to it.”97 When people go through the program, there is the sense that they have

---

95 Foucault, Michel, “Afterword – The Subject and Power,” 214.
96 Ibid.
97 Burdett, Charles, “Journeys to the other spaces of Fascist Italy,” 7.
been trained as an activist and big changes are going to be made in their lives, and the
lives of others.

Kyall Glennie describes what he got out of the program in an article for a newsletter as “a
desire for change in our communities, our province, our country and our world,” and
feels he “will stop at nothing until such change brings about real equality.”98 Cynthia
stated much the same thing, “I always get all pumped up though... after attending an
educational that is as intense as SW is.... I get that, ‘I'm going to change the world
mentality.” The one burden, though I hate to use that word, perhaps obligation is a better
word, as a facilitator and as a participant is the sheer massive weight of all the
experience, all the confession, you hear during the first week.

It is this shared experience that forges the community of participants in Solidarity Works
but how that happens needs to be further investigated. Solidarity Works is advertised as a
youth activist training program, and as the quotes above indicate, Solidarity Works tends
to produce the youth activist subject.

Pastoral power, confession, these forms of knowledge production about the self
contribute to a certain subject making process that in heterotopia allows for technologies
of self that subvert the dominant discourse. Emily describes on site education as follows:

On-site means we eat, sleep, play and learn all in the same space. We did our
training out in Moose Jaw at Wood Acres. We had the blue room where the
education took place, and then a sort of residential space for sleeping. All meals
were in-house and we chilled out together during down-time... No one was forced

98 Glennie, Kyall, “Solidarity WORKS!,” *The Commonwealth*, vol. 64, no. 4, Sept.-Oct. 2004,
http://www.saskndp.com/cw/64.4/solidarityworks.html.
to stay at Wood Acres during down time, people could go into town, but for the most part we always stuck together. We became friends and shared stories. A lot of networking happened out of classroom times. People learned about each other and it really created a different environment then a 9-5 training project.

However, divisions between the facilitators and the participants were recognized, Cynthia states “I remember feeling very aware of a divide between the educators and the “students”. We almost only interacted during session and rarely, except maybe for the odd person, did anyone do anything with the educators during free time. Cliques developed and, to me, it was us and them.” Cynthia recognized that she and the people she spent time with could be construed as a clique as well, “I do know that I was in a ‘group’. It didn't feel like a clique... but there were four of us that hung out all the time, so it definitely could have looked that way to an ‘outsider’.”

Jenny had an experience in the session that affected her participation in the educational as a whole:

We were discussing white [privilege].... and I had never had any experience or had even really thought of it. Anyway - I'm sure I might have asked something slightly dumb and the facilitator snapped and went into a rant...the overall feeling I had was I better keep my mouth shut because I don't need another lecture.

Foucault’s comments in regards to confession are instructive here as “one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires confession.”

---

In chapter three, confession, pastoral power, and salvation were discussed as they relate to popular education. In a “normal” educational, or in the “banking education system” described by Freire, one would expect there to be a divide between teacher and student.

The inclusiveness and political project of radical popular education rejects a divide between teacher and student but that doesn’t mean that the same sort of relationship cannot be replicated between facilitator and participant. Cynthia mentioned that “after attending an educational that is as intense as SW is.... I get that, ‘I'm going to change the world’ mentality.”

This feeling of empowerment is a positive end result of a popular education session but there are risks involved with this style of education as well, particularly if the facilitator becomes a confessor that runs against the intent of the popular education program. The sense of inclusion and exclusion that can be generated in these programs is something should be investigated. Emily commented, “I should say that not everybody felt the bubble and felt included. There was always some folks who were less included or felt less included.”

Maria Tamboukou, in her work on the heterotopias of women’s colleges in Cambridge in the early 19th century explains the process through which women strove to surpass limits and constraints on their femininity and cultivate technologies of the self:

These technologies, as Foucault explains, ‘permit individuals to effect, by their own means, or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies, and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being so as to transform
themselves, in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.”

