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U.S. Adult Education for Democratic Social Change

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US adult education for democratic social change

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Adult education alone will not bring about social change, however critical education connected to a vehicle for political and economic change, such as a grassroots organization, union or social movement, will ultimately be the combination that leads to lasting democratic social change (Heaney, 1995).

1. Introduction

The political project of implementing a radical¹, transformative adult education movement in the United States has yet to be realized. Despite its roots in the labor movement of the 1920s and a strong link to values of social action, the field of adult education in the US has been largely co-opted by the state as a tool for workforce development. Adult education in the US is primarily funded by the Department of Education (DOE) and is therefore regulated by a myriad of funding restrictions and federal mandates. Many grassroots community-based organizations that offer adult education programs have been forced to accept funding from DOE in order to keep their doors open to the communities they serve. Grassroots, or indigenous, educators are seen less frequently in the classroom as advanced degrees and credentials are favored over community-based knowledge. Program directors and administrators are overburdened with tracking data for DOE, monitoring standardized curriculum and testing, enforcing rigid attendance policies and producing mandated outcomes. Adult education programs that do not perform according to strict federal standards are punished by a non-renewal of their DOE contract and loss of funding. For many small adult education agencies sustainability is linked to federal funding. This enormous pressure weighs on program staff,

¹ Refers to a radical political project for adult education and adult literacy as articulated by Gramsci (1988), Freire (1970), Horton (1998), Peter Mayo (1999), Diana Coben (1998), Peter McLaren (1993), Donaldo Macedo (1987), Henry Giroux (1987), Stanley Aronowitz (1993) to name a few. Radical adult education advocates for a complete dismantling of the hegemonic social order; it is a revolutionary praxis that necessitates critical consciousness and political engagement with the world. Adult education in this genre can alternately be referred to as radical, emancipatory, liberatory, critical, transformative, or Freirean.

teachers and adult learners, limiting the creative potential for developing adult education as a transformative praxis.

In light of our stark wealth inequality, intensified marginalization and criminalization of poor, immigrant and working class families, and the increase in racialized segregation of our public schools, it becomes necessary to re-examine the connections between education, the capitalist market, and the alarming race and class divide (Kozol, 2005; Hilfiker, 2002; Wilson, 1996). While public school reform activists and educators battle the marketization of public schools, standardized testing, mandated curriculum, and an education divide that fosters an educated elite, the field of adult education also becomes a critical site for contesting the market-driven education agenda. Adult education has the potential to not only provide literacy and job training but also engage learners in a process of consciousness raising and social activism that can support local and national movements for participatory democracy and social justice.

What are the limitations and barriers to organizing within the field of adult education and pushing for a liberatory pedagogy and praxis? In the following paper I will briefly examine the history of adult education for social action in the United States and the current limitations of the field within the context of a neoliberal² global economy. Alternatives to state controlled adult education will be explored, including an examination of popular education in the US and in a Third World context. Is it possible to develop a radical adult education movement in the US in the absence of a cohesive social movement? This question will be explored and models will be examined from popular education programs in the US, those operating outside the system and

² Neoliberalism refers to a political-economic philosophy that emerged in the 1970s, also referred to as Thatcherism or Reaganomics. Neoliberal policies protect the free market, unrestricted flow of capital, and multinational corporations while dismantling the welfare state. Neoliberalism advocates deregulation of state control and rejects policies that support environmental protection, labor unions, minimum wage, and fair trade. Consequences of neoliberal policies include privatization of services once funded by the state and drastic cuts to public spending, including health care, education and social services.

also programs attempting to include popular education within a state-funded traditional adult education framework.

I will highlight the work of the Community Education Project (CEP), a community-based adult education program in Holyoke, Massachusetts, located in a working-class Puerto Rican neighborhood. Founded in 1991 as a collaboration between Hampshire College and Latino educators in Holyoke, CEP was conceived with the intention of linking adult literacy and popular education to foster leadership and community organizing skills in the Latino community. Initially funded as a university/community partnership, CEP later attained independence as a 501c3 non-profit, and eventually became a “client of the state” receiving the majority of its funding from the Massachusetts Department of Education. CEP becomes a compelling example of the debates and contestations in the field of adult literacy education, manifesting the tensions between an emancipatory literacy paradigm, in the tradition of Paulo Freire and Myles Horton, and a functional literacy paradigm as currently supported by forty-five years of federal policy. CEP’s model of integrating popular education within a traditional ABE (adult basic education) framework will be critically analyzed to determine if this is a viable avenue for liberatory adult educators.

2. US Adult Education for Democratic Social Change

Adult education discourse began in the 1920s with the scholarship of Eduard Lindeman and the formation of the American Association for Adult Education in 1926. Lindeman was among the earliest scholars to reflect on the field of adult education and articulate the link between adult education and social action. In his seminal work, *The Meaning of Adult Education*, first published in 1926, Lindeman stated: “Adult education will become an agency of progress if

its short-term goal of self-improvement can be made compatible with a longtime, experimental but resolute policy of changing the social order” (1989). Building off the foundation of John Dewey, Lindeman advocated for the connection of learning through action, and action linked to social purpose. Lindeman saw a natural integration between social action groups and adult education groups and believed that all successful adult education groups eventually evolved into social action groups (Brookfield 1984, p. 192). John Dewey and Eduard Lindeman shared a common belief in the interdependence of an informed public and the creation of democracy (Heaney, 1996, p. 2).

According to Lindeman learning was an engaged process, involved interaction with one’s lived reality, required self-reflection and embraced a philosophy of collective learning as opposed to learning in isolation (Heaney, 1996). “Collectivism is the road to power, the predominant reality of modern life” (Lindeman 1989, p. 153). We can recognize pedagogical strands in Lindeman’s philosophy of adult education that were later articulated and further developed by Myles Horton.

2.1 Myles Horton and Highlander

The Highlander Center is an internationally renowned residential popular education and research center that has been linking adult education and movements for social justice for seventy-five years. Founded in 1932 by Myles Horton and Don West, the Highlander Center has inspired thousands of liberatory adult educators all over the globe and has offered strategic support to several generations of social movements in the South. Located in rural Tennessee, Highlander’s work has always been firmly rooted in Southern struggles for justice, including the labor movement of the 1930s and 1940s, the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and

the Appalachian People's movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Through the use of participatory action research and organizing initiatives, Highlander has also played a critical role in supporting Southern environmental justice movements and the preservation of Appalachian culture.

Highlander's current focus includes efforts to support Southern movements for economic justice, democratic participation, and immigrant rights. Highlander recognizes the rapidly changing demographics of the South, including a tremendous influx of immigrants from Mexico and Central America, largely as a result of neoliberal economic policies. Highlander has responded by educating Southern constituencies about the effects of neoliberalism on workers across borders. A key principle in Highlander's work is a philosophy and praxis of international solidarity, not only by making the theoretical and analytical local-global links, but also by forging transnational alliances between workers in the US South and in the Southern hemisphere. As a regional leader in the new immigrant rights movement, Highlander now offers strategic support for multilingual organizing initiatives.

The Citizenship Schools

Perhaps one of the most successful literacy programs in the nation, the Citizenship Schools played a vital role in building the base for the Civil Rights Movement by teaching disenfranchised African-Americans to read, protest, vote and demand their rights. Started in the Sea Islands of South Carolina in 1954, the Citizenship Schools were implemented to help African-Americans in the deep South learn to read in order to pass mandatory literacy tests and become eligible voters. At that time there were over 2.5 million functionally illiterate African-Americans in eight Southern states (Highlander website, 2006). Eventually, the Citizenship

Schools led to a region-wide citizenship education program under the management of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

While Highlander staff embraced and supported the project, the initial idea for the Citizenship Schools came from the African-American community. This is a salient point as Highlander does not impose projects or an outside agenda on communities, instead responding to the requests and needs of local constituencies. Highlander also felt strongly that the Citizenship School teachers should be African-Americans.

Certainly the first people you want to avoid are the certified teachers, because people with teaching experience would likely impose their schooling methodology on the students and be judgmental. We wanted someone who would care for and respect the learners, and who would not be treating – which meant that the teacher should be black, like them (Horton, 1998, p. 101).

2.2 Adult Education and Workforce Development

Scholars argue that the field of adult education in the US has moved far away from its social action roots to a technical form of education that is dictated by the capitalist market economy – human resource development, skills acquisition and workforce development are the new buzz words associated with adult education. Tom Heaney (1996) states in his article, *Adult Education for Social Change: From Center Stage to the Wings and Back Again*:

The subordination of education to the workplace and learning to the development of job-related “competencies” has privileged instrumental knowledge and the techniques by which such knowledge is transmitted. Such knowledge and pedagogical forms maintain the appearance of neutrality, seemingly unencumbered by social or political values. They are, nonetheless, expressions of political processes which subordinate individual citizens to the prior and undemocratically conceived demands of capital. (p. 8)

It is important to note that contradictions and opposing ideologies existed within the field of adult education from its inception. The Carnegie Institute (later the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching) helped establish the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE) in 1926 and was openly criticized for promoting a non-democratic organizational structure. Once the AAAE was established a shift had already begun from conceptualizing adult education as part of nonformal education (ie: unregulated, grassroots, organic) to an institutional model (ie: bureaucratic, controlled, top-down). Adult education organizations and institutions began to function as socialization agencies much the same way as formal schooling (Lovett *et al.* 1983; Lovett, 1988 as cited in Heaney, 1996, p. 11). Eduard Lindeman, Myles Horton and other activist educators, once active in the leadership of the AAAE, eventually left the organization in frustration (Heaney, 1996, p. 7). Also noteworthy is a shift in the early literature moving away from Lindeman and his attention to social action and democracy toward Malcolm Knowles and a focus on technique and skill development. Once the field of adult education became institutionalized a new class of ‘experts’ emerged creating a professional/client encounter (Heaney, 1996, p. 12) and reducing adult education to a service or commodity to be purchased. The trend in liberal adult education became one of individualism, meritocracy, and maintenance of the status quo.

In the 1960s human capital development theory became the dominant force behind new public policy that linked “functional literacy” with employment (Demetrian, 2005, p. 10). Simply stated this theory views adult basic education as an investment that will reap economic returns. Not surprisingly the discourse of adult education as a fundamental human right or as a vehicle for social transformation was absent from federal policy debates.

Learners were presented as “human capital” and their education became intrinsically linked to economic and technological advancement (Heaney, 1996, p. 8). Forty-five years of federal policy has linked adult basic education with workforce readiness in a post-industrial economy.

This shift away from adult education for social action and critical consciousness toward a servicing of the capitalist market economy creates enormous challenges for community organizers and popular educators. Adult basic education (ABE) has become an integral component of strengthening a community’s readiness to enter the global job market. “Identifying gaps in the education system as an economic development issue opens possibilities for economic development practitioners to act as intermediaries who encourage local training and education providers to be more responsive to the needs of key local employers” (Fitzgerald & Leigh, 2002, p. 210). The problem with this framework is that the focus is on the workforce demands of local employers. There is no accountability to principles of social equity such as providing a living wage, job retention and advancement, or moving people out of poverty (Fitzgerald & Leigh, 2002, p. 196).

While the field of adult education has largely been co-opted into a vehicle for workforce development, there are adult educators, albeit a minority in the field, who remain committed to education for social action and democratic participation. Due to the current alliance between the fields of adult education and workforce development, many of these practitioners chose to distance themselves from the present discourse in adult education and prefer to label themselves “popular educators” in the tradition of Paulo Freire and Myles Horton.

3. Popular Education

Popular education is a form of adult education that is first and foremost grounded in the reality of people's daily lives, their lived experiences and daily struggles. The ultimate goal of popular education is to change the hegemonic social order and promote liberation from all forms of oppression. Popular education is best utilized as a tool for collective consciousness raising and community organizing. Advocates of popular education are aware that the process of social transformation is complex, therefore popular education must be integrated into other vehicles for collective action (Vio Grossi, 1981).

