



# The Challenges of Educating for Equality in Unions

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## **1. Origins and focus of the study**

Changing conditions of working life are having a profound impact on unions. Restructuring of the workforce is leading to rapid changes in the age, gender, cultural and social profile of union members. Tensions around diversity and equality are becoming central concerns in both workplace and union life, with vast implications for both formal and informal elements of union-based education. This case study explores how these issues are being addressed by labour education in the Canadian Labour Congress. These efforts try to reach workers like one participant in a focus group:

“There is progress. In certain areas I have different views towards minorities than I would have had like twenty years ago. It is human nature, the way I see it anyway, it is human nature to not want change. You know, we get so comfortable, and it’s like my little nest here, and don’t mess with my nest.”

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) is the national labour body representing 3.2 million workers from 57 affiliated international and national unions. As such, the CLC plays a leading role for labour education across English Canada in policy development, curriculum development and setting up labour education schools across the country. 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" some traditional assumptions within its own institutions and "reconstruct" a different kind of movement. The report’s discussion of education said in part:

“Unions have failed to strategically promote and market their anti-racism and human rights courses and workshops... Aboriginal members and members of colour interpret this situation as yet another sign that unions are not placing a high enough priority on their issues...there is a need for union educational materials to reflect anti-racism principles...our educational materials have been written with a Euro-centric analysis, which ignores the diversity within union memberships.”

Canadian Labour Congress, (1997:12)

Canada's unions were built as a tool of economic justice, by a working class that was largely white and male. However, in recent years they have engaged directly and explicitly in the politics of equity, most visibly in work on sexism and racism. The quote above is harsh, and would seem to parallel other "detached critiques" of Canada's social institutions. What is interesting is that it was the basis for an action plan adopted officially by the labour leadership in Canada. It is one of many explicit efforts to incorporate anti-racism into the practices of the movement, which has already born some fruit. In this wider context, it was asserted by one focus group participant:

"I can actually see that there are more people of colour in union staff positions, speaking out as guest speakers or facilitators at union conferences. That's an improvement, and that's good."

Arguably, unions are in the leadership among Canadian social movements around an equity agenda. They have undertaken formally to broaden a movement based on a white male norm into a movement whose conception of class includes gender and racial equity, as well as other social identities. As one interviewee observed about good anti-racist union education:

"Open education – include everybody- don't exclude anybody. That's what I find works- pay attention to people's opinions and adjust if there's an issue that they have and adjust to what's happening around them. Adjust as much as you can. You've got to learn to do that, just to keep these people interested."

As with all social movements, there is a distance between declared intent and daily practice, between goals and outcomes. Within workplaces and communities, workers of colour are frequently targeted, and their unions have not always stood by them. Some workers of colour have been sharply critical of racism within Canada's labour market and labour movement, and their concerns were articulated in the ground-breaking report and action plan, quoted above. This case study is concerned with one of the efforts to address such inequities. It explores the dynamics of learning within the labour movement related to equity and diversity. More specifically, it investigates how anti-racist learning has unfolded in the labour education program of the Ontario Region of the Canadian Labour Congress. This study aims to generate proposal, not just to reinforce critique. The CLC deserves full credit for its courage and creativity in tackling

the systemic racial injustices in Canadian society, and indeed for proposing and sponsoring an action research project aimed at better education. Here is a social movement seeking to structure learning so that goals and outcomes are aligned more consistently. As one interviewee observed:

“I think the CLC is again leading the way in this anti-racism work. The papers that I’ve read through the website, they’re first rate. There’s been a lot of research done, and they’re very careful and they’re really well-written. So, I think in terms of the CLC leading the way. I think my affiliate has all the best intentions in doing it, whether they actually implement it will be another story- I don’t think they’ve taken the steps to implement. They’ve got the policy – but it’s not being pushed forward.”

This qualitative action research project draws together reflections by those involved in such education, as sponsors, educators and participants, as a contribution to the dialogue about approaches and tools for building anti-racist educational capacity inside a social movement. It also contributes to the mapping of Canadian labour education, building on other academic literature and on a major NALL survey of labour education practices.

The four-person research team is interpreting results of interviews and focus groups through the lens of theoretical work on informal learning, on equity and anti-racism, and on educational evaluation. As results emerge from the current WALL national survey on learning and work, specific findings from that quantitative work will be integrated into this case.

This research serves as a reminder of the persistent challenges of evaluating education in the context of a social movement. It also points to the profound systemic nature of organizational and social obstacles to equity:

The first time I attended a CLC human rights conference, I looked around the room and I thought: ‘Hey wait a minute! Where are all those white brothers and sisters? The room was full of people who looked like Jawara and me. I thought well as long as it’s perceived as my issue, and not everybody’s issue, it’s just my issue.’”

On a more optimistic note, the study has also suggested two practical points of intervention, one in recruitment of course participants and the other in course evaluation, to be applied and assessed in the next phase of the work.

Four overarching research questions have guided this participatory action research project:

- a) *What is the current climate around anti-racism and equality issues in the labour movement in the CLC Ontario Region?*
- b) *What is being done about equality in labour education? In Ontario and nationally, what are some of the labour education practices, formal and informal, among affiliates and/or federations that are considered to be most effective?*
- c) *What is working? This requires a participatory evaluation of progress, impact and limitations. In particular, this will involve developing qualitative indicators of success and then applying them. What lessons can be drawn for adapting these experiences for use elsewhere?*
- d) *How can labour education for equality and inclusiveness be strengthened and enhanced? Given the context of globalization and the pressures on the labour movement, how can labour respond in an integrated and effective way?*

## **2. Research team's stance in the study**

*“Labour education forms an integral part of the labour movement, and as such cannot be separated from the dynamic process whereby unions are constantly adapting to the changing demands of the changing workplace and to the other environmental challenges to workers, organized and unorganized.”*

Winston Gereluk (2001:12)

This study is done by activists, all four of us committed to the goals and engaged in the politics of the labour movement. We share a passionate commitment to increasing equity and effectiveness in labour movement education. Among us are some strong and long-standing relationships of respect and trust, as well as differences in social location and style that generate mutual criticism and prevent us from taking solidarity for granted.

Winnie Ng, director of the Ontario Region of the Canadian Labour Congress, proposed the study in the first place. As the sponsor and organizer of educational programs, she was concerned about the effectiveness of the anti-racist work she and others were doing, and wanted a safe space for critical reflection on goals, methods and limitations of that work.

Nancy Jackson, professor of adult education at OISE/ UT, has been co-investigator with Winnie, and brought her experience in academic research and administration to bear on the project. Given her past work in building union training programs, and her current engagement in labour literacy, she had grounded as well as theoretical resources to contribute.