It is this surpassing of limits that I find interesting. In voicing experience, in confessing, in cultivating the ‘salvation self,’ limits are surpassed when voice gets transformed through the possibilities provided by heterotopic space. It is a limit that is surpassed when people are able to examine their experience in a new way. However, the popular education space of Solidarity Works is still tied to discourse and culture, and we see this in the requirement for and from voice in cultivating new technologies of self. Once the limits of the heterotopic space are surpassed the bubble that ‘cultivates’ this technology of self can burst.

**Circuits of Power and the Youth Activist Subject**

Foucault illuminates this discussion in his work on the two forms of subjectivity – “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.”

So, we see in Solidarity Works an example of a space where subject-making leads more towards focusing on identity and self knowledge. But when we look at discourse or processes as continuums of power rather than stark binaries, we realize that one form of subjugation is not completely separate from the other. This leads me to ask the question, what circuits of power does the ‘youth activist subject’ produced by Solidarity Works and produced by the subjects themselves fit into?

---

100 Maria Tamboukou, “Of Other Spaces: women’s colleges at the turn of the nineteenth century in the UK,” 256.

Solidarity Works is a labour movement program, it is funded and staffed by the labour movement. The placements take place with unions, as well as community organizations, but the community organizations have nowhere near the level of involvement in the process. The labour movement is also a product of dominant cultural production. There are concrete examples of this: the corporate-legal structure of unions that reflects dominant corporate and governance structures; the domination of unions by white male leadership is reflective of white supremacist patriarchy of the Canadian settler state.

What interests me is how the internal discourse of the institution of the labour movement relates to biopower and what this does for our understanding of the circuits of power that exist in the labour movement and how Solidarity Works fits into that. Essentially I am interested in what Solidarity Works does for the labour movement.

Foucault discusses “the internal discourse of the institution-the one it employed to address itself, and which circulated among those who made it function.”102 Any person who has spent any time working for unions in any way has a good understanding of the internal discourse of those institutions. This ‘internal discourse’ is one where unions portray themselves as organizations who fight with and for working people, who stand up to bosses and corrupt governments and who have historically made real gains for workers. This ‘internal discourse’ is an interesting one because of the biopower it involves and elicits.

---

Biopower allows for the attachment of power to individual bodies through populations.\textsuperscript{103} Unions are biopolitical institutions in this sense. The union slogan “you are the union” is an example of this. Unions require a membership/population and they rely on their members to do a wide variety of work. In \textit{Eight Days a Week: How Union Workload Blocks Women’s Participation in the Labour Movement}, Adriane Paavo discusses how unions have come to depend on workaholic activists. She examines how this construction of union work, at all levels of leadership, is part of “invisible centrality of (white) men in the union movement and the definition of union power, leadership, activism, and paid work as men’s domains.”\textsuperscript{104}

Unions rely on a workaholic activist/leadership portion of membership to do the organizing work unions require. The white male subject is normative in this process. Activists don’t simply come to be, they need to be produced from the population so they can do the necessary work that allows unions to produce their membership as a population.

As an example, if unions were not organizing and advocating for their members that would make the fact that the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour has 95,000 members meaningless. It is all the work done by and for those 95,000 members that gives the internal discourse of unions, that they are an effective voice for working people, meaning.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., p. 147.
It is this circuit of union biopolitical power that the ‘youth activist subject’ produced by Solidarity Works fits into. Activists need to be produced for the ‘internal discourses’ of unions to ‘work.’ Unions portray themselves as representing their members, all of their members, and so youth activists are necessary for unions to ‘populate’ that aspect of their membership.

**Gramsci, Freire, and the Complications of Radical Labour Education**

In the first chapter of this thesis Gramsci’s position on education was discussed. Gramsci felt that the Communist Party required an educational program because for the health of the party it was a necessity that there would be a means to transition people from the mass of the party to its leadership element. Individuals involved in this group in between leadership and what in the union movement would be described as the rank and file membership Gramsci called the intermediary element.