The popular education curriculum is developed through a process of collective theorizing among participants and the group facilitator. There is no top down hierarchical model of teaching in popular education where the teacher transfers knowledge to his/her students (ie: Freire's banking model of education). Instead there is a collective learning space created where all participants are teachers and learners. Fundamental to popular education is a pedagogical practice of linking theory with action for social change. Usually there is a cycle of action, reflection, then further action that is informed by collective reflection. This cycle of action/reflection/action is known as praxis, where theory is developed as a result of engagement with the world (Freire, 1970). Popular education is grassroots, organic, community-based and grounded in local struggles, therefore there are as many variations of popular education as there are communities engaged in liberatory struggles. However there are a few common elements of popular education that can be identified: leadership is shared, everyone is a teacher and a learner, knowledge is generated collectively, theory is produced with the intent of being used as a tool for social action, participants engage in critical reflection, analytical framework is used to connect the local to global, and participants engage in collective action (Kerka, 1997, p1).

3.1 Freire and Popular Education in Latin America

Although Paulo Freire (1921-1997), radical Brazilian educator, is often credited with being the father of popular education it is important to note that popular education existed previously as “political-pedagogical projects supported by the state” (Torres, 1990, p. 18). Carlos Alberto Torres (1990) points to several examples including nonstate projects: socialist education in Mexico during the government of General Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) which contributed greatly to the creation of rural education in Mexico; literacy and cultural renewal programs at the beginning of the Russian Revolution; antioligarchical peasant education in Bolivia in 1952; and working-class education initiatives by anarchist-syndicalist unions in Argentina in the early twentieth century. Freirean popular education developed in Latin America and was inspired by a fusion of Marxism and liberation theology. In his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire introduced a paradigmatic shift in adult literacy that challenged the dominant discourse perpetuated by North America and Western Europe. Cornel West characterized the release of Freire’s classic work as “ a world-historical event for counter-hegemonic theorists and activists in search of new ways of linking social theory to narratives of human freedom” (Cornel West in McLaren & Leonard, 1993, p. xiii).

Adult literacy was traditionally utilized as a mechanism for modernizing ‘underdeveloped’ countries, which necessitated assistance from ‘developed’ nations. This paradigm valorized western knowledge and the Eurocentric canon, relied heavily on foreign assistance such as USAID (Hayter, 1971), and privileged teachers with higher education credentials. The goal with this paradigm of adult literacy was to educate and modernize the Third World in preparation to enter the global economy (ie: modernization theory). “The

modernization approach considers education in general, and adult education in particular, as a variable intimately linked to the processes of socioeconomic development” (Torres, 1990, p. 6). Inherent also in this state-controlled effort was a civilizing mission to quell unrest among the poor and attempt to assimilate the subaltern classes into the nation state. “Literacy and basic education count among the privileged mechanisms for increasing contacts with modern societies (and their products), disorganizing traditional cultures (often of oral origin) that are considered an element of backwardness, and permitting development of social heterogeneity in the adoption of innovations” (Torres, 1990, p. 6). Under the paradigm of modernization and human capital development, adult education in Latin America was used as a tool of social control and the extension of state authority (Bock and Papagiannis, 1983 as cited in Torres, 1990, p. 21). Rodriguez Brandão articulates this further, “adult education is simply the ‘memory of the colonizer’ represented in a set of institutions that are centralizing and domesticating” (Rodriguez Brandão, 1984 as cited in Torres, 1990, p. 19).

Popular education differentiated radically from adult education in that its origin developed from the popular classes and was grounded in a vision and praxis of social transformation. Rodriguez Brandão claims popular education of the 1960s did not pretend to be an advanced form of adult education but a pedagogical movement that rested on the negation of mainstream adult education. “Popular education has produced a confrontation between ‘official’ state-sponsored strategies of adult education and alternative or advanced forms of nonformal education” (Torres, 1990, p. 21).

In the early 1960s Freire³ initiated a participatory literacy movement among the rural campesinos of northeastern Brazil that linked literacy with political engagement and fostered a

³ Paulo Freire was born in Recife, in the northeast of Brazil, one of the poorest regions of the country. Greatly influenced by his involvement in the Catholic Action Movement and a close association with Don Helder Camara,

utopian vision of liberation from all forms of domination. At the core of this movement were the oppressed who became agents in their own transformation. Through a process of conscientization and liberated thinking the poor and disenfranchised of Brazil were able to engage in various forms of collective action for emancipation. The goal was nonviolent revolution and a complete dismantling of the hegemonic order. This revolutionary goal was seen as a threat to the established social order and Freire's radical education movement was eventually suppressed. In 1964 a right-wing military coup overthrew the democratically elected government of President João Goulart. Freire was accused of spreading communism – he was arrested, imprisoned by the military government for 70 days and forced into exile (Brown, 1978, p. 6). Despite this bitter ending Freire inspired similar radical literacy efforts in other Third World countries engaged in struggles for national liberation – Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chile, Guinea-Bissau and Grenada (McLaren, 1997; Mayo, 1999, Freire, 1978; Miller, 1985; Torres, 1990; Coben, 1998).

Central to Freire's educational philosophy is a belief that education is not neutral (Mayo, 1999, p. 5). As he articulated numerous times in his writings education is political and is linked to ideological interests. Depending on the political agenda education can either lead to domestication or liberation (Freire, 1970). Freire's pedagogy utilizes a dialogical method among educators and learners where both exchange valuable knowledge and engage in reciprocal learning in groups known as 'cultural circles'. In this relationship there is no hierarchy between teacher and student whereby the teacher has authority over the student, and similarly there is no transfer of knowledge from the 'expert' teacher to students as passive recipients of knowledge

the Bishop of Recife, Freire drew inspiration and political clarity from liberation theology and Marxism. His theoretical insights were also influenced by the work of Hegel, Eric Fromm, Antonio Gramsci, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Lev Vygotski, and Amilcar Cabral among others (Mayo, 1999; McLaren, 1997).

(ie: banking education⁴). Collectively educators and learners engage in a process of conscientization through ‘praxis’ or reflection and action in order to transform the world. “In Freire’s view, any separation of the two key elements in the process of praxis (i.e. action and reflection) is either mindless activism or empty theorising...”(Mayo, 1999, p. 63). The process of conscientization relies heavily on indigenous or local knowledge and draws referents from participant’s daily-lived reality. “Reading and writing thus became grounded in the lived experiences of peasants and workers and resulted in a process of ideological struggle and revolutionary praxis – or conscientização” (McLaren, 1997, p. 148). Freire articulated this as learning to read the word in order to read the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

A discussion of Freire’s pedagogy would be incomplete without mention of the critical element of hope. Freire was inspired in his work in large part by radical Christian beliefs of building the beloved community through agape or love. Freire maintained that hope was fundamental to sustaining a utopian vision of justice, democracy, and liberation. “I do not understand human existence, and the struggle needed to improve it, apart from hope and dream. Hope is an ontological need...When it becomes a program, hopelessness paralyzes us, immobilizes us. We succumb to fatalism, and then it becomes impossible to muster the strength we absolutely need for a fierce struggle that will re-create the world” (Freire, 1992, p. 8).

3.2 Freirean Inspired Programs in the US

Paulo Freire was introduced to the United States in the early 1970s when he visited Harvard and published an English translation of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. His critique of

⁴ Banking education “becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (Freire, 1970, p.58). Banking education domesticates students by transmitting pre-selected knowledge into empty vessels or passive learners. The counter to banking education is problem-posing education where students are active subjects or agents in their collective search for knowledge.

mainstream education systems that support ‘banking education’ as opposed to critical thinking was received enthusiastically by US educators both within formal schools and educators in non-formal arenas. Freire resonated deeply with radical educators and organizers who were building an education reform movement to challenge the hegemony of US public schools and generate momentum for social change. US educators began to utilize Freirean liberatory praxis in classrooms and adult education programs, especially in urban barrios and inner-city communities where large populations of poor African Americans and Latinos lived. “Throughout the United States and Canada, hundreds of Freirean adult education centers opened in store-fronts, churches, neighborhood organizations, and community colleges” (Heaney, 1996, p. 20).

Community-based educators in the US imported Freirean methodology into a US context with the hope of supporting local movements for social justice. Alongside a period of tremendous progressive struggle in the US (Civil Rights movement, Black Power movement, Chicano and Native American movements, Puerto Rican Independence movement, feminist, gay and anti-war movements) there was a strong commitment by oppressed communities to gain control over their education and curriculum (Katsiaficas, 1987; Jameson et al, 1988). Black and Latino parents and activists demanded a non-eurocentric curriculum that would reflect their diverse histories and cultures, insisted on bilingual education in the public schools, raised public awareness about unequal resources between wealthy predominantly white public schools and public schools that served working class communities of color, demanded ‘dropout’ prevention programs and forced the issue of desegregation. Local struggles emerged throughout the US for community control of education including community representation on school boards, parent councils, and within the classroom (Morazzani, 1997; Katznelson, 1981)

Freire made a profound impact on North American radical educators who pursued numerous avenues to integrate his theories into a North American context. For example Freire has been associated with the deschooling movement and his influence on Ivan Illich has been publicly recognized. Freire is cited as a major inspiration to the school of critical theory produced by Henry Giroux, Stanley Aronowitz, Donaldo Macedo, Peter McLaren, Herbert Kohl and bell hooks. Jonathan Kozol widely recognizes Freire's influence on the development of his educational theory. In addition, Ira Shor advocated for the application of Freirean pedagogy in job training education (Shor, 1988) as well as North American public schools (Shor ed., 1987). However, Freire's influence has been greatest in the field of nonformal adult education.

4. Limits/Barriers to a Freirean Praxis in the US

4.1 Institutionalization

In the absence of a sustained radical social movement in the US, Freirean pedagogy has largely been reduced to a teaching methodology devoid of political content. Freire is often misunderstood in the US and simply associated with adult literacy, neglecting his vision of social transformation and counter hegemony. Peter Mayo states, "To reduce Freire's work simply to a method – the cause of much liberal misappropriation and dilution – and thereby divest it of its radical political thrust is tantamount to adulterating his work" (Mayo, 1999, p. 74). While adult literacy was certainly important in Brazil, it was imagined by Freire only as a vehicle for the larger goal of political conscientization (Mayo, 1999, p. 71).

Over time Freire's work has been appropriated and watered-down, reduced to a teaching methodology or set of techniques for the classroom. "Freire's ideas have been assimilated to the prevailing obsession of North American education, following a tendency in all the human and

social sciences with methods...” (Aronowitz in McLaren & Leonard, 1993, p. 8). It is not difficult to conduct an internet search and find a wide range of programs in the US claiming to utilize Freirean methodology or popular education to generate student participation and empowerment. What is meant by ‘Freirean methodology’ varies dramatically and can simply refer to a teacher’s attempts to be ‘interactive’ or include dialogue in the classroom (p. 8). The goal of many of these programs/schools claiming to use Freirean methodology is individual educational success; ie helping one student at a time to climb out of poverty or illiteracy and reach their personal indicators of success such as going to college, getting a decent paying job or buying a house. This reflects the current trend in federally funded adult education programs - to support individual success, promote citizenship and develop a functional workforce.

Western canonizers of Freire too often identify him with a ‘learning by doing’ methodology of perfumed liberalism. As a consequence, language arts educators in the public schools and liberal arts mavens in the academy ignore the immanently sociopolitical character of dialogical praxis (McLaren and Tadeu da Silva in McLaren & Leonard, 1993, p. 51)

There is a tendency even among so-called ‘progressive educators’ to implement mainstream literacy programs that are primarily functional while couched in Freirean language. The implication being, that somehow the use of Freirean language alone will initiate a process of transformation or social change (Coben, 1998, p. 154).

