# Volunteer Work, Informal Learning and Social Action

THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY AND EDUCATION



**Scope:**
The aim of this series is to provide a focus for writers and readers interested in exploring the relation between the knowledge economy and education or an aspect of that relation, for example, vocational and professional education theorised critically.

It seeks authors who are keen to question conceptually and empirically the causal link that policymakers globally assume exists between education and the knowledge economy by raising: (i) epistemological issues as regards the concepts and types of and the relations between knowledge, the knowledge economy and education; (ii) sociological and political economic issues as regards the changing nature of work, the role of learning in workplaces, the relation between work, formal and informal learning and competing and contending visions of what a knowledge economy/knowledge society might look like; and (iii) pedagogic issues as regards the relationship between knowledge and learning in educational, community and workplace contexts.

The series is particularly aimed at researchers, policymakers, practitioners and students who wish to read texts and engage with researchers who call into question the current conventional wisdom that the knowledge economy is a new global reality to which all individuals and societies must adjust, and that lifelong learning is the strategy to secure such an adjustment. The series hopes to stimulate debate amongst this diverse audience by publishing books that: (i) articulate alternative visions of the relation between education and the knowledge economy; (ii) offer new insights into the extent, modes, and effectiveness of people's acquisition of knowledge and skill in the new circumstances that they face in the developed and developing world, (iii) and suggest how changes in both work conditions and curriculum and pedagogy can led to new relations between work and education.

# Volunteer Work, Informal Learning and Social Action

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Fiona Duguid, Karsten Mündel and Daniel Schugurensky

D. W. LIVINGSTONE

# PREFACE

In advanced capitalist economies, our lives often appear to be consumed by market relations. An increasing amount of most adults' time is devoted to labour market activities, either engaging in or seeking employment compensated by a wage or salary. Once we get the money, shopping for and using goods and services commodities have become pervasive pursuits. Work done beyond the realm of market exchange has tended to be taken for granted and devalued. But the spread of this consumer society has also made more evident the necessity of unpaid work beyond the market for the reproduction of our social lives. As we have less time for household work, the issues of when, how and by whom it can be done become more problematic, especially for the women who have been increasingly expected to juggle it with paid employment. A re-appreciation of the importance and value of household work is at least slowly occurring.

Volunteer work includes activities that we choose to engage in beyond the realms of paid employment and household work, whether joining community-based organizations or just helping neighbours. The facts that these activities have tended to be more freely chosen than paid employment and household work as well as being very diverse have probably contributed to their continuing devaluation. But empirical researchers have now clearly documented that, in several advanced economies, participation in voluntary organizations has witnessed substantial decline over the past few generations (e.g. Putnam 2000). The causes and significance of this decline have been hotly disputed (e.g. Durlauf 2002). However, the general trend is now widely acknowledged, along with heightened concern about getting more people engaged in community contexts. As the incidence of volunteer work declined, appreciation of its importance for revitalizing social life began to grow.

At the same time as the general import of volunteer work is increasingly recognized, it becomes more difficult to distinguish it from paid employment. As this book graphically illustrates, numerous people are now volunteering to do work that others are paid for, in order to gain work experience to qualify for paid jobs. For example, some private employers now troll the internet, find highly qualified recent immigrants, and then expect these people to pay to be allowed to perform the work that others are paid to do. More generally, growing numbers of people are compelled to involvement in coercive volunteering to qualify for a chance at paid jobs. The only thing that distinguishes such volunteer work from paid work is the fact that it is unpaid.

In the current socio-economic context, with many voluntary organizations facing funding cutbacks from government and philanthropic sources, the premium on use of volunteer workers increases and the importance of ensuring that these workers are as well-trained as possible to perform effectively grows accordingly. There have been some previous studies of formal training programs in the few voluntary organizations that have offered them. But most voluntary organizations appear to rely primarily on informal training, done in ad hoc terms by more experienced mentoring members. There have been no prior research studies of the array of formal and informal training activities in diverse voluntary organizations. In this respect, the current book is unique.

The editors provide a thicket-clearing review and clarification of concepts of volunteer work and provide the first tentative general framing of the sorts of learning related to this work. The book's authors present case studies of three basic types of voluntary organizations: those providing social services, representing local communities and mobilizing for social change. These case studies include profiles of the actual work their members do and detailed accounts of the sorts of formal and informal learning practices they are engaged in during their work. The concluding chapter offers some comparative analysis, practical recommendations and steps for further research.

The nature of adult learning is akin to an iceberg. Most of it is beneath the surface of normal observation. My colleague Allen Tough (1971) began documenting this condition decades ago. The research network of which the current book is a part has taken up the challenge of exploring this iceberg of learning in relation to paid employment, household work and volunteer work (see Livingstone 2010; www.wallnetwork.ca). A related study on household work offers unique insights into learning in that sphere, almost all of which has been done informally (Eichler et al 2010). It is probable that most of the learning we do is deeply submerged in the iceberg, beyond conscious recuperation. But it is also probable that most of the intentional learning we do in all spheres of work is informal, as all the studies in this network and a growing array of empirical studies of learning in paid workplaces (e.g. Malloch et al 2010) confirm. The present book finds that the most valuable forms of learning in diverse voluntary organizations have occurred informally with other workers and the authors begin to develop profiles of the most pertinent dimensions of this learning.

The central relevance of this book for this series on "The Knowledge Economy and Education" is to shine a light on the diverse forms of voluntary work that are much needed but little appreciated in contemporary societies, and on the learning largely beyond the realm of formal education that is required for such organizations to continue to survive in an era in which credentialed formal education has been given overwhelming importance. Voluntary work and related learning should be much more recognized and rewarded in knowledge-based societies than they have been. This book can contribute to that end.

In some respects, learning in conventional volunteer work may have been the freest form of learning. People who have chosen to do this form of work have tended

to spend proportionately more time engaged in related learning than people do in learning related to paid employment or household work (Livingstone 2001). Some of the case studies in this book suggest that, especially if people actively engage in such voluntary organizations from marginalized standpoints (e.g. low formal education, recent immigrants) and in relation to social justice issues, the learning can be quite profound and transformative. In the heavily credentialed, media-laden context of our knowledge society, such deep learning only appears to happen in voluntary organizations where there are opportunities for group reflection – which is to rediscover the basic principle of critical pedagogy (Freire 1971). Reflective learning in voluntary organizations has the potential to be a very empowering form of learning, especially when formal education is highly standardized and more removed from direct experience.

The authors modestly suggest that the many volunteers' stories in this book only offer "a window into the world of informal learning in the volunteer world". This is true and this first view may still be quite obscure in some ways. But it is truly the first concerted view. As appreciation of the importance of voluntary work for revitalizing social life grows, the conceptual and empirical relevance of this book should also increase. It warrants careful scrutiny by all who are interested in wider dimensions of work and learning in contemporary societies.

DWL
November 28, 2012

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# INTRODUCTION

## WHY THIS BOOK?

This book aims at contributing to the incipient body of literature on the connections between informal learning and volunteer work. Its origins can be traced to the project "The Changing Nature of Work and Lifelong Learning" (WALL), coordinated by our colleague D.W. Livingstone, professor of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). He has observed that, with the growing atomization of communities in capitalist societies, the centrality of volunteer work in local social networks for ensuring sustainability of community life has become more evident. We agree with him, and would add that the increasing dismantlement of the safety net of the welfare state and the privatization of many services have downloaded a great deal of activities to the community and to the volunteer sector. The book deals with an area that has not been sufficiently covered in the research on work and education: the connections between volunteer work and informal learning. Indeed, to a great extent, a book on volunteer work and informal learning explores uncharted territory.

Three reasons account for this. First, most of the existing research literature on work tends to privilege paid employment, paying little attention to voluntary work. Second, most of the research literature on learning tends to concentrate on the formal educational system or on the psychological dimensions of knowledge acquisition. The literature on informal learning, and particularly on informal learning among adults, is still marginal to the educational research enterprise. Third, the research on the relations between work and learning tends to focus on the relations between paid employment and organized education, and there is a dearth of literature that brings together volunteer work and informal learning. Moreover, most research on volunteerism focuses on motivations to volunteer (often driven by a desire to recruit and retain volunteers) and on the impacts of volunteering, particularly on personal health (especially mental health) and on employment prospects. The experience of volunteering itself has received far less scrutiny (Wilson 2012). Even less attention has been paid to the learning dimension of such experience. In this context, this volume brings together a collection of studies that document the impressive depth and breadth to volunteers' learning. In terms of the relations between an emergent knowledge economy and learning activities, the chapters of this book shed new light on the substantial but much ignored informal learning that occurs in diverse community settings.

*F. Duguid, K. Mündel & D. Schugurensky (Eds.), Volunteer Work, Informal Learning and Social Action, 1–16.*

In the context of the 'new economy', with the hegemony of neoliberalism and the ensuing drastic cutbacks to the public sector, many governments are forced to rely more and more in the voluntary sector and in community organizations for service delivery. At the same time, there are increasing pressures on those population groups that face more difficulties to enter the labour market (particularly youth and recent immigrants) to do volunteer work to build their credentials and become more employable. For these groups, learning through volunteer work has become in many cases a requirement to increase employability prospects in paid positions.

This situation has created a new trend in the world of volunteer work that we call, for the lack of a better term, 'coerced volunteerism'. This is different from the oxymoronic 'mandatory volunteerism' that we can find in some educational institutions and workfare programs. In this case, we are not talking about physical coercion (the use of threatened force), psychological coercion (e.g. emotional blackmail), legal coercion (e.g. threat of harsh penalties and plea bargains) or social coercion (e.g. community pressures with threats of shame and ostracism to non-conformists) but about economic coercion. Some demographic groups that have difficulties to entering the labour market are increasingly pressured to undertake volunteer work as a strategy to put a foot in the door. As noted above, prominent among these groups are youth with no prior work experience in their chosen field and recent immigrants without job experience in the host society.

Youths, particularly those completing college degrees, are increasingly pressured to undertake unpaid internships. In a book suggestively entitled "Intern Nation: How to Earn Nothing and Learn Little in the Brave New Economy", Perlin (2011) reports that the percentage of college graduates doing internships has tripled in less than two decades (from 17 percent in 1992 to 50 percent in 2008), and that this is a mass labour exploitation that, in the USA, saves firms more than $600 million annually. In Canada, Andrew Langille, an employment lawyer who does research on the topic, contends that unpaid internships are replacing entry-level jobs, that they rarely lead to permanent work, and that most of them (95% in the case of Ontario) are exploitative and illegal because interns are doing work typically performed by paid employees. In the context of the current economic recession and high unemployment rates, young graduates are forced to compete with each other and improve their resume in order to gain an advantage in the job market (The Huffington Post 2011).

All this has opened the door to another relatively new phenomenon: volunteer work in the for-profit sector. Whereas in the past practically all volunteer work was done in the non-profit sector, in the public sector and in community associations, in recent times it has been possible to observe the emergence of volunteer work in for-profit companies. In some of these situations, it is not easy to determine how much of this work is genuine volunteer work and how much is labour exploitation. This is not an issue that pertains exclusively to the for-profit sector. Indeed, in a general context of budget cuts and a reduced workforce, and the resultant pressures to do more with less, in some non-profit organizations and public sector agencies volunteers are not always perceived as a healthy and welcomed complement to paid

labour but as a replacement of paid labour. In other words, changes in the political economy are leading to dynamic changes in the nature of work, in employment conditions, and in the relations between work, formal and informal learning.

As noted above, volunteer work goes well beyond service delivery or the performance of certain tasks in formal institutional settings. People also do volunteer work in a variety of social movements, neighbourhood groups, grassroots organizations, sports clubs, faith communities and participatory democracy processes, to name a few. Although there is a wide range of reasons to volunteer, from instrumental purposes to more altruistic motivations, many volunteers devote time and energy to these activities because they want to make their own communities –and also other communities- better places to live. In doing so, they engage in personal and collective learning experiences. This is the topic of this book.

## VOLUNTEER WORK

Volunteer work, understood in its traditional meaning, as unpaid activity oriented to help others and to improve society, has existed throughout the history of humanity. It has ranged from casual or regular assistance to community residents and family members in need, to more collective and organized efforts to better the quality of life of the community (akin to community service), However, it was not until the 19th century when volunteering began to take a more institutional form, with the creation of charitable organizations aiming at helping people in need, like the Young Men's Christian Association or YMCA (1844), the Young Women's Christian Association or YWCA (1855), the Red Cross (1863) and the Salvation Army (1865). In the 20th century, these organizations expanded their operations and their volunteer programs, and many other organizations were established. Of course, most individuals continued to do informal volunteer work like helping friends and neighbours, and surveys still show that people are more likely to be involved in such activities than in voluntary organizations. However, for those interested in undertaking volunteer work in organizations, the process has become more formalized and institutionalized over time. Today, prospective volunteers often have to go through a rigorous application process that often is relatively similar to the one that they would face for paid positions. Consider, for instance, a recent announcement for a volunteer position at a neighbourhood organization located in Toronto.

Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office
Services in Spanish
(Volunteer job position)

| | |
|---|---|
| Job Title: | Interpreter |
| Days: | Weekdays |
| Time: | Morning, afternoon or evening |
| Department: | Settlement |
| Programs: | SWIS/ISAP |

**Description:**

The Volunteer Interpreter will provide Language Interpretation Services to clients who are unable to communicate in English. Simple interpretation at the community programs and services – registration for a program, appointments with welfare office, income tax, doctor, and other services as required.

**Duties/Responsibilities**

- Report to settlement worker to communicate completion of assignments, and to express availability for pending or unscheduled assignments
- Attend all assigned encounters with punctuality, respect, and professional manner
- Demonstrate flexibility when last minute changes or emergencies affect the scheduling Calendar
- Adhere to the standards, ethics, and professional rules of TNO.
- Report any problems, conflicts, or needs (personal or client driven) to the settlement worker for rapid and effective resolution
- Promptly notify settlement worker if unable to attend a scheduled assignment
- Assist the ISAP/SWIS team and other Volunteers in assignments as needed
- As an integral member of TNO volunteer Interpreter team you will provide linguistic support in favour of the successful daily operations of the program. This will include the following points:

**Skills/Experience:**

- Oral and written knowledge of English and Spanish
- Respectful towards people from all cultures
- Good communication skills
- Patient; supportive; reliable and trustworthy
- Commitment to Anti-Oppression framework

*All applicants selected should be willing and available to attend an orientation and training session*.

*We thank all applicants for their interest but only those selected for further consideration will be contacted.*

**To Apply:**

To apply for this position candidates are requested to forward a copy of their resume to TNO Services in Spanish by 5:00 pm on Wednesday November 24th, 2010.

"Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office is committed to employment equity initiatives. We strongly encourage residents of Thorncliffe Park and surrounding communities and members of ethno-racial, aboriginal, immigrant, francophone, refugee, LGBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans) and disabled community groups to apply and self-identify."

This announcement, typical of institutional calls for volunteer job positions in the last decade, suggests that in certain fields the application process is more competitive and demanding than in the past. This situation, coupled with a changing economic and political context characterized by a larger pool of qualified unemployed and underemployed people seeking an open door to the labour market, on the one hand, and increasing accountability pressures on non-profit organizations, on the other, is slowly but steadily leading to a sort of 'professionalization' of volunteer work.

Moreover, in order to start doing volunteer work, many organizations require that prospective volunteers complete a background check, which usually includes reference checks and a criminal history check. All this makes it more onerous for people to volunteer in organizations, even if they care about their mission. This can be partly explained by greater public demands for safety, especially for volunteer work in programs that involve minors, such as schools, boys and girls clubs, sport coaching, recreation centres and the like. Another recent trend related to the institutionalization of volunteer work is the proliferation of service learning programs in the formal education system, particularly in high schools and universities. These programs are frequently highly organized, and students are expected to fulfil certain obligations, work a specified amount of hours, and have their activities monitored and evaluated. Some of these programs emphasize the learning part of the equation, others emphasize the service part, and a few attempt to find a balance between the two.

Interestingly enough, at the same time that some volunteer programs are in high demand and prospective volunteers have to endure a competitive application process, in other contexts it is not easy to find enough volunteers to fill all available positions. Consider, for instance, the case of the Hillbrook/Tall Oaks Civic Association in Virginia. The President, Mark Crawford, had served three consecutive terms and, as per association bylaws, could not run for that office again. He encouraged and begged residents to run for the volunteer position, but to no avail. In this community of 250 families, younger residents said that they their work, kids and long commutes took all their time, and veteran residents claimed that they have already volunteered enough. Frustrated, Crawford nominated Ms. Beatha Lee for the President's position. She was described as a relatively new resident who had interest in neighbourhood activities and the outdoors, and who had experience in Maine overseeing an estate of 26 acres. At the general assembly, the approximately 50 people present raised their hands in approval, assuming that the candidate was a community-oriented newcomer. Then they socialized, ate food, and went home. A few weeks later, while reading the association's newsletter, they were taken aback by an article entitled "Dog Rules, Humans Apathetic (Pathetic)". At that moment, they realized that at the general assembly they had unanimously elected a dog as president of the residents' association. They checked the bylaws, and acknowledged that the dog fulfilled all requirements for officer qualifications, which, by the way, do not specify that only humans could serve.

Ms. Beatha Lee is the pet of Crawford, the former president who was unable to find volunteers to apply for the positions and now serves as vice-president. Interviewed by the Washington Post, he said that he wanted to send a message to the neighbourhood that they needed to get involved, because "they can't count on the same people to do this year in and year out" (Schulte 2011). Indeed, as several volunteers pointed out in our interviews, it is not uncommon that in many organizations 20% of volunteers do 80% of the work. Sometimes people referred to this 20% as 'super volunteers', because they seem to be active in different groups, they are present in most activities, and they return to their duties year after year. When asked about this situation, most 'super volunteers' tended to be polite and understanding, noting that people are busy with their lives, but a few expressed disappointment and resentment about the limited participation of other volunteers and the lack of participation of many residents. The so-called 20/80 rule observed by our interviewees is not far from the Canadian reality of volunteerism. Statistics Canada (2007, p.43) reports that the top 25% of volunteers account for 78% of all volunteer hours.