This observation is hardly a revolutionary one. It is confirmed by each type of labour educational text that was analyzed in the literature review. Gramsci’s concern about the health of his communist party is the same concern that leads unions to fund and deliver labour education. Let’s recall the description of labour education found in Labour Education Today, a review of dozens of labour educational texts delivered in Canada. “Labour education includes all union and independently provided education designed to strengthen union representation, activity, and culture.” A strong union requires labour education.
This arrangement does get complicated in regards to radical labour education. Michael Newman’s description of radical education being at odds with the political position of the leadership of the labour movement was reflected in Emily’s feeling that “the mainstream labour movement as a whole is not committed to radical change.” It is those within the labour movement that are committed to radical change, both inside and outside the labour movement, who deliver radical labour educational like Solidarity Works. Yet as Newman observes that desire for change is not a commonly held belief within the mainstream labour movement and is indicated by the observations of other Solidarity Works participants that attempting to implement change within a union local can be tremendously difficult.

This raises the central difficulty in regards to radical labour education within the labour movement. The foundation of Popular Education, as theorized by Freire, is that the person who is involved in the education is able to implement that education through ‘praxis;’ a combination of action and reflection. Radical praxis within the labour movement is difficult to come across.

There is no shortage of positions one can occupy within the labour movement. There are participants of Solidarity Works in Saskatchewan, and I would imagine across the country, who occupy many of these positions. I am a staff representative for one union and am on a provincial and national committee for the union that all staff at the union I work for belong to.
There is also no shortage of work to be done within the labour movement. It is that work that requires educated activists, and it is for that reason that unions provide labour education. What is in short supply within the labour movement are opportunities to work for meaningful change on the structures and practices of the labour movement itself. It is the gulf between the politics of a radical labour educational like Solidarity Works at the politics at large within the labour movement that can make labour movement activism quite difficult for a participant of Solidarity Works, and based on the interviews it clearly has made that experience difficult for some of the participants.

In the first chapter we examined Gramsci’s position on education as it related to “contradictory consciousness.” Simply put, there was a gulf between what capitalism promised to workers and what it could deliver. Radical labour education can create a similar effect within the labour movement. As illustrated by the experiences of the interviewees some people were provided with a great deal of opportunities to work within their unions and to occupy leadership positions. This support in some cases started when the participants were youth activists and has carried those folks to prominent positions within their local and union long after they ceased being young activists.

However, other people had different experiences. There were those who struggled with the disconnect between the labour movement they grew attached to in Solidarity Works, and the labour movement they experienced in their own local. That disconnect eventually led to them leave the labour movement all together.
The reason that radical labour education exists is because there is a gulf between what radical labour educators want the labour movement to be and what it is.

Radical praxis within the labour movement can be difficult to implement. The frustration this creates can be overwhelming. I think for this reason that it is important to consider the points of Gramsci and Freire in regards to this necessity for radical education for workers in the context of what happens when not only are you fed up with management, you are just as, if not sometimes more so, fed up with your union. I believe that an important piece of Solidarity Works in this vein was the inclusion of non-unionized workers and the connection to community organizations.

Gramsci argued for involvement within the labour movement for members of the Communist Party not as an end in and of itself but as a means of moving people beyond the constraints on their intellect that monotonous industrial labour created. Education for workers was a means of allowing workers to focus on building intellectual skill because they were not allowed many forums to do so while at work, particularly if that work was monotonous. The intent of that education was also to get workers to be involved with both their union and the communist party.

The pace of change in the labour movement is slow. The resolution passed in 1996 at the CLC convention about shifting towards the needs of young workers has led among other things to resolutions on creating young workers conferences, youth committees, expanding the number of youth delegate seats for conventions, and most depressingly,
increasing the age of what is considered a young worker, from 26 to 30. Solidarity Works built into its radical labour education a space for work with community organizations struggling for social justice and the recognition that community activism is as important as the work people do within the union movement.

The point of this thesis is to examine the issues with radical labour education so that we can better equip participants in that kind of education for their activist work both inside and outside the labour movement. I think it is instructive to recall Gramsci again at this point because the point of the political work he was doing wasn’t simply for change within the labour movement, it was for the broader revolutionary struggle that he cared about so deeply.

I believe one of the most important pieces of Solidarity Works, and a component of it that is instructive for other radical labour education projects is the incorporation of the broader community in the project. Participants in Solidarity Works do not have to come from unionized workplaces, a quality that is quite rare for a labour funded education project. In addition to this, community organizations were also encouraged to take on placements. As we saw in the interviews with Solidarity Works participants, those community placements were often more interesting and beneficial than placements in unions.
There is so much work to be done within unions, and so much pressure to do as much of that work as possible, that it prevents many people once they become involved with unions to be involved with anything else.