Examples of this appropriation of Freirean language can be found in some higher education contexts where Freirean terminology is applied to programs that are antithetical to Freirean pedagogy and praxis. The University of Minnesota has named an international community service grant after Paulo Freire that provides students with a unique learning opportunity for “self-discovery, multicultural understanding, personal growth, and community service”. The program, jointly sponsored by the Learning Abroad Center and the Career Center,

is designed “in the spirit of Freirian philosophy and pedagogy” to link understandings of human oppression and liberation with international community service. The grant application goes on to reference Freire as a “Brazilian educator and leader who sought to empower the oppressed through literacy programs that encouraged social and political awareness”. This is disturbing to me on a number of levels; first and foremost that Freire should be connected with an educational program for US college students (ie: privileged) to foster their own ‘self-discovery’ and ‘personal growth’ is flagrantly disrespectful of Freire’s core principles of working with the most marginalized populations of the world. While Freire was certainly committed to self-transformation he was primarily focused on a project of radical transformation that would subvert the existing social order. The above statement disregards his pedagogy of engagement and action that fosters a process from literacy to collective political consciousness and social action. This University of Minnesota program literature would have us believe that Freire was simply a literacy educator who promoted ‘social and political awareness’. One final point, ‘community service’ is more often than not practiced as charity rather than solidarity. Freire was fundamentally opposed to any paternalistic efforts to “help” the poor and alleviate suffering that did not address root causes of oppression; he labeled these interventions as false charity or false generosity.

True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the ‘rejects of life’, to extend their trembling hands. True generosity lies in striving so that these hands – whether of individuals or entire peoples – need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world. (Freire, 1970, p. 27).

Terms such as liberatory education or popular education can include a myriad of definitions and can uphold fundamentally different goals, meanings, and ideologies. Similar to

the World Bank appropriating/co-opting language of resistance from the popular sector such as ‘participatory’ or ‘empowerment’ (Narayan, 1996) there is an appropriation that has occurred with some Freirean terminology (Mayo, 1999). Institutions such as the World Bank, USAID and the US Department of Education will appropriate and institutionalize language from the popular sector in order to dilute or manipulate its meaning and divorce the language from its original radical context. “...it has always been one of the strengths of capitalism, a reflection of its dynamism, to appropriate a once oppositional concept and gradually dilute it in such a way as to make it an integral feature of the dominant discourse” (Mayo, 1999, p. 3).

4.2 Transplanting ‘Third World’ Pedagogy in a ‘First World’ Context

Peter Mayo makes the point that it is not possible to simply import Freire’s pedagogy from the Third World into the First World and expect the same results. “...it [Freirean pedagogy] does not comprise a set of techniques which can be transferred from one context to another at will...It is an approach which requires sensitivity towards the issues of oppression that emerge from the socio-cultural context in question” (Mayo, 1999, p. 74). The challenge then becomes how to adapt or modify Freire’s pedagogy within a North American context to support efforts for social change, even if those efforts do not constitute a ‘revolution’.

“The principal challenge was the adaptation of pedagogical forms developed in the cauldron of revolutionary change – nations where political will was accompanied by public policy supportive of people’s initiatives – to the functionalist domain of capitalism and parliamentary democracy” (Heaney, 1996, p. 20). Freirean pedagogy was successfully implemented in countries where the state was already engaged in a process of revolutionary change, therefore the liberatory education or popular education campaigns served to reinforce a

radical political movement. For example, in Nicaragua “Freirean pedagogy was carried out not in isolation but in relation to a strong social movement which drew together three strands: Sandino’s popular national revolt, Marxist class analysis, and Christian Liberation Theology” (Mayo, 1999, p. 159). Mayo concludes that emancipatory adult education can not lead to social transformation on its own. “It [Freirean pedagogy] appears likely to prove effective in this regard only when carried out in the context of a strong all-embracing social and political movement” (Mayo, 1999, p. 159).

“If carried out in isolation, Freire’s pedagogy would only involve ‘intellectual praxis’. This is a kind of praxis that would probably be capable of transforming people’s consciousness; but it would not enable them to engage in direct political action to change their plight. If linked with social action, however, the educational process would involve ‘revolutionary praxis’- the kind of praxis that took place in Nicaragua, carried out in the context of a social movement” (Mayo, 1999, p. 160).

North American radical adult educators who have had hopes of implementing Freirean pedagogy on a wide-scale to support revolutionary change have been bitterly disappointed, or disillusioned. Tom Heaney states, “Freirean programs in this country have ‘raised consciousness’ but seldom directly influenced social change” (Heaney, 1995, p. 4). In her essay, “Freire-inspired programs in the United States and Puerto Rico: a critical evaluation”, Blanca Facundo (1984) reflects on a “failed” Freirean adult education multi-year project initiated in the early 80s by a network of Latino liberatory educators. Facundo had been working with “Freire-inspired educators” in the urban barrios of her native Puerto Rico in the late seventies implementing what she defines as “educación liberadora”. After federal funding for her project dried up she moved to the United States and continued the work with Latino radical educators. Her article outlines the disappointments and frustrations of trying to implement ‘Third World’ pedagogy within the United States, even with the stated analysis that an inner ‘Third World’

exists within the US. Facundo argues that radical educators in the US romanticized Freire and naively sought to replicate his pedagogy in an uncritical manner without analyzing the fundamental differences between oppressive conditions in the Third World and oppressive conditions in the US, including the difference in poverty. She claims that the US has a “subsidized poverty” that breeds a dependence on the welfare state by creating a class of client recipients. Thus there is a culture of receiving services that can arguably pacify attempts at building a social movement. Facundo also reflects on the lack of awareness that she and her colleagues originally had about accepting federal funding for their work and the extent to which federal funding can co-opt and depoliticize a project. “We underestimated the power of the old class, not only to understand, but also to coopt our work. We took its money to work against it, and were most effectively neutered. We did not even realize it until it was too late. A good political lesson from which we *have* to learn if we are to begin a new” (Facundo, p. 10, Section 6). She concludes her article by questioning “the extent to which the stated goals of liberating education are attainable for Latinos in the United States, given that we are not politically organized in any meaningful way” (Facundo, p. 2 of Section 8).

While I share the lament of other radical adult educators that our emancipatory goals are limited by the current political climate in the US, I urge us to consider the critical importance of pushing forward with a transformative agenda for adult education. We are in a different moment politically, with a neo-conservative repressive government that is rapidly eroding the civil rights of US citizens, harassing and criminalizing immigrants, and aggressively pursuing imperialist policies that support war and transnational corporate domination. Despite, or perhaps in spite of, the current hegemonic regime, there are fertile signs of hope. This past year witnessed the

largest civil rights demonstrations ever recorded in US history⁵. The growing movement to support the rights of immigrants connects to a larger social justice agenda of labor rights, anti-racism, economic equality and anti-imperialism. This is a critical moment to continue our commitment to community-based radical adult education. The potential to link popular education programs with an immigrant rights and social justice agenda is a critical step in supporting groundwork for the social movement(s) we are constructing.

Freire reminds us that “experiments cannot be transplanted; they must be reinvented” (Freire, 1978, p. 9). With this understanding it becomes our charge to “reinvent” Freire’s pedagogy in a North American context given this particular socio-political moment in history. It is also imperative that we remember social change is a historical process and the building blocks we construct during this process are of profound importance in preparing for radical transformation. We need to connect liberatory adult education with local sites of struggle, community-based action, linking the local to the global and present day realities within a historical context. This is valuable work for radical adult educators and popular educators. Perhaps we can draw inspiration from Gramsci’s notion of the *historical bloc*, where distinct social actors, organizations and sectors of civil society are linked together in a common purpose of social transformation (Mayo, 1999). These various groups may be operating autonomously, however the combined effect is the creation of a historical bloc, or burgeoning, decentralized

⁵ In 2006 millions of people participated in marches, demonstrations, boycotts and civil disobedience to protest racist reforms to existing United States immigration laws. The protests began in response to proposed legislation known as H.R. 4437, which would raise penalties for illegal immigration and classify unauthorized immigrants and anyone who helped them enter or remain in the US as felons. It also calls for the construction of new border security fences along portions of the 2,000-mile United States–Mexico border (<http://en.wikipedia.org>). On May 1st, 2006 over one million protesters took to the streets to demand immigrant rights and support a nationwide boycott of US schools and businesses. The Great American Boycott, otherwise referred to as ‘A Day Without an Immigrant’ mobilized mass demonstrations in most major cities across the US and succeeded in slowing or shutting many farms, factories, markets and restaurants (<http://abcnews.go.com>).

social movement. We can imagine the World Social Forum⁶ in a Gramscian framework as autonomous actors are creating a ‘historical bloc’ through webs of international solidarity. Radical adult education can be utilized as a tool for developing political consciousness and connecting local struggles within a national and international solidarity movement such as the World Social Forum.

Popular education has been utilized successfully in sites of political repression, helping to plant seeds in a pre-revolutionary context. Freirean education was clandestinely carried out in Chile under Pinochet, and often under the guise of vocational adult education (Mayo, 1999, p. 157). It would be a far-reach to classify our leftist movements in the US as pre-revolutionary, unfortunately the left has settled for ‘reform’, however radical educators may be able to envision their work as critical in forming an international historical bloc of decentralized social movements. Especially in today’s era of rampant neoliberal colonialism⁷, it is critical that our local organizing be linked to global struggles. The slogan, “think globally, act locally” has implications for popular education curriculum which will be addressed later in this paper.

4.3 Funding Restrictions

Any effort to fund liberatory adult education in today’s political climate will be very challenging. Adult educators who have chosen to work outside the system and establish centers

⁶ The World Social Forum is an open meeting place where social movements, networks, NGOs and other civil society organizations opposed to neo-liberalism and a world dominated by capital or by any form of imperialism come together to pursue their thinking, to debate ideas democratically, to formulate proposals, share their experiences freely and network for effective action. Since the first world encounter in 2001, it has taken the form of a permanent world process seeking and building alternatives to neo-liberal policies. This definition is in its Charter of Principles, the WSF’s guiding document (<http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br>).

⁷ Neoliberal colonialism – whereby transnational corporations and international economic institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund become the new colonizers

for popular education must rely on private funds from progressive foundations and individual donors. This is the case with the Highlander Center as well as other popular education centers such as: Project South, School of Unity and Liberation, The Freire Center in Minneapolis, and the Catalyst Centre in Toronto⁸. These programs struggle hard to maintain their autonomy yet may be forced at times to accept funding from grantors that place restrictions on their programs. The majority of public and private funding available is for social services, not social action (Heaney, 1995, Resources, p.2). Funders are interested in providing agencies the funds to pay ‘professionals’ with credentials to service or “help” individual clients, as opposed to funding programs that will empower people to help themselves. This of course creates a dependency, which also serves to quell social unrest and discourage organizing initiatives.

As Heaney notes:

When grants have been made available, the cost has often far outweighed the benefits. It is not surprising that grantors frequently place demands on those they fund which subvert any local agenda for change. Even private philanthropies such as the United Way and other combined charities have been eager to stabilize and regularize community initiatives and use the leverage of funding to revise by-laws, force staff and board into adapting corporate models of organization, and play a role in the selection of board members. (Heaney, 1996, p. 20)

In her excellent article, “Funding Our Radical Work”, Suzanne Pharr (2004) examines the rise of the state controlled non-profit sector and the implications for radical organizing and social movement building. Following the decline of the social movements of the 60s and 70s, the conservative government of Ronald Reagan began to rapidly erode government sponsored human service programs. Due to this gap in service provision there was an increase in volunteerism and charity, in addition to an increase in the non-profit sector. Suzanne Pharr charts the changes that occurred in the battered women’s movement and provides useful parallels

⁸ See appendices for more information on these organizations

for an examination of adult education in the US. The beginnings of the anti-domestic violence movement were community-based and constituency led. Women came together in living rooms, kitchens, church basements and neighborhood centers to dialogue about domestic violence and patriarchy. Popular education methods were utilized and the result was conscientization and action. Women formed support groups, underground shelters, legal council and public education campaigns. Seeking financial support for their new programs, women's organizations applied for tax-exempt status and entered into the non-profit sector. Thus began the "professionalization of the movement" which redefined domestic violence as an individual mental health issue instead of a systemic social justice issue. Therefore women who had been abused were to be treated by professionals (ie: mental health counselors, therapists) instead of receiving counsel and support from women in the community who had experienced similar violence. Grassroots organizers and facilitators were replaced by women with social work degrees and mental health certification. Non-profit agencies required boards of directors and followed a corporate structure of leadership. Very little organizing remained as a shift was created to social service delivery and advocacy. Suzanne Pharr asks critical questions about what was lost in the move to receive federal funding. She notes that during the Reagan era women's organizations were forced to fit into funder-controlled boxes and work within the rules and regulations of a right-wing government. "As the government was moving toward the right during the Reagan years, we were seeking relationships with government. They were writing the rules and we were doing our best to shape the work within those rules..." (Pharr, 2004, p. 2).