## VOLUNTEER WORK AND INFORMAL LEARNING

We learn from cradle to crave. However, we tend to assume that the only educational game in town is the formal education system, that is, the institutional ladder that goes from kindergarten to the university. For a variety of reasons, the bulk of financial and human resources, policies, programs, curriculum development and research focus on the formal education system. Important resources and research efforts are also allocated to the non-formal education system, which encompasses all the organized educational programs outside of the formal education system. Indeed, in addition to schools, people also learn a great deal– from religion to gastronomy, sports, literacy, health, politics and history– through workshops, courses, lessons, seminars, and other educational activities. However, there is a third dimension in the world of learning, and such dimension is usually unacknowledged by researchers and by the larger society. This third dimension, known as informal learning, is a residual category that includes all that learning that is not acquired through the formal and non-formal educational systems. At first glance, it seems that there is little left. A deeper look will reveal that we learn many important and relevant things outside of organized educational programs. Informal learning could be self-directed (intentional and conscious), incidental (unintentional but conscious), or tacit (unintentional and unconscious). This book shows the impressive amount of learning that takes place in volunteer work. It does so by exploring different volunteer settings and different areas of learning. Indeed, in this book we do not reduce adult learning to the acquisition of marketable knowledge and skills. As Livingstone and Guile (2012) note in *The Knowledge Economy and Lifelong Learning*, in most advanced economies/societies there is an emphasis on the private commodification of knowledge and a lack of interest on promoting a wide socialization of knowledge. Such prioritization tends to privilege the "knowledge economy" at the expense of the "knowledge society".

The connections between informal learning and volunteer work are rarely discussed, or even acknowledged. Most definitions of volunteer work, even the most comprehensive ones, tend to omit any references to learning. The Association of Voluntary Service Organizations (AVSO), for instance, has a holistic and multidimensional understanding of volunteer work that includes many facets, but does not make any explicit connection to learning:

> Volunteerism refers to all forms of voluntary activity, whether formal or informal, full-time or part-time, at home or abroad. It is undertaken of a person's own free will, choice and motivation, and is without concern for financial gain. It benefits the individual volunteer, communities and society as a whole. It is also a vehicle for individuals and associations to address human, social or environmental needs and concerns. Formal voluntary activities add value, but do not replace professional, paid employees.

It could be argued that learning is implicit in the sentence that mentions benefits to the individual volunteer and to the communities, but this would be a stretch. In other definitions and discussions on volunteer work, the dimension of learning is tacitly or explicitly acknowledged as some socially useful particular expertise that was acquired prior to the act of volunteering. The volunteer, then, applies the knowledge and skills previously acquired to the new situation. For instance, the Statistics Bureau (2000) defines volunteer activity as "the act of providing one's own efforts, time, knowledge or skill for society or community without receiving remuneration for the work". Along the same lines, the Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating asks a question on reasons for volunteering, and provides several choices for responding. One of them, chosen by 77% of respondents, is that they do volunteer work "to put their skills and experience to good use" (Statistics Canada, 2007, p.50). Other possible choices (not mutually exclusive) had to do with making a contribution to the community, being personally affected by the cause, meeting people, improve job opportunities, exploring strengths, fulfilling a religious obligation, or because a friend volunteers. Interestingly, learning does not appear at all as a potential reason to volunteer. We wonder how many volunteers would add this reason if given the choice.

In the section on benefits of volunteering, the Statistics Canada survey does include a question on learning skills. Two-thirds of respondents (66%) mentioned interpersonal skills, such as understanding and motivating people or being better able to handle difficult situations. This was followed by communication skills (45%), organizational or managerial skills (39%), knowledge about specific subjects like health, gender, political issues, criminal justice, or the environment (34%), fundraising skills (32%) and technical skills such as first aid, coaching, computer skills, and bookkeeping (25%). As we will see in the subsequent chapters, this is consistent with our findings, and can be connected to an interesting finding of a study coordinated by Livingstone. He found that the relation between work and informal learning appears to be strongest in the sphere of volunteer work. The majority of

participants who devoted less than three hours a week to community volunteer work spent one hour or less on related informal learning, whereas the majority of those who put more than three hours spent more than three hours on related informal learning.

Livingstone (1999, 2001 and 2003) noted that those who engage more fully in community work tend to be not only more involved community learners but also, to some extent, more active learners in housework, paid work and general interest activities as well. In other words, a high level of informal learning in one sphere tends to be positively associated with a high presence of informal learning in other spheres. Moreover, there is a much stronger association between community volunteer work time and community-related informal learning, on the one hand, than there is between paid employment time and job-related informal learning, on the other. This is an insightful finding, and suggests that greater control of one's activities can lead to fuller use of work-related skills and knowledge, and that those who are more active in more discretionary spheres of working life may also generally be more active informal learners. Moreover, participants in Livingstone's study reported that the learning activities they most enjoyed and found fulfilment in were much more likely to be community and general interest activities, over which they typically exercised much more control.

Another important aspect of the informal learning acquired through volunteering is its transferability to other dimensions of people's life, like paid employment or the civic sphere. The literature on the topic tells us that, through their work, volunteers acquire a variety of knowledge, skills and dispositions that could be useful in workplaces. Moreover, volunteer work teaches civic skills, such as the ability to write letters and memoranda, plan and organize meetings, and give presentations or speeches. Furthermore, through volunteering, participants build trust in other people and in public institutions, and this, together with the development of higher levels of political efficacy, a deeper understanding of the experiences of other social groups, and a heightened awareness of the structural nature of social problems and the need for political solutions, can increase civic and political participation. Volunteering also helps people to examine their biases about certain minority groups, to take steps to move beyond those biases, and to listen to participants with an open mind and heart. Indeed, for many people, volunteering is the first opportunity in their lives to recognize the issues faced by minority groups and to empathize with their humanity, and in this process they become more empathetic and caring people, and open their horizons. Moreover, through volunteering people learn that actions are interdependent, that group discipline serves a common purpose, that differences among participants can be negotiated, and that multiple perspectives bring new insights to solve problems. People also meet a wider range of people than they would have met otherwise, learn about local issues and local politics, and become more engaged (Youniss et al. 1997, Flanagan et al, 1998, Bloom and Kilgore 2003:434, Musick and Wilson 2008).

The particularities of the learning itself are connected to the profile and prior experiences of the volunteers themselves, the characteristics of the organization in

which they volunteer, the specific tasks that they perform, and the interactions that they have with other people inside and outside the organization. For instance, a study on a housing cooperative for university students in Canada (Mook, Quarter and Richmond 2007) found that volunteers learned a variety of personal, organizational and leadership skills, including managerial skills (how to run an organization with a $4 million budget) and democratic skills (how to deliberate and make decisions according to cooperative principles and practices). Likewise, Vanzaghi (2007) conducted a study on the volunteers of *Meals on Wheels*, a program that deliver meals to individuals at home who are unable to purchase or prepare their own meals. The volunteers interviewed reported changes in their personality as a result of their volunteer experience, using expressions as becoming more "outgoing", "assertive", "social", "talkative" and "less shy". Some said that at the beginning of their volunteer work they were timid and avoided talking with other volunteers, but over time became more social, confident, and happier. They also noted changes in values, dispositions and practices: they became less selfish and self-centred, more aware of other people's needs and of their own privileges and prejudices, more empathetic towards those who are different, and more likely to engage in practices of solidarity. In this book, which helps to reconsider and expand the relation between learning and work, we further explore some of these issues by reporting and discussing the informal learning of volunteers in diverse institutional and organizational settings.

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

The book is organized in 11 chapters. The first one provides a conceptual discussion of volunteer work, informal learning, and the connections between these two human activities in contemporary societies. The second chapter, by Susan Stowe, discusses data on volunteer work and informal learning in Canada and internationally, in the context of the new political economy.

Chapters Three to Ten cover the case studies on informal learning and volunteer work. Recognizing that volunteer work comes in different types, modalities and settings, in this book we made an effort to include a diversity of volunteering situations.

Although we were unable to include every type of volunteer activity, our case studies cover three arenas that have an important presence in the world of volunteerism: community service, community representation, and community development. Community service refers to volunteer work that delivers 'something' to community members, be it on individual or collective basis, often through a voluntary organization. Community service is probably the most typical understanding of voluntary work. Examples of 'community service' include delivering meals to seniors, coaching sports teams, driving children to music camps, helping in a food bank, teaching local language and culture to new immigrants or to migrant workers, coordinating a toy drive or organizing a film festival. Chapters Three, Four and Five deal with community service.

Community representation refers to volunteer work that is undertaken on behalf of (and/or in benefit of) a particular community, acting as an unpaid representative in decision-making bodies like boards, committees, or councils. Chapters Six, Seven and Eight deal with community representation. In this book, examples of 'community representation' include the cases of housing co-operatives (Chapter Six), the tenant participatory system in public housing (Chapter Seven), and participatory budgeting (Chapter Eight). Community development, in the context of this book, refers to volunteer work that builds capacity and empowers groups to affect changes in their own communities, guided by principles of justice, equality and respect.

Finally, Chapters Nine and Ten are about cases related to community development. In the field of community development, it is possible to identify three distinct– though sometimes overlapping– ideal types: social planning, locality development, and social action (Rothman 2001). In the social planning approach to community development, the process is typically initiated by a public sector agency such an urban planning unit, a health promotion program, or welfare institutions. This approach typically relies heavily on technical expertise, assessments, indicators, rational problem solving, surveys, partnerships with community organizations, and the articulation of social services, and decisions on programs or services are usually based on data collected by professionals. Professionals are also expected to play a key role in setting goals, coordinating activities, and evaluating outcomes. The locality development approach focuses on enabling local residents to identify issues of common concern and develop strategies to address them. Community members take ownership of the process and participate actively in the planning, implementation and evaluation of actions. People's expertise, participatory processes and study groups are highly valued. Social action involves activities that increase the power and resources of relatively powerless groups, sometimes to advocate a particular policy, sometimes to cancel a policy or to interrupt a government or business action that is considered detrimental to the wellbeing of the community (the case discussed in Chapter 10). The social action approach favors community mobilization around an issue, and this process usually involves awareness raising (e.g. popular education and communications strategies), civic-political organization, and coalition building. In social action, community volunteers might arrange disruptive events, including demonstrations, lawsuits, boycotts, sit-ins and strikes, to call the attention of those in power to their concerns. Social action tactics are typically used in situations involving conflicting interests and power asymmetries, especially when conventional negotiations fail (Brager and Spetch 1973, Rothman 2001). The case discussed in Chapter Nine is a combination of social planning and locality development, whereas the case discussed in Chapter Ten provides a good example of a social action approach to community development.

After considerable thought and consideration, we decided not to include a chapter about service learning. Three factors led us to make this choice. First, there is already a significant body of literature (both praising and critical) dealing with service learning. Second, most of these programs are ephemeral one-time volunteering

events (Pompa 2002, Scales and Roehlkepartain 2004, Musick and Wilson 2008). Third, and most importantly, most service learning programs in educational institutions are mandatory, and therefore could not be considered as volunteer work unless we accept a contradiction in terms. At the same time, we decided to add a case of 'coerced volunteerism' (see Chapter Five) because it constitutes a relatively new phenomenon that has not been sufficiently addressed in the literature on volunteerism. By 'coerced volunteerism' we mean situations in which certain vulnerable populations are forced by social and economic dynamics to volunteer in order to gain access or re-entry to the labour market. Three examples of these vulnerable populations are youth who need to build their resume before they apply to their first paid job, unemployed persons who were laid off from their jobs and need retraining in a second (or third) occupation to re-enter the labour market, and new immigrants who are compelled to do volunteer work to gain access to the labour market in the host country by getting local work experience (the case discussed in this book). What follows is a more detailed description of each case study.

The first case study (Chapter Three) builds on the rich tradition of volunteering in community service in non-profit organizations. To explore volunteer learning in this type of situations, we chose the Red Cross, a prototypical humanitarian organization that, like the Cancer Society or the Salvation Army, relies heavily on volunteer work. Indeed, the Red Cross has approximately 97 million volunteers worldwide, an impressive number for any organization. Founded in 1861 in Switzerland by Henry Dunnant, the mission of the Red Cross is to protect human life and health, to ensure respect for all human beings, and to prevent and alleviate human suffering, without any discrimination based on nationality, race, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity, religious beliefs, class, allegiance, or political opinions. More specifically, the Red Cross provides relief assistance in emergency situations of large magnitude, such as natural disasters and wars, organizes disaster preparedness activities, and supports local healthcare projects and youth-related activities. This chapter, written by Kunle Akingbola, Fiona Duguid and Martha Viveros, explores three main questions: a) what types of knowledge and skills do Red Cross volunteers acquire through volunteering activities?; b) how do they learn them?; and c) who is likely to benefit the most from the learning acquired through volunteer work—the volunteer or the organization? The chapter examines the learning dimensions of volunteer work from the angles of personal and professional development and organizational effectiveness.

In Chapter Four, Adam Perry examines a different type of service-oriented volunteerism, expressed in the case of Frontier College, an adult education organization based in Toronto, Canada. Adult education programs all around the world, and particularly literacy programs, often rely on the active participation of volunteer educators. Mass literacy campaigns, from China to Brazil, Cuba and Nicaragua, have been prominent in mobilizing urban youth as volunteers in rural areas. In Canada, Frontier College established a pioneering program of 'labourer-teachers' in 1899 and has been running successfully for over a century. The 'labourer-teachers', all volunteers, are often students on summer vacation who

live and work alongside frontier labourers while teaching literacy and basic skills to their worker colleagues, often temporary agricultural workers from Mexico and Jamaica. Unlike many other youth volunteer programs (including different versions of 'voluntourism'), the emphasis is more on solidarity and less on the young participants' consumption of cultural experiences. Hence, it is not surprising that the 'labourer-teachers' program prioritizes the learning of local workers and does not pay any attention to the learning of volunteers. Despite this fact, all labourer-teachers who participated in this study reported a significant amount of informal learning through living in solidarity and through partaking in the struggle for decent working conditions.

Chapter Five, written by Bonnie Slade, Yang Cathy Luo and Daniel Schugurensky, explores the learning of recent immigrants – most of them professional trained-who are coerced by the labour market to undertake volunteer work because their international work experience is unrecognized by employers. Their accumulated skills and knowledge and their previous job experience (sometimes in more than one country) are considered irrelevant for the new context. Although they are aware that in some cases their volunteer work is not too far removed from labour exploitation, they often accept this situation because there are few other avenues available to enter the local labour market. The volunteer experience is particularly useful for finding a paid job in their field to those immigrants who undertake volunteer work in their fields. However, for those who do volunteer work in areas unrelated to their specializations, it generates a deskilling process that over time removes them further and further from meaningful opportunities for economic progress or professional development. One interesting finding of this study is that some of these immigrants did volunteer work in for-profit organizations, which may indicate the beginning of a new trend.

In Chapter Six, Fiona Duguid, Karsten Mündel and Daniel Schugurensky examine the informal learning experienced through participation in governance by members of a housing co-operative in Canada. Volunteer engagement in self-governance can be observed in a wide variety of membership organizations, from student councils to social clubs, from neighbourhood associations to trade unions, community gardens, tenants' organizations, academic associations and worker cooperatives. As suggested by the Virginia case discussed a few paragraphs above, effective self-governance demands a high degree of volunteer involvement by local residents or by members of a co-operative organization like the ones discussed in this chapter. In this case study, members of the housing co-operative who took part in deliberation and decision-making processes in various committees and boards, collectively acquired a great deal of knowledge, skills and attitudes in a wide variety of areas, from self-governance to the realities of housing co-operatives, and from leadership to political efficacy. Some co-op members reported that volunteering in these spaces allowed them to meet people who they otherwise would not have met, and these interactions helped them to examine their own prejudices and values (including sexist, racist, homophobic attitudes) and to change both their personal views and their day-to-day

practices. This study confirmed some of the findings of the study carried by Theriault et al. (2010) on a housing co-operative, particularly the enabling dimension of co-operative housing life for future development of projects and goals among residents.

The study discussed in Chapter Seven, undertaken by Behrang Foroughi and Erica McCollum, presents another case of learning through volunteering in local resident associations. This chapter examines a participatory model (called 'tenant participatory system') that involves public housing tenants in decisions that affect their daily lives. Unlike co-operatives such as the one discussed in the previous chapter, where members are expected to actively participate in self-governance, in public housing this is highly unusual, because more often than not tenants are perceived by government officials as incapable of making important decisions are therefore are seldom given the opportunity to have a say. The case study is the Toronto Housing Corporation, which with 165,000 tenants is the second largest public housing agency in North America after New York. The tenants who are elected by their fellow tenants in their buildings devote many hours of volunteer work to represent them at the tenant participatory system. Since 2001, the tenant participatory system of the Toronto Housing Corporation includes a variation of a model of deliberation and decision-making known as participatory budgeting, which was born in Brazil in the late 1980s and is now being implemented in thousands of cities around the world.

Volunteer work in participatory budgeting is further explored in Chapter Eight, prepared by Daniel Schugurensky. This chapter elicits the informal learning acquired by delegates of participatory budgeting in three progressive Latin American cities: Porto Alegre (Brazil), Montevideo (Uruguay) and Rosario (Argentina). In these cities, residents can allocate a portion of the municipal budget to specific projects in their neighbourhoods, usually related to infrastructure. The learning acquired by participants was organized in four main categories: democratic and political knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, and practices. Unlike most traditional models of participatory democracy, which tend to attract primarily white, affluent males who are already familiar with city hall and local politics, participatory budgeting tends to attract more low-income groups, women and people of colour. For this reason, volunteer delegates refer to participatory budgeting as "our school of citizenship".

Taking together, Chapters Six, Seven and Eight provide a good understanding of volunteer work through community representation. Like professional politicians, these community representatives dedicate countless hours to attend meetings, to do research about the issues to be discussed at the meetings, to address the problems that affect their communities and advance new projects, and to monitor that decisions are followed up with actions. However, unlike professional politicians, who hold paid positions, these community representatives engage in this work on voluntary basis. The learning reported by participants in these three case studies support the argument posed by democratic theorists that participation in local governance encourages citizenship learning and promotes better democracy by allowing people to develop the very skills and attitudes they need to participate effectively.

Chapter Nine, prepared by Karsten Mündel and Daniel Schugurensky, is about the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, an organization that brings together a broad-based group of community and provincial associations dedicated to build strong, equitable and sustainable communities through education, engagement and collaboration. This organization started as an informal and loose network in 1986, and became formalized in 1992 to support local and regional groups, coalitions and networks working on comprehensive community development processes that nurture social, economic and environmental well-being in their localities. In this case study, which could be considered an example of volunteering in non-governmental organizations committed to social action and community empowerment, we found an interesting profile of volunteer workers. For the lack of a better term, we refer to them as 'intermittent' volunteers', because they alternate recurrently between paid and volunteer work within the same community-based organization, depending on funding availability, changes in life circumstances or the urgency of a particular issue. With the budget cuts of the last decades and the implementation of new funding formulas, many organizations had to lay off staff. However, some staff members who are committed to the mission of the organization sometimes continue working for the organization on voluntary basis. When the organization has access to new financial resources, the recurrent volunteers switch back to paid work, often performing similar tasks. The intermittent volunteer is a figure that cannot be isolated from the expansion of neoliberal polices, the economic crisis, and of course the commitment of many people who do not perceive themselves only as paid staff of non-profit organizations but also as active citizens who are engaged in their communities and are willing to devote significant amounts of unpaid time to improving the quality of life of those communities.