The point of radical labour education is not just for change within the labour movement itself, but for change within the world as a whole. Therefore, it makes little sense to focus all of one’s activist energy on the labour movement alone. Indeed, if one does, the effects of that can lead to burn-out and even outright political apathy.

Solidarity Works was analyzed in this chapter as a heterotopia. This provides a framework to establish how a radical labour education program, which is delivered on site and then proceeds to short term placements, is connected to the larger labour movement in Saskatchewan. The connection to the broader labour movement can be a complicated one for participants of radical labour education and that was analyzed by looking at why the youth activist subject is necessary for the labour movement based on the internal discourse of the labour movement itself.

The chapter concluded with a discussion of the importance of a community activism component for any radical labour educational so that participants have an option for doing progressive work that is less bureaucratic than the labour movement itself.
Conclusion

Solidarity Works has had a significant impact on my life as it deepened my involvement and commitment to labour movement activism. My experience within the labour movement has been rewarding and challenging, inspiring and stressful. I doubt I would have experienced the labour movement in the way I have without participating in Solidarity Works.

Solidarity Works did what it was designed to do in my case. I participated in a youth activist training program, I became a young activist in the labour movement, and I am now a not-so-young activist in the labour movement. I have been able to reconcile my concerns with the structural inequities in the labour movement with my belief that the labour movement is an important forum for the struggle for social justice. However, my experience is not the norm for many other Solidarity Works participants and I believe that is a problem for both radical labour educators and the labour movement in general.

Bursting Bubbles

I participated in Solidarity Works in 2001, the first year it ran in Saskatchewan and the third year it was delivered by the CLC. After the first week of on site education we got together as a group and many people spoke of their “bubbles bursting.” They were describing the dissonance between the feeling of empowerment they had while doing the education and the feeling they experienced going back to the “real world.”
I have never forgotten those remarks and I have noticed people discussing it in regards to other popular educationals that I have been a part of that have had an on-site component. That “bubble bursting” has always been an issue that I felt needed to be investigated further and this thesis is an effort to do that. The theorists deployed in this thesis were selected primarily because I believe they contribute to a more complete understanding of the “bursting bubble.”

Antonio Gramsci argued that the “contradictory consciousness” that workers possess in a capitalist society made education a necessity for a revolutionary organization because the only way to make people see that another world was possible was by educating them about that possibility. Paulo Freire addressed why the form of education that challenged oppressive power relations was so important. If you simply reconstituted a top-down educational with revolutionary content would not empower workers. Dialogue was a necessity so that the workers themselves would recognize the strength of their knowledge. Through active dialogue with the teacher-student those workers could embrace their skills and build on them.

Here we see how Gramsci and Freire complement each other. Gramsci felt education within the Communist Party was the only way to ensure that the mass of the party were able to take up leadership positions within the party. Popular education, which was effectively founded by Freire, allows for that kind of education to happen in a meaningful way.
Solidarity Works is a radical labour education project that lends itself to much of the theorizing of Gramsci and Freire. Solidarity Works builds on participants’ experience, so they recognize and embrace their own knowledge, it provides them with new skills and information to address their “limit situations.” It challenges hegemonic constructions of meritocracy that are the foundation of the capitalist system in which we live. It further recognizes the contribution of workers of colour, aboriginal workers, workers with disabilities, women workers, workers who are paid and unpaid, and shows how that labour has historically been undervalued.

That said, when people left the educational they immediately felt their “bubble bursting.” Once education is delivered the facilitator has no control over the experiences that a participant will have outside the classroom. What a participant goes through in their struggle can be incredibly difficult. Those difficulties can, and do, lead to burn out, frustration and even apathy.

Foucault’s work on heterotopia and biopower figures prominently in this thesis because it provides a tool for analyzing how and why peoples’ “bubble burst.” Solidarity Works was a form of heterotopia which denounced the “real space” of Canada, and the assembly of social and economic power relations in that country. It had a “precise and specific operation,” which was to create young activists to struggle for social justice within the “real space” it was denouncing.
At the same time Solidarity Works, as we saw through the literature review, received institutional funding and support from the CLC because of unions own internal discourse – that unions represent all working people effectively. Unions simply have to be involved in young worker issues and unions have to develop young activists, because if they do not, they lose an entire portion of the workers of this country. Unions cannot afford to be irrelevant to such a sizeable minority of workers, particularly as their raison d’etre is to represent all workers.