Jawara Gairey, a former local union officer whose family has been engaged in union activism for generations, was the primary researcher in the project. Guided politically by Winnie and theoretically by Nancy, he conducted the interviews, organized the data, and engaged in three academic conferences where the results were discussed formally and informally. Now enrolled at York University, he is the student member of the team.

D'Arcy Martin, a long-time labour educator and coordinator of the Centre for the Study of Education and Work, served as a research officer in the team. He coached Jawara, assisted in writing, and kept the communications lines open between the labour end and the academic end of the project.

In terms of the issues addressed, there are significant differences among us. Winnie and Jawara are people of colour, while Nancy and D'Arcy are white. Jawara is considerably younger than the other three, and has the most recent experience of how racism works at the grassroots level of unions. The program being analysed is coordinated by Winnie, who must defend its value at the same time that she seeks to improve its effectiveness.

Jawara offers these reflections on the work process:

“The research process began with an annotated bibliography. This work was difficult because the literature around anti-racism in union education was limited. There was a vast amount which examined labour education as a whole but little focused on equality and diversity. The main material which addressed those issues came from labour/union sources, not available in public and university libraries.

As a current undergraduate student with minimal experience in external research projects, I felt greatly intimidated at the start. I questioned how I could utilize the skills which I currently possessed. While I had taken social research courses, to actually become that researcher was initially challenging. The study was to explore critically a movement with which I had professional and personal ties. I also recognized that the labour movement was a precarious place and my involvement in such a project may limit my own future advancement within its structure. Specifically, some entrenched individuals within labour might resist such a study, and the implications of its findings for their own conduct.

From the start, D’Arcy reassured me on the value of my acquired skills through post-secondary education and the labour movement. My prime duties have been to assess, edit and administer questionnaires for one-on-one interviews and focus groups.

The interview process was not as intimidating as initially thought. The participants of winter school were intrigued at the opportunity to become involved. In trying to elicit information from the participants, the issue proved difficult to grasp. Some interviewees thought there would be a ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answer to the questions. I had my own initial biases in the process because of previous involvement in equality and diversity issues. Being a person of colour may also have created a space of uneasiness for participants and me. The focus groups were more uncomfortable for some people, in speaking on equality and diversity in front of others.

The data collection process provided me the opportunity to analyze and re-organize my thoughts around the research. Trying to be objective in this research was most difficult. I am a trade unionist, directly engaged in issues of equality and diversity in the labour movement. Throughout the stages of the project I have had to grapple with what these issues mean to me. I have a passion for them which needs to be held back in my interviewing, analysis, and reporting. Being accurate and fair in such a controversial area is very difficult and still conflicts with my desire to influence the outcome of this research.”

Because of the multiple layers of the object of study, we have focused on exploring the "nature" rather than delineating the "extent" of learning around racial equality in the labour movement. We do this in order to avoid imposing "false precision" (Livingstone 2003) on a topic and a setting that are culturally and institutionally complex. For example, because of the action-oriented culture of the labour movement, informal learning within it is often "an extension of and continuous with doing" (Percy 1994 cited in Church et al 2003:9). In our study, learning about racism and acting upon it are dialectically intertwined, and the limits of the one are tied intimately to the limits in the other. Thus, in the manner of a preliminary, exploratory case study, we examine data from participant observation and in-depth interviewing in a quite open-ended attempt to sort out among ourselves (and other researchers) the dialectics of explicit and implicit, intended and experienced, formal and informal aspects of learning.

### **3. Theoretical challenges in the project**

#### **(a) Formal and informal dimensions of learning**

"It is more accurate to conceive 'formality' and 'informality' as attributed present in all circumstances of learning. The priority for research is then to identify these attributes, explore their relationships, and identify their effects, on learners, teachers and the learning environment." (Learning and Skills Research Centre, 2004:1).

Much ink has been spilled over the boundaries between formal and informal learning, and around the usefulness of "non-formal learning" as a category. Indeed, this was a major topic of discussion at the WALL conference in June, 2004, and the problems with rigid categories become clear in this case study. Labour education as it is practiced in the Canadian Labour Congress is organized in courses, using a pre-set curriculum and a designated instructor, in the context of scheduled "schools" or residential settings with several parallel courses. The climate of the courses is quite formal, much learning occurs in the general sessions and other activities of the overall school, and in turn the school is nested within the political dynamics of the labour movement as a whole. These dynamics operate at all levels, since the "staircase" of elected office is what governs the labour movement day by day, and the clash of ideas is itself a continuing source of learning.

Hence the case study illuminates important elements of informal, unintentional, incidental and situational learning... much of it contradictory. It moves far from the liberal assumption that all learning is necessarily good; rather, we consider the union culture as a site where progressive and reactionary thinking are both alive and well, and we seek the dialectical tensions in learning of all sorts.

In practice, "...informal learning is contested terrain, its definitional boundaries fluid and blurred." (Church et al. 2003:1). The findings that interest us the most are related to the complex interweaving of all these levels, facets and modes of learning. Thus we have found our subject matter rather resistant to the boundaries implied by the categories of formal/nonformal/informal learning. Rather than placing this project on a continuum from formal to informal, we have found it most useful to adopt the approach suggested above by the researchers in Leeds, and to tease out the multiple dimensions of a single situation.

### **(b) Equality and anti-racism**

To frame this study, we drew upon three literatures: the academic discourse on equity, the union discourse on anti-racism, and the discourse in both settings concerning labour education.

Within OISE/UT alone, an entire department is dedicated to "sociology and equity studies in education", and much of the scholarship produced has dealt with issues of racism and learning. Recently, one working group within the Centre for the Study of Education and Work completed an annotated bibliography on racism and the Internet (Sangha: 2002), and an article on racial barriers to computer access (Mirchandani et al., 2004). Yet it is rare for such academic work to specifically address the inner workings of a social movement, and writing about the labour movement in this perspective has mostly been historical rather than contemporary in focus.

Within the labour movement itself, there is an emerging body of documentation on issues of race, racism, unionism and work. Making this literature more widely known may indeed be a significant outcome of this project. It addresses and challenges the historically built-in barriers experienced by some groups and the privileged position of others. (CLC, 1997). An Anti-Racism Integration Guide has been produced (CLC, 2003), as a support to educators who wish to apply this perspective in courses that have not explicitly tackled human rights issues in the past. Videos, booklets and manuals are being produced in affiliates, and these efforts are coordinated at both a provincial level (Ontario Federation of Labour Human Rights Committee) and at the CLC level. These documents also circulate at conferences for workers of colour and aboriginal workers, which have been held at the national, provincial and most recently the municipal level (Labour Council of Toronto and York Region).