What parallels can be drawn between the research presented here about the women's movement and the adult education movement? Here are some final observations from Suzanne

Pharr's article that demand analysis when considering similar dynamics within the field of adult education:

- *It was a constant struggle for the Women's Project to maintain a left analysis that engaged the community in systemic change – and to receive funding that did not attempt to modify our work;
- *The Battered Women's movement had moved from local, grassroots organizing to "professional" service delivery funded by government entities;
- *Staff of nonprofit organizations were spending an extraordinary amount of time on fundraising and a rapidly decreasing amount of time on organizing;
- *There was a dreadful competition among groups for funding and less cooperation in working together;
- *There was a loss of political force and commitment to movement building;
- *Very few organizations seemed to have an active membership base committed to organizing for change (Pharr, 2004, p.1).

In conclusion, Pharr claims that we can not expect government agencies or foundations to fund radical social change work. Paulo Freire's literacy campaigns in the northeast of Brazil were funded in part by USAID until Freire was accused of being a communist and inciting revolutionary behavior in the campesinos. The United States government saw Brazil's northeast as a security problem and financed Freire's literacy method in an effort to prevent the spread of communism following the Cuban Revolution. "AID's intention was to pacify the northeast" (Facundo, 1984, website). In January of 1964, USAID dropped all funding of the literacy projects; shortly after, in April, there was a military coup and Freire was forced into exile (Brown, 1978, p. 6). It seems absurdly obvious to reason that any federally funded adult education program in the US will be unlikely to support any agenda for radical social transformation. Peter Mayo (1999) cautions us to consider the link between funding and bureaucratic control claiming that adult education organizations, operating within broader social movements, will gradually be tied to bureaucracies through funding structures. He also warns us that dependence on state funding may lead to cooptation of the organization. There is a "...need

for social movements and their component organisations involved in transformative adult education to explore ways of creating internal and autonomous sources of funding to avoid cooptation” (Mayo, 1999, p. 165).

Recognizing that it is almost impossible to find funding for adult education or popular education without strings attached, Tom Heaney has developed strategies for survival. First of all he sights the critical importance of developing a base of volunteers who are committed to popular education and social movement building. This requires the creation of agencies that are constituent-led, where members of the local community do not simply approach the CBO requesting a service (ie: adult basic education classes) but are willing and able to contribute their time and energy to a collective political project of community building, political consciousness-raising and social action. Volunteers can be used to facilitate popular education classes or cultural circles, or can be involved in offering a service that will bring income to the CBO such as teaching Spanish classes. When collaborating with institutions of higher education Heaney cautions us to be aware that colleges and universities can co-opt the community’s agenda for action (Heaney, 1995, Resources, p. 3). Grassroots, community-based efforts can become dictated by institutions of higher education in exchange for project funding. Heaney strongly urges higher education professionals to promote and support resource development from within the community that will build strong organizations under local control. “Only if the community controls its own funds, can the community hope to hold on to its own agenda and be free to engage in action for social change” (Heaney, 1995, p. 3).

5. US Adult Literacy Education: Divergent Paradigms

George Demetrian (2005) identifies three divergent paradigms in the current field of US literacy education: the Freirean-based participatory literacy movement grounded in counter-hegemonic politics and community activism; functional literacy and workforce development as supported by federal policy for the past forty-five years; and the reform-oriented school of thought referred to as the New Literacy Studies. Alternative adult literacy paradigms (ie: New Literacy Studies and participatory literacy) have been effectively marginalized by the dominant paradigm of functional literacy and workforce development.

5.1 New Literacy Studies

Informed by the intellectual disciplines of cultural anthropology and Vygotskian social psychology, New Literacy Studies offers a middle ground between participatory literacy and functional literacy by focusing on the literacy practices of adult students (Demetrian, 2005, p. 4). The New Literacy Studies (NLS) utilizes ethnographic literature as a base to contextualize the learning practices of adult students. NLS advocates do not believe that print literacy should retain more legitimacy, in terms of cognitive development, than oral discourse. As such literacy is determined by the social, cultural, political and historical contexts of the community in which it is used. Scholars associated with the New Literacy Studies include Brian Street, Deborah Brandt, James Paul Gee, Allan Luke, Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel.

While NLS validates a student-centered curriculum and assists students to achieve their own goals, this school of thought generally supports a politics of greater inclusion and integration into mainstream social structures. Students exercise their own personal agency, however their actions are predominantly assimilationist, versus taking an oppositional stance to

the dominant socio-political order. Thus public policy that supports a New Literacy Studies model of adult literacy would embrace a liberal reform movement within capitalism (Demetrian, 2005, p. 20).

5.2 Functional Literacy

As stated earlier, the dominant paradigm in adult literacy education includes a technical-rational discourse fundamentally linked to the neoliberal economy. Forty-five years of federal policy illustrate this point. Starting in the 1960s the concept of ‘functional literacy’ emerged as linked to employment. In 1962 the Manpower Development and Training Act was passed and as a result a new emphasis was placed on adult basic education for people who fell below requisite employment training levels. The adult performance level (APL) study of 1975 revealed the economic imperative of addressing the issue of adult literacy. The research claimed that over half of the adult population was lacking the necessary skills and knowledges necessary to function in the state economy. Following the release of this study there was a shift from the traditional school-based model of literacy (ie: reading and writing) to a functional literacy or adult basic education that included: consumer economics, occupational knowledge, community resources, health, government and law (Demetrian, 2005, p. 11). In a post-industrial economy, with the rise of information technology over physical production, federal education policy initiatives began to reflect the primary concern of preparing and strengthening the US workforce to compete in the global economy.

A series of key reports served to heighten national alarm about the link between a new information-based economy and a failing US education system, resulting in widespread concern for the future stability of the US economy. The 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* claimed that the

progressive educational movement of the 1960s resulted in widespread mediocrity in education and played on cold-war fears of enemy nations with superior academic achievements (Demetrian, 2005, p. 60). The Reagan administration commissioned the *Workforce 2000* report (1987) that identified: the need for the US to expand vigorous export markets; a shift from goods to services with an increasing focus on information, knowledge and technology; and the rapidly changing dynamics of the US workforce (p. 62). Key factors in the workforce demographic shift included a slower growth rate in the population, an aging workforce and one dominated by more women, minorities and immigrants (p. 66). The conclusion was that workforce training was essential for the sustainability of the nation's economic future. The *Jump Start* report (Chisman, 1989) identified 20 million plus adults who were functionally illiterate and therefore unprepared to work in the information-based economy (Demetrian, 2005, p. 67). Soon after the Department of Labor appointed the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) which articulated the specific content and skills needed to function in the modern workforce. The early 1990s witnessed a flourish of literacy initiatives including the passage of the National Literacy Act of 1991 and the creation of the National Institute for Literacy in 1992.

The 1994 midterm elections confirmed a massive Republican victory and commenced the dismantling of liberal social programs including adult education programs that were not directly linked to workforce development. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) was passed in 1998 and effectively replaced the Adult Education Act of 1969 and the National Literacy Act of 1991. WIA sought to streamline education, training and employment programs under one comprehensive system. "One-Stop Centers" were established throughout the nation where 'clients' can seek assistance with job training, education and employment services from helpful 'case managers'. Local business-led boards oversee one-stop delivery centers and ensure a flow

of labor into the low-tech service economy. (Demetron, 2005). Critics of WIA argue that training for higher wage jobs is only available after a client has been unable to find work. Welfare-to-work recipients are often placed in unsubsidized, low-income jobs without the ability to earn a living wage. In the absence of substantial job training and access to higher education, recipients of public assistance are likely to remain trapped in a cycle of low-wage, unstable work and welfare (D'Amico, 1997, p. 15 as cited in Demetron, 2005).

With the passage of WIA also came a new focus on a federal accountability system that implemented a uniform assessment system based on “objective and measurable” criteria. The National Reporting System (NRS) created performance-based accountability standards and set mandatory outcomes that are extremely rigid and difficult to attain. Major discord erupted between proponents of the WIA/NRS and those in favor of participatory literacy adult education. As a result of the NRS large numbers of volunteer-driven community-based programs were effectively eliminated from federal funding (Demetron, 2005, p. 108). Many of these programs worked with the most severely marginalized populations of adults – those who read below a fourth grade level. It was absurdly unrealistic to expect these students to demonstrate the required learning gains on the NRS scales. Debates in the field about measurement and accountability persist to this day. In summary Demetron claims that the WIA/NRS model views adult literacy students as clients of the state. Assessment is an ‘objective’ process designed to monitor student progress in light of pre-determined policy-driven objectives (p. 36).

Critiques of the dominant ‘functional literacy’ paradigm are numerous. Most critics widely agree that the main objective of functional literacy is to incorporate marginal adults into the established economic and social order. The aim is to provide illiterate adults with minimal competencies, the lowest level required to function as workers in a print-dominated society.

Basic reading skills are prioritized over writing, as this competency is necessary for following instructions, filling out forms, reading signs, etc. Jonathan Kozol claims that functional literacy demeans human beings by denying its recipients the potential inherent in print as a vehicle for discovering, expressing, and enhancing their humanness (Lankshear in McLaren & Leonard, 1993, p. 92). The entire philosophy is antithetical to Freire's notion of liberatory education; functional literacy serves to dehumanize and domesticate. Colin Lankshear critiques the dominant functional literacy paradigm using a Freirean critical analysis. In short he states that functional literacy is simply a form of *banking education* where knowledge and skill content is pre-determined by outside educational experts and is transferred to the marginal sectors without room for critical engagement. The method of transference is *anti-dialogical* and reflects a *false generosity*, a Freirean concept used to highlight a paternalistic form of helping the oppressed which reduces a portion of their immediate suffering (ie: illiteracy) but does nothing to address root causes of oppression. In fact, false generosity functions to maintain the social structures which create oppression (p. 99-103). Freire has this to say about dialogue, a practice that is clearly absent from the functional literacy paradigm:

Dialogue further requires an intense faith in [humanity], faith in their power to make and remake, to create and recreate, faith in their vocation to be more fully human (which is not a privilege of an elite, but the birthright of all)...Founding itself upon love, humility and faith, dialogue is a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between participants is the logical consequence. (Freire, 1970)

5.3 Participatory Literacy

This school of thought is firmly rooted in a Freirean paradigm that seeks to transform the unjust social order, rather than adjust to it, assimilate, or accept the status quo. In direct contrast to the core philosophy of functional literacy, which promotes educational empowerment for

individuals, the participatory literacy model promotes collective action and community empowerment. Under a functional literacy paradigm the burden of success is placed on the individual – if you work hard enough anyone can attain educational success, followed by economic rewards. This philosophy continues the myth of an equal playing field in “America’s democracy” where good behavior, hard work, patriotism and educational achievement will bring rewards and prosperity for oneself and their family. As discussed earlier this paradigm is designed to reproduce the dominant social order and prepare workers to function in the neoliberal workforce. Participatory literacy, on the other hand, is organized to promote education and learning by a process of critical reflection, social and political analysis, and generating the tools to engage in transformation of oppressive situations in the learner’s immediate lives.