The last case study, presented in Chapter Ten by Kate Rogers & Megan Haggerty, provides a reflection on the case of the *Frente Cívico*, a social movement that emerged in Cuernavaca, México, to protect a regional cultural historic site from being destroyed to make room for a big-box store. Learning through volunteering in solidarity action with oppressed groups is closely related to the learning that occurs through participation in some social movements. Indeed, a field known as "social movement learning" has emerged in the last decade to account for the learning that takes place within and among social movements, and also in the larger society as a result of the actions carried out by social movements (Hall 2004). Using the lenses of the social movement learning framework, Rogers and Haggerty describe the learning dimension of *Frente Cívico*. Given the context of the conflict that ignited this movement, it is not surprising that most of the learning reported by participants related to social, political and environmental issues. They also noted learning about legal and economic knowledge, and developed skills for democratic leadership, horizontal organization, critical analysis, and strategies and tactics. Together, Chapters Nine and Ten allow us to better understand the learning dimension of volunteer work through social action, and particularly through different approaches to community development. In the work of the Ontario Healthy Communities

Coalition, we can observe a combination of locality development (creating an infrastructure for community activism and action) and social planning and policy change (using the political and other systems to create policies that work toward improving the quality of life for all citizens). In the case of *Frente Cívico*, we can observe an approach guided by social action and systems advocacy (engaging citizens in understanding and building power, and using it to advocate and negotiate for the interests of the community).[1]

In Chapter 11, Duguid, Mündel, Schugurensky and Haggerty, drawing on the insights arising from the previous chapters, provide a summary and some preliminary conclusions on the connections between informal learning and volunteer work. Based on the case studies, this chapter reflects on motivations to volunteer, on the breadth of the learning acquired by the volunteers, and on the connections between profiles of volunteers and type of learning. In this final chapter, the authors also revisit and expand the typology of volunteer work developed by Cnaan et al. (1996) that is presented in Chapter 1.

For a long time, informal learning has been a marginal topic in the literature on education (even in the literature on adult education), and volunteer work has been a marginal topic in the literature on work. The emphasis has been paid to the formal education system (K-12 and higher education) and to paid work. However, as the following chapters will show, the rich universe of diverse learning experiences in a variety of volunteer contexts deserves more scholarly attention.

It is our hope that this book makes a modest contribution to this endeavor and to our collective understanding of the connections between informal learning and volunteer work.

## NOTE

[1] For a discussion on different approaches to community development, see Rothman 2001.

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# 1. VOLUNTEER WORK AND INFORMAL LEARNING: A CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSION

## INTRODUCTION

Informal learning and volunteer work are two dynamics that coexist everyday in communities throughout the world. However, we still know comparatively little about the nature of these dynamics. While an abundant literature exists on work, only a small portion of this literature deals with volunteer work. Likewise, only a minority of the vast literature on learning explores dynamics of informal learning. In the same way that volunteer work has a marginal place in the study of work; informal learning has a marginal place in the literature on learning. The chapters included in this book deal explicitly with the learning dimension of volunteer work, a topic that has not yet attracted the interest of many researchers. Nonetheless, we suggest that the topic is important because, as we will argue in the following pages, both volunteer work and informal learning are present in our daily lives and necessary for the reproduction of our daily lives. Before we proceed, it is pertinent to clarify the meaning of the two main terms guiding our exploration: "volunteer work" and "informal learning". This chapter serves that purpose through its three sections. In the first one, we examine different conceptions of volunteer work. In the second, we discuss the concept of informal learning in the context of other types of learning and examine different forms of informal learning. Finally, in the last section, we establish some connections between volunteer work and informal learning, describe the socio-political context for volunteer work and informal learning and provide a general framework to assist us in the exploration of the informal learning of volunteers that will be presented in the subsequent chapters.

## VOLUNTEER WORK

The concept of volunteerism makes reference to a great variety of activities. Among them are the following:

- organizing and supervising events
- coaching children and youth
- delivering food and clothes to the needy
- serving on boards, councils and committees
- providing support and healthcare

*F. Duguid, K. Mündel & D. Schugurensky (Eds.), Volunteer Work, Informal Learning and Social Action, 17–36.*

– taking part in canvassing, campaigning and fundraising
– protecting the environment and wildlife
– teaching and tutoring
– raising awareness and advocating on important issues
– greeting visitors
– doing office work
– leading tours and other recreational activities
– ushering and helping in religious institutions
– researching and disseminating information
– fighting fires
– doing repairs, maintenance and construction work

Although this is not an exhaustive list, it gives a general idea of the vast array of activities done by volunteers (Abdennur, 1987; Elsdon, Reynolds, & Stewart, 1995; Hall, McKeown, & Roberts, 2001; Ilsley, 1990; Salamon & Sokolowski, 2002). It is estimated that close to half of all Canadians do some form of these volunteer activities (Hall, Lasby, Ayer, & Gibbons, 2009). Despite this impressive fact, it is interesting to note that a significant amount of publications dealing with volunteer work do not include an explicit definition of the term. In fact, in a study that sought to define "volunteering", Cnaan, Handy, and Wadsworth (1996) found that in the more than 300 articles and reports that they reviewed, the term volunteer was seldom defined. Cnaan et al set out to uncover what were the commonalities of volunteering.

The definition of what constitutes volunteerism has evolved over time. In the 18th century, the term "volunteer" referred to someone who willingly served in the military. These individuals were not paid to serve nor were they obligated to serve (Cnaan et al., 1996). Later on, the term was used, in daily language, to refer to those who rendered aid, performed a service, or assumed an obligation voluntarily. More recently, formal volunteer work has been understood as work that fulfils four characteristics: freely chosen, unpaid, part of an organisation (normally a non-profit), and benefits the larger community (i.e. Cnann et al., 1996). This definition can be presented in a simple yes/no table:

*Table 1. Restricted definition of volunteer work*

| *Criteria* | *Yes* | *No* |
|---|---|---|
| Freely chosen | | |
| Unpaid | | |
| Part of an organization | | |
| Benefits the community | | |

According to this definition, if a given activity fulfils all four characteristics, then it can be considered volunteer work. If it does not fulfil at least one of the four characteristics, then it cannot be considered a true and full expression of volunteer

work. This dichotomous approach is simple yet deceiving, because it ignores the many shades of grey that occur in the real world of volunteerism. To overcome this limitation, Cnaan et al. (1996), after an exhaustive analysis of the many existing definitions in use by organizations, policy makers and researchers, conceptualized volunteering as a series of four interrelated dimensions and 12 categories that are part of a continuum:

*Table 2. Dimensions and categories of volunteer work*

| *Dimension* | *Categories* |
|---|---|
| Volition | 1. Free choice |
| | 2. Relatively uncoerced |
| | 3. Obligation to volunteer |
| Remuneration | 1. None at all |
| | 2. None expected |
| | 3. Expenses reimbursed |
| | 4. Stipend/low pay |
| Structure | 1. Formal |
| | 2. Informal |
| Intended beneficiaries | 1. Benefit/help others/strangers |
| | 2. Benefit/help friends or relatives |
| | 3. Benefit oneself (as well) |

(Cnaan et al., 1996, p. 371)

The table overcomes the limits of the restricted definition of volunteering with a more subtle elaboration that acknowledges the degrees of volition, remuneration, structure and potential beneficiaries that can be present in a given volunteer activity. According to this table, the further down the activity falls in each category, the less likely that it will be considered "true" volunteerism in the strict sense; nonetheless, it can be considered volunteer work. These gradations are important because a yes/no test to the four dimensions is insufficient to capture the complex reality of the social world of volunteer activities. Indeed, a particular activity may have a score of two in two categories, a three in another category, and a one in another. Moreover, in real life it is not always easy to determine with precision whether a particular situation fits one category or another.

For instance, in terms of *volition* – the first dimension of the table – the classic definition suggests that volunteering should be freely chosen. However, even when the volunteer may perceive a particular situation as freely chosen, an external analysis of the context may suggest a combination of volition and constraint. For instance, many people volunteer because they internalize social norms and expectations of the community in which they live or the organizations in which they participate. Indeed, in some political, religious and neighbourhood groups, belonging means

volunteering (e.g., Musick, Wilson, & Bynum, 2000). This does not mean that volunteering is compulsory, but that volunteering is expected.

Hence, although the political, religious and community convictions may be freely chosen, the volunteer activity itself includes elements of free will and elements of social coercion that are not easily distinguishable. For instance, a person's decision to volunteer in the local library, in a food bank, a religious community centre, a neighbourhood association or a soccer league may be perceived by the individual as freely chosen, but in fact it may be a combination of free choice and a need to satisfy external expectations. A similar situation can be found among the so-called "overtime volunteers" who put in additional work during the evenings or weekends in non-profit organizations because either they believe in the cause of the organization or unpaid overtime is part of the organizational culture (see Baines, 2004; Basok & Ilcan, 2003).

Additionally, in some workplaces employees are expected to do volunteer work as part of corporate volunteer initiatives. Whereas in these cases there is not necessarily a formal structure of incentives and punishments in place to promote volunteer work, and there may be some degree of free choice, often there is a subtle set of expectations and peer pressures.

The third indicator within the category of volition ("mandatory volunteerism") is more clear-cut, because the element of free will is usually absent. Mandatory volunteerism can be found, for example, in compulsory community service stipulated as a requirement for probation, workfare, or high school graduation (Kahne & Westheimer 1996).

Some readers may even argue – and we would agree with them – that the term "mandatory volunteerism" is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms, because volunteering, by definition, should include an element of "voluntas", that is, the will to do something. If the free choice to act is replaced by legal requirements and the motivation is replaced by threats of punishment, then it can be argued that, strictu sensu, these are not voluntary activities. For this reason we prefer to avoid the term "mandatory volunteerism" and use instead "mandatory community service", which leaves the element of volunteering out of the equation. Hence, since this is a book on volunteer work, we decided to exclude case studies dealing with "mandatory community service", leaving it as a topic for another study.

Other examples regarding volition suggest that it is often difficult to establish whether a particular volunteer activity is genuinely and entirely "freely chosen" or not. We propose that in most volunteer activities there are elements of free choice and elements of coercion, and hence it is more pertinent to talk about degrees of internal freedom and degrees of external pressures. Moreover, the existence of a continuum of volunteers' volition does not necessarily reflect on the quality of the volunteer experience in terms of its potential for learning or its potential to "do good". In other words, the degree of choice or coercion in any given volunteer activity is not necessarily correlated to the social benefit of the activity or to its educational impact.

The second dimension of the definition is *remuneration*. In theory, 'true' volunteer work is supposed to be unpaid. In the real world, however, there is a range from less than zero – like in international volunteering, where there is an expectation that volunteers pay their own travel and subsistence costs (e.g., Lacey & Ilcan, 2006) and other instances that require out-of-pocket expenses paid by volunteers – to a modest honorarium. In between those extremes – paying and being paid to undertake a volunteer activity – there is the possibility of reimbursement of expenses. When an honorarium is in place, to qualify as volunteer work it is expected that such remuneration is substantially lower than the "market rate" for the same work.

In terms of *structure*, the strict definition noted in Table 1 only considers volunteer work if it is performed on a regular basis in an organization, usually a non-profit organization. However, as suggested in Table 2, volunteer work can also include informal and sporadic activities, like shovelling the sidewalk of an elderly neighbour after winter snowstorms, picking up litter in the community, or helping a teenager with her math homework. Helping someone with math homework would be considered formal volunteerism if it were part of participation in an organization that, for instance, created learning mentors in neighbourhoods.

The last dimension of volunteer work mentioned in Table 2 refers to the intended *beneficiaries* of the volunteering activity. The continuum presented in the table ranges from helping strangers – what could be considered "true altruism" – to activities that also benefit oneself. Between them are activities that benefit friends or relatives. While this framework is useful, we would like to extend the category of helping others/strangers – that is, identifiable persons – to more intangible contributions to the common good. It is in this discussion of beneficiaries that we can see a diffuse link between volunteering and active citizenship. Many volunteer activities such as participation in political riding associations or social movements, planting trees for reforestation or making submissions to environmental hearings can be considered a form of civic service or part of being an active, caring and informed citizen. At the same time, this also raises the question of the potential overlap between civic service and volunteering (e.g., Smith, 2004). For example, should the act of voting be considered volunteering? On the one hand, it is unpaid, freely chosen, formal and of benefit to society, and hence could be considered volunteering. On the other hand, it can be argued that it is simply a civic duty that is part of being a responsible member of a democracy. Another issue that arises in relation to the question of beneficiaries has to do with the private or public nature of the beneficiaries. In the past this was a non-issue, because most formal volunteering activities used to take place in the context of community organizations, non-profit organizations or governmental institutions. In recent years, however, we have witnessed the emergence of a new trend in formal volunteerism, which we address in chapter five: volunteering in for-profit organizations. In this context, it is pertinent to ask if it is conceptually acceptable to include this activity (which usually involves vulnerable people who need work experience like recent immigrants or youth) as volunteering, even if it is freely chosen, formal, unpaid, and of benefit to others. From a different

perspective, it could be conceptualized as labour exploitation. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore all these questions in depth, but we find it important to highlight again how the concept of intended beneficiaries, even if conceptualised on a continuum, fades into shades of grey.

So, does it matter whether we have a precise definition of volunteer work? Would this help us in our analysis of the different situations presented in this book? In part, in order to compare across different case studies, it is important to have a common definition of what we consider volunteer work to differentiate it from other unpaid work such as household and care work (e.g., Eichler, 2005, 2010). It is from this common base of experience that similarities and difference between volunteers' learning become illustrative and can make a contribution to understanding the links between volunteering and learning. However, acknowledging the different ways through which volunteerism can be viewed helps us expand our ability to recognize the multi-faceted nature of the volunteering. We now turn to a further exploration of the breadth and depth of the volunteering activity.

## VOLUNTEER WORK AND SOCIETY

In the previous section, we problematised the concept of "volunteering" by looking at the different components of the volunteer experience. A follow-up to the Cnaan et al. 1996 study was conducted in 2000 by Handy, Cnaan, Brudney, Ascoli, Meijs and Ranade. It included over 3000 questionnaires administered in Canada, the Netherlands, India, Italy, and the United States. They started from the premise developed in the Cnaan et al. study that the perception of who is considered a volunteer and who is not boils down to the net cost of the undertaking: the "concept of net cost best accounted for the perception of who is a volunteer" (1996, p. 381). Handy et al. (2000) found that the public holds the perception that the greater the self-sacrifice the more altruistic the action is perceived to be. Likewise, the more the work benefits strangers (rather than oneself or friends), the more it is totally unpaid, and the more uncoerced it is, the more it will be considered a "true" volunteer activity. That is, another way in which the volunteer experience can be categorised or classified is by looking at how it is perceived. If the net cost to the volunteer is considered to be high and the net benefit low, then the experience is considered to be "true" volunteering.

Another challenge in trying to understand the breadth and depth of the volunteer experience is the tendency to conflate it with the voluntary sector. While a great deal of volunteer work is indeed done through voluntary organizations, it is important to recognize that there is also widespread volunteer activity in the public sector, in the private sector and in the community at large (Brudney, 1990; Sheard, 1995). Additionally, volunteer work can take different forms, and volunteers are motivated (and sometimes coerced) by different circumstances. Let's consider, for instance, teaching literacy on a regular basis, helping a disabled neighbour with certain chores on occasional basis, undertaking an internship in a corporation in order to gain job experience, working outside of regular hours in a non-governmental organization

(NGO) in order to complete tasks, participating in a governing board, doing community work as mandated by a government agency, or participating in a social movement against child labour. All these activities can be considered volunteer work according to the general definition, but clearly they are of a very different nature. Some of them, like working beyond regular hours or doing long-term internships with negligible educational impact are even borderline cases, and some may consider them unpaid work rather than volunteer work.

One further important way of looking at volunteer work is a supposed shift from "old" to "new" volunteering. One of the main features of this shift is the decline of long-term, regular volunteer work and the increase of short-term commitments. This trend has resulted in the rise of episodic volunteers, that is, those who are only willing to engage in short and occasional tasks. In this regard, the classic volunteer used to make unconditional, regular and long-term commitments, while the new volunteers are more likely to set conditions, and to engage in a more irregular and erratic way. Another feature of this transition is that the classic volunteer was more idealistic, selfless and altruistic, and tended to put the needs of the organization first. The new volunteer, instead, tends to be more pragmatic, is more inclined to do a cost-benefit analysis before volunteering, and believes in a balance between individual needs and organizational needs (Hustinx, 2001; Macduff, 2004, 2005). This parallels the broader shifts to more contingent work and working lives that see many different careers throughout the life course. In part, peoples' volunteering vary with their shifting commitments to their paid employment.

A more nuanced analysis of this trend is provided by Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003) who contrast collective with reflexive styles of volunteering. They argue that rather than a transition from one type of volunteering to another, there are instead two distinct ideal types of volunteering that are concurrent. Collective volunteering "involves voluntary acts that are initiated, stipulated, and supervised by groups regardless of the intentions or preferences of the individual group members" (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003, p. 171). Reflexive volunteering "represents individuated forms of commitment in which the focus shifts to the volunteer as an individual actor" (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003, p. 172). This analytical framework highlights the extent to which a given volunteer activity is collectively or individually directed. This framework complements the continua-based definition provided by Cnaan et al. (1996). Using the later, we can come to some sense of the degree to which an activity can be considered volunteering. Using the former, we can see how the activity relates to the modern epoch and tension between individualism and collectivism. We now turn to a discussion of informal learning.

## INFORMAL LEARNING

> Adult education takes place in both formal and informal settings in a wide range of locations: in the community, the workplace, formal institutional environments, and the home. (Ontario Education, 2005, p. 48)

Having explored the breadth and depth of volunteer activity it is now time to turn our attention to the learning of volunteers. Before we can explore the connections between the two, we need to first investigate the relevant aspects of the learning literature. We are interested in exploring learning that results from the volunteer experience. While there is a significant body of knowledge exploring experiential learning and education (e.g., Chapman, McPhee, & Proadman, 1995; Dewey, Hickman, & Alexander, 1998; Kolb, 1984; Mooney & Edwards, 2001), we have found that in most cases, the learning activity that takes place through volunteerism does not fit the experiential model. Since most volunteering activities are not conceived of as learning activities, it is not surprising that there are limited opportunities for reflection and analysis – which are key parts of an experiential learning cycle – in the volunteer experience. This is not to say that experiential learning is of no relevance to our study but rather we needed to pursue another framework for understanding volunteers' learning.