The documentation of labour education is quite scattered within the movement, and has been documented very little in the academy. Until Spencer, Taylor, Gereluk, Briton and others at Athabasca University began writing in the mid-1990's, it had been literally decades since this activity had been described in academic settings, let alone analysed. As Martin has stated:

“The record of union education in Canada has been transmitted from one generation of educators to another mostly by stories and examples. While practitioners constantly exchange stories and tools, little of this richness finds its way into the written record. This is consistent with the oral traditions of the union movement, but limits the sharing of knowledge in the field... The motors of contemporary Canadian union education, then, have yet to be taken apart and reassembled on paper. As a result, the Canadian adult education field has lacked insight into one of its most innovative and widespread areas of practice.”  
(Martin, 1994:8)

Much of this literature has been developed by white men, who have made sincere efforts to document anti-racist work but treat it as a theme rather than a central priority. In Gereluk's survey and Martin's thesis, the reader must go well past the opening section before the first substantive mention of racism occurs.

For this study, then, it has been necessary pull together a literature review from several sources, to note the gaps as well as the substantial accomplishments, and to make links across boundaries. This emergent theoretical framework is consistent with the state of the work itself. Anti-racism work is both an agenda for unions to advance in the wider society and a challenge within unions themselves. It highlights the need to broaden the range of social identities reflected in union membership and leadership, moving past the image ascribed to the U.S. labour movement leadership just a few years ago -- “too male, too pale, too stale”. Such work is controversial, and provokes resistance. At times it may provoke backlash more than it strengthens activism. At times, it seems like a squeak of defiance in the face of the roars of right-wing commentary against “political correctness”.

Anti-racist education in Canada’s unions has been a part of the push for union renewal that has brought in programs for women workers, young workers, disabled workers and other excluded groups. Yet it has its own dynamic, and it is this dynamic that this study set out to explore. It is particularly interesting to address it with the CLC Ontario Region, because of the explicit agenda to advance such education here. This stands in sharp contrast to the situation in the U.S. labour movement, as discussed recently by Needleman and Geronimo, where education has been subordinated to organizing, and equality issues subordinated to an assumed “solidarity” (Needleman, 2004, and Geronimo, 2004). Even within Canada, the pattern of this work is like that articulated by Church et al.:

“When organizations are balancing multiple pressures and agendas .... an oppositional perspective will often not be formally supported. Instead it must be fostered in the gaps and holes between other more structurally valued and recognised activities”. (Church et al., 2003:12)

Despite these multiple pressures, the CLC Ontario Region has followed up on internal reports around the ways the labour structures reproduce systemic racial discrimination. In hiring, in selection of facilitators, in recruitment of participants, in course offerings and curriculum design, a conscious effort has been made to advance an anti-racist agenda. What then have been the results?

### **(c) Evaluating education**

Informal evaluation goes on within unions all the time. When a local executive decides to send three new stewards to an introductory stewards course, and not to send three new health and safety representatives to an introductory course for their role, evaluation is at work. Perhaps the decision is based on the relative importance of the topic; perhaps they think that one area is “easier” than the other, and doesn’t actually require structured education; perhaps they know who will be teaching each course, and think one instructor is much better than the other. Whatever the criteria, they are evaluating. And when the “graduates” return from the course, they too will express a verbal assessment of its value, of the skill of the instructor, of the quality of the study material, of the quality of the meals. Whatever the criteria, they are evaluating.

This evaluation has been largely anecdotal and informal, but has some effect. Some manuals get updated, some instructors aren’t invited to teach the following year, some proposed courses get no enrolment at all and have to be cancelled. However, the very informality of the evaluation makes it next to impossible to assess on a larger scale how the dues money of members can best be spent. It also makes it hard to defend investment in education as opposed to other union priorities, such as hiring more staff, or contracting lawyers and economists. In unions, as in most other social movements, written feedback beyond the “smile sheets” filled out at the end of educational events is minimal. While claims are made about “educating for action”, little formal effort is made to track what action does and doesn’t happen, to assess how and how much the course participants actually apply what they learn to build organizational capacity.

This pattern of vagueness has specific consequences when addressing a controversial area, and one that crosses “issue courses” as well as “tool courses”. Our research has had full political and financial support from the elected leadership of the CLC. Yet this leadership itself needs to justify its decisions in budget priorities, to be accountable to the membership which elects it. This accountability is a pressure to capture the results of anti-racist education, not just to describe the efforts going into it.

Such evaluation could be a powerful tool for strengthening the movement, and could be applied in other areas of education. Once evaluation is sharpened in courses, it could also be extended to other settings where anti-racist learning is advanced, such as conferences, weekend CLC courses, programs outside Ontario and programs within affiliates.

In addressing this need, it might seem at first glance that established educational theory should be extremely helpful. The already extensive literature on educational evaluation has been expanding in recent years under the pressures for “accountability” of formal education systems and “return on investment” when organizations and employers choose to support adult learning. Yet the two great streams of writing, one to evaluate individual learners and the other to evaluate educational programs, both have focused on large and well-resourced organizations. They in turn have become involved in discussion of validity and reliability of instruments, usually quantitative and increasingly computer-based. Such tools will be of little value in a layered reality such as we are studying here.

More useful is the tradition of participatory self-evaluation, tied to participatory research. This responds to a desire to examine from within, rather than from 'without', to understand how to better do this work on the assumption that its sponsors recognize its importance and are committed to its improvement. This evaluative approach puts aside defensiveness, and considers critique as a resource for enhancing effectiveness. It is this positive context which motivates the four researchers in this study.

In the dynamics of the labour movement, both inside and outside perspectives need to be accommodated. The dialectical tension here is that the work needs to be critiqued rigorously, at the same time that it is defended vigorously. Some people within the labour movement are sceptics and want to be sure they are getting a bang for their buck in anti-racist education. Some of them ask the same of other forms of education, both in tool courses and issue courses, and these activists deserve a thoughtful and non-defensive response. At once, then, the research team has been gathering ideas from anti-racist activists wanting to sharpen their educational tools, and from cautious activists seeking to 'prove' the return on investment for this kind of education, in the face of doubt

and of backlash. This raises issues of political and ethical responsibility for the research team, which have been the focus of many of our meetings.