Elsa Auerbach⁹ developed the *emergent curriculum*, a participatory approach to traditional ESL literacy that is based on a belief that educators must not pre-determine curriculum, rather the curriculum must *emerge* from the particular context of student’s lives (Making Meaning, Making Change, 1992, p. 13). The participatory approach to curriculum development necessitates an intellectual partnership between teacher and students in an “ongoing, collaborative investigation of critical themes in students’ lives” (p. 13). Consequently the instructional process moves from the students to the curriculum rather than from the curriculum to the students (p. 19). The teacher’s role is one of problem-poser¹⁰, facilitating critical dialogue and helping students to link classroom content to a broader social analysis (p.

⁹ For an excellent resource on participatory curriculum development please refer to *Making Meaning, Making Change: Participatory Curriculum Development for Adult ESL Literacy* (Auerbach, 1992).

¹⁰ Problem-posing is a tool for developing critical thinking. It is an inductive questioning process that structures dialogue in the classroom. Teachers formulate questions to encourage students to analyze and challenge the conditions of their lives (Wallerstein, 1987; Freire, 1970).

22). Auerbach advocates for learners to become subjects of their own learning and use literacy as a tool to address social problems in their lives, thus transforming their relation to the world and making them subjects of their own history (p. 17). The link to Freire's pedagogy is clear.

Although participatory literacy is rooted in a social change paradigm, its political intent is often neglected. Elsa Auerbach (1993) claims that the terms 'participatory' and 'learner-centered' are often used interchangeably, despite very different ideological implications. The learner-centered approach to literacy places primary importance on participants' involvement with curriculum development *processes* such as students setting their own learning goals, exploring their life experiences, co-producing the curriculum, and evaluating their own learning. While participatory literacy also embraces the principles above, the primary emphasis is curriculum *content* that is drawn from the social context of learner's lives. Critics of the learner-centered approach argue that the emphasis on individual goals may, in fact, support the values of the dominant culture. "The effect of leaving all curricular choices to the students is not likely to result in questioning of the social order" (Auerbach, 1993, p. 544). The learner-centered approach has also been criticized for valorizing learner's individual experiences, cultures and histories devoid of a broader social and political context. Giroux warns us about a romantic celebration of student experience that characterized much of the radical pedagogy of the early 1960s (Giroux in Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 20). Giroux claims that working-class culture is also a terrain of struggle and contradiction, and should be interrogated and analyzed (p. 5).

6. Alternatives to State Controlled Adult Education

In the previous section I highlighted the participatory literacy model of adult literacy education, a model that can be integrated within the paradigm of state-funded adult education. In

the following section I will highlight a few popular education projects in the US that can be viewed as potential alternatives to state controlled adult education. These models can be referenced later when examining the possibilities for transformative adult education practice in Holyoke, Massachusetts.

6.1 Popular Education: Tools for Social Movement Building

Since the 1999 Seattle meetings of the World Trade Organization, the US global justice movement has increasingly turned toward popular education as a political organizing tool to educate and mobilize constituencies against corporate globalization. Understanding that low-income communities of color are often the hardest hit by neoliberal corporate practices, community-based organizations are developing strategies to connect local and global struggles. Grassroots organizers have turned increasingly to popular education to ‘bring globalization home’. Organizers understand that in order to be successful with local campaigns for social justice it is imperative for communities to analyze the complex links between global and local exploitation. Several research think-tanks and progressive foundations have taken an interest in how local communities are educating and organizing themselves to become social actors in the global political arena. One such project, *Globalizing Civil Society from the Inside Out*¹¹, is funded by the Ford Foundation and seeks to explore how local organizers and marginalized communities can inform and reshape the globalization debate (Bringing Globalization Home, 2005). In addition, popular education is being used as an organizing tool in the new immigrant rights movement.

¹¹ *Globalizing Civil Society from the Inside Out* is a three-year initiative jointly launched by the Center for Justice, Tolerance and Community of the University of California, Santa Cruz, and the Inter-American Forum of the Collins Center for Public Policy in Miami, Florida.

Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty and Genocide

Project South is a leadership development organization with an extensive history of working for social and economic justice in the South. Initially conceived to generate a more comprehensive historical understanding of the Civil Rights movement, Project South emphasizes history as a core element of its popular education curriculum. In recent years, Project South has framed all of their education initiatives in the context of neoliberal globalization and global social movements. Project South has evolved from more conventional forms of educational activities, such as study circles, to focus on leadership development and popular education.

Jerome Scott, Project South director notes:

We experimented with Horton, Freire, and a bunch of other people, and tried to pool together our particular brand of popular education, as it reflects struggles that we're involved with here in the South. We emerged as a popular education organization because we realized we had to develop thousands of leaders, not just two or three or four, but thousands of leaders, if we were going to be able to ensure that once the movement breaks out and takes a leap, that it moves in the correct direction, and that we win (Bringing Globalization Home, 2005, p. 15).

Project South builds relationships with organizations and networks across the US and global south by providing leadership development and popular, political and economic education for personal and social transformation. As a lead organizer in the US Social Forum, Project South seeks to strengthen national and international social movements for radical democracy.

School of Unity and Liberation (SOUL)

Founded in 1996 on the wave of protests surrounding the future of affirmative action at UC Berkeley, SOUL was conceived to strengthen student and youth leadership in the emerging

social movements of the mid-90s. SOUL is primarily a community-based organizing and training center for youth, also referred to as a “school to build a movement”. Initially SOUL offered a summer training school inspired by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee’s ‘Freedom Summer’. SOUL has since grown into a year-round training center offering courses in political education and organizing skills designed specifically to meet the particular needs of youth activists. Connecting political analysis to lived experience is at the heart of SOUL’s teaching philosophy. Youth educators comprise SOUL’s Teaching Collective and utilize popular education methods in their teaching. “Education is a powerful force, and it is the responsibility of people like us – conscious people, revolutionaries, people fighting for social justice, organizers, activists - to use education as a force of liberation” (<http://www.youthec.org/soul>).

6.2 Popular Education: University/Community Partnerships

Lindeman Center for Community Empowerment through Education

The Lindeman Center was founded in 1983 by educator/activists at Northern Illinois University to provide resources and support to community-based activist organizations working for social justice. Named after Eduard Lindeman the center claims that adult education can and should play a vital role in achieving democratic social change. Fundamental to the core philosophy of the center is a belief that poor and marginalized groups must maintain community control over their education. The Lindeman Center is a popular education center and offers pedagogical support and training to community-based groups engaged with popular education and participatory action research. The center provides a space for community groups to undertake collective planning and reflection about community problems and strategies for action. When requested by a community group, university professors and graduate students (also activist

educators, often from the field of critical adult education) will join the collective process of problem-posing and strategizing. Control of the process remains in the hands of the community, however center staff and university affiliates can provide vital resources and training in such areas as participatory action research, popular education methodology, mini-courses on Freire, and technical skills such as grant-writing and web development. Another way the center can support community activists is to network and bring CBOs together with common struggles so they can learn from each other. The center also provides a one-year internship for selected community leaders to strengthen and develop their work in the community, in addition to offering graduate students professional development opportunities in the field of critical adult education. The Lindeman Center is also a popular education resource center and builds networks of solidarity with other popular education organizations in the Midwest, other parts of the US, Canada and Latin America.

El Barrio Popular Education Program

In 1985, inspired by the work of Freire, the Language Policy Task Force of the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY, initiated a participatory research and literacy education project in the Puerto Rican community of East Harlem. The “literacy project” evolved into the El Barrio Popular Education Program, an autonomous community-based organization, and was incorporated as a nonprofit corporation in 1987. The board of directors included former program participants, Latino scholars and community educators. A student steering committee, created to formalize student decision-making power, became the primary directive body regarding the daily operation of the program. Community representation on the board and student steering committee were critical steps towards the goal of “complete self-management

and control of the program by the community” (Walsh,ed., 1991, p. 185). While the fledgling CBO moved toward complete autonomy, the Centro of Hunter College continued to support the program’s work by paying for the director’s salary, organizing the research/evaluation component, and taking major responsibility for fundraising (p. 185).

The primary focus of El Barrio Popular Education was to develop an empowerment educational model for adult literacy.

...for a community of U.S. citizens who confront life in this country from a subordinate position, the struggle is to change those power relationships. Our objective in the El Barrio Popular Education Program, therefore, is to develop *critical literacy*, as a model and a strategy for disempowered communities to affirm their own forms of knowledge, to acquire new ones and to negotiate their position in society on an equal footing. This is a pedagogy not merely for imparting skills, but for bringing about social change (Walsh, ed., 1991, p. 217).

Bilingual Community Literacy Training Project

This university-community collaboration was designed to train immigrants and refugees as adult ESL and native language literacy instructors in their own communities. Project partners included three community-based adult education programs, the University of Massachusetts at Boston, and the Boston Adult Literacy Fund. This multi-year collaboration involved partners to develop, implement, and evaluate a participatory training project that would develop community assets to solve critical community needs, such as adult literacy and ESL services.

6.3 Popular Education: Immigrant Rights Movement

The Autonomous University for Social Movements/Mexico Solidarity Network

The Autonomous University for Social Movements is a collaborative proposal formulated from extensive dialogues between undocumented workers, community-based activists, and

university professors. The Autonomous University seeks to build upon existing programs of the Mexico Solidarity Network that bring immigrant organizers and college activists together to engage in local community struggles such as labor exploitation faced by undocumented workers, housing discrimination and immigrant rights. These existing programs are based in immigrant/migrant communities in Chicago, Washington DC, and Ciudad Juarez. The Autonomous University will educate directly affected communities and college-educated activists in theory, strategy and practice of social movements, with a strong emphasis on the practical construction of community-based activism leading to effective social change.

Utilizing popular education practices, grounded in the work of Paulo Freire, the Autonomous University aims to “develop theoretical analysis, leadership ability, analytical talent, and practical skills that form the basis of effective community-based social movements” (Mexico Solidarity Network, project paper, 2006). At the request of immigrant/migrant participants, the Autonomous University will also offer ESOL classes within a framework of popular education. The Mexico Solidarity Network is currently training new staff for community-based popular education and theoretical training that will also include a practical element of ESOL classes.

7. Lessons from the Field: Adult Education in Holyoke

The following three sections will attempt to apply the theoretical and practical applications of adult education, as outlined in this paper, to a site specific context – adult education in Holyoke, Massachusetts.

7.1 Overview of Holyoke, Massachusetts

Holyoke, like many other small northeastern cities, is facing an economic crisis as it struggles with the transition from an industrial economy toward the service sector. In the mid-1980s Massachusetts lost 76,000 manufacturing jobs. Latino workers were hit particularly hard since 41% were employed in manufacturing (Holyoke Employment Partnership, 2002). In recent decades manufacturing provided low-skilled workers with a decent wage, enough to support a family and live with dignity. As manufacturing jobs have fled Holyoke and the service sector has increased, Latinos have been left either unemployed or underemployed with jobs that do not provide a living wage or job security. The service sector dominates the regions' economy with health care and social services providing the bulk of jobs for skilled applicants. The largest employer in the service sector is Holyoke Hospital. Following the service sector is the government sector, primarily supplying jobs in education, and the manufacturing sector, primarily supplying jobs in paper. "One of the most important implications of this change in industry mix is the fact that the salaries for workers without higher education are significantly lower in the emerging industries" (Holyoke Employment Partnership, 2002).

The city of Holyoke has the sixth largest population of Latinos in Massachusetts and as a percentage of the total population, the Latino population in Holyoke ranks third in the state (Mauricio Gaston Institute, January 2003). A city of approximately 40,000 residents, Latinos comprise 41.4 % of the population and of this group Puerto Ricans are the majority (US Census 2000). Ironically while unemployment among Holyoke's Puerto Rican residents remains high, the city of Holyoke is importing workers from outside the city to fill job vacancies. "Holyoke appears to be increasingly filling better paying jobs – and jobs that require higher levels of education – with workers from outside the city" (Holyoke Employment Partnership, 2002). Also

noted in this report is the fact that most of Holyoke's successful manufacturing firms employ few Puerto Ricans. Language barriers and a skills gap were listed as the primary reasons for not employing the Puerto Rican workforce.