As noted in the introduction, we have found that informal learning is a more appropriate lens through which to explore the learning activity of volunteers. An examination of the literature on informal learning prompts at least five general reflections. The first relates to the distinction between informal learning and other types of learning; the second to the perceived importance of informal learning; the third to the different forms of informal learning; the fourth to the tacit nature of most informal learning; and the last one to the implications of researching informal learning. We take up these reflections in turn.

The first refection concerns the absence of an agreed upon definition of informal learning. There is an abundance of definitional discussions of the term, and although space does not permit an exhaustive review, some general trends can be seen (e.g., Colley, Hodkinson, & Malcom, 2004; Eraut, 2000; Livingstone, 2006). Many definitions conceive informal learning as a residual category that includes all learning that falls outside of formal and non-formal education systems. This tripartite typology is not perfect. Indeed, some authors have argued that it is impossible to clearly distinguish one category from another, and called for discarding it altogether (e.g., Eraut, 2000). For our purposes, we accept the typology of formal, non-formal and informal learning because, following the insights of activity theory and situated learning theory, we conceptualise learning as taking place in social context (e.g., Bandura, 1971; Engeström & Miettinen, 1999; Seppanen, 2002). That is, learning is not merely the individual act of cognition; it is also a process that takes place through social action in particular contexts, and we find that there are distinct social and pedagogical relations embedded in each of these three types (formal, non-formal and informal). At the same time, we accept this typology with reservations because of the amount of confusion and overlapping that it creates. To clarify some of this confusion, we find it important to distinguish between informal learning as a site and as a process. As a site (and this is the most frequent understanding of the term), informal learning refers to that learning that takes place outside formal and non-formal education settings. As a process, informal learning refers to the

*way* in which learning is acquired, regardless of the setting. Hence, some types of informal learning (e.g., "the hidden curriculum," social relations of inclusion and exclusion, gender roles, etc.) can be also acquired in formal and non-formal settings (see, Colley et al., 2004; Mündel, Duguid, & Schugurensky, 2004).

Secondly, the implicit meaning conveyed in the concepts of formal, nonformal and informal learning implies a hierarchy of learning experiences. In this regard, Billet (2001) points out that "although unintended, this labelling [of formal, non-formal, and informal] has fostered a view that learning experiences in the workplace are incoherent as being 'informal' and 'incidental', and as failing to furnish critical insights" (p. 14). While Billet is writing from the context of paid workplace learning, the critique is still relevant to other contexts, including volunteer work. As Illich (1970) and other educational critics have commented, informal learning from experience is seldom given the same prestige as learning that is acquired (and accredited) through either formal or non-formal systems. A contributing factor to this phenomenon is that informal learning has been under-theorized and under-researched, largely because it is more difficult to uncover and analyse than formal or non-formal educational activities that have a set curriculum and objectives whose attainment can be identified and evaluated. Indeed, most of informal learning is incorporated as tacit knowledge, which was characterized by Polanyi as "that which we know but cannot tell" (1966, p. 4). This explains why informal learning has been for a long time a sort of "black box" about which not much was known.

A third consideration has to do with the different types of informal learning. In the pioneering work of Alan Tough (1971; 1979), for instance, informal learning was largely equated with self-directed learning. When considering the criteria of intentionality and awareness, Schugurensky (2000) identified three types of informal learning: self-directed learning (intentional and conscious), incidental learning (unintentional but conscious) and socialization (unintentional and unconscious). Likewise, Livingstone (2006) divides informal learning into two main types. The first type of informal training occurs "when teachers or mentors take responsibility for instructing others without sustained reference to an intentionally-organized body of knowledge in more incidental and spontaneous learning situations, such as guiding them in acquiring job skills or in community development activities" (p. 2). The second type is self-directed or collective informal learning, a residual category for "all other forms of intentional or tacit learning in which we engage either individually or collectively without direct reliance on a teacher or an externally-organized curriculum" (p. 2). All these attempts at defining the nuances recognize that within informal learning there is continuum of experiences that can be more or less structured and organized, and that can occur at the individual and/or at the collective level. Whereas this taxonomy of learning is not without problems, it can be useful in understanding how and what people learn – as long as we recognize the fluidity of the boundaries between and the potential simultaneity of the different learning types. A common concern in these and other understandings of informal learning is the need to recognize the degree of consciousness and intentionality of the learner.

In our case studies, we certainly found that there were different levels of intentionality to volunteers' learning. Nonetheless, rather than developing rigid categories into which to place our data, we have found it more useful to foreground the degree of intentionality – speaking of predominantly deliberate learning on the one hand and predominantly implicit learning on the other hand. For example, this continuum of intentionality follows closely the continuum of tacit learning developed by Eraut (2000). There is also a continuum of consciousness of the learning experience. Some of these learning experiences are evident and conscious (e.g., self-directed and planned learning) while others are more likely to be unconscious (e.g., socialization). Moreover, some learning may be unconscious at one time, but upon further reflection or elicitation may become conscious later on.

The fourth consideration arising from the literature is that most informal learning tends to be tacit. Tacit learning – and its conceptual cousin implicit cognition – can shed light on both the level of intentionality and awareness of a given learning activity. It can also shed light on the challenges of researching learning that, while informing research participants' actions, is difficult for them to explicitly articulate. That is, as research into implicit cognition and tacit learning has shown, it is possible to act on knowledge that we are unable to express or even know we know (Berry, 1996; Durrance, 1998; Polanyi, 1966; Underwood, 1996; Underwood & Bright, 1996). This is not only in the case for describing physical competencies such as riding a bicycle– in which case a complex understanding of physics would be necessary to give a complete explanation. It is also the case in adapting or learning the "culture" of a given organization and realizing what are the socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in that context.

The fifth consideration relates to the implications of informal learning research for public policy and for transformative social action. In terms of policy, an uncritical and individualized emphasis on informal learning (sometimes under the official discourse on lifelong learning) can lead to a withdrawal of the state and employers from education and training, and to a commodification of education, transferring most of the responsibilities and financial burdens to learners (Apple, 1982; De Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; Gorman, 2002; Newman, 2002; Parker, 2003). In terms of social action, exploring the tacit knowledge of volunteers involved in community-based organizations is not simply academic curiosity; it can also serve an emancipatory purpose.

## INFORMAL LEARNING AND VOLUNTEER WORK: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIPS

Past studies seldom consider learning as a possible primary motivation for volunteering (Percy, Barnes, Graddon, & Machell, 1988). To a large extent, this is due to the fact that surveys have not tended to include learning as a possible response item among the motivations for volunteering. While chapter two provides a detailed analysis of the Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating (CSGVP), here we highlight the fact that this significant survey of Canadians'

volunteering does not include learning as a possible reason for doing volunteer work. Therefore, based on that data, it is not possible to draw any conclusions about the significance of learning as a motivator for volunteering.

It may also be the case that, with the exception of internships, learning is not perceived as an important motivation for volunteering. This hypothesis is supported by research on the accreditation and rewarding of volunteer activities (Cox, 2002; Percy et al., 1988). Cox found that "explicitly educational motives are rarely cited as the reason; people engaged in voluntary activity perceive their activities as 'doing' rather than learning" (Cox, 2002, p. 166). Likewise, Percy et al. (1988) found that "an adult may speak about 'learning' as a motive for attending a voluntary organization, but is most likely not to do so" (p. 58). The 2004 CSGVP suggests that volunteers are more likely to perceive the opposite connection: 77% of respondents felt that the volunteering experience let them apply previous learning to a concrete situation. For reasons probably related to the invisibility and tacit character of informal learning, the connection between learning and volunteering is mostly perceived as a one-way street. The dominant perception is that we learn in school and to some extent in our professional work, and then we can put our acquired knowledge and skills to social use through volunteering.

Although CSGVP shows that volunteers acquire knowledge and skills from volunteering, for the most part learning is a peripheral theme in the field of volunteerism. To a large extent, this is because volunteering is usually seen as the business of doing, and learning is often seen as a more passive/reflective activity (Cox, 2002) or as the result of a structured curriculum. The few studies that focus on volunteering and learning note a strong association between the mission of the volunteers' organization and the content of what is learned (Andersen, 1999; Elsdon, 1995; Elsdon et al., 1995; Henry & Hughes, 2003; Ilsley, 1990; Kerka, 1998; Mooney & Edwards, 2001; Percy et al., 1988). We see this confirmed in our case studies as well: volunteers learn significantly about topics related to the vision and operational realities of the organizations they are involved with. While an important finding in and of itself, it is not particularly surprising. Our work uses the existing studies as a starting point for exploring other informal learning from the broad range of volunteer activities that study participants engaged in.

One of the possible reasons to explain the peripheral place of learning in the volunteering field is that most of the learning is tacit. Similar to previous research on volunteers' learning, we found that, on first blush, many volunteers said that they were not engaged in an educational activity during their volunteer work, and most had difficulties identifying particular learning outcomes resulting from their volunteering activities. However, once we elicited different areas of learning through a series of questions asking about changes in knowledge, skills, abilities and values, many volunteers were able to recognize the amount of learning acquired in the different areas through their volunteering.

The acknowledgement of informal learning in some instances helps us to recognize that educational activities take place outside the walls of educational institutions and

training programs. From a social perspective, this is particularly relevant when the informal learning helps volunteers to challenge the official curriculum of schools and the messages conveyed by the mass media, and assists them to contribute to, for example, social justice. The formal recognition of informal learning is also a step forward in valuing knowledge and skills acquired outside of schools and universities. However, this can also be understood as either an abdication of responsibility of an educational enterprise or a commodification of learning creating a better workforce.[1] Ultimately, it is likely both at the same time. Nonetheless, it has been important for us to be aware of these dynamics as we conducted our research.

The learning dimension of volunteer work is not only often ignored by volunteers themselves, it is also off the radar of researchers and voluntary organisations. Eldson et al. (1995), after reviewing the literature on the connection between learning and volunteering (pp. 24–26), concluded that very few studies exist that directly explore the learning that results from volunteering. Ilsley (1990) found that voluntary organisations do not pay much attention to the learning of their volunteer members:

> Although most formal volunteer organizations offer training programs, we found that much of the actual learning in volunteer organizations is unplanned. Perhaps relatedly, learning – especially forms of learning other than instrumental/didactic – appears to be undervalued in most volunteer programs. This is highly unfortunate. (p. 71)

In our studies, we found that volunteers acquire learning related to their specific contexts, from learning how to produce a newsletter to making coffee for large groups, and from the provincial legislation about housing evictions to the chemical make-up of acid rain. They also acquire institutional and political knowledge about their organizations, specific social realities and the larger context. Sometimes they revisit their own assumptions and change their perspective on a particular issue or a population group. Over time, they also develop and refine a variety of social and practical skills, as well as attitudes and dispositions.

## CLOSING REMARKS

As we have seen, there is a variety of ways in which volunteer activity can be conceived and classified. The two major approaches that we will be using are based on a series of continua rooted in the classical definition of formalised work that is unremunerated and freely chosen. This is complemented by a continuum between collective and reflexive volunteering. This last continuum in part reflects the changes that have occurred in the field of volunteering with the changes in the world of work and beyond. In a general sense, we adhere to the classical definition of volunteer work recognising the need to push its boundaries to include important insights from our case studies on immigrant volunteers and social movement members.

Generally, the learning of volunteers is informal. Recognising some of the shortcomings of this traditional classification of learning activity, we still chose to refer

to volunteers' learning as informal to reflect the fact that we are elucidating the learning that takes place outside of both the formal classroom and non-formal workshops or conferences. Non-formal education activities in particular complement volunteers' learning, but the predominant learning modality and site have been found to be informal.

In this book, we are trying to serve two principal aims. The first is to complement existing research that details the (informal) learning that takes place as people volunteer. The work cited above has begun the task of cataloguing the breadth and depth of volunteer learning particularly as it relates to organizational mission. The case studies presented in the following chapters will supplement these findings. The second is to explore the connections between this learning and the volunteer experience, considering a variety of volunteering experiences. As we have seen, there are few studies that explore the connections between volunteering and learning. We hope to make a modest contribution to this field.

## NOTE

[1] This can be especially seen in the case of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (Thomas, 1998) where recognition of prior learning can either be a recognition of a person's previous experience through life and/or a commodification of that learning.

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SUSAN STOWE

# 2. VOLUNTEER WORK AND INFORMAL LEARNING: MAJOR INTERNATIONAL AND CANADIAN TRENDS

## INTRODUCTION

In order to have an understanding of the realities of volunteer work we need to complement our previous discussion with information about the reality of volunteers – the political, social and economic context. The impact of volunteers is significant. In a 2007 survey, Canadians aged 15 and older contributed "almost 2.1 billion hours, an amount equivalent to 1.1 million full-time jobs" (Hall, Lasby, Ayer, & Gibbons, 2009, p. 10) to the Canadian economy and Statistics Canada (2009) reports that there was a total of 12.5 million volunteer jobs in Canada in 2007. Similarly, a study of 22 OECD countries in 2004, estimates that volunteer contributions (made by approximately 28% of the population) were equivalent to 10.6 million full-time jobs and their value added amounted to $840 billion, representing 3.5% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of those countries (Salamon, Anheier, List, et al., 1999; Salamon, Sokolowski, & List, 2004). Moreover, volunteers contribute significant amounts to the Canadian economy in out-of-pocket expenses ($841 million in the late 1980s) that are not reimbursed (Hall, McKeown, & Roberts, 2001).

The intention of this chapter is to provide an overview of the role that volunteering plays within our political economy as a whole and of the impact it has for individuals. The concept of political economy was originally developed in the 18th century to refer to the study of the economies of states (also known as polities). Today, it usually refers to the study of the relationships between economic and political dynamics, including the role of the state and public policies in mediating those dynamics, on the one hand, and the interests of capital and labour, on the other. We begin the chapter investigating the political economy of the volunteer sector. We will then examine the demographic profile of volunteers – who they are, what activities they are involved in, and what type of learning takes place.

## IMPACT ON POLITICAL ECONOMY

In chapter one, we noted the significant financial and time contributions of volunteers. Less visible are the changes in how volunteer work fits into the broader political economy of Canada. Volunteering has generally made an important contribution to the common good either directly, by working with specific populations such as individuals with disabilities or the economically disadvantaged, or indirectly, by

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lobbying the state for policy changes. There has generally been a close association with the social welfare system in Canada, but recently the nature of that relationship has changed. Remembering here not to conflate volunteering and the voluntary sector, we argue that there has been a change from volunteering providing services that complement the welfare state to volunteering being the predominant form in which a particular service is delivered. We can see this in both in the voluntary sector organizations who "employ" volunteers to provide services previously carried out by the state as well as in our case study of immigrants who volunteer to gain Canadian experience. In some ways, this is simply the exploitation of volunteer labour, which is often used as a cost-saving measure by governments.

One way to explore the changing face of the context of volunteering is by viewing it through the lens of unpaid work which has a significantly different perspective than the one provided by volunteering and the assumption of altruism and contribution to the common good. The overall (Work and Lifelong Learning) WALL network examines work and learning relations through twelve case study projects. Among these projects, there are two that are particularly devoted to exploring the learning dimension of unpaid work. Two of these studies, undertaken by a team led by Margrit Eichler (2005, 2010), focuses on the lifelong learning involved in unpaid household and caring work, which is often carried out by women. Much of the work done by women, predominantly in the "private sphere" is not visible or accounted for. Many women experience a double or triple workday; in addition to paid employment, there is considerable housework and work caring for children, elders, and other family members. On top of that, often there is also volunteer work in community associations or neighbourhood groups. While there have been attempts to make this double day visible, and find some way of accounting for all of this work that goes into the reproduction of labour, for the most part it remains invisible (Waring, 1988, 1999; Eichler 2005). While it is beyond the scope of this book to explore in depth the connections between our study and the Eichler team's study, it is important to highlight that the same realities of the so-called "new economy" that have the effect of obfuscating household and care work are developing an increased dependence on social service provision through another form of unpaid work: volunteering.

Volunteer work has always made an important contribution to building healthy, vibrant and caring communities. Volunteer work arises from the good faith, the solidarity, the concern for the common good, and the altruistic spirit of well meaning women, men and children. At the same time, in contemporary capitalist economies, volunteer work can also be understood as labour exploitation. This highlights a key tension for the voluntary sector: on the one hand, volunteer work can play an important role in nurturing active, critical, and engaged citizens and vibrant communities. On the other hand, it can simply facilitate the state's use of unpaid labour to deliver public services. The latter has become a particular concern in the last two decades with the consolidation of neoliberalism as a guiding principle for state function. The retrenchment of the state is one of the dynamics that characterizes the transition from the welfare state to the neoliberal state. Generally speaking, it refers to the withdrawal

of the state from a variety of social and economic activities, and the increasing role of the private sector and civil society in the provision of social services previously covered by the state. An important dimension of the retrenchment of the state is the reduction of public expenditures, the privatization of public services and public enterprises, the erosion of entitlements, and the downloading of service provision to lower levels of government and voluntary organizations. The pressures for state retrenchment and the subsequent funding cutbacks in the provision of public services have resulted in massive downloading to the voluntary and non-profit sectors, which are forced to fill the gap left by the withdrawal of the welfare state. This phenomenon has given rise to what some call the "shadow state". This is a concept that refers to third sector organizations that provide essential services to a state's citizens through an intricate relationship with the state (e.g., outsourcing certain services to non-profits) and often rely on unpaid volunteer labour for service delivery (Mitchell, 2001; see also Smith & Lipsky, 1993). For example, one study conducted in Ontario found that across five different centres, the estimated amount of volunteer labour was equivalent to more than half of their average yearly budget (of course, the value of the volunteer labour is not included in the budget) (Neysmith & Reitsma-Street, 2000).

In this context, volunteering has become an increasingly large part of the provision of social goods and services. It has also become a larger part of people's lives in areas ranging from food banks and libraries, to affordable housing construction, hospitals and schools. Hence, the state's increasing reliance on its citizens' volunteer work can be interpreted, at least in part, as an abdication of state responsibility. As Miller (1998) notes, many non-profit organizations still use the language of citizenship, volunteering, and local democracy in spite of the fact that now, instead of providing supplementary services, they are the primary providers of state-defined public services. On the other hand, even though volunteers are often seen as an inexpensive way to provide services due to their free labour, organizations usually face costs for having volunteers. Among these costs are the salary of a volunteer coordinator, training activities, food and transportation expenses, and volunteer recognition activities (Grantmaker Forum on Community & National Service, 2003).