The challenge is complicated in the labour movement by the fact that courses are nested within schools, which are nested within other labour education settings, which are in turn nested within the political and organizational life of unions. The learning within a course is totally connected to its context, as we know about learning in almost all situations, and this can be the source of unintended and contradictory outcomes. One remark in a coffee break can kill the gains of a morning in the classroom. One criticism by a local leader when returning to the workplace can put into question all that was learned during a week-long school. Through these incidents, union members "learn" that the official policies taught in the classroom may be at odds with actions and attitudes in daily life. These are the dimensions of the "hidden curriculum" in labour education as elsewhere, and it is precisely these tensions and complexities that makes it both interesting and problematic from a research perspective. As Wildavsky has observed:

*"The assumption that objectives are known, clear, and consistent is at variance with all experience. We know that objectives invariably may be distinguished by three outstanding qualities: they are multiple, conflicting and vague. They mirror, in other words, the complexity and ambivalence of human social behaviour."*

(Wildavsky, 1996:215)

Educational outcomes in regard to anti-racism certainly dissolve quickly into the messiness Wildavsky implies. For example, if a member of colour leaves the course angrier about racism, and more determined to run against the local union president at the next election, is that a positive outcome? If three white members decide to become allies and return from the course demanding a human rights committee in the local, which one of them wants to chair, is that a positive outcome? By comparison, the outcomes of traditional courses for union representation skills are relatively easy to evaluate. For example, on return to work, a trained steward is expected to write grievances properly, a trained bargaining committee member is expected to understand contract language fully, and so on. Where learning is less cut and dried, as with racism and human rights, the challenge of "testing on the job" is more difficult, and would require more organizational

resources. How can individual learners be subjected to scrutiny on their ability to apply new skills and knowledge in representing fellow members? While much more is needed, a start has been made, by mention of two outcomes that reflect anti-racist principles:

- More women, youth and racialized members are involved institutionally (talk with their steward; grievances; attend union meetings; member of a committee; steward or other position; involved in negotiations);
- Members matter-of-factly challenge discriminatory comments and behaviours;

(Burke et al., 2002:175)

On foundations such as these, our study has proceeded, albeit tentatively. In developing a survey of course participants, an interview schedule for facilitators and participants, a schedule for focus groups, we were acutely aware of the limits of the tools already at hand, and of the importance of self-critical reflection on the use we made of them. Again, we hope that by the end of the project we will have contributed to developing evaluative tools that respect the union culture and that place equity as a key element in union renewal.

#### **4. One activity system inside another**

A framework we have found useful in this case study is that of cultural historical activity theory, drawing on the thinking of Helena Worthen (Worthen: 2001). This suggests that we might consider a particular course as one activity system, nested inside the wider system of the “school”, nested inside the wider system of labour movement education, nested inside the labour movement as a whole. Of course, this in turn is nested in a wider system of class relations, and the WALL survey should illuminate that to some degree, but this wider system will not be examined directly in our study.

Within each system, Worthen suggests what fruitful inquiry involves:

“These four principles, then – the socially constructed nature of the subject (the collective subject); the rule-governed nature of the system (rules externalized in language, not just imagined or remembered); the historicity of

the context (implying its future as well as its past, and therefore its potential for change); and the primacy, for the purpose of understanding change in the system, of what is contradictory rather than what is modal or normal – frame the methodological mindset...”

(Worthen, 2001:6)

Worthen’s last principle, of dialectics, needs to be applied within systems as well as where they intersect. As we will see below, the tension between goals and outcomes operates within a course, within a school, and so on. Otherwise, attention would be directed away from the dynamics between the formal and the incidental and often contradictory elements of "learning" that may be more attributable to de facto union (unofficial and historical) culture at every level of the labour movement. We do not want to limit our exploration to the tensions among the formal structural levels of labour education per se. It would be conceptually tidy to find that the de facto interaction at the 'course' level reflects unequivocal support for anti-racism, whereas the de facto climate in the labour movement at large undermines it. However, the interplay occurs within levels as well as among them. Our interviews suggest that some people are on their “best behaviour” in class, but it is these same people who go to the coffee pot at break and crack a racist/homophobic joke. Hence systems can be interwoven, to the point that they blend on occasion, and do not separate neatly into structural levels.

System one is the course. In the adult education literature, trade union education has referred quite narrowly to “tool courses” that prepare union activists for roles in representing their fellow workers. These would include steward courses, introductory health and safety courses, collective bargaining courses and so on. While still union-centred, “issue courses” would be listed around topics like globalization, or strategic thinking, which cross over specific union roles and can extend to citizenship and liberal studies. Beyond the scope of this study would be “labour studies” courses, whether provided by a union (like the Paid Educational Leave program of the CAW and CUPW, or the Collège FTQ-Fonds) or by a post-secondary institution (like the labour studies programs at Athabasca or McMaster Universities). In combination, “tool courses” and “issue courses” make up the bulk of union-provided education. Bruce Spencer has characterized Canadian unions as the largest provider of non-vocational adult education

outside the formal school and post-secondary system. He estimates that 120,000 workers a year take part in these courses. (Spencer, 1994).

System two is the “school”. In the labour movement, some education is done in local communities, usually on weekends, where most participants are able to attend without need to replace their wages. More in-depth study can happen in a residential setting, usually from Sunday evening until noon on Friday, and draws on a wider geographic range, usually a province. In both settings, several parallel courses may be underway, with general sessions arranged for all participants to network informally, engage with guest speakers or be exposed to videos or labour arts performances. For purposes of this study, the choice of focus for the general sessions is an important factor in reaching a critical mass of equality discussion, sufficient to shift the culture of labour education. This general shift could be identified if participants in “tool” and “issue” courses engage outside class in discussion of equality themes.

System three is labour movement education. Here the key is the local union, which generally selects the participants and covers their costs in attending schools. This is in fact the key to Canadian labour education, because of the decentralized nature of collective bargaining in Canada and because of the structure of educational financing within the movement. Since most collective agreements are negotiated and signed for specific workplaces, it is generally argued that the learning needs related to bargaining and contract administration are best identified at this level, especially for tool courses. The argument is less strongly supported for issues courses, but the mechanisms for other nomination routes are very weak. Hence the participants for CLC courses are usually nominated, and their costs covered, by their local union. From this standpoint, courses and schools are only one tool for developing individual and collective capacity. In the NALL study of labour education, Winston Gereluk points to another layer of the complexity in following union education:

“We related our findings to some of the informal learning associated with union activity: i.e. the knowledge, skills and understandings gained from running meetings, advocacy, representation, leadership and democratic processes...”  
(Gereluk, 2001:20)

While we do not explicitly explore this aspect of union learning, it is a tantalizing side path to follow in future studies. Certainly this dimension is crucial for planning and recruiting participation in schools, which is why educational representatives can be seen at all union functions, strengthening informal networks and judging openings for new initiatives. The organizers of a CLC school, then, must be intimately connected to the leadership of local unions in a wide range of affiliates, so that the communication and support needed to release workers from the job, and later to assist them in applying their learning, will actually happen. Otherwise, educational initiatives around equality, or for that matter globalization or strategic thinking or workplace harassment, will meet a brick wall of resistance at the local level.

