

## **CRI Case Study: Labour Education**

**Project Name:** **CLC Labour Education: An action research project from an equality perspective**

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### **Rationale**

Today unions are facing an ‘identity’ crisis in which issues of equity in solidarity and access to union life and culture are becoming central concerns. This challenge at the heart of union cultural has vast implications for both formal and informal elements of labour education.

In Canada, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) is the national labour body representing 2.5 million unionized workers from 70 affiliated international and national unions. As such, the CLC holds the overall responsibility of labour education in policy development, curriculum development and setting up labour education schools across the country.

Most recent statement from CLC convention in Vancouver in June 2002  
[INSERT HERE .... Winnie]

In principle, equity issues are not new to labour education ... a basic part of CLC policy for many years. Furthermore, among the affiliated unions, access and equity issues are already identified among the goals to be pursued in various ways by most of affiliates in their policy documents (CLC 1999)

In addition to labour education per se, the CLC has set guidelines for affiliates in the development of training policy and practice, including an explicit statement that proposes ‘an end to discrimination which has been a feature of workplace related training. Training must be accessible to all.’ (1992 Policy statement – get proper quote and ref here ...)

Despite these policy statements, the road to equity in practice in the labour movement has been far from smooth. Although many of the labour education courses and schools have embraced women’s issues and to a slightly lesser extent anti-racist education, gaps remain in terms of overcoming the marginalisation of identity groups. Few unions have overtly built in affirmative action policies to ensure inclusive access to labour education. And even where identity/issue

based courses exist, it seems that many are attended primarily by members of equity seeking groups themselves. While it is an important achievement that such courses are offered, the challenge remains of doing more effective and pro-active equity education work with the membership as a whole in order to build a more inclusive culture of solidarity. Meanwhile, changing economic, political and social conditions make such goals increasingly difficult to achieve.

*Relevance for labour education of changes in the conditions of work and other social conditions:*

There is a formidable list of economic, political and social changes posing a challenge to union education internationally over the past decade: high unemployment, casualisation of jobs, decline of manufacturing (the mainstay of traditional unionism), the rise of the service economy (traditionally non-union), downsizing and introduction of market values and competition into the public sector, growing business and government hostility toward trade unions, and the spread of management strategies to win over the allegiance of individual employees (Pocock, 1997; Pollert, 1996; Hyman, 1994).

These international changes have been mirrored in Ontario in the political climate since the Conservative government took power in 1995. During those years, workers have witnessed the repeal of Employment Equity legislation, the dismantling of the Anti Racism Secretariat, and the successive tightening of labour legislation, making organizing increasingly difficult for workers from equity-seeking groups. More broadly across Canada in the aftermath of September 11, workers of colour have been attacked, and places of worship for non-Christians have been vandalized. All these conditions have fostered a growing sense of threat and defensiveness amongst existing union members in Canada, only heightening the challenge of addressing issues of inclusion and equity in solidarity.

*Current forms, contents and outcomes of labour education for equity*

In 1997, the CLC released its groundbreaking Task Force Report on racism, "Challenging Racism: Going Beyond Recommendations." In its critical analysis of the normalcy of systemic discrimination in every facet of our society, the report challenges the labour movement to take on the issue and proposes concrete actions to "deconstruct" within its own institutions and "reconstruct" a different kind of movement.

In 1998, the work on Disability rights, Aboriginal rights and anti-homophobia took shape at the national level of the Canadian Labour Congress. The first CLC staff representative on Youth Issues was hired. In September 1998, the CLC hosted its first ever Triennial National Workers of Colour and Aboriginal Workers Conference. With the support of the Human Rights

Departments and National Education & Campaign Dept, the CLC Ontario Region began to take the lead in developing an integrated model of labour education. It involves a 3 pronged approach:

1. Development of new education courses to deepen labour's understanding and commitment to equality issues,
2. Integration of Equality issues into all CLC tool courses
3. Review of recruitment and outreach strategies for the education programs ( participants and instructors)

In the four years since the beginning of this initiative, the CLC has developed some new courses, integrated some course materials and made some targeted outreach to enhance representation. The current action research project provides an opportunity to step back from this work and assess its strengths and weaknesses. The evaluation will be an opportunity for reflection on achievements and envisioning the pathway ahead.