At the same time, as a result of changes resulting from the "new" political economy, the Canadian voluntary sector is facing a variety of unprecedented challenges. One of them is the increasing pressure to compete for funding (particularly in the area of health and social services) with other non-profit and voluntary organizations and, in some instances, with private business. Paradoxically, this is complemented with a pressure for mandated collaborations with other organizations. Moreover, whereas organizations were traditionally given funding in the form of general support, financial support has now shifted towards project-based funding. This is associated with the restriction of funding to direct program costs, with little provision for infrastructure or the administrative overhead associated with program delivery, putting more pressure on fundraising and on volunteer work. Likewise, organizations must face the shortening in the length of time for which funding is provided, a challenge that is compounded by frequently changing funding priorities.

On top of this, there are increasing requirements for financial accountability (Hall, Barr, Easwaramoorthy, Sokolowski, & Salamon, 2005).

To this point, we have focused on the context of volunteering through voluntary sector organizations. In order to complement this picture and keep the sector distinct from the activity, we turn to the case of immigrants who volunteer to gain access to the labour market. This is a clear case showing how a shift in language can hide what is actually taking place. During the settlement process, by framing immigrants' activities as "volunteering", rather than as training or internships, we can ignore the significant potential for exploitation of these well-trained individuals. Greater detail about this case study will be provided in Chapter Five. For now, we provide a few basic elements. The Canadian government encourages trained professionals from a variety of fields to immigrate to Canada. When these immigrants arrive, they find that their professional training is, in many cases, not recognized by the professional associations that regulate many professions as a proxy for the state. Additionally, even immigrants whose training is recognized or whose profession is not regulated encounter difficulties finding employment because of their lack of Canadian experience.

Many voluntary sector organizations helping with immigrant settlement suggest that immigrants volunteer with a relevant organization to gain Canadian experience. Ideally, this takes place in an organization in their field of expertise, which means that in some cases, this voluntary activity takes place in the for-profit and government sectors. As we will see in the later part of this chapter and in the case study, there is certainly benefit to immigrants who engage in this type of activity, from understanding relevant Canadian legislation to developing relationships with other Canadians. The challenge is that by framing this activity as volunteering, the exploitative aspects are hidden under a veneer of an altruistic activity. This is a great case of reflexive volunteering in that the focus is much more on the benefits to the individual (this is not to diminish the desire of immigrants to make meaningful contributions to the common good, but rather to foreground the semi-coercive nature of this volunteering activity).

Another aspect of the political economy of volunteering in Canada that is worth noting is the profiles of the volunteers themselves. We will delve into this in greater detail in the next section of this chapter, but for now, an important note is what is referred to as the "80/20 rule": 80% of volunteer work is done by 20% of volunteers. Indeed, in most organizations there tends to be a small percentage of volunteers who show up more times and work more hours than the average. These volunteers sometimes stretch themselves to the point that they perform core functions in more than one organization. As disproportionate as that sounds, the Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating (CSGVP) found that the top 27% of volunteers (11% of Canadians 15 years and older) contributed 78% of all volunteer hours in 2007 (Hall et al., 2009). This issue is not often acknowledged, and in our study many of these "overworked volunteers" complained that sometimes they felt like they were being taken advantage of. This was particularly evident in the

case of housing co-operatives, where it is expected that all members take a role as volunteers, but not all fulfill this expectation. This is known in the co-operative literature as the "free-rider" syndrome, a term borrowed from the field of economics. Although there are certainly some forms of public recognition of the contribution of volunteers,[1] the disproportionate amount of volunteer work done by relatively few has not received enough public attention.

The picture that we have painted of society's increasing dependence on volunteers highlights the dangers and negative impacts of state downloading to the voluntary sector. We are certainly critical of policies that allow the state to abdicate its responsibility and to shift the responsibility to individual volunteers or to non-profit organizations that rely on volunteer workers. At the same time, the involvement and engagement of volunteers in their communities is clearly a positive development at the individual and at the collective level. Many of these citizens are taking an interest in their communities and are working—without pay—in different ways to "give back" and improve their communities. The amount of volunteering and learning that takes place in Canada will become more evident in the following section when we focus on who is helping their community and how much learning is actually taking place in these volunteer work activities.

## OVERVIEW OF WHO VOLUNTEERS IN CANADA

This section attempts to answer questions about who is volunteering in Canada and to closely review the kinds of learning activities that are undertaken by those who volunteer. The focus will be on volunteers who are performing unpaid work for organizations or groups. There are three main data sources used throughout this section to highlight the demographics and changes in the political economy that are described above.(Note: In other words, bring together the two paragraphs; the second paragraph is only one sentence long).

The first one is a national survey conducted in 2004 which is part of the Work and Lifelong Learning Project (WALL).[2] The survey of over 9,000 respondents asked a variety of questions about participation in both paid and unpaid work activities and participation in learning activities that included both formal and informal learning.[3]

The second is the 1997 New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL) national survey.[4] There were 1,562 respondents who took part in the 1997 NALL survey on learning and work activities. With the intention of creating a longitudinal study of learning and work, 600 of the 1,562 respondents were re-interviewed in 2004 as a supplement to the WALL survey. Many of the questions that were asked in NALL are comparable to WALL, making it the first large longitudinal study of its kind in Canada.

The third national survey that looked at volunteer activities is the Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating (CSGVP), which is a national survey that focuses on both the practices of donation and participation in volunteering. The CSGVP was conducted by Imagine Canada (formerly the Canadian Centre

for Philanthropy) in 1997,[5] 2000, 2004, and 2007. The survey's focus was on contributions of both time and money by Canadians to other Canadians and to their communities. In all three years, the survey was conducted on Canadians who were 15 years old or more. The sample size for the 1997 survey consisted of 18,301 Canadians; in 2000 of 14,724 Canadians; in 2004 of 20,832; and, in 2007 of 20,510. The results from this survey were obtained mainly from reports published by Imagine Canada. Access to the raw data is not available to the general public at this point in time.

Both the NALL and WALL projects focused on Canadian's involvement in paid and unpaid work, and formal and informal learning. The CSGVP focused mainly on donating and volunteering in organizations. In all of these surveys basic demographic questions are used to enable us to analyze who is participating in these activities and the type of involvement in learning through participating in unpaid work activities.

## SURVEY DESIGN AND DEFINITIONS OF VOLUNTEER WORK

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the definition of volunteer work is not consistent for all researchers. In this chapter, the definitions used are restricted by the question posed in each of the surveys. Comparisons among the surveys are difficult because wording and question placement differences in each survey might result in some of the data being more or less inclusive. Caution must be used when looking at comparisons among the different surveys. The CSGVP, however, has been consistent with their question among the various years in which the survey was carried out.

Volunteer work has been divided into two types: informal and formal. Informal volunteer work includes acts that directly help others which were not linked to an organization such as someone helping neighbours or others in the community (Hall et al., 2001). In the WALL survey, the specific question posed to find out about informal volunteering was: "In a TYPICAL week, how much time do you spend helping out friends and neighbours in your community?" Formal volunteer work refers to work that was carried out for an organization or a group. The specific question for formal volunteer work in the WALL survey was: "In the past year did you do any unpaid volunteer work in any organization or group?" It is important to note here that informal volunteer work often excludes activities that help family members such as caring for children or elders.

In the CSGVP surveys, the questions used in all years (1997, 2000, 2004, and 2007) remained the same. In order to determine the rate of participation in volunteer activities, respondents were asked a set of questions rather than just one question. In comparison to the WALL survey, the opening question was: "My first set of questions deal with unpaid volunteer activities done as part of a group or organization in the past 12 months, that is, since October, 1999?" Respondents were then asked specifically about participation in certain types of activities, such as working on

a campaign, fundraising, etc. The slight difference in the question wording used between the WALL survey and the CSGVP may have affected the way a respondent reported participation in volunteer work.

In the NALL survey, respondents were asked: "About how many hours a week, if any, are you usually involved in any community activities, including civic or political organizations, service clubs, fraternal, cultural, educational, or hobby organizations, sports or recreational teams, religious, neighbourhood or school associations, or other community groups?" The wording of the question in the NALL survey was much more inclusive than both the WALL and the CSGVP because it included any community activities whether these activities were related to volunteer work or belonging to the organization or group.

## WHO VOLUNTEERS IN CANADA

Volunteering has been in existence for many years in Canada and has grown exponentially throughout the years. The first large national survey conducted in Canada on volunteering was in 1987 as part of the CSGVP project. The 1987 survey revealed that 26.8% of Canadians of the age of 15 or more worked for free for a voluntary organization in the preceding twelve month period (Hall, Knighton, Reed, Bussiere, McRae, & Bowen, 1998). Based on the 1997 CSGVP survey, the percentage of Canadians who volunteered increased from 26.8% in 1987 to 31.9% in 1997 (Hall et al., 2001). Even though the questions changed slightly between the 1987 and the 1997 survey, the increase in volunteers in the 10 year period is significant. In 2000, we saw a decline in the percentage of volunteers. Based on 2000 CSGVP results, there has been a decrease to 27% of Canadians who are 15 years of age or more who volunteer (Hall et al., 2001). However, the percentage of Canadians who volunteer increased to 42% in 2004 (Hall et al., 2006). In 2007, the percentage of volunteers was higher by 4% (46%) than in 2004 (Hall et al., 2009). The results from the WALL survey from 2004 show a very similar picture in participation as the CSGVP here: nearly half (42%) of Canadians surveyed reported doing volunteer work in an organization or group.

Based on the results from the 1997 and the 2004 CSGVP surveys, there has been an increase in the actual number of hours that Canadians spend volunteering. In 2007 on average volunteers worked 166 hours per year compared to 168 hours in 2004 and 162 hours in 2000 and 149 hours in 1997 (Hall et al., 2001; Hall et al., 2006; Hall et al. 2009).[6] As highlighted earlier, the 80/20 rule in the voluntary sector dominated. We should not be surprised to learn that the majority of the hours contributed by volunteers were from the top one quarter of volunteers. In 2000, those who were in the top quartile in number of hours spent volunteering, contributed on average 471 hours per year compared to an average of 431 hours in 1997.[7]

It is important to keep in mind the political economy and context in which changes in volunteering take place. The number of Canadians who volunteer and the number of hours of volunteer work are influenced by many factors that in turn

relate to changes in the economy and the workplace, among others. As we discussed near the beginning of this chapter, for example, in 1999 mandatory volunteering was implemented for Ontario's high school students, which had an impact on the percentage of Canadians who volunteer, the age of volunteers, and the number of hours of volunteer work. As well, funding to non-profit and charitable organizations was cut in many provinces in Canada. This likely led to an increase in reliance on volunteers while at the same time support provided to these volunteers may be decreasing. As well, in poorer areas people may choose to volunteer for an organization rather than to donate money.

As we saw earlier, there exists both formal and informal volunteering. It is important to recognize the extent to which Canadians participate in informal volunteering. In this particular research, informal volunteering is defined as those who help friends or neighbours rather than volunteering for an organization. Based on WALL data, in 2004 one third (34%) of Canadians reported spending time helping friends or neighbours in their community. The CSGVP 2007 results show that the large majority (84%) of Canadians help others who are not living in their home. The CSGVP question was much more inclusive in that respondents were not asked to exclude family members. In the WALL question, respondents were first asked a question about the amount of time spent on caring for a child or an elderly person. The high rate of participation in informal volunteering found in the CSGVP was because respondents included the child care and elderly care that was not included in the WALL survey. The following section focuses only on those who participated in formal volunteer work.

## FORMAL VOLUNTEER WORK

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CANADIAN VOLUNTEER

There are certain characteristics that differentiate those who volunteer from those who do not. In this section we will further delve into the characteristics that set volunteers apart from non-volunteers. The findings below rely on the 2004 WALL data unless otherwise stated.

#### *Age*

Younger Canadians between the ages of 18 and 24 and those in the mid-adulthood are most likely to participate in volunteer work. As can be seen in Chart One, nearly half of younger Canadians between the ages of 18 and 24 (48%) and Canadians in their middle-ages (35–44 years, 44%; and 45–54 years, 47%) are donating their time to organizations or groups. Slightly more than one third of those who are between 55 and 64 years old (39%) and those over 65 (35%) volunteer. The finding that those over the age of 55 are less likely to volunteer is consistent with other studies (Statistics Canada, 2011).

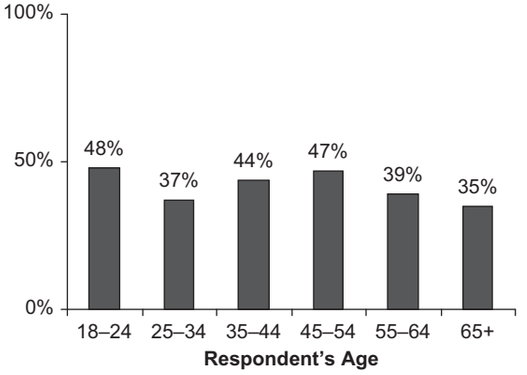


*Chart 1. Canadians who volunteer by age.*

Although more youth and middle-aged adults are volunteering, the highest number of hours spent volunteering is for those who are over the age of 65. Based on the results from the CGSVP in 2000, on average those between the ages of 15 and 24 reported volunteering 130 hours per year compared to Canadians who are 65 years old or more who reported volunteering 269 hours per year (Hall et al., 2001).

### *Gender*

Women have always been portrayed as more likely to volunteer than men. It was not until the 1987 national survey on volunteering that these perceptions were confirmed. Based on the 2004 data from the WALL survey, women (45%) are still more likely to volunteer in an organization or a group than men (39%). However, based on the 2000 figures of the CSGVP, men report spending more hours per year on average volunteering than women (170 versus 155, respectively) (Hall et al., 2001).

### *Number of Years in Canada*

The analysis revealed that there is no difference in the percentage of people who volunteer based on the number of years in Canada. In other words, those who have been in Canada for less than one year are no more likely to volunteer than those who have been in Canada longer. As well, there are no differences based on citizenship status. Although there may be no differences in the percentage of "New Canadians" who volunteer, their reasons for volunteering are very different from those who have been in Canada longer. We will see more on this in the sections below and in the chapter on immigrant workers.

### *Ethnicity*

In the WALL survey, respondents were asked to identify their ethno-racial origin based on a number of categories that were read to them.[8] Using the data from this

question,[9] an analysis was carried out to determine whether there are differences in volunteering based on ethno-racial origin. The findings indicate that Chinese (45%) and White (43%) are slightly more likely to report doing volunteer work than South Asian (35%) and Black (31%). Of those who identified themselves as belonging to a category other than the above, one third (34%) report volunteering.

### *Marital Status and Number of Children*

Based on WALL data, married people (44%) are slightly more likely to volunteer than single people (40%) and than those who are separated, divorced, or widowed (34%). These numbers are consistent with both the 1997 and 2000 CSGVP results. However, looking at the average number of hours volunteered, we see that those who are separated, divorced or widowed work more volunteer hours than married and single people (Hall et al., 2001). When combining gender and marital status, married men (42%) are much more likely to volunteer than single (33%) or divorced, widowed, or separated (29%) men. Women's marital status has little impact on volunteering.

Canadians with children are also more likely to report doing volunteer work (47%) than those who do not have children (39%). The reason for these differences will become more apparent when we look at the type of organization in which people volunteer. Those with children are more likely to work for non-profit organizations in their community such as schools and sports/recreation clubs.

### *Employment Status*

Canadians who are currently working (44%) and those who have worked in the past but who are not currently working (41%) are more likely to volunteer than those who have never worked (37%). Those who are currently working or plan to look for work (45%) are more likely to volunteer than those who do not plan to look for work (37%). As well, those who are working less than 30 hours a week or more than 50 are also more likely to volunteer than those who are working between 30 and 49 hours a week. The results are shown in Chart Two.

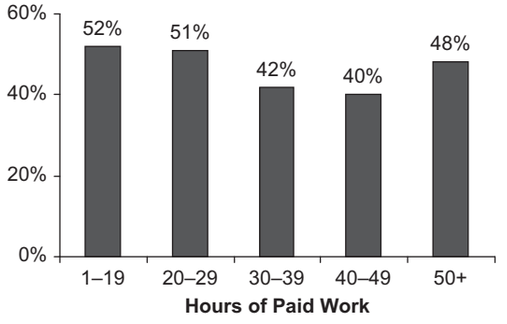


*Chart 2. Percentage of Canadians who volunteer by number of paid work hours.*

As we have seen above, Canadians who volunteer are more likely to be women, married, with children, either younger or older, and working either part-time or full-time.

### *Educational Level*

Canadians with higher levels of education are more likely to volunteer. As seen inChart Three, those with an educational attainment level of less than high school(29%) and those with complete high school (37%) are less likely to volunteer than those from higher educational levels. This is consistent with previous research that shows that those who obtain higher levels of education are more likely to participate in adult education than those from lower education levels (Hall et al., 2006).

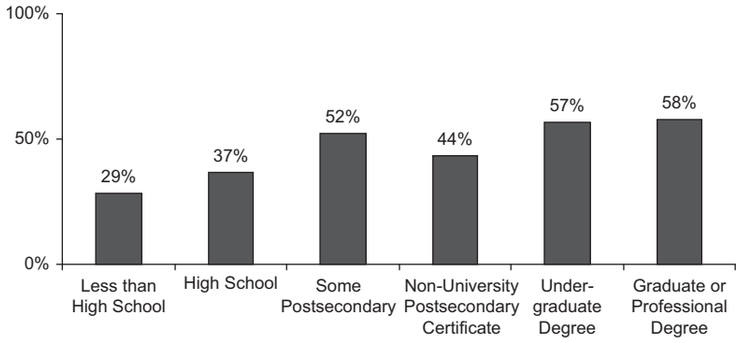


*Chart 3. Canadians who volunteer by education level.*

### *Income Level*

There are no differences in volunteering based on income except for those in the highest income levels. Those who earn $70,000 or more are more likely to volunteer for an organization than those who earn less. One plausible explanation for this is that those who earn higher incomes are likely to have more discretionary time than those who are working in low paying jobs.

## TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS FOR WHICH VOLUNTEERS WORK

Volunteers work in many types of organizations and groups. Based on the findings in the 2004 WALL survey, the types of organizations where volunteers do their work are more likely to be religious organizations (19%) and school or neighbourhood organizations (19%), followed by sports (12%) and cultural (10%) organizations. Fewer report working for service clubs (8%) and political organizations (5%). A large percentage of respondents reported volunteering in a type of organization other than the ones mentioned above (44%).[10]

It is not possible to determine whether there has been much of a change in the types of organizations that volunteers work for between the CSGVP 2000 survey and the WALL 2004 survey because of the differences in the questions posed. For example, in the WALL survey culture and sports were two separate groups, whereas in the CSGVP they were one group. Despite these differences, few changes are found based on the types of organizations in which people volunteer.