System four is the labour movement as a whole. The guidelines for union schools and courses are developed through CLC committees, federations of labour, union affiliates, and labour advocates across Canada. Needs are identified at conferences and meetings, which are transmitted, often informally, to those who could address them. Again, this process is highly political, since the credit and blame for educational initiatives can become grounds for election battles inside the union structures. Issues of racism can also play within these battles:

“...when I go out into the wider union I’m kind of amazed, and dismayed and shocked to see that there is still evidence of racism, evidence of sexism, that there is evidence of homophobia...again, in my workplace we have people of colour. The art director is a Cree...It’s pretty open, we have two trans-gendered people. We have very open gays and lesbian...to live in that culture daily and then to be transplanted out- I find really weird. It doesn’t seem normal that we have to talk about these issues in my own workplace...but to come out into the bigger union and have to talk about these issues really is like, I’m doing the work again.”

While Canadian union leaders overwhelmingly recognize the need for educational strategies which enhance the knowledge and capacity of members, the devil can be in the

details. In controversial areas such as anti-racism, the perspectives of a “servicing model” and an “organizing model” play out in practical terms; “business unionism” and “social unionism” clash in any of the venues identified above. The core question of our study, around the effectiveness of anti-racism education in unions, needs to be located in the wider political debates of the movement. As Paulo Freire observed, “there is no neutral education”, and the interplay of political perspectives within the labour movement is quite explicit compared to other educational settings.

The object of study here is the dynamic within each system, and then the interplay among them. At each point, we need to recognize the gaps and contradictions between formally stated aims and real life practice. This involves standing inside-outside of the labour culture, tracing the flows of energy, and taking stock of the silences as well as the spoken words.

## **5. Initial findings**

### **a. Gathering the data**

We have had two major sources of data so far. The first was educators and students at a major set of union courses. The second was a series of interviews with key union leaders and staff with responsibility for union education. In this, we did without hypothesis generating or testing, scientific measurement, clinical trials, deception or placebo, experimental interventions of other kinds, and we make no claims to statistical generalizability. This is a study in the tradition of non-positivist qualitative social research. In the first week of the courses, focus groups were held with groups from five courses, and four individual interviews conducted. In the second week, eight focus groups were conducted. Since then, a meeting was held with the Human Rights Committee of the Ontario Federation of Labour, and individual interviews conducted with CLC staff and elected leaders responsible for equity and human rights issues.

It was carried out by participatory action research methodology involving the following basic principles. First, the research plans were negotiated in an ongoing way

with the community partners/collaborators. Inquiry proceeded in a recurring spiral of discovery described in the participatory action research literature as a process of 'look, reflect, and act'. Secondly, the research participants are actively involved in conducting and shaping the inquiry and generating data based on their own expert knowledge and experience as insiders to the topic. Finally, the daily conduct of the research followed a logic of emergent design, involving on-going decision-making of the research team with reference to the study objectives.

At the union courses, we conducted surveys, focus groups and one-on-one interviews, over a two week period. Survey questions were distributed during lunch session of the 1<sup>st</sup> week and were simple yes/no responses. At the 2<sup>nd</sup> week, survey questions were distributed at the beginning of the plenary session with a range specified from 1 (low)-5 (high). The portrait resulting from the first week was more optimistic than in the second week. Charts of this data were compiled, but we consider them impressionistic, especially since many of the respondents were relatively new to the labour movement and had limited familiarity with the practices being discussed. For example, one participant highlighted the holes in the communications network:

“To the best of my knowledge and from my own personal experience, I would say that I haven’t really heard of any courses for anti-racism, within the CLC or, I mean you mentioned the aboriginal workers and that conference, but in my experience I haven’t heard of the conferences, I haven’t seen the pamphlets myself.”

The focus group data provided a richer range of responses to the questions. A substantial proportion of membership and educators were initially convinced that equity issues are being well addressed in the status quo of unionism. Only a small percentage within courses would object to the status quo and acknowledge that equity problems exist in labour education. Since this is a relatively articulate and empowered part of the union membership, it appears that knowledge and concern around anti-racism and equality issues is far from widespread. Further, a desire to mobilize around the issues was negligible. The focus groups revealed the importance of dialogue around anti-racism and equality work with the membership, educators/facilitators/leadership.

As the focus groups and interviews progressed through the two weeks, the effects of the courses began to show. Even those least concerned began to recognize that these issues are significant within the labour movement, and not only the workplace. Many participants questioned their own actions, or at least began to think of the importance of equality in their own lives. The labour environment provided a space where these issues could be discussed and opened for critique, assessment or praise.

There existed a definite discrepancy between women and men over the issue of anti-racism and equality measures being undertaken by the labour movement. Women saw the issue as more pressing, and linked their own experience of gender discrimination to the issues being discussed. There was also a major difference in the way these issues were addressed in the 'issue' courses like human rights, as opposed to the traditional 'tool' courses like stewards training, where the necessity for equality based initiatives was at times absent.

Late in 2003, this data was enriched by interviews with key Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) executive and staff. There is also a definite recognition that work on the issue of anti-racist education has been done for several years by activists, staff, executive board members etc. The desire is to now move beyond just educating workers for internal work in the labour movement and to engage racism as part of broader social, political and economic issues.

In early 2004, the initial findings from this research were explored in a series of dialogues with other union educators. These took place in Gary, Indiana, in Chicago, Illinois, and in Victoria, B.C. Our main objective was to identify the tensions that exist around learning for equality more widely in the labour movement and among worker educators based in academic institutions. There was a striking difference in context between the work in Canada and the United States. As one U.S. participant observed:

“One disturbing trend that I see in the labour movement in the U.S. is---the issue of equality has come more to the forefront, there's more of an emphasis on it, and there's more of an effort to hire more representative organizers, but

the focus is shifting more and more towards integration, that's what is falling by the wayside is the whole question of African American involvement. And this has been felt by a lot of people that the degree of representation of African Americans has been falling and in place, they're looking to less powerful groups to do their equality."

If equity is in retreat in U.S. unions, it is certainly contested in Canadian unions as well. It requires that individuals acknowledge that racism exists in the labour movement, as a challenge to be addressed. These tensions were explored formally and informally. Increasingly, we became convinced that the labour movement lacks a rigorous and comprehensive study on the results actually being achieved by in its courses, on this and other topics. In considering the effects of investment of time and money in anti-racist education, we are hoping to break some new ground. Evaluating union education practices is crucial to the evolution of what members and leadership want to attain, a strong educated union, both in regard to immediate workplace issues and to the broader social, political and economic disparities which target that large share of its membership which embodies equality and diversity issues (i.e. people of colour, aboriginal people, people with disabilities, LGBT people). This study aims to strengthen efforts to deconstruct conventional norms, to build new solidarities capable of resisting neo-liberal globalization. In keeping with the participatory ethos of labour education, such models and methods of implementation must be built with affected groups, not simply offered to them.