Significant demographic changes are occurring in the city that must be recognized and incorporated into the city's economic revitalization and community development plans. Since 1930 the city has lost a third of its population, almost entirely from the white population. In dramatic contrast, since 1980 the Latino (majority Puerto Rican) population has increased by 170%. Also important to note – the Latino population is considerably younger than the rest of Holyoke – 45% of the Latino population is under 18. Holyoke's Latino families are overwhelmingly female headed households and Latina females outnumber Latino males in every age category, most importantly in the prime working age category of 25-44 (all statistics in this paragraph taken from the Holyoke Employment Partnership, 2002). Holyoke must find new ways to integrate its young, predominantly Latina workforce.

7.2 Brief History of Puerto Ricans in Holyoke

Puerto Ricans came to Massachusetts as early as 1948 to work in the Pioneer Valley as farm laborers primarily concentrated in the tobacco industry. In 1947 the Department of Labor in Puerto Rico created an agency to address both the island's unemployment problems and the mainland farmers' labor shortage. The Department of Labor's new Migration Division acted as a placement bureau which arranged contracts between mainland farmers and unemployed Puerto Ricans on the island (Ruth Glasser, 1997). Thousands of migrant farmers made their way from the island to the tobacco fields of Massachusetts and Connecticut where they faced harsh living conditions, broken work contracts and limited means to advocate for themselves politically in the

face of extreme exploitation. Puerto Ricans began migrating to Holyoke in the 1960s and accelerated in the 1970s and 1980s in response to Puerto Rico's economic downturn and displacement from nearby cities such as Springfield. Historically an Irish-American and French-Canadian immigrant workforce filled the jobs of Holyoke's flourishing paper manufacturing industry. As these European immigrants assimilated into "white" culture and climbed the economic success ladder, they evacuated Holyoke's working class neighborhoods and moved up the hill to enjoy a higher standard of living – improved housing, education, and access to services. Many Puerto Ricans relocated to Holyoke to fill factory positions abandoned by the 'upwardly mobile' Irish-American and French-Canadian populations.

7.3 Institutional Barriers

Poor and inadequate public schools. 20% of the US adult population has no high school diploma or equivalent GED; in Holyoke 30% do not. In 2000 the Holyoke Public Schools reported a dropout rate of 9.1%, significantly higher than the Massachusetts dropout rate of 3.8% (Massachusetts Department of Education). Despite its proximity to the city, Latinos accounted for only 9% of the enrollment at Holyoke Community College in 2001 (JUNTOS Collaborative, 2003). *Poverty and unemployment.* According to the 2000 Census almost 34% of Holyoke's children live in families below the poverty line, compared to 12% for Massachusetts (US Census Bureau). In 1999, Holyoke's unemployment rate of 6.7% was significantly higher than the Massachusetts rate of 4.6%. *Limited English proficiency.* The 2000 Census found that in almost 43% of Holyoke's households a primary language other than English is spoken. One in five residents say they speak English less than very well (US Census Bureau). *Institutional racism.* Puerto Rican migrants to Holyoke, despite their US citizenship, face blatant discrimination and

racial prejudice. Holyoke is racially stigmatized by its “Puerto Rican ghettos”, gang violence, drug trafficking, teen pregnancy and excessively high dropout rates. The poverty and “failures” of the Puerto Rican community are often viewed through a racist lens. *Legacy of colonialism*. Much has been written and theorized about Puerto Ricans as a colonized people. It is undeniable that the legacy of colonialism has had a tremendous impact on Puerto Ricans’ ability to be economically and academically successful in the U.S. “The major academic problem for U.S. Puerto Ricans is not that they possess a different language, culture, or cognitive or communication style, but rather the nature of the history, subjugation, and exploitation they have experienced...” (Nieto, 2000).

7.4 Holyoke ABE Needs Assessment

Holyoke is currently facing a crisis in ABE services. Given the high rates of poverty and unemployment in the Puerto Rican community, and given the fact that the city of Holyoke has job vacancies that are not being filled by Holyoke residents, the demand for ABE classes that will facilitate job-readiness is very high. According to the 2000 Census over 30% of Holyoke adults ages 18 and older did not have a high school diploma or equivalent. A recent Holyoke ABE assets/needs statement claims that there are nearly 9,000 adults ages 16 and older who could benefit from instruction leading to completion of a GED or alternative diploma (JUNTOS Collaborative, 2003). The 2000 Census reported that 42.8% of Holyoke’s population age 5 and older speaks a language other than English at home and nearly 5,000 adults ages 18+ report speaking English “less than very well”. In addition there are at least 4,000 adults (ages 18+) who have high school credentials but need substantial additional instruction to meet the demands of the new economy (JUNTOS Collaborative, 2003). The Massachusetts Institute for a New

Commonwealth defined the term “new literacy challenge” in its groundbreaking report entitled *New Skills for a New Economy*. In their report, the new literacy challenge refers to ensuring that low-skilled workers with high school credentials have the verbal, reading, writing, math, and analytical abilities considered sufficient for the demands of the modern workplace. After assessing the three categories of needs above (adults in need of a GED or alternative diploma, adults in need of ESL classes, and adults with high school credentials who need substantial additional instruction) the JUNTOS Collaborative report determined that there is a minimum of 13,000 Holyoke residents in need of adult basic education. *The total number of cost-free seats in ABE programs in Holyoke is 337*. Holyoke is able to serve fewer than 4% of its residents who could benefit from ESL and/or ABE instruction (JUNTOS Collaborative, 2003). This astounding lack of services and neglect for the educational and workforce development needs of the Puerto Rican community must be examined critically in context of the global economy, institutional racism, welfare reform, and the colonial history of Puerto Rican labor in the US.

The JUNTOS Collaborative

The JUNTOS Adult Basic Education Collaborative was founded in 1995 to facilitate cooperation, communication and resource sharing among Holyoke’s adult basic education service providers. Funded by the Department of Education, the seven JUNTOS partners include:

- *Holyoke Public Schools/HALO Center (Holyoke Adult Learning Opportunities)
- *New England Farmworkers’ Council
- *Community Education Project
- *Holyoke Works
- *CARE Center (Community Adolescent Resource and Education)
- *Holyoke Community College/ABE to College Transition Program
- *Chamber of Commerce/Tutor-Mentor Program/Distance Learning

Each JUNTOS partner operates a portion of Holyoke's overall ABE system with coordinated, comprehensive course sequences in Bilingual/Native Language Literacy, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), ABE in English and Spanish (pre-GED and GED), along with counseling/referral services and college/vocational transition. The success of the JUNTOS Collaborative lies in its ability to collaborate instead of compete with each other for limited ABE funding from the Department of Education. Sharing a similar vision for the future of Holyoke and a strong commitment to the education and employment of Holyoke's Latino community facilitates a productive collaboration that ultimately benefits the city's adult learners. JUNTOS partners meet once a month to share curriculum ideas, coordinate joint program and staff development efforts and implement strategies for improving adult education in Holyoke.

8. Introduction: The Community Education Project

8.1 History

The Community Education Project is a small, grassroots adult education organization based in the Latino, primarily Puerto Rican, community of Holyoke. Founded in 1991 through a collaborative process between community leaders in Holyoke and Hampshire College, CEP was created with the aim of addressing the widespread need for English language and basic literacy skills among Latino adults in Holyoke. CEP has attempted to expand its scope of programs to include popular education, Latino leadership development and community organizing. After Hampshire College's support ended in 1993, CEP was sponsored by Casa Latina of Northampton until early 1999 when CEP received its 501c3 non-profit status. Today CEP receives funding from the Massachusetts State Department of Education, the City of Holyoke, private foundations, and fundraising efforts (CEP Project Overview and Programs, year?).

8.2 Mission Statement

“The Community Education Project (CEP) works toward social and economic justice by contributing to the development of a capable, informed, and self-determining Latino community in Holyoke, Massachusetts. CEP’s work is carried out through adult literacy and language education programs as well as through grassroots organizing and action initiatives”.

8.3 Governance and Programs

CEP’s board of Directors and staff are highly representative of the community they serve; more than 75% of the board and staff are Latino, over half are low-income and many are current or former adult basic education students (CEP Project overview and Programs, year?).

Current programs include two levels of Native Language Literacy (NLL), two levels of ESOL, one GED class taught at a family literacy center, one ABE to College Transition class held at Holyoke Community College, a parent leadership development workshop series, in addition to resource and referral services and vocational/college transition counseling.

CEP claims to utilize a participatory curriculum development process inspired by Freire where instructors work closely with students/learners to create a relevant context for the educational materials. Recognizing that language and literacy instruction is a vehicle for community empowerment and organizing, CEP’s classrooms have become sites to discuss issues of community concern. Welfare reform, unemployment, immigration, racism, domestic violence and failing public schools are frequent topics in CEP classrooms. At times classroom discussions lead directly to community action. One Spanish language literacy class explored the theme of domestic violence and in the process became inspired to create a bilingual play

addressing the issue of violence against women in their own community. “Our work is grounded in the belief that education is fundamentally political and that we can not separate instruction in basic skills from a process of dialogue and action in response to the conditions faced by the learners in our classrooms” (CEP Overview and Projects).

8.4 Proyectos/Projects

In addition to classroom instruction in language and literacy, CEP learners and teachers have engaged in several popular education projects. *Latinos and Allies for a Fair Economy* brings Latino community members together to collectively explore, and begin working to change, the root causes of poverty among Latinos in the local and national economic system. “This project will address and change the severe economic disparity faced by Latinos in Holyoke by empowering community residents to confront, understand, contextualize, and attempt to change their own marginalization through a process of education, analysis and action. On a systemic level, we intend – through a grassroots, constituent-led movement – to effect a measure of change within the local economic systems that keep Latinos in Holyoke unemployed or working poor” (CEP Proposal to the Ben & Jerry’s Foundation).

The Latino Grassroots Leadership Project focuses on developing organizational and institutional leadership among low-income Latinos. This project evolved out of a critique of Holyoke’s social service sector, dominated by white middle-class leaders from outside the community. While many programs and organizations exist in Holyoke to “serve” economically disadvantaged Latinos, very few of these programs include members of the same community in their leadership. Only three or four Executive Directors among an estimated 75 social service organizations serving majority Latino populations are Latino; and only one or two organizations

other than CEP have anything besides token representation of the low-income Latino community on their Boards of Directors (CEP funding proposal to SDPF, June 2001). CEP staff and board members developed a political analysis about the lack of Latino representation in positions of leadership across the city:

- 1) In order to exist at all, organizations and programs established to “help” the low-income Latino community are set up in ways that function to meet the expectations of funding sources and policy-makers outside the Latino community
- 2) In order to meet these external expectations, the process of providing “help” to the low-income Latino community becomes “professionalized”, making it difficult for members of this community to qualify for leadership positions
- 3) The existing leadership gets so busy providing “help” in accordance with external funder and policy expectations that it does not have (or make) the time to engage local community members in developing the skills required to take on, and be effective in, leadership roles
- 4) Some low-income Latinos are recruited for leadership roles, but are essentially set up for failure in these roles because they have not had the training or support required for success and, as a result, leave or are pushed out
- 5) The existing leadership is able to “justify” the continuation of the process of exclusion of Latinos from positions of leadership and influence, because those who have been recruited either left or “didn’t measure up”
- 6) Low-income Latino community members internalize the message that we are incapable of taking on leadership roles that will allow us to challenge the policies and expectations imposed on the organizations that are supposed to serve us (CEP funding proposal to SDPF, June 2001)

Inherent in this cycle are notions of paternalism and racism. Typical of white liberal organizations, is a desire to “help” or “save” oppressed communities. While social service agencies often provide vital necessities to poor communities this kind of service model, otherwise known as missionary or charity models of service¹², provide professionals (often white) with secure salaries and keep the status quo in tact. Outside “experts” provide services and foster a dependency relationship whereby “clients” become reliant on social services for

¹² See Keith Morton’s article, “The Irony of Service: Charity, Project and Social Change in Service-Learning” in the Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning (1995).

mere survival. These organizations are not conceived to empower poor communities to build upon their existing assets and organize for fundamental social change.