## **Research Plan**

The literature review already begun for this case study shows an abundance of documentation of how inequalities work in adult education more broadly, including the recent annotated bibliography sponsored by the Centre for the Study of Education and Work on racial inequality in access to the Internet. There is also a growing literature on labour education, including a book to be published in October, "Education for Changing Unions" co-authored by five practitioners associated with the labour educators working group of the CSEW.

Building on an expanded literature review, five key groups need to be involved in this process of action research: union leadership, labour educators, members of equality-seeking groups, participants in CLC courses generally, and adult education researchers specialized in labour education.

During Year One, these five groups will be a source of ideas for assessing and re-visioning the work. During Year Two, they will be a source of guidance and support in conducting the two pilot initiatives. During Year Three, they will be a sounding board for evaluating the pilot initiatives and proposing follow up. During Year Four, they will become participants in disseminating findings from the project in a variety of labour and academic venues. Throughout, these groups will provide us with new documentation, which can be added to the already considerable collection on learning and work being assembled as a CSEW project by Canada's largest educational library, the collection at OISE/UT.

For union leadership, the preferred method will be individual interviews, conducted primarily by the researcher based at OISE. In this regard, the CLC officer responsible for education, and the Ontario ranking officers to whom education staff report would be the key contacts.

For labour educators, the preferred method would be focus groups, held in association with the biennial meetings of the Education Advisory Committee of the CLC. This committee includes the regional directors of the CLC and the education officers of all major unions.

For members of equality-seeing groups, a combination of interviews and focus groups would work best. The key contacts would be those in the relevant committees of the CLC, followed up with members of equity-seeing groups who have previously taken part in CLC week-long courses, as participants and as educators. The focus groups would be conducted on-site with people enrolled in courses with an equity focus in the CLC Winter School.

For course participants generally, the preferred method will be focus groups. These would be conducted on-site with people enrolled in traditional “tool” courses in the CLC Winter School.

For labour education researchers, the project will take advantage of networks established over the past five years by the NALL program and the labour educators working group of the CSEW. These have included participation in panels and workshops on labour education in academic conferences in Vancouver, Toronto, Calgary, Los Angeles, Boston, Chicago and the United Kingdom.

During Year One, participants in this project will propose to present initial findings from this research in conferences of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (in Halifax), the Adult Education Research Conference (in San Francisco), the United Association for Labor Education (in Washington) and the third conference on researching work and learning (in Finland). It is expected that most such dissemination will be sponsored by regular academic funding, but the participation of practitioners will be assisted by funding in this project.

## **Research Questions**

Four research questions will guide the research:

What is being done? Nationally, where are some of the best practices among affiliates and/or federations on equality issues? What lessons can be drawn for adapting current work in labour education and action, and in guiding the two pilot initiatives.

What does it matter? Given the context of globalization and the attacks on labour, what should an integrated labour education model of race, class and gender look like and feel like? This is a considerable task of re-visioning.

What is working? This requires a participatory evaluation of progress, impact and limitations. In particular, this will involve developing success indicators, and then applying them, which is a considerable conceptual task.

Where can it go next? This is a strategic reflection on ways for labour to make a stronger commitment to integrative labour education. It is the action part of the action research project.

### **Time Frame:**

Year One (October 2002-2003): Re-consider current work, and consider alternative approaches. Conceptual work and initial inquiry.

Year Two (October 2003-2004): Pilot two initiatives in Ontario. Initial thinking on this is that one would be in the area of vocational education, probably in the construction trades, and might involve Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition for foreign-trained skilled workers. A second possible initiative would be assembling materials and activities for union courses on equality strategies in a knowledge-based economy, including resources for developing allies from dominant social identities. However, the specifics of these two initiatives would depend on the outcomes of research and consultation during Year One.

Year Three (October 2004-2005): Evaluate what's been tried in the pilots, and disseminate results. This would involve discussion with other union jurisdictions across Canada, and may include a pilot in another regional structure of the CLC. Initially the Prairie Region of the CLC seems most interested in such collaboration.

Year Four (October 2005-2006): The bulk of work on this specific case study would be completed by the end of year 3. In the final year, findings would be shared with researchers in other cases, and integrated into the overall project. This would involve substantial dissemination in labour events and in academic conferences.

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