With employers becoming increasingly confrontational towards bargaining unit members and local unions, the need is increasingly clear to utilize the strengths of the union membership through union education. These strengths have been clearly shown in the resilience of groups of members who insisted that equity issues be addressed, both in specialized courses and in the union curriculum as a whole:

"Getting much more anti-racism into other courses is very important, but it's not easy because some people just don't see how it is core, to whatever subject you're teaching... we were told that we can't hire anybody unless they can teach collective bargaining and arbitration. But nobody was told that you can't be hired unless you understand racism and sexism. And so there is this assumption about what you really need, to be a good unionist."

Recognizing that systemic racism exists in the labour movement, as in all our social institutions, this study focuses, not on a critique of inequality, but on efforts to address inequality by education.

As suggested above in the image of interlocking activity systems, the CLC Ontario week-long schools are the point of entry into a web of informal influence and authority which defines in practice what courses are offered, who gets to attend CLC schools, how they will be prepared for it, and how they get to use what they learn. For this reason, it simply makes little sense to consider an initiative like anti-racism education in conventional terms of a formal course evaluation, or even a program evaluation. Rather, assessing the impact or effectiveness of this form of education requires all the subtlety that activity theory can offer.

### **b. The activity system of the course**

CLC Ontario education has established an formally inclusive framework which promotes equality and diversity agendas within the educational courses offered. The central subjects in the course are the co-facilitators (usually two people), who are responsible to guide learning among 15-25 participants. They interact within a framework of introductions on Sunday evening to evaluation on Friday morning, with about thirty hours of structured course time. This format, and its associated rules, is applied in all regions of the CLC (Quebec operates quite differently), and operates similarly in many affiliated unions.

The primary tension to consider here is between the “issue courses” and the “tool courses”. The former have titles that address issues of marginalized groups in the movement (anti-racist, anti-homophobic, GLBT, gender, persons with disabilities). These courses take these issues as a central theme. Equality and diversity issues are the basis of the curriculum. On the other hand, the “tool courses”, such as stewards training, labour law, collective bargaining, workplace safety and insurance board training (WSIB) address equality as a component within course material and discussion. As we will see, the

dynamics are quite different between these two, but in both contexts, equality and diversity issues can be used as supportive tools for more inclusive union education or as pacification tools.

The segregation of equality and diversity courses from the core curriculum of union education poses some problems; if the courses are external from the core curriculum then the issues that arise from them may not be considered a component of union life and responsibility. Segregation also leads to a lack of interest by the general membership outside the affected groups.

“I see issues of racism coming up in classes. For the most part, unless it’s somebody who’s been to a lot of union schools and that, or somebody who’s been at the butt end of racism, it doesn’t come up...because for most white people they don’t see it.”

Despite participatory methods of learning in courses, the full spectrum of issues facing the membership cannot be engaged, because the experience of some key groups is simply absent from the discussion. The introduction of the CLC Anti-Racism Integration Guide (CLC, 2003) now provides facilitators with some tools to address such situations, especially outside the “issue courses” where they are the central focus. This material is a new development by the CLC to address the growing concern that the issues were not being addressed. The shape and intensity of resistance from membership, facilitators and leadership will determine the success or failure of this material. In this, the identities and attitudes of the facilitators will be key. In the words of one participant:

“I mean part of it is making sure that the person who teaches collective bargaining, the person who is teaching the leadership program, is someone who will include those issues, understand those issues. You know, the old stuff is still true, about who gets called on and who volunteers to be the spokesperson in a training program.”

### **c. The activity system of the school**

The course is nested within a wider structure, which includes general sessions with guest speakers, structured social activities such as sport and karaoke evenings, and

the breaks and meals which knit together larger groups in a residential setting. Here the central collectively-defined subjects are the coordinators, who both serve and guide the specific courses and set the tone in general sessions. The rules have evolved significantly from a time when sexual harassment was common and racial harassment not even noticed, from a time when the climate was primarily that of a party. One tension to explore here is between the formal occasions and the “hidden curriculum” of the school, particularly in regard to issues of racism. But the primary issue raised in interviews was the selection system by which members actually get to attend the school in the first place, whatever course they may attend.

Empirical data, collected through the use of class photographs, indicate that the share of people of colour and aboriginal people among participants has increased from about 7% to about 11%, if we compare 1998-99 with 2003-04. This increase is significant, and is one simple measure of the progress made. Nonetheless, this leaves Caucasian men with 55% of the spots in courses, and Caucasian women with 35%. A closer analysis of gender, and of which courses are attended, would be required in the light of discussion above, to establish the significance of the change. Consider, for example, this comment by a course participant:

“Just generally if we look at the people that are walking by...the participants who have shown up, there isn't as much diversity as I would have like to have seen. To be honest with you...I still find that it's a lot of white men. More white women than what I expected to see, but still a lot of white men...not the amount of diversity that I would have liked to see.”

Union organizations along with the CLC Ontario primarily identify individuals at the local level, to enhance their knowledge and capabilities in representing fellow workers.. Currently local unions and affiliates examine courses offered through CLC Ontario winter school and select participants that hold executive positions within the local or can be targeted as future leaders. These processes remain undocumented, making it difficult to assess the selection criteria. What is known is that as one activist put it about their affiliate, “most local union leadership would not rather not send people to an

anti-racism course.” While the policy is for equal opportunity and access, and progress is being made, it seems clear that more needs to be done to generate a CLC winter school reflective of the demographics of Ontario. This will involve specific consideration of systemic and institutional barriers within local unions, such as the emphasis on “long-service” activists, the allocation of financial resources at the local level, and the lingering perception of courses as a reward for past work rather than a tool for future activism.

Improvements of representation can be attributed in part to outreach done by CLC Ontario staff. In the words of one interview participant, this outreach is “...because someone specific helped select the people that should come to those courses and push people to come to those courses.” This initiative somewhat accommodates the diversity agenda, especially in equality and diversity courses, although in the 2004 Winter School most participants of colour were enrolled in “core” courses, and in new courses which were not explicitly oriented to equity issues. Behind this lies another dynamic, described by another interviewee:

“No it has not changed. So that means we still have a lot of work to do and part of it is to figure out how we get particular local presidents or local executive boards to understand that it is important for them also for the local leadership to go to those (equity) courses. Right now it is not happening... Whether they like it or not the labour movement is changing, the membership is changing...”