The Community Education Project is unique among Holyoke ABE agencies due to its stated commitment to grassroots Latino leadership development and inclusion of popular education in the curriculum. Despite its progressive mission the organization is limited by funding restrictions and has to contend with some of the very contradictions CEP has critiqued in other social service agencies throughout the city. Without financial autonomy, CEP is tied to grant requirements and federal and state funding restrictions. Traditional funding sources are interested in providing financial support for adult education programs but are unlikely to fund a program that links critical literacy with social action in the tradition of Paulo Freire, Myles Horton, Eduard Lindeman. CEP recognizes the narrow trend in adult basic education toward workforce development and while acknowledging that the Latino community needs jobs, there is also an understanding that the community needs education for critical consciousness and tools for analyzing and resisting oppression. While being literate and having access to employment are critical, so too are the skills needed to advocate for a living wage, fair housing, decent public schools and elected officials from the Latino community. CEP is the most bold of the Holyoke ABE programs in its clearly stated political mission of grassroots community empowerment.

9. Reflection and Analysis: Community Education Project

9.1 Methodology

My reflections and analysis of the Community Education Project are informed by three years of participant observation with the agency; first as a member of the board of directors for two years, followed by a nine month period where I served as the Interim Program Director

during a staff transition. My specific location as CEP board member and staff member situated me as an ‘insider’ to the agency, granting me access to ‘insider knowledge’ including board and staff meeting minutes, grant application narratives, budgets, ABE curriculum material, staff evaluations, and popular education program designs. In addition, I had access as a ‘participant observer’ to the staff and adult students of CEP, board members, funders, and collaborating community partners. Due to my responsibilities, first as board member and later as Interim Program Director, I was afforded access to specific classifications of insider knowledge as mentioned above. However, I am acutely aware of the socio-political factors that also situate me as an ‘outsider’ in the Latino community of Holyoke. As a white, middle-class graduate student with ‘functional’ Spanish-speaking skills, and as a non-resident of Holyoke, I recognize that there will always be barriers that separate me from the Latino community in Holyoke. Here lies a classic insider/outsider tension as exemplified in the broader field of social science and in the paradigm of participatory research.

It was never my intention to conduct research at the Community Education Project, therefore there are no field notes, no interviews, no focus groups, nor ethnographies. The following section, “Reflections and Analysis” is my attempt to situate my experience and observations, over the past three years at CEP, within the analytical framework presented in this paper.

9.2 Reflections and Analysis: an Insider/Outsider Perspective

The Hegemony of English

After several years of working in partnership with multiple community-based organizations in South Holyoke, I was invited to join the Community Education Project’s board

of directors in 2003. CEP had a longstanding commitment to retain a board majority of Latino/a local residents and conduct board meetings in Spanish. I felt very honored, as a white woman and as a non-Holyoke resident, to be invited onto the board. At the time there was only one other white person on the board; a woman who is fluent in Spanish, married to a Puerto Rican man, and has taught in the Holyoke public schools for over 20 years. Board meetings were conducted in Spanish and at times I struggled to follow the rapid dialogue. As needed someone would offer to translate for me or I would ask a clarifying question after the meeting. Occasionally meetings slipped into English as most board members are bilingual, however this was to the exclusion of one board member, a Colombian former adult learner at CEP. When this happened someone would begin translating into Spanish for Fernando and the power dynamic shifted rapidly. I could visibly see the discomfort and embarrassment on his face as he regressed from active participant in his native language, to passive observer in English. Fernando had completed level one ESOL at CEP and was asked to join the board because of his outstanding student leadership skills. Although this scenario did not happen frequently, when it did, I was very aware of Fernando's marginalization and asserted my request that the language of preference not be adjusted to accommodate my Spanish 'functional literacy'. My occasional discomfort as a non-fluent Spanish speaker was minimal compared to Fernando's alienation when English was spoken. The 'hegemony of English' functions on many levels to disempower and shame language 'minorities' equating a lack of English speaking skills with a lack of intelligence (Macedo et al, 2003). In my opinion CEP board meetings should maintain a counter-hegemonic discourse that includes the practice of speaking Spanish as a common language. There was no essentialized "Latino" culture on the board, as members were from Puerto Rico (3), Colombia (2), Peru (1) and North America (2). We did, however, share a

common respect and appreciation of diverse Latino cultures, histories, traditions and experiences in the US; a commitment to multilingual education; and a political commitment to the empowerment of local Latino communities in Western Massachusetts.

Professionalization of the Board: a Corporate Nonprofit Model

The Executive Director at the time was a Latina woman of Peruvian heritage who was a highly skilled administrator, grant writer and executive leader. Despite her many talents, however, I soon began to realize that she was using a very traditional, or corporate nonprofit approach to directing CEP. Her style of staff management, from what I observed and what the staff revealed to me, was top-down and authoritative. Under her leadership the board dramatically changed its composition from the previous director. The former director retained a majority Latina/o board with over 50% of the board members being Holyoke residents or graduates of CEP adult education classes. With the shift of executive leadership all Holyoke residents and/or former CEP students dropped the board, and in their place new board members were recruited with ties to the local colleges or access to financial resources. I am not implying, nor do I think, it was the *intention* of the ED to discourage local resident participation, however the culture of the board shifted to a more “professional” class of academics and the focus of our meetings became increasingly focused on fundraising and developing ‘proper’ nonprofit infrastructure. While this type of board development is necessary in order for a nonprofit board to maintain a 501c3 status, if this becomes the sole purpose of the board a critical link can be lost to the community. Gradually the former CEP adult education students left the board for legitimate personal reasons (insufficient time, work & family obligations, etc) and significant effort was not made to replace their board seats with other Latino/a residents from the local

community. One of the new board recruits was a white development officer at Holyoke Community College who did not speak Spanish; therefore after he joined the board all meetings were conducted in English.

A couple of observations can be drawn here. In order to support the mission of CEP – a program curriculum that extends well beyond the federally mandated ABE curriculum, we must have access to unrestricted resources. This is what Suzanne Pharr and Tom Heaney referred to in their articles about funding social change organizing or popular education – we must develop autonomous bases of funding. Given the enormous pressure to raise funds it is understandable, even reasonable, to diversify a board of directors to include folks with access to foundations, institutions of higher education, connections with local business leaders and folks with grant writing and fundraising skills. However there are consequences, or ripple effects, to these actions. Within the span of a few short years CEP’s board of directors switched from “highly representative of the community we serve” to consisting of mostly academics and all non-Holyoke residents. While the majority of the board remained Latina/o, the medium of communication switched from Spanish to English to accommodate non-Spanish speakers. As a grassroots, “progressive” CBO committed to Latina/o empowerment we did little as a board to critically analyze and name this shifting dynamic. This would have been a perfect opportunity for us to draw on our commitment to Freirean principles and implement a process of reflection and action. Perhaps with critical dialogue the board would have decided to move in a similar direction, however it would have been an informed decision with anticipated outcomes.

Community-based Organizations: From the Grassroots?

Without actively recruiting Latino residents from Holyoke for the board, and maintaining the meetings in Spanish, the outcome was predictable – a CBO that is not constituent led, or truly grassroots if we are to understand ‘grassroots’ as emerging from the community. While it is true that CEP is located in the barrio of South Holyoke, a working-class Puerto Rican community, and working-class Latinos constitute the majority of adult students who attend classes at CEP, and the majority of the staff are Puerto Ricans from Holyoke and Springfield – does this constellation of facts equate to “grassroots”? Who holds the power in the agency? The Executive Director and the board of directors. If there is no clear vehicle to facilitate community accountability (ie: mechanism to ensure that the ED and the board are accountable to the community), and there is no clear vehicle for channeling information (ie: suggestions, requests, complaints, concerns, vision) from local residents and adult students to the executive leadership, *and* the ED and the board are all non-residents of Holyoke, how, then, can the agency be considered “grassroots”? One could make the same argument with the term community-based organization. There are countless CBOs that may be based in the communities they serve, but do not take direction and leadership from the community members who live there, usually the most marginalized sectors of our communities. In short, most CBOs are not constituent led.

Hierarchies of Power: Race, Class & Gender

One final comment about the board dynamics that I observed over the three-year period of time I was working with CEP. There was much praise and excitement about the recruit of the white development officer from Holyoke Community College, a former development officer at

Amherst College. It was the hope of the ED and certain staff members that this new board member would be able to raise substantial funds for CEP. And this was the posture of this particular board member - he frequently 'name-dropped' letting us know he had close ties with the mayor of Holyoke, the President of HCC, and very wealthy local business owners. He referred to these men on a first-name basis and talked about large grants the city was applying for that might benefit CEP. For over one year this board member made implied promises to raise funds for our organization – either through grants at HCC or through direct appeals to local banks. After our ED resigned, in August 2005, the board had to raise significant funds to hire a new director. This same board member offered to raise \$20,000 for CEP by soliciting four banks to donate \$5,000 each. Recently he quit the board because CEP did not elect to hire the candidate he wanted for director; he never fulfilled any of his promises to raise funds for the agency. During the past three years the two most successful fundraisers I have seen for CEP were community-driven efforts. One was a walk-a-thon for adult education, organized by a former CEP student, a Latina woman who served on the board. She was able to solicit participation from the CEP staff, local residents and the mayor of Holyoke. This fundraiser not only generated money for the organization, but also involved the community and received favorable press coverage.

Why do I highlight these examples in this paper? First, to make the observation and critique that CEP shifted from a grassroots, constituent-led board to a mainstream nonprofit board. At the time of this shift our ED was following recommended protocol for building a nonprofit board, including searching for a lawyer, business owner, and financial accountant. Along with this shift came the change in language from Spanish to English to accommodate non-Spanish speakers on the board. Was this simply a shift in strategy to attempt to generate much

needed economic resources for CEP, or was racism a contributing factor? Was the white development officer from a local college seen as a more valuable asset for the board than the Latina adult student who organized the walk-a-thon? Why was more effort invested in recruiting lawyers, business owners and financial accountants than recruiting *and* retaining local, working-class Latino residents?

Community Accountability

Stanley Aronowitz offers us this reflection of Freire's comparison between a 'capitalist' school and a 'popular democratic school'. The popular school...

"must be deformalized, debureaucratized, a measure that entails democratizing schools so that the community elects the school director and there is direct accountability. This means the director can be removed any time by the base but also that curriculum and other decisions are broadly shared. Freire uses this term 'accountability' to describe this desired relationship" (Aronowitz in McLaren & Leonard, 1993, p. 19).

While CEP is not a formal school, there are many strands of formal education that run through CEP classrooms due to federally mandated curriculum, standardized tests, etc. The term 'school' can certainly be applied to CEP as a site of community education. Throughout history people have taken control of their education and generated schools in the most unlikely places; factory floors (union schools/labor education), in the fields (migrant worker education), freedom schools (Civil Rights movement), and the free school movement (popular education). A critical question for CEP is if the agency will choose to become a 'capitalist' school or 'popular democratic school'. In other words, will CEP be governed by the community it serves, or be governed by an external base? Aronowitz holds forth that teacher trainings, administration and curriculum

design will be the ultimate responsibility of the director (or education secretary) but from the “base of a working-class-oriented political formation that holds radical democratic reform toward popular power as its core ideology” (p. 20).

Another way of remaining accountable to the community is to maintain a vigilant commitment to hire teachers and staff who are representative of the community CEP serves. As discussed earlier, by highlighting the work of Elsa Auerbach, there are numerous benefits to training and supporting indigenous, community-based educators. Not only does this facilitate the creation of a safe space for learners where their culture and traditions are understood and respected by their teacher, but also it provides adult students a concrete example of leadership development from within marginalized sectors of the community. It subverts the paradigm of who is traditionally deemed the ‘expert’, or the ‘professional’, thereby becoming a political act to resist the dominant trend of credentialized adult educators. And finally, hiring and training teachers from within the local community provides needed jobs and contributes to community economic development efforts.