Unions need to change how they operate to address the needs of young workers, through such resolutions like the one in 1996 that called on all affiliates of the CLC to pay attention to the issues of young workers. This creates opportunities for activism and opens up spaces for youth within the labour movement.

Programs like Solidarity Works do not happen for any group other than young workers because the labour movement doesn’t see itself as irrelevant to any group other than young workers. That is not to say that the labour movement as it exists is as relevant to workers of colour as it is to white workers, or as relevant to male workers as it is to female workers. However, by virtue of the labour movement feeling it has to “shake things up” in order to meet the needs of young workers a space like Solidarity Works can be created.

Sadly we see here how Solidarity Works, as a program, is an example of a heterotopia, in that it had an “opening” and a “closing.” Solidarity Works started in 1999 and currently
doesn’t run anywhere in the country. Hundreds of young activists went through an educational that empowered and inspired them, and now young activists do not have that same opportunity anywhere in the country. As youth activism within the labour movement increased, the necessity for the labour movement to deliver a radical labour education project like Solidarity Works diminished.

**Lessons for Other Radical Labour Education Projects**

In order for people who believe in and practice radical labour education to improve the education we deliver it is important to analyze the projects we have engaged in. I believe there are some key lessons that Solidarity Works provides on that front. The first and most important is the connection to community activism. Community organizing is hardly a utopia, as systemic racism, sexism, and ableism, can impact any organization, and organizations who struggle for social justice in their communities are no exception.

However, community organizations are certainly less rigid and bureaucratic than unions. Allowing participants in radical labour education the ability to network with organizations struggling for social justice, and, arguably more importantly, the activists within those organizations is key. This allows participants the ability to create support groups for struggles for equity, democracy, and social justice within the labour movement. That support is important because the struggle for equity in the labour movement can be an uphill battle.
Another key lesson from Solidarity Works is the importance of links with other activists who have participated in radical labour educationals and other like-minded activists within the labour movement and other social movements. Efforts were made to keep momentum going after Solidarity Works each year it occurred, but those efforts were ultimately not successful. This had much to do, I believe, with the schedules of the participants of Solidarity Works. Much of what led to those efforts being unsuccessful were the schedules of the participants themselves. Many worked, went to university, and were doing labour activism, or activism in other forums. That did not leave a lot of time for anything else.

With that said if there was a space for people who had participated in either radical or popular labour educationals where activists could come together and support each other and strategize collectively that would certainly be a positive. Drawing from a larger group of people who have experienced radical labour education would increase the likelihood of finding participants. The feeling of isolation of struggling for equity within an unsupportive local union would definitely be addressed by such a space.

**Closing**

As Michael Newman stated in *The Third Contract*, “if union trainers draw on the ideas and practices of [radical] education to any large degree, we are likely to come into ideological conflict with the unions we are working for.”¹⁰⁵ Yet as we have seen with

---

Solidarity Works, radical labour education programs do come into existence, though they also come to an end.

The struggle for a democratic, equitable, and vibrant labour movement is an important part of the struggle for a democratic and equitable world. However, if the radicals in the labour movement have experiences like mine, it is easy to get bogged down in the day to day of union work, of union activism, of fighting management. It is easy to neglect improving the labour movement when one becomes a cog within it.

I will always recall Solidarity Works fondly as it is the program that introduced me to the labour movement and to many people with whom I am good friends to this day. I think Solidarity Works provides a lot of lessons for radical labour educators and radical labour activists. If we stay active in our communities, and in the labour movement, when spaces like Solidarity Works open up, we are in a better position to do as much with those radical spaces as possible. I believe that would do radicals, and the labour movement, a lot of good.
Bibliography


Tamboukou, Maria. “Of Other Spaces: women’s colleges at the turn of the nineteenth century in the UK.” *Gender, Place and Culture* Vol. 7 no. 3 (2000), 195-216.