Another respondent also felt that not enough effort was made within the current union framework to develop accessible initiatives for inclusion. The problem is not only those in power, but also the follow-through from activists of colour. As one said:

“We ought to do a much better job of getting people to come. When I took the anti racism workshop as a woman of colour, nobody was saying to me ‘go take stewarding or arbitration or collective bargaining’. Yet those are the courses, the core courses that you need to become a good leader. I did those things on my own, but there wasn’t any outreach there for me to do that and there still isn’t... White activists and white leaders have been supporting each other for a long time. ... We need to start doing the same thing.”

These observations of CLC Ontario winter school illustrate that access remains a barrier to workers from equality-seeking groups which do not possess resources and can garner

limited support from decision-makers. Learning is limited to “core” traditional issues for general membership, while most participants in equality and diversity courses are those directly affected and targeted. This is part of the “hidden curriculum” of union education, whose impact is felt before the course itself even begins. Much of it is taught invisibly, not under the scrutiny of a week-long residential school:

“I think that the CLC itself, within the limited resources it has, does try to make scholarships available to ensure that there is more diverse participation. But I don’t think the locals do, or the unions do, make that conscious effort.”

**Follow Up:** One specific finding of this study is that increased effort in recruitment is required for access patterns to improve. For this purpose, it is proposed in the next phase of the project to engage a person for a short-term contract, specifically to encourage activists of colour and aboriginal activists for attendance at the 2005 CLC Winter School. It will then be possible to assess the effectiveness of this effort, as a complement to other CLC initiatives that advance the policy agenda around equality and learning. In combination, these measures may contribute to a critical mass of diverse participants, sufficient to provide concrete support in the Winter School for a climate of equality.

#### **d. The activity system of union education**

The CLC week-long courses are set within the context of other structured opportunities for members to learn. A simple table, which certainly varies among unions and regions, can nonetheless help to orient the newcomer:

<b>Level</b>	<b>Provider within affiliate</b>	<b>Central Labour Body provider</b>
Workplace/ community	Local Union	Labour Councils
Provincial/ regional	Regional Office	Federation of Labour
Pan-Canadian/N. American	National/ International Office	Canadian Labour Congress

Here the first column suggests the geographic scope of the programs provided. In the middle column are programs, often very extensive, provided within a single union such as the

Canadian Auto Workers or the Canadian Union of Public Employees. In the right column are those occasions that cross affiliate lines, allowing a Machinist to study with a Fire Fighter and a Nurse.

In this system, the key collective subject is the affiliate education committee. This operates within locals, regions and at the national/ international level of a union like the Carpenters or the provincial public service employees. These groups choose who will attend the CLC school and which courses they will attend. Their evaluation of the course is of central political importance, and historically they have applied their leverage to advance some agendas and hold back others. On the issue of anti-racism education, they set the limits for what can be done in a CLC Ontario school. The debates among them, explicit and tacit, are the framework within which schools grow and shrink. The potential is there for education to provide a framework for reflection that isn't possible in the heat of a union campaign:

“Education for change challenges workers’ beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes in order to build bridges among workers, to unite a multicultural and diverse labor force. Educational programs can withstand the risks of confronting controversial issues in ways a specific campaign cannot. Debate in a classroom creates the tension necessary for learning. Debate that questions policy or tactics in a campaign may disrupt the work.”

Needleman, 2004:7

The interviews and focus groups generated many ideas around the implications of initial findings across the system of union education, such as:

- Equality and diversity content is still too limited to targeted groups, and changes to recruitment are essential for anti-racist thinking to gain wider support;
- By not establishing equality and diversity protocols, core union objectives may not be reached
- The Anti-Racism Integration Guide provides support to address equality and diversity issues across the full range of CLC courses, and its use should be monitored
- Effective courses can help lead members beyond workplace concerns to the issues in the community, like systemic racism, stereo-typing groups, racial profiling. These could be the basis of a more cohesive membership, and of a union more anchored in the community.

### **e. The activity system of the labour movement**

Labour education can produce awareness, and awareness can produce change. To the degree that affiliate education committees get behind equality and diversity issues for the general membership, they too must choose their battles. These issues can influence change in areas of staffing, local and executive leadership, facilitation and instruction, and overall policy making within union organizations.

Here the collective subject is the elected union leader. The rules are clear, by which they exercise authority within their organizations, and ensure that the education committees at their level are working in tune with the overall policy direction set at conventions. These are the “staircase” people, who rise in the formal structure by winning elections over other people. They in turn work with the “web” people, often the union education staff, who act as conduits of union policy to the members and bring messages back from the members as to what will fly and what won’t. The tension of the staircase and web people is the one we would highlight in this activity system.

In the 1997 CLC Anti-Racism Task Force Report, the lack of educational initiatives for aboriginal workers and workers of colour at that time is noted:

The importance of raising awareness about racism through education was highlighted by participants at all task force consultation meetings. Aboriginal members and members of colour felt that unions too often use the lack of anti-racism education in the general membership as a reason for not making tough political decisions to defend the rights of Aboriginal Peoples and People of Colour.(CLC, 1997:12)

The CLC has recognized that resources and funding continue to constrain educational initiatives that address equality and diversity issues. This barrier was clearly identified at a policy level within the CLC in its ground-breaking report on anti-racism work within labour:

Financial and staff resource allocations signal the degree of importance of anti-racism issues to our union sisters and brothers and the union

leadership. In their presentations to the task force, members from the Aboriginal Peoples and People of Colour communities said they felt discretionary power has been infrequently used to implement anti-racism measures in our unions and communities.(CLC, 1997:11)

Resources can be a factor when deciding whether a participant is able to attend a union course, especially one requiring a week away from the job, in a relatively expensive residential setting, as is the case with the CLC Winter School. Smaller unions representing industries whose workers are primarily from visible minority groups can rarely afford the necessary costs involved in sending individuals to CLC Ontario winter school:

“It’s very expensive. So if you think about low-wage industries where immigrant workers, for example, are more likely to be working, often times the local doesn’t have a lot of resources. And it’s very difficult for them to send anybody to the school at all. Or if they do maybe it’s just one or maybe two. Often it’s local leadership and if the leadership doesn’t reflect the membership, that’s an issue already.”

The CLC Ontario region has attempted to address this concern through scholarship initiatives for motivated locals with small treasuries. These scholarships are warmly received, but funding for them is limited, and often targeted to specific courses. The member under scholarship can be directed into a course for which they are not well suited, just to get access to the overall educational experience. As one participant stated:

“There are all types of scholarships offered for those who want to take the specific courses being pushed, but when you want a scholarship to do something else, it's much harder to get.”