Based on the CSGVP, in 2000, nearly one quarter of Canadians (23%) volunteered in culture and recreation; one fifth helped in social services (20%); 14% volunteered in religious organizations; another 13% volunteered in education and research; and 13% volunteered in health-related organizations. There were very few changes between 1997 and 2000 with regards to the types of organizations to which Canadians donated their time (Hall et al., 2001).

We can see that in both the WALL and CSGVP survey results that Canadians are more likely to give their time to cultural, recreational, educational and social service organizations than to other types of organizations. There are differences based on gender with regard to the types of organizations for which Canadians volunteer. Men are more likely than women to volunteer for sports and recreation (18% vs. 8%, respectively) or service clubs (10% vs. 7%, respectively), whereas women are more likely than men to volunteer for religious organizations (22% vs. 16%, respectively) and school or neighbourhood associations (23% vs. 13%, respectively). The results are shown in the Chart Four below.

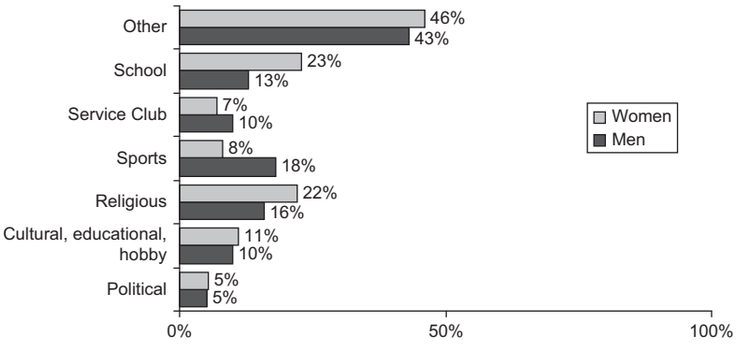


*Chart 4. Type of organization by gender.*

There are quite a few differences in the types of organizations in which people choose to volunteer, based on their age. Younger people are less likely to work in political and religious organizations than other age groups. Those in middle-aged groups, such as between 35 and 54, are more likely to volunteer for sports organizations or schools with a sharp decline after the age of 55. This is likely an indication that people who have school-aged children are more likely to volunteer for organizations in which their children participate. This finding is consistent with the earlier finding

that married men are more likely to volunteer than single, separated, divorced or widowed men. Older Canadians are more likely to volunteer for religious groups and service clubs. No differences were found based on age for those who volunteer for cultural, educational or hobby organizations.

Differences based on whether respondents were born in Canada or not exist only for two types of organizations. Those who are not born in Canada are more likely to volunteer for a religions organization (25% vs. 18%, respectively) and those born in Canada are more likely to volunteer for a sports organizations (14% vs. 6%, respectively). No differences were found for the other types of organizations.

## REASONS TO VOLUNTEER

Based on the WALL survey, the main reason given for volunteering is to contribute to the community (83%). One quarter of volunteers (26%) report that the main reason for volunteering is to improve their job opportunities. Fewer are volunteering because they are required to volunteer (7%). Although it is a small percentage of the population who volunteer because they are required to do so, it is important to note that this likely refers to those who must volunteer as part of their education or as mandatory community work.

In some provinces in Canada, youth who are attending high school have been mandated to do volunteer work for 40 hours in order to receive their diploma. This may in part explain the increase in the percentage of youth who participate in volunteer activities found in between the 1997 and 2004 CSGVP (Hall et al., 2006). Youth are more likely to report that their motivation for volunteering is to obtain skills for future employment (Volunteer Canada, 2001).

The 2004 CSGVP survey found that a large majority of volunteers (92%) donate time to an organization in which they believe in the cause. Another large majority (77%) volunteer because it allows them to put their skills and experience to good use. Slightly fewer report volunteering because they are personally affected by the cause (60%) or because volunteering is an opportunity to explore one's strengths (49%). Slightly less than half of respondents report volunteering to network or meet other people (47%). Fewer mention volunteering because their friends volunteer (43%). Approximately one quarter (22%) report volunteering in order to increase job opportunities (Hall et al., 2006). These findings are very similar to the ones of the 2004 WALL survey. Less than one quarter (22%) volunteer because of religious obligations or beliefs.

We saw that findings from both the 2000 and 1997 CSGVP surveys were similar to those from the 2004 WALL survey with regards to one quarter (23%) of volunteers reporting that volunteering increased their employment prospects. Those who were unemployed were more likely to report the helpfulness in finding a job (62%), as were younger Canadians between the ages of 15 and 24 (78%). There was a slight increase between 1997 and 2000 in the percentage of volunteers who were employed who reported that their volunteer work was helpful in finding work (34% and 37%, respectively). This was more so the case for younger volunteers between the ages of 15 and 24 (464, or 49%) (Hall et al., 2001).

The majority reported that volunteering is an important component to their lives (90%). The importance of volunteering becomes more important as respondents get older. The results are shown in Chart Five. This change may be related, in middle age, to diminishing priority for education, and in later years to diminishing priority for paid work.

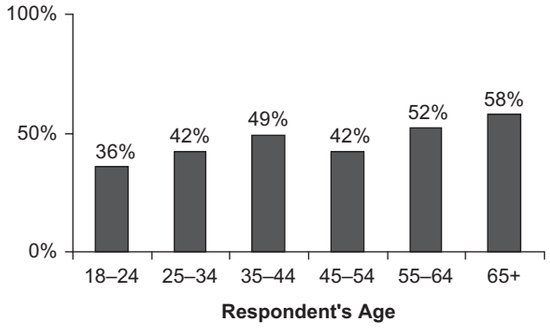


*Chart 5. Volunteers who report that volunteering is very important by age.*

In summary, we have seen that a large group of Canadians are volunteering for various reasons including increasing their work skills. We have also seen that volunteering becomes a more important part of people's lives as they age. The following section focuses on the learning patterns, including both formal and informal learning, for those who do formal volunteer work.

## LEARNING PATTERNS OF VOLUNTEERS

### *Adult Education*

Based on the results from the WALL survey in 2004, Canadians who volunteer (excluding full-time students) are more likely to be taking adult education courses (38%) compared to those who do not volunteer (22%). Volunteering appears to be a factor that affects participation in adult education courses. Even if we hold education levels constant, we still find that volunteers who currently have university degrees (46%) are more likely to participate in adult education than non-volunteers who have a university degree (33%). In other words, volunteering increases the likelihood that people take formal part-time courses.

Overall, the results from the WALL 2004 survey show that of Canadians who report taking courses, volunteers are more likely to take non-credit courses, whereas those who do not volunteer are more likely to be taking courses that are credit courses. Moreover, volunteers are more likely to report that the courses taken are not related to their paid employment compared to non-volunteers who tend to report that the courses taken are primarily related to their employment.

Volunteers are more likely to report taking general interest courses (22%) compared to those who do not volunteer (16%) (see Chart Six). Likewise, those who do not volunteer are more likely to report taking courses to upgrade their job or career (35%) compared to those who volunteer (27%). When asked about the usefulness of the courses taken, almost half of volunteers who are participating in adult education report that the courses they are taking have been useful for their volunteer work (21% very useful and 20% somewhat useful).

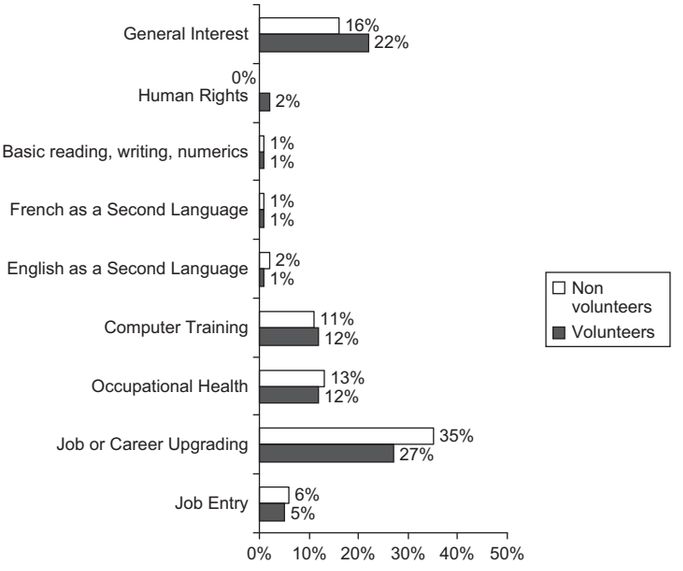


*Chart 6. Types of courses by volunteer status.*

As we have noted at the beginning of this section, volunteers are more likely to take courses than non-volunteers. Chart 6 informs us that this is especially noticeable for general interest courses, and to a lesser extent human rights related courses. As we also have seen previously, many volunteers report that they volunteer to increase their work skills, and many point out that volunteering helped them with their current employment or in finding new work. Interestingly, however, those who do not volunteer are more likely to take courses related to job or career upgrading. This may be related to professional development courses offered by their workplaces. Both groups were as likely to take courses on occupational health, computer training, job entry or literacy.

### *Informal Learning*

Based on the results from the 2004 WALL survey, a large majority (80%) of volunteers report engaging in informal learning that is directly related to their volunteer activities.Volunteers who participate in informal learning through their

volunteer work reported doing so, on average, nearly 4 hours per week. Overall, comparing the amount of formal learning done by volunteers in the previous section, we see that volunteers are more likely to learning informally.

Proportionately, those who do volunteer work spend more time per week in informal learning activities in their volunteer work than in any other sphere (employment or housework). As seen in Chart Seven, volunteers spend on average 7 hours per week doing volunteer work; of those 7 hours, on average 4 hours are spent learning informally for their volunteer work. The ratio of informal learning to time spent doing the activity is higher in volunteer work than for employment-related informal learning (5 hours learning to 38 hours working) or housework-related informal learning (6 hours learning to 17 hours of housework). Volunteers are not only helping the community but they are also increasing their skills through informal learning.

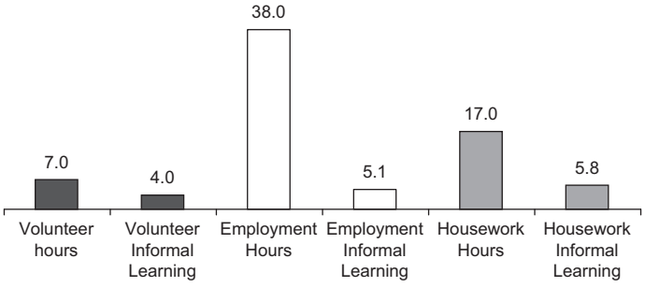


*Chart 7. Hours per week spent in work and in informal learning.*

We have seen that volunteers spend proportionately more hours learning informally in their volunteer work than in any other sphere. This may be a consequence of the more discretionary nature of volunteer work than either paid work or house work. Both paid work and house work must be done and often they leave less discretionary time for people to engage in intentional learning activities.

It is important here to delve further into this notion of learning through volunteer work to see if there are certain demographic groups that are spending more time in learning. The following analysis looks at whether there are differences in the amount of time spent doing informal learning for various demographic groups.

The analysis based on gender has found that women are more likely to report more hours of informal learning than men. This is not surprising considering that that earlier we indicated that women tend to spend more hours doing volunteer work than men. The results in Chart Eight show that the main difference is that women are more likely (13%) to report informal learning for 6 hours or more through their volunteer work than men (9%). Higher percentages of men (39%) report doing one hour or less in informal learning in volunteer work compared to women (33%). It is not possible to know from these surveys whether this is a consequence of the type of volunteer work that men engage in compared to women.

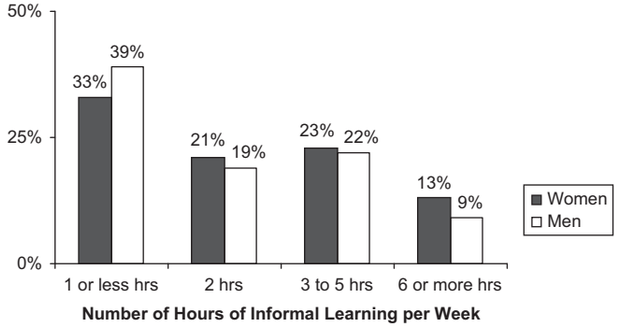


*Chart 8. Hours of informal learning per week by gender.*

Differences also exist based on whether volunteers are born in Canada or outside of Canada. Those born outside of Canada are more likely to report spending more hours per week doing informal learning than those born in Canada. More specifically, 28% of those born outside of Canada spend on average 6 hours or more doing volunteer work-related informal learning compared to 20% of those born in Canada. Conversely, 37% of those born in Canada spend one hour or less in informal learning compared to 30% for those born outside of Canada. Delving further into the results reveals that volunteers that are fairly new to Canada spend more time in informal learning with regard to volunteer work than volunteers who have been in Canada for a number of years. As seen in Chart Nine, nearly two thirds (63%) of those who have been in Canada for one year or less spend on average six or more hours informally learning in their volunteer work, followed by one third (32%) who have been in Canada for two to three years, to less than one quarter who have been in Canada for four to six years (22%) or seven years or more (23%). The results can be explained by the fact that immigrants who are less familiar with their new cultural context may be engaging in volunteer work because it is one of the most accessible ways for them to gain Canadian experience.

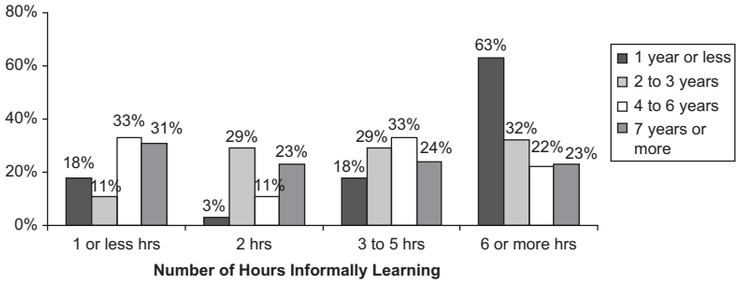


*Chart 9. Percentage of volunteers by hours spent informally learning per week by number of years in Canada.*

There also exist differences in the amount of time spent informally learning in volunteer work based on education level. Volunteers with lower levels of schooling are more likely to report doing more hours of informal learning than volunteers from higher education levels. More specifically, those with high school or less (29%) are more likely to report learning six hours or more per week than those with either a college diploma (18%) or a university degree (18%). Those with some post-secondary (27%) are more likely to report between 3 and 5 hours of informal learning per week than those with college (21%) or university (21%). The results are shown in Chart Ten. This finding is consistent with previous research that people from low levels of education are more likely to use informal learning as a substitution to less accessible formal learning than those from high levels of education (Stowe, 2012). In the case of volunteers, it is possible that recent immigrants are lacking access to formal education; therefore, they are participating in informal learning.

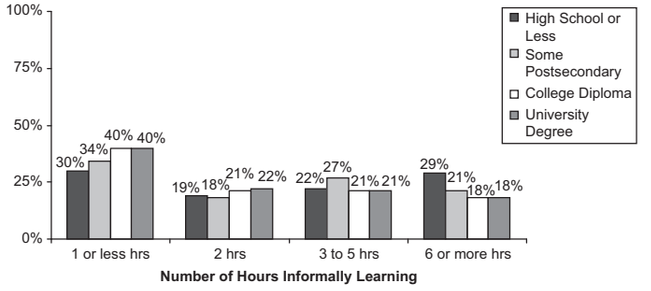


*Chart 10. Percentage of volunteers by hours spent informally learning per week by education level.*

Similar trends were found based on income levels with regards to the number of hours spent in informal learning during volunteer work. Of those who volunteer, the more income earned the fewer hours that are spent in informal learning in volunteer work. It is important to keep in mind that those who are earning smaller incomes might be working on a part-time basis; therefore, they have more discretionary time to do volunteer work. The results by income are found in Chart 11.

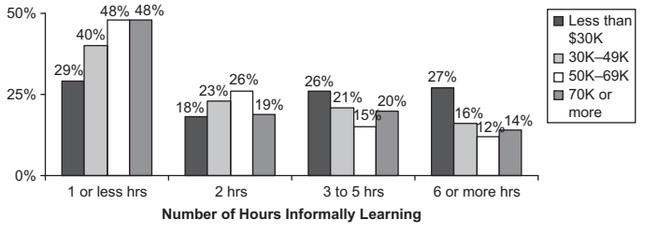


*Chart 11. Percentage of volunteers by hours spent informally learning per week by income level.*

## LEARNING CONTENT AND ATTITUDES

We have seen that there are differences based on background characteristics and the incidence of learning through volunteer work. At this point, it is important to look at what has been learned through volunteer work. This section reports the results from the analysis on knowledge, skills and attitudes that are being learned through volunteer work.

## WHAT IS LEARNED?

The majority of those who reported participating in informal learning indicated that they learned about teamwork and problem solving (59%) and interpersonal skills (56%). Nearly half (46%) report learning about health, and 44% learn about social, political, environmental issues. Fewer report learning about organizational/ managerial skills (36%), new equipment (32%), computers (27%), financial management (25%), and language (20%). The results are shown in Chart 12.

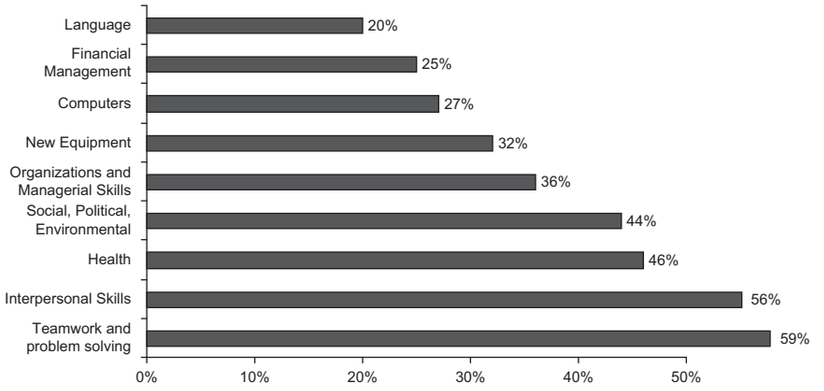


*Chart 12. Percentage of volunteers informally learning various skills.*

The majority (80%) of those who do volunteer work report doing informal learning in on or more of the areas mentioned above. A closer look at the number of categories in which respondents reported learning reveals that only 11% mention learning about only one item, and almost half (47%) of those who volunteer report learning between two and five items from the list above. One quarter (25%) mention learning between six and nine of the items mentioned. From this we can safely conclude that people are increasing their knowledge and skills while doing volunteer work. The following section delves into differences in what is learned based on demographic characteristics.