Latino Leadership Development

During the three years I worked with CEP I observed very few ABE programs hiring Latinos from within the community of Holyoke. The “typical” ABE teacher in Holyoke is a white, middle-class professional with at least one higher education degree, and lives somewhere other than Holyoke. I occasionally heard program directors or executive directors complain that they could not find ‘qualified people of color’ to work in their programs without any critical analysis about their methods of recruitment or how their stringent requirements might limit their applicant pool. During the ten months that I attended JUNTOS meetings as Interim Program

Director of CEP, not once was the topic broached of developing a comprehensive plan to recruit and retain Latino ABE teachers for our various adult education programs. The critical missing link here is a refusal to prioritize Latino leadership development.

CEP has maintained a strong commitment to hiring people of color and can proudly claim that the majority of the staff and board are people of color. CEP has also established a standard of developing leadership from within, including hiring former adult learners as teachers, office managers, outreach workers, and just recently as administrative director. While this is commendable it becomes necessary to examine what kind of leadership is being developed and what ideologies are being supported. It is important for the staff and board to have a clear understanding of the agency's mission statement and the kind of political leadership they want to develop before making any hiring decisions. It is not enough to hire people of color if their values do not support the mission of the agency. Simple identity politics do nothing to subvert/transform the legacy of racial inequality in Holyoke. This is exemplified by Holyoke's Superintendent of Public Schools, a Cuban-American, who did not support bilingual education in a school district where Latino youth are the clear majority.

Ideological Tensions: Functional vs. Emancipatory Literacy

In my opinion there exists a profound tension at CEP between staff who support a functional literacy paradigm and staff who support an emancipatory or transformative vision for adult education. This tension is not named as such but it is evident at every level of the program from curriculum development, to the facilitation of student goals, to board development, to fundraising strategies. These ideological tensions also exist at the board level. If the current CEP board and the new Agency Director want to develop CEP as a site of critical literacy and

community empowerment then many changes will need to be implemented including addressing the ideological tensions between ‘domesticating’ adult education (functional literacy) and adult education that seeks to liberate communities from oppression. Of primary urgency is the need to review CEP’s mission statement and analyze what is meant by the following: “CEP works toward social and economic justice by contributing to the development of a capable, informed and self-determining Latino community”. How is CEP working toward social and economic justice? How is CEP facilitating the development of a self-determined Latino community? Do all members of the staff and board agree with the mission statement, and if so, do they have the political tools and knowledge to implement it? Have staff members been adequately trained to implement such a mission statement?

Popular Education Initiatives

The second part of the mission statement is as follows: “CEP’s work is carried out through adult literacy and language education programs as well as through grassroots organizing and action initiatives”. In the three years that I have worked with CEP I have never seen CEP engage in grassroots organizing. However, one of the former popular education projects, *Latinos and Allies for a Fair Economy*, initiated community-based research about poverty in Holyoke and produced a resource booklet with suggestions for economic change in the Latino community. The grant proposal claimed that the project would lead to a “grassroots, constituent-led movement for local economic change” but did not state how this would be accomplished. The funding for this project has long since evaporated and no evaluations were conducted to determine why the project did not move forward as envisioned. This would be a useful research project to interview past participants of this popular education project and find out what were the

outcomes for individual and community empowerment. The other popular education project, *The Latino Grassroots Leadership Project*, also lost grant funding and is no longer in operation. The goal of this project was to utilize a popular education curriculum to facilitate Latino leadership development¹³ and support Latino community members to become active on local CBO boards of directors, parent teacher organizations (PTOs), church committees, or city councils. According to staff members who were involved with the project the popular education curriculum was a great success, but there was no follow-up or support offered to help participants utilize their new leadership skills. This is a ‘classic’ example of how popular education can be used to raise consciousness, but does not necessarily translate into political mobilization or direct action. It is also worthy of noting that the original grant proposal for this project defined leadership in terms of fairly conventional models (ie: participating on a CBO board, school committee, etc.) and did not articulate Latino leadership in terms of grassroots mobilization or community organizing. Again, this is another opportunity to revisit this project through research, interviews, and conducting evaluations with former participants. Did participants gain leadership skills during this popular education workshop series, and if so, how are they currently utilizing their leadership skills?

Curriculum Content: Domesticating or Liberating?

Since the dissolution of the popular education curriculum at CEP I have observed a discourse shift in the agency, in regards to leadership development, to include traditional notions of ‘student leadership’, promoting ‘active citizens’ and ‘civic engagement’. This is the

¹³ See appendices for curriculum outline.

functional literacy discourse supported by the Bush administration's emphasis on "American values", patriotism, and democratic citizenship (Demetrian, 2005, p. 295). The current USDOE curriculum for adult ESOL classes supports an assimilation agenda for new immigrants, including learning 'American' history, government and how to become a citizen. Given the current restrictions on DOE funding and the required standardized testing there is limited flexibility in a DOE funded classroom. There is enormous pressure on adult learners to advance at a rapid pace, which consequently promotes 'banking education'. Teachers often feel pressure to fill their students with information so they will be ready for the standardized tests, thus limiting possibilities for a dialectical exchange or for curricular material to generate organically from the learners. I have observed this dynamic in CEP classrooms. At this current moment CEP does not have a stated political commitment to implement participatory literacy which would involve learners in the curriculum development content and process. From my observations over the past three years at CEP, it has become clear that CEP does not have a clearly articulated method for connecting literacy with community empowerment and social justice. Here lies some of the tension within the agency – there remains an emancipatory mission statement (ie: agency vision), however very little in actual practice to implement that mission.

Despite its past attempts at implementing popular education projects, and despite its emancipatory mission statement, CEP has devolved into a functional literacy program, simply providing a social service to the community. Consequently adult learners come to CEP seeking a commodity, adult basic education, and often leave as soon as they have achieved their minimum goals. Blanca Facundo takes note of this contradiction,

It has been our field experience that, while we wanted to develop critical consciousness with learners, *they* wanted a high school diploma, or to learn English as a second

language; and very rapidly, to get a job. They did not have the time or the inclination for other “critical” subjects. (Facundo, 1984, p. 5 of Section 3).

I have certainly observed this dynamic at CEP where some adult learners are seeking minimal English language skills in order to quickly find a job. This is exactly what is meant by functional literacy! Is it not the mission of CEP and liberatory adult educators to create a learning environment that engages students beyond the minimal functional requirements needed to attain employment? If so, it should then become CEP’s charge to create classrooms where practical utilitarian skills can be achieved (ie: learning English or earning a GED) and where students can simultaneously engage in critical analysis about the social conditions of their lives, and ideally begin a process of collective action to change their oppressive conditions. Processes of collective theorizing and action can offer essential support and solidarity in an effort to counter the isolation, alienation and shame that often accompanies poverty, unemployment and deep-rooted racism. As colonized subjects Puerto Ricans experience multiple layers of oppression, including some of the highest indicators of poverty of any racial or ethnic group in the United States.

9.3 Recommendations

In the following section I will outline some recommendations for CEP starting with the premise that the staff and board are committed to actualizing the current CEP mission statement. These recommendations have evolved from my own process of reflection and analysis over a three-year period of participant observation with the agency. The theories and practices of the authors reviewed in this paper have also influenced the following recommendations. While these recommendations were developed specifically for the Community Education Project in Holyoke,

they constitute practical steps that any community-based adult education program can follow in pursuit of a transformative praxis for adult education.

- 1) **Create a constituent-led agency.** The issue of community representation on the board needs to be addressed. In the past CEP's board was predominantly local, working-class Latino residents. In order to avoid tokenism or an unequal power dynamic, the board should be at least 50% working-class Holyoke Latino residents, representative of the community that CEP serves. Another option is to create a separate community advisory board comprised of local Holyoke residents and former ABE students. This advisory board would function autonomously from the board of directors and would have the jurisdiction to guide and challenge the board of directors. In addition to democratizing the board, CEP could institute a membership base whereby local residents and former CEP adult students can 'invest' in the mission of CEP by paying minimal annual dues, participating in annual meetings open to the community, and volunteering in a wide variety of capacities to support the work of CEP, including program development and implementation. This system will encourage principles of community accountability and will allow for the greatest plurality of voices within CEP.
- 2) **Develop leadership capacity.** This needs to occur on multiple tiers: board, staff, adult students, and community. Leadership development training and curriculum should include political education, introducing a socio-economic and historical analysis of oppression in the Latino community of Holyoke in order to provide a context for the mission of CEP. Leadership development should follow the principles of participatory leadership training as outlined by Elsa Auerbach. CEP can not responsibly offer leadership training to adult

students or the general community if there has not been adequate time spent on internal leadership training (staff and board).

- 3) **Commit to a comprehensive praxis of anti-oppression.** This would require CEP to conduct an internal assessment of principles and practices that not only *support* a social justice agenda, but also actively *dismantle* oppression in all its forms. This requires a serious commitment from staff and board to analyze class, race, gender, sexuality, and issues of language dominance, and counter both institutional and personal practices of discrimination. This past year, for example, CEP included a statement in the personnel policies that CEP strives to end domestic violence in all its manifestations. Mechanisms must be created to address behaviors on staff, the board, or in the CEP community that are discriminatory or oppressive.
- 4) **Diversify funding sources.** This is clearly a huge challenge, but as has been stated earlier in this paper without an autonomous funding base CEP will not be able to maintain control of its programs. Due to multiple funding restrictions from Massachusetts DOE, it is imperative to cultivate unrestricted funds that can be used to support CEP's projects outside of the DOE framework (ie: popular education, community organizing, leadership development, and cultural programs). Community-based fundraising efforts should be organized by current and former CEP students. The Agency Director and board should pursue grants from progressive foundations that support the work of grassroots social justice agencies. Other avenues to pursue: soliciting resources from the local colleges and University, and establishing a membership base with annual dues.
- 5) **Implement participatory curriculum.** Every CEP classroom should utilize an emancipatory or liberatory pedagogy including student involvement in curriculum

development and classroom teaching practices. Please refer to the section in this paper on participatory curriculum and the work of Elsa Auerbach.

- 6) **Commit to hire and train teachers from within the local Latino community.** This establishes a political principle of respecting community or indigenous knowledge and rejecting the dominant discourse of teacher as ‘professional’ or ‘expert’ (often white, with higher education degree, and living outside the community). This commitment should also be framed in terms of developing the skills and talents of local leaders and educators, in addition to providing local community members with jobs.
- 7) **Integrate popular education programs, community organizing, and direct action initiatives.** Action initiatives should be generated through dialogue and problem-posing in the classroom. Implement participatory action research (ie: Holyoke oral history project, immigrant rights). Connect with local and national social movements; integrate transnational analysis by linking local and global struggles.
- 8) **Strengthen and integrate cultural programs.** Expand the Kimbombó theater project to include more adult students and reach a wider community audience. Begin each class with a short student-led cultural presentation (ie: song or poem). Initiate “cultural circles” as an educational tool and to raise political consciousness.
- 9) **Protect and promote multilingual communities.** This is a stated political commitment to deconstruct the hegemony of English, both in theory and practice. While CEP offers ESOL classes it should be within a theoretical context and physical environment where Spanish and other languages are equally respected and promoted. Bilingual teaching methodologies should be utilized as there exists ample research to prove that bilingual learning environments support learner’s self-confidence and ability to learn another language

(available resource: UMass School of Education; Language, Literacy and Culture Department). Community organizing should be conducted in multiple languages (available resource: Highlander Multilingual Capacity Building Initiative).

10) **Expand educational programs and services to reach underserved populations.** Explore opportunities to work with Holyoke's high school 'dropouts', local prison inmates, and women in domestic violence shelters.

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