The limitations of these week-long schools are recognized within the CLC, in a way that validates less structured learning in conferences and meetings which are taking place in unions all the time. After one such conference, a participant observed:

“The last CLC conference for Workers of Colour and Aboriginal Workers was great. It was an opportunity for activists to educate each other on anti-racism, in particular what place it has in relation to other social and economic policy issues. What does it mean not to get jobs if you are an aboriginal person or a person of colour? What is the disproportionate impact of the federal government economic policy on these communities.

This broadens the discussion beyond equality issues into the broader social and economic issues facing our unions and communities.”

The interviews and focus groups generated many ideas around the implications of initial findings for ongoing practice to remedy the imbalances:

- Limits to participation of members in educational forums could become detrimental to union organizations that promote equality and diversity agendas.
- Since decision-making on access to education only partially alleviates the tension around equality and diversity issues, some affected groups conclude that education will not be an effective instrument in their struggle for equality

These opinions are simply recorded here, as indications of the rich and passionate debate now underway within Ontario’s labour movement around equity and learning.

#### **f. The activity systems interacting**

As each of these systems contains its own contradictions, it also interacts with others. So a good course can be offered, whose impact is undercut by events in the school. A good school can be organized, which some affiliate education committees decide to boycott. A progressive agenda amongst labour educators can come aground on the caution of elected leaders who are afraid of backlash. In turn, the reverse can happen, with a progressive “staircase” leader sabotaged by their education staff, and so on down the line. When addressing systemic discrimination like racism, we need systemic tools for analysis. The tool of activity theory is being tested in this case study.

In this context, the issue of evaluation takes on its full significance. In which activity system is a facilitator evaluated? Which actors in which activity system have historically influenced the selection of issue and tool courses, and in which formal and informal settings are these choices made? Who decides when enough anti-racist education has happened?

“The biggest problem, which I think was more prevalent in the States but that I don’t know for sure, was getting the leadership to allow it to happen. And they feel like, well we’ve done it once or twice, isn’t that enough already.”

In this terrain, authentic evaluation can be undertaken, and the potential and limits mapped for an explicit effort to undertake anti-racist education. Yet the current evaluation measures generally consist of surveys and questionnaires that assess ‘feel good’ qualities of the courses and of the school. Something more rigorous and comprehensive is called for, if the outcomes are to be aligned with the intentions of progressive anti-racist policy.

Evaluations are rarely a structured process of critical engagement of the course content, learning process, facilitator, and school. Interestingly, providing the Equality and Diversity questionnaire at the plenary session of CLC Ontario winter school 2003 created a space to engage the issue. The questionnaire provided a means to tabulate informal data of which issues are being addressed where in the union education. This opens the door to further discussion, and to debate in each of these interlocking activity systems.

**Follow up:** The evaluation system in labour education is very limited in terms of documentation and formality. It works on the same practices of informal accountability as much of union politics and planning. Some of these processes may need more transparency if new groups and a new generation are to take their leadership role. In the next phase, the project can develop more precise evaluation tools, and test them at the 2004 CLC week-long school. This could be a practical contribution of the project to the practice of labour education.

#### **4. Some Implications**

The demographic make up of Ontario communities indicates a significant growth of people of colour. The Toronto Census Metropolitan Area data states that 37% of the population represent visible minorities. <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/demo40g.htm> (March 20, 2004). These populations will inevitably become part of the workforce.

Unions will focus on these working and community groups for organizing campaigns but

may find barriers if these communities view the labour movement as non-progressive on equality and diversity issues within its own organization. One key indicator in this regard will be the scope and stance of labour education that speaks to the issues of those targeted by racism. As one union staff person stated:

“We know that our membership is much more diverse than it was. And we also know that we are not yet good enough at reflecting that diversity in our own leadership positions. So there is a conscious effort, it may not be adequate or whatever, you can see that, you know it’s a step in the right direction and there’s the feeling that there’s a will, a political will, to make progress on this.”

The focus must also be on developing membership concern over these issues. As one activist commented:

“Until programs are offered at the local level, I don’t know that programs that are offered at the affiliate level or at the CLC can be effective; because it’s reaching only a very small minority of people who are actually predisposed to be interested in it, and it’s not going to change attitudes.”

In this sense, the work at the CLC is just one part of what is needed. Even within that work, difficulties have been noted. An indication of the distance still to travel is this comment by an aboriginal participant:

“It must be noted that the diversity and equality seeking courses are generally filled with membership from targeted equality seeking groups... Here the core courses do not address the issues that workers from equality seeking groups face.”

This statement illustrates present perceptions of educational initiatives which strive to address diversity and equality issues. Analysis of the sort undertaken by this project reminds us of the possible changes in union education. The adoption in more and more CLC courses of a transformational and popular education approach (Burke et al, 2002) which has equity as one of its key threads is an encouraging sign in this regard. Without such initiatives, the narrowing of perspective among members can be detrimental to union organizing, political action, and social justice initiatives.

To strengthen its engagement in the community, and its effectiveness in social justice work, the CLC Ontario union education will need to continue progressing along these lines. The CLC has engaged this opportunity and recognized the necessity to politicize its membership and develop inclusive strategies which are pertinent towards equality seeking groups. The CLC document *Labour's Political Activism Post C-24* acknowledges this position:

...emphasis will need to be placed on involving youth activists and activists from equality seeking communities so as to meet the challenges and make the connections that Canada's changing demographics present. If we are going to influence the outcome of political decisions and directions in the future, then a necessary starting point is to build political capacity and broad based support that reflects the changing demographics of our members. ([http://www.clc-ctc.ca/web/menu/english/en\\_index.htm](http://www.clc-ctc.ca/web/menu/english/en_index.htm))

Once again, the discussion in interviews and focus groups was rich in suggestions and observations:

- Need for successful engagement of the political process for all union members
- Addressing equality and diversity issues expands a member's knowledge from within the union, to encompass varying issues of community and cultural difference
- Have more diverse members interact with the union and public political spheres that would ultimately incorporate diverse representation in both areas
- Increase the social ties to communities by illustrating the relationship labour has with communities on diverse issues

In the course of this project, participants, facilitators, staff and leadership have all spoken of the need to progressively change the methods in which labour education is conducted and promoted. Some of this change is underway in the CLC Ontario Region, which provides a unique inside-outside opportunity for action research. Curriculum restructuring should involve better access to education, integration of equality and diversity issues, and politicization of members. Evaluating labour education will also move the process to a new level of accountability. Politicizing equality and diversity issues will enhance the knowledge of the union learner. This development provides confidence and familiarity with issues and prepares the learner to contribute politically in union and community life. The learner will possess knowledge that effects policy change in the union, workplace, communities, and governments. It is to this kind of learning that our project hopes to contribute.

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