### *Gender*

Men and women tend to learn very different things in their volunteer work activities. We saw earlier that men and women tend to participate in different types of organizations; this might explain part of the effect of the type of informal learning each engage in. More men than women report learning about computers (30% versus 25%); budgeting and financial management (28% versus 22%); new equipment (40% versus 26%); and social, political or environmental issues (47% versus 42%) than women. More women than men report learning about organizational or managerial skills (38% versus 33%); teamwork, problem solving, or communication skills (63% versus 54%); interpersonal skills (60% versus 52%); and health and well-being (48% versus 44%). There were no differences based on gender with regards to learning language skills (20% for both).

### *Age*

Overall, as age increases, volunteers are less likely to report participating in informal learning pertaining to their volunteer work. Higher percentages of younger people (between the ages of 18 to 24) report participating in nearly all informal learning areas with a declining trend as respondent's age increases. The only two categories where there is an increase in participation in informal learning for older respondents are a) health and well-being, and b) social, political or environmental issues. Those in the age groups of 45 to 64 are more likely to report learning in these two categories than those either younger or older. This finding is not surprising because older people participate less in formal education. As they have accumulated considerable knowledge and skills over their life course, they have a diminishing need for formal upgrading/certification. This might also hold true, though to a lesser extent, for volunteer workers over their life course.

### *Whether Volunteers are Born in Canada*

Differences exist based on whether respondents were born in Canada or not with regards to what they learn informally through their volunteer work. Those born outside of Canada are more likely than those born in Canada to report learning about computers (34% versus 25%) , budgeting and financial management (28% versus 24%), health and well-being (53% versus 45%), new equipment (44% versus 30%), language (34% versus 17%), and social, political or environmental issues (55% versus 42%). Differences for all the other categories are not significant. The results for those categories that are different are shown below in Chart 13. The things learned by those born outside of Canada seem more pertinent to learning about a new cultural context. This might indicate the importance of volunteer work for new immigrants.

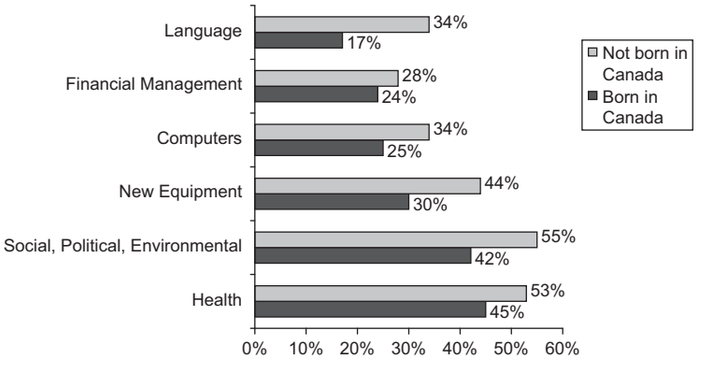


*Chart 13. Informal learning by volunteers born in Canada or not.*

### *Education*

The analysis that looked at volunteer related informal learning by education level revealed that there are differences in what is learned informally but the differences are not large. For this analysis the education level was regrouped to reflect those with high school or less, with some post-secondary, with a non-university diploma, and with a university degree. The results are shown in Chart 14 below. Respondents with some post-secondary and a non-university diploma were slightly more likely to report learning about organizational or managerial skills, teamwork, problem solving, communication skills and interpersonal skills than respondents with other education levels. Moreover, those with university degrees are less likely to learn about new equipment. It is important to note though that few differences exists, so overall there is very little connection between the education level of the volunteers and the content of their informal learning.

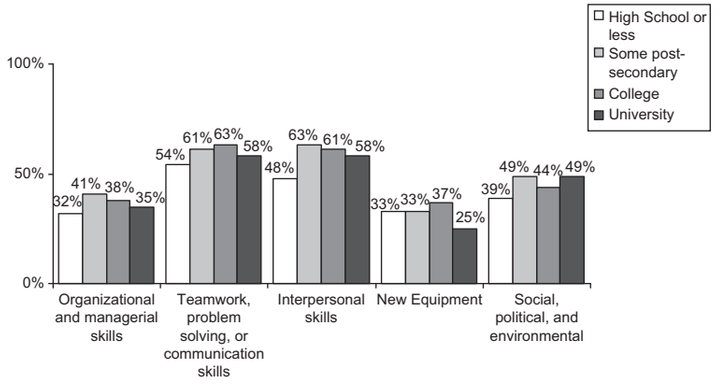


*Chart 14. Informal learning by education level.*

### *Helpfulness of Informal Learning*

We have seen that much learning happens in volunteer activity. The large majority of those who volunteer (88%) for an organization or a group report that the learning was very helpful (35%) or fairly helpful (53%) in performing their volunteer work. Very few (12%) mention that it was not helpful.

The learning that these volunteers are acquiring in the context of their volunteer activity also reveals to be helpful for them with regards to their paid employment. Moreover, of those who are employed who volunteer, more than one quarter (28%) of those who did informal learning in their volunteer work report that their learning was helpful for them in finding a job or in changing jobs.

The results further indicate that volunteers that are born outside of Canada (23%) are more likely to report that their volunteer work has been helpful for them in changing jobs or finding new work than those born inside of Canada (10%). Similarly, those with high school or less (19%) are more likely to report that the informal learning during their volunteer work was very helpful compared to those with some post-secondary education (12%), college diplomas (10%) or university degrees (8%). As well, women (15%) are more likely to report that their informal learning was very helpful compared to men (10%). These findings suggest that informal learning in volunteer work can particularly valuable to those who have been marginalized from the formal education system and/or from the formal economy.

## CONCLUSION

Many Canadians are involved in volunteer work and there has been a significant increase in the percentage of Canadians who volunteer. We have seen the immense importance of the non-profit sector in many areas, by directly helping those who are disadvantaged. This chapter has focused mainly on those who volunteer for organizations or groups, which means that we have not included in our analysis activities related to informal volunteerism (e.g. helping neighbours and friends).

Although some volunteer work is now required by institutional authorities, the majority of volunteers still volunteer in order to help their community. We have seen that volunteer work is an important aspect of the lives of those Canadians who do volunteer. Canadians volunteer for a multitude of reasons from helping their children in sports and recreation clubs to volunteering to gain Canadian experience.

In general, Canadians who volunteer are more likely to be women, those who are married or who have children, those who are either younger or middle-aged, and those from higher levels of education. However, the profile of those who volunteer is changing. Younger people are engaging in volunteering through school programs and those new to Canada are increasingly more likely to volunteer to gain experience.

Overall, we have seen that there is a decline in volunteering as people age. However, those that are near retirement age or older spend more hours in volunteer work than younger Canadians. Moreover, as people age, they are less likely to report engaging in volunteer work related informal learning.

We also saw that there are no differences in the incidence of volunteering based on the number of years in Canada; however, those newest to Canada spend the most hours per week in volunteer work and they spend the most time in volunteer work related informal learning activities. Those who are not born in Canada are more likely to report learning about new equipment, language, and social, political or environmental issues. These findings are not surprising as new Canadians need to learn about their new environment and culture.

Few differences exist between men and women. Women are only slightly more likely than men to volunteer, yet, men spend slightly more time in volunteer activities. Women are more likely to report learning about teamwork, problem solving, or communication skills, whereas men are more likely to report learning about new equipment.

Canadians from high levels of education are more likely to volunteer than those from low levels of education. This might be a reflection of the discretionary time that more educated people have to participate in activities outside of work. Moreover, those who volunteer are more likely to participate in adult education courses than those who do not volunteer. These courses are also more likely to be non-credit based than for credit.

Volunteers engage in a great deal of learning both formally and informally. Much of this learning is transferable between helping with their volunteer work and with the paid employment opportunities. Higher percentages of volunteers are engaging in informal learning than formal learning; however, these volunteers rated both types of learning as important.

Overall we have seen that volunteering is a good vehicle by which people can obtain skills that will help them in their employment, and at the same time help those in the community that are in need of the services provided by these volunteers.

## NOTES

[1] One example of a recent high profile public recognition was the 2001 International Year of Volunteers (see www.worldvolunteerweb.org).

[2] Information about the WALL project can be accessed at http://www.wallnetwork.ca.

[3] The definitions of formal and informal learning are discussed in Chapter One.

[4] Information about the NALL project can be accessed at http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/depts/sese/csew/nall/index.htm.

[5] The name of the survey was changed from the National Survey on Giving, Volunteering, and Participating in 1997 to the Canadian Survey (CSGVP) in 2000 and 2004.

[6] The average number of volunteer hours shown in the CSGVP and WALL surveys cannot be compared due to the nature of time-use data.

[7] Hours were not available for the 2004 CSGVP.

[8] Please use caution when quoting these figures. There are many limitations when categories are created for various ethno-racial origin questions.

[9] The survey question posed in the WALL survey was: "How would you BEST describe your race or colour: would you say White, Chinese, South Asian, Black, Aboriginal, Arab or West Asian, Filipino, South East Asian, Latin American, Japanese or Korean?"

[10] The types of organizations included in the question are: a) political organization (including political parties, social or environment issue organizations, etc.); b) cultural educational or hobby group (theatre groups, book clubs, bridge clubs, etc.); c) religious organization; d) sports organization (baseball leagues, tennis clubs, etc.); e) service club (Kiwanis, Knight Columbus, Shriners, etc.); f) school or neighbourhood association (PTAs, neighbourhood watches, rate payers, etc.); and g) other groups or organizations (including food banks, etc.).

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# 3. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER IN VOLUNTEERING: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF RED CROSS VOLUNTEERS

## INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we focus on a community service non-profit organization as a space and place of work and learning for volunteers. Using a sample of Canadian Red Cross-Toronto Region volunteers, we investigate three important dimensions of learning among volunteers: what types of knowledge and skills do volunteers acquire, how do they learn, and who is likely to benefit from the learning acquired through volunteer work— the volunteer or the organization? We are interested in the learning dimensions of the volunteer from the angles of personal and professional development and organizational effectiveness.

The Canadian Red Cross (CRC) has been working with volunteers for over one hundred years, offering them a wide range of volunteer activities. These activities appeal to a wide range of people in terms of interest, age and aptitude. Despite the diversity of people in the Red Cross (RC), there is a common thread among the volunteers: the desire to help others in need. This common thread expresses itself throughout the many day-to-day community services of the Red Cross, as well as through the Red Cross's disaster services responses to intermittent emergency situations.

Similar to other case studies in this book, we begin with a discussion of the context of the Red Cross. We then turn to discuss the methodology used in this research project. Following this, we review the literature on volunteering, volunteer learning and organizational effectiveness. The findings section discusses the learning dynamics of volunteering at the Red Cross. Here we present what volunteers have learned and how they learn to do their volunteer work. In the discussion section, we consider the benefits of learning for volunteers and organizational effectiveness. We conclude the chapter with a summary of the main findings, recommendations and suggestions for further research.

## CANADIAN RED CROSS CONTEXT

Volunteers are the backbone of the global Red Cross movement. The Red Cross was born in 1859 due to the efforts of Henry Dunant. The Swiss businessman helped the wounded from the three conflicting armies during the war in northern Italy with the

*F. Duguid, K. Mündel & D. Schugurensky (Eds.), Volunteer Work, Informal Learning and Social Action, 63–78.*

aid of volunteer workers, thereby planting the seed of the organization. From this moment to its formal founding in 1864 as a volunteer humanitarian group, the Red Cross defined itself as an organization that provides relief to the wounded, irrespective of the side they belong to. The Red Cross currently operates in 185 countries with more than 97 million volunteers (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies 2006); the organization is a major player in disaster relief and humanitarian services. Red Cross has a single mission: *to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity.* The principles (core values) of the Red Cross are humanity, independence, unity, impartiality, universality and neutrality, as well as volunteer service. The Canadian Red Cross was established in 1896. Similar to other national societies around the world, the heart of the Canadian Red Cross has been to improve the situation of the most vulnerable at the national and local levels. The structure of the international organization is designed to enable national societies to operate as full-fledged community and disaster response non-profit organizations.

The Canadian Red Cross-Toronto Region is focused on helping people to deal with situations that threaten their survival and safety; their security and well-being; and, their human dignity (Canadian Red Cross-Toronto Region, 2003). The organization achieves this through programs that provide valuable services to seniors, homeless, victims of disaster and refugees, as well as first aid and safety education services to the general public. With estimated annual revenues of approximately $5 million, twenty-five per cent of which is from government sources, the range of services provided by the organization over the past ten years has evolved due to the demise of the blood program, the changing needs of the community and the priority of funders (Akingbola, 2005). The shifts in priorities are particularly evident when examining the volunteer resources of the organization. Canadian Red Cross-Toronto Region had 1,506 volunteers who worked 63,568 hours between the April 1, 1999 and March 31, 2000 fiscal year (Quarter, Mook, & Richmond 2003). In 2005, there were 506 volunteers who contributed 44,097 hours in the three locations of the organization in Toronto.

Volunteers are integral to the services provided by the Toronto Region of the Canadian Red Cross, from natural disasters such as tsunamis and earthquakes, to local emergencies in the form of extreme cold weather or heat alerts and community services such as Meals on Wheels. In fact, volunteers are the primary providers of several of these services, with minimal logistical support from paid staff. Some volunteers work in administrative functions or governance roles either as members of the Region Council (Board of Directors) or of other committees.

Similar to many non-profit organizations in Canada, the Toronto Region of the Canadian Red Cross has undergone changes, which have contributed to the transformation of its volunteer resources. In addition to the factors noted above, the drivers of change in the organization also included the reduction from $4 million to $2 million of long-term and stable United Way funding and the change in government funding from grants to contract-based funding (Akingbola, 2004, 2005). As a result

of these changes, the resources that the organization had traditionally provided to support volunteers were significantly reduced.

To put the change in perspective, one needs to understand the Canadian Red Cross before the late 1990s. The recruitment, training and retention of volunteers are fundamental to the services of the Red Cross-Toronto Region. Many of the current volunteers have been with the organization for decades; some joined around the Second World War. At one point, the organization was managing: blood services as a national program; the veteran unit of Sunnybrook Hospital; Meals on Wheels; and, other services with volunteers in the forefront of service delivery. From a stakeholder perspective (Jordan, 1989), volunteers were the single most important stakeholder in the Canadian Red Cross for over a century. The importance of volunteers was further highlighted by the existence of a department that was primarily devoted to volunteer resources long before other non-governmental agencies established such a department.

Until 2006, Canadian Red Cross-Toronto Region had a designated employee and volunteer resources manager, two coordinators and one administrative assistant. With the added support of the human resources departments at the provincial and national offices, the employee and volunteer department provided extensive support to managers and staff of the agency in recruitment and selection, compensation, employee relations, training, volunteer resources, and health and safety. Today, the department has been restructured to focus primarily on volunteer resources, with two volunteer resources coordinators and one administrative assistant.

Notwithstanding the funding changes, blood services crisis, increased accountability requirements, and continuing challenges of the operating environment (Akingbola, 2005), the tradition of volunteer service remains. However, these challenges have impacted volunteers in other ways. For example, the role of volunteers and the resources that could be conscripted to support them was redefined. Whilst the confluence of factors that brought about the changes in the organization has not destroyed the volunteer foundation of the Canadian Red Cross, the organization has restructured its scope, size and management.

It is within this context that we examine learning among volunteers in the Canadian Red Cross-Toronto Region. The literature review explores the changing nature of volunteerism, challenges and opportunities for learning, and the implication for organizational effectiveness in non-profits. The limited research on the Canadian Red Cross is incorporated into the discussion.

## THE STUDY: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

We decided to work with the Canadian Red Cross-Toronto Region as a site of investigation on volunteer learning for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it is a clear example of the common understanding of volunteerism as altruistic work – giving service for others' benefit. Around the world, the Red Cross has been the eponymous "service" organization in times of war, disasters resulting from natural

phenomenon, or city patrols for health and safety. The Canadian Red Cross is not different. This image attracts certain kinds of people who want to fulfill dreams of contributing to a better world, whether in their city, country or other nations. We wanted to find out more about the work and learning dynamics of these types of volunteers and the response of the organization to these motivations and learning opportunities.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with the Toronto Region volunteers; however, before launching a battery of interviews, we had a partnering meeting including Canadian Red Cross-Toronto Region staff, Red Cross volunteers, the lead researcher, as well as a student researcher and the three authors. From this meeting we were able to develop an interview guide geared towards the Canadian Red Cross volunteer experience. In total we interviewed 28 volunteers from two of the Toronto Red Cross offices – Etobicoke and Downtown – where volunteers worked in the Meals on Wheels program, Disaster Services, Tracing and Reunion, Transportation Service, and in general office support. Our participants self-selected to be interviewed after we put a call out for participants through the volunteer resources manager.

The sample included people of different ages, educational levels, occupations and national backgrounds. Their motivation for volunteering was diverse and was related to their stage in life. Our sample of Canadian Red Cross volunteers is heavily weighted with seniors and retirees; out of 28 volunteers interviewed for this study, 23 were retired and the other 5 were employed or had a business of their own. Two possible explanations may account for this. One is that most volunteer jobs at the Red Cross take place during regular working hours. The other is that many of the services provided by the Red Cross are for seniors, and seniors are more interested than other age groups in helping seniors.

While working with the Canadian Red Cross we came face-to-face with the strain the organization felt due to the lack of human resources. Further testament to the socio-economic struggle that we spoke about earlier, many non-profit organizations, including the Canadian Red Cross, have endured funding cuts. For example, while we were interviewing Red Cross volunteers, the employee and volunteer resources manager, the person most connected to our study and the person who we had developed a rapport with, left the Red Cross and her position was eliminated. Needless to say, support for our project was understandably downgraded. Importantly, the support for volunteers has also shifted, including their opportunities reduced for training and learning.

## VOLUNTEERING AND NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Volunteering is a multidimensional concept. Volunteering "promotes social participation and active citizenship, and strengthens civil society. It can also help to maintain society's stability and cohesion. It is a plus for society, for it is a conduit for universal value in terms of human rights, democracy, combating racism, solidarity and sustainable development" (United Nations Volunteers, 2001, p.10).

While the definition is important and represents the most commonly articulated view of volunteering, there is another important aspect to volunteering. Beyond the altruistic definition, volunteering is also an important productive activity that contributes to the performance of individuals and organizations (Day & Devlin, 1998; Gomez & Gunderson, 2003). Volunteering can be rewarding for individuals and society. Volunteer activities have also been identified as ways of enhancing employment opportunities, career advancements, and learning new skills (Gomez & Gunderson, 2003).

For many organizations in the non-profit, public, and to some extent the for-profit sector, volunteer labour is an invaluable component of their productive capacity. At the Canadian Red Cross-Toronto Region, the estimated market value of volunteer hours contributed in 2001 amounted to $939,430 (Quarter, Mook, & Richmond, 2003). In a study of 31 hospitals in Ontario, the net value of volunteer hours per hospital was $1,053,543 (Handy & Srinivasan, 2002). Rehnborg (2005) reported that government agencies at local, state and federal levels engage volunteers in diverse areas such as public safety, cultural and arts programs, highway litter removal, youth development, and veteran affairs. The point is that volunteering coalesces benevolent, productive, and rewarding dimensions. This is the multidimensional perspective of volunteering. It benefits the receivers of the volunteer activities, the individual volunteers (Brudney, 2005), and the community.

## VOLUNTEER LEARNING AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

As outlined in the introduction, we are interested in exploring work and learning of volunteers in the Canadian Red Cross-Toronto Region equally from an organizational perspective as well as from the point of view of the individual volunteers. In the context of our research, the opportunities for formal, non-formal and informal learning (Livingstone, 1999; Schugurensky, 2006) that are provided by the organization enable volunteers to perform their roles. This taxonomy of formal, non-formal and informal learning is useful for understanding how and what people learn; it is also important to recognize the fluidity of the boundaries and the potential similarity between the different learning types (Schugurensky & Mündel, 2004). Formal education or learning usually refers to the institutional ladder that goes from preschool to graduate studies; whereas, non-formal learning refers to all organized educational programs that takes place outside the formal school system, and are usually short-term and voluntary (Schugurensky, 2000). These include many of the training and learning opportunities offered by the Red Cross.[1] Informal learning is the learning that happens in spaces and places that are not necessarily governed by curricula, degrees, experts and timelines; it is learning that can be intentional, unintentional or through socialization. For volunteers, training is primarily through informal and non-formal learning.

The learning that occurs during the volunteering experiences either for organizational performance or individual personal growth is based on a foundation

that includes prior learning and abilities that the individual volunteer brings to the organization. For most non-profits, training is engrained in the very process of actualizing the values and mission they set out to achieve (Akingbola, 2005). In other words, raising awareness, which is the starting point of most non-profit organizations, involves training. Even loosely organized advocacy groups use training to get their message across. Similar to employees in paid work, training impacts the link between volunteer aspirations and the mission of non-profits (Pynes, 1997). While learning has not commonly been identified as a motivation for engaging in volunteer activities (Cox, 2002), the process of aligning the altruistic aspiration of the volunteer with the mission of the non-profit organization involves learning. At a minimum, volunteers receive orientation or some form of training. Volunteer training includes three components: a) orientation to the organization; b) instructions on the job to be performed; and, c) supervision and on-the-job training (Fletcher, 1987).

According to Osborne (1996), the following are some of the challenges faced by the non-profit organizations with respect to training:

– the changing environment and the context of non-profit organizations
– the changing pattern of social and community needs
– the diversity and distinctiveness of the non-profit sector
– the rise of the contract culture and managerialism
– the importance of equal-opportunity and anti-discriminatory practices

Volunteers are the primary human resource of many voluntary and non-profit organizations (Hall et al., 2003); hence, the learning of these volunteers is crucial to the overall program effectiveness. Learning and training should therefore be a major concern. Training impacts the performance of organizations (Betcherman, Leckie, & McMullen, 1997; Saks, Taggar, & Haccoun, 2002). The new operating environment requires that the knowledge base of non-profit organizations be continuously renewed and aligned with the service priorities of the primary funder, who is often the government. It is this renewal or innovation that makes non-profit organizations competitive in the funding process, and from a human resource management perspective, the organization inevitably has to embrace continuous training and development (Akingbola, 2005). Innovation means change, and change brings new skills requirements which, in turn, underscore the importance of training and a learning culture (McMullen & Schellenberg, 2003).

As a strategic tool, learning and training are essential to the effectiveness and survival of non-profit organizations. It is also crucial if non-profits intend to attract, retain and motivate volunteers to provide the continuously evolving quantity and quality of services. To properly capture and effectively utilize knowledge and skills of volunteers, non-profits must develop a learning culture. An important step in this direction is to identify the forces that shape learning—formal, non-formal, and informal—in their sector and incorporate them into their adaptive strategies. Volunteer management must embrace the strategic value of knowledge and skills,

and by extension learning, as a means to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Bratton, Mills, Pyrch, & Sawchuck, 2004).

## FINDINGS ON VOLUNTEERING AND LEARNING IN CANADIAN RED CROSS-TORONTO REGION

Throughout the years, the Canadian Red Cross's tradition as an altruistic organization has attracted traditional volunteers, that is, people who are willing to volunteer regularly and to make a long-term commitment with the organization. This was evident in the number of respondents in the case study who have been volunteering with the Red Cross for between 5 and 40 years. In spite of the Red Cross's global brand and ability to attract volunteers, social and political changes in policy and support for non-profit organizations since the early 1990s have left the Red Cross with fewer resources to train and retain volunteers.

In examining the learning experience of volunteers of the Red Cross, we group our findings into four categories: a) learning goals, that is, whether or not volunteers engage in volunteer activities with learning as one of their motivations; b) what they learn, the type of knowledge, skills, dispositional learning such as attitudes and values, and reflective learning acquired in the course of volunteering including opportunities provided by the organization; c) how they learn, that is non-formal and informal learning; and d) the degree to which they transfer their learning to settings outside the Red Cross context. Schugurensky's (2000) classification of informal learning based on the learners' degree of intentionality and awareness was helpful in analyzing our data.

### *Learning Goals*

Although a majority of the participants in the case study started volunteering without a specific learning goal, some volunteers reported that learning is one of their motivations. Some retired volunteers explained that they want to volunteer their time to keep themselves active after retirement while others note that giving back to society is their motivation, as opposed to setting learning goals for themselves. As one volunteer expressed:

> I wouldn't say I had learning goals because I just came to volunteer and whatever they wanted me to do I was willing to do, so I mean at my age I think I have learned all I can learn. Well no, no, we never can stop learning, but anything they wanted me to learn I would learn.

Volunteers who responded that they have learning as one of their motivations identify diverse impetuses ranging from career or employment goals to improving their ability to volunteer. One respondent in her 20s noted that she is volunteering to acquire knowledge and skills in order to be ready to develop a career. Another volunteer, without any previous work experience, explained that volunteering with

Red Cross is part of her life plan, to get training that will allow her to travel overseas while doing something she likes and believes in:

> My learning goals would have been to prove to myself that I could be reliable and dependable and to be able to learn to work in a team and develop skills and to be trained well enough and have enough experience to be deployed overseas.

Learning for personal growth and to be able to volunteer in other situations appears to be the dual motivation for some of the respondents. As one volunteer noted a goal is to feel able to respond to emergency situations:

> Whether it was a medical response, CPR and first aid or a response where there is some kind of big weather disaster in my community and to be able to be part of a team or an organization that would be dealing with that at a personal and community level. I guess I just wanted to feel more prepared to deal with that kind of crisis. I'm young, I'm strong and I don't know anything right now, so I need to learn something so I can put this to use because I think that disaster is around the corner. You never know… you need to be prepared to deal with it.

In summary, our findings on learning goals suggest that goals are relative to the age of volunteers. While the few respondents who are younger consciously have learning as one of their motivations for volunteering, the older volunteers only consider learning as an added benefit. Some of the older volunteers did not mention learning until they were prompted.

### *What Volunteers Learn*

An overview of the non-formal learning opportunities offered by Canadian Red Cross is the logical starting point of our findings on what volunteers learn. At the organizational level, Red Cross staff reported that the organization offers a number of non-formal learning opportunities. The first chance to acquire explicit and codified knowledge is provided to all volunteers during the Red Cross orientation. Unlike the program-specific orientation discussed below, the Red Cross orientation explains the history, fundamental principles, scope and size of the Red Cross globally, in Canada and in Toronto. Sometimes the Red Cross orientation is combined with program orientation, with the former beginning the orientation. While many of the respondents received orientation when they joined, few of them acknowledged it as the source of their knowledge of the Red Cross or the skills for their volunteer work. Most of the respondents generally know what the Red Cross is about; however, some have little understanding of the overall activities and programs of the Canadian Red Cross in Toronto beyond their volunteer work.

Outside of the Red Cross orientation, there are non-formal learning opportunities through a number of programs either at the organizational or departmental levels. The most comprehensive training program at the Canadian Red Cross in Ontario is the in-house Volunteer Resource Management (VRM) Certificate program designed

primarily for staff supervising volunteers; however, regular volunteers are allowed to take the course. The VRM has 13 modules including topics on: value of volunteers; emerging demographics; trends and issues shaping volunteerism; the volunteer retention cycle; volunteer expectations; conditions of successful change; learning to empower others; how to use coaching; and, principles of recognition. The VRM is an important source of acquiring leadership skills and knowledge for volunteers who are supervising other volunteers; however, none of the respondents indicated that they have taken any of the courses in the VRM program. This could be attributed to the fact that the course is generally designed for staff who are required to manage volunteers.

At the program level, volunteers have the opportunity to acquire more specific knowledge and skills. They acquire instrumental learning necessary to function effectively in their volunteer role. In the Meals on Wheels program, all volunteers undergo an orientation and a training program. These serve as the primary way of learning about their role in the program. Topics covered in the orientation include: volunteer responsibility, meal delivery, and emergency procedures.

Disaster services volunteers are required to learn emergency first aid, disaster procedure and leadership skills, most of which are included in the curriculum for the Disaster Services Level 1 training. Volunteers are also trained to complete the appropriate forms, learn to recognize the condition of clients, and assess and provide assistance to fire victims and people who visit the Heat Alert Centres. As discussed below, many of the respondents acknowledge these non-formal learning opportunities, but as noted in the response of this volunteer, they learn mostly through other means:

> I would say mostly through interaction with clients, directly… the communication skills and the disaster preparedness that would have been courses, and the knowledge of international (issues)... that would be by receiving all the information from the Red Cross. So I guess it started with courses and continued with volunteering in disaster relief.

Regardless of the specific non-formal learning opportunities offered by the Red Cross, the respondents report that they acquire skills, knowledge and consciousness as a result of their volunteer activities. Topping the list of types of learning are soft skills such as teamwork, working with diversity, and dispositional learning. Learning is central to the Red Cross and its client population (see Figure 1 below), such as victims of disaster, seniors and other vulnerable populations. The knowledge and skills are not only instrumental for volunteers to function effectively in their respective roles in the Red Cross. As this volunteer observes, such learning is also transformative:

> The principles of the Red Cross are something that I truly, truly believe in, because it is the only organization that I know of who can go into a country to help someone with no other ulterior motive other than helping these people, and I do believe in these principles, definitely do. You feel for people on the street, you feel for them and see if you can do something for them. I am concerned.

Closely related to Red Cross values and volunteer work learning is dispositional learning. One example of this that volunteers indicated is that they have more awareness of poverty and marginality in the community.

> I would say that is one of the biggest learning…In the cluster of Toronto I mostly dealt with people from different cultures that have assimilated. I started seeing a lot more people from different cultures that haven't fully assimilated. People who live up in areas and hardly made it to downtown Toronto…things that I find most inconceivable because I couldn't live like that. I couldn't live without knowing the city I was living in. And, so yes, a lot of awareness.

Several of the volunteers interviewed express having increased their leadership skills as a result of their volunteer work with the Red Cross. Their skills increased partially because of being exposed to situations that are new to them and that require them to take a leadership position. However, when asked to indicate what they have learned through volunteer activities from a list and how much they have improved in the area, less than half selected leadership skills. Other notable skills volunteers indicate that they acquired or improved upon are teamwork, managerial and organizational skills, and computer skills. Overall, while the perception of learning through volunteer work in the sample is quite diverse, many volunteers report changes in their levels of mastery over certain skills.

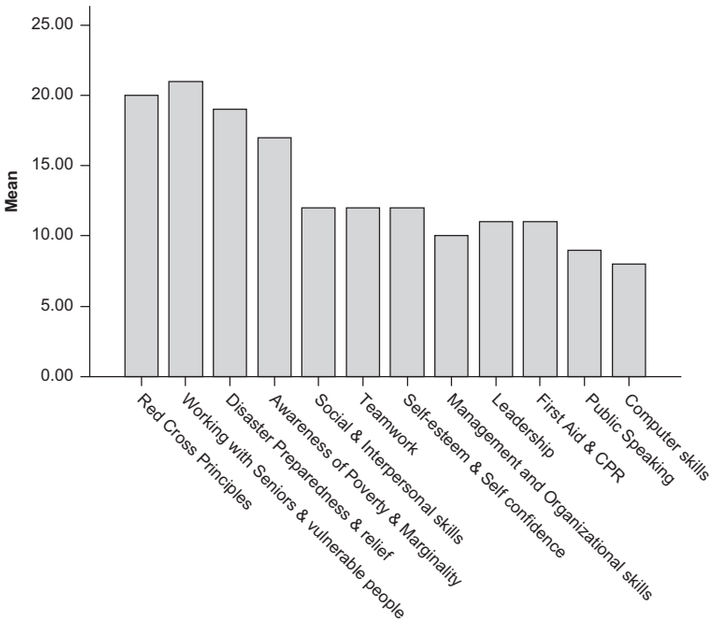


*Figure 1. What volunteers learn.*

### *How Volunteers Learn*

Volunteers' understanding about learning differs significantly from one volunteer to another. Although the organization reports that they provide training opportunities, few of the volunteers in the sample spoke clearly about having acquired skills through their activities with the Red Cross. One of the reasons for this position might be the generalized perception that learning is only possible in formal learning settings, that is, in the highly-structured setting of an institution where the intention to learn is clearly expressed by a student that enrolls to take a particular course or program. The lack of clearly-defined learning objectives, a guidance system that would help volunteers evaluate the potential transference of the newly-acquired skills to a different setting, or the issuance of learning certificates leave volunteers unaware of the learning they acquire through their volunteering experience at the Canadian Red Cross. When interviewed, volunteers asserted that they acquired knowledge and skills primarily through informal learning in their volunteer activities.

As previously noted, some volunteers did acknowledge the non-formal learning opportunities offered by the Red Cross, but they cited this as secondary to the learning that occurred through informal and incidental means:

> It's just been a full and a bit steep learning curve and you just get there and you have the experience and you just kind of suck it all up. I learned about disaster, how you just deal with a situation… what I actually saw in action was actually a lot more instructive. Just on the job, doing something with them, you have to be a good listener.

The informal learning that volunteers identify could be broadly categorized into two main types: a) tacit or incidental learning that volunteers acquire by observing or being guided by others; and, b) learning by experience that occurs as a result of volunteers performing the required tasks. One of the volunteers, a floater in the Meals on Wheels program, described her experience of incidental learning about leadership in the following way: "[I learned] by watching other people here, specially, seeing how they handle things, I guess I learned by watching."

Some of the volunteers who did not have learning goals explained that they selected their volunteer activities because they would be easy tasks and would enable them to apply the skills they already had. This group also reported that they learned or improved their knowledge, skills and dispositional learning and that this was done through informal means.

### *Transfer of Learning*

Volunteers have mixed responses about their ability to transfer learning to other settings outside of the Canadian Red Cross environment. The transfer of skills and knowledge to paid work has become one of the signifiers of "useful" volunteering in the current socio-economic climate. In the case of the Canadian Red Cross and our volunteer

sample, most are retirees and/or seniors who are not as interested in acquiring skills and knowledge for the paid work environment. However, volunteers frequently report an ability to transfer dispositional learning to other areas of their lives:

> As a volunteer you can't help but transfer most of what you learn to other parts of your life. This is the only volunteer work that I do; I haven't really thought of anything else. I suppose some of the things I learned in the Red Cross since 1989 were transferred to helping my mum who past away in 2001.

Among the volunteers who emigrated from other countries, they report gaining a different understanding of Canada. One volunteer used this learning to compare cultural differences between Asian countries and Canada:

> Canada is a very nice country, but for seniors' – sometimes they are happy, most of the time they are unhappy. It is a nice country. They are very comfortable in retirement and they have a pension. They have a stable life when they are older. And then when they become older they become lonely because they are by themselves. But in Asian countries we are poor, we have poverty, but the seniors are very happy because they are with their family.

In sum, our findings show how volunteering is an important source of learning, especially in an organization that combines both an international and community-based focus.

### *Discussion*

In this section, we briefly explore our findings within the literature on learning and analyze the likely benefits for professional and personal development of individual volunteers and effectiveness of the Red Cross.

The first finding relates to what volunteers learn. While many volunteers report learning procedural skills and knowledge such as computer skills, organizational skills or management skills, volunteers from all programs resoundingly report high levels of learning of a dispositional nature. Volunteers describe gaining awareness of poverty, learning about seniors' issues, marginalized people and vulnerable populations, and acquiring social and interpersonal skills. Dispositional skills and knowledge can easily be dismissed in times, such as these, when funders are focused on fiscal organizational prudence and quantifiable, hard assessment and results. However, the role of volunteerism in helping to form individuals who conduct their lives with respect, compassion and humility for others is priceless to the overall welfare of society. Ultimately volunteers' learning of the Red Cross principles helps to encourage concern and consideration for all human beings. Dispositional learning is one of the most important aspects of the volunteer experience that organizations can support, because it benefits the individual, the organization and society at large.

The second finding focuses on the nuances of the volunteers' motivation to learn through volunteering. It is obvious from their responses that their motivations,

learning goals and transfer of knowledge or skills directly relate to where each individual is within the life cycle. The Red Cross volunteer context links directly with the life cycle of the individual volunteer. The younger volunteers were attracted to Disaster Services where there is a high level of learning as well as flexibility, quick response and variability; whereas, many seniors were more attracted to Meals on Wheels because they want to help other seniors and have a regular volunteering routine. Although many of the seniors who volunteer with Meals on Wheels did not enter into their volunteering with the intention to learn, they did fulfill their other volunteering goals of service to community and/or keeping busy, as well as learning about marginalized people, multiculturalism, teamwork and principles of the Red Cross.

The third finding relates to knowledge transfer; most of the volunteers transfer their increased awareness of values and other dispositional learning to contexts outside of the Red Cross. In the tradition of transformational learning (Scott, 1998), volunteers acquire knowledge which enhanced their social consciousness, particularly about Canadian society. The knowledge and skills appears to have contributed to the personal transformation of volunteers and could be argued to be a good source of implicit social transformation. Since this learning is enhancing personal transformation that ultimately benefits society and community, one can make a case for government funding to recognize this. Dispositional training and development should be seen as citizenship and community education, and incorporated into the funding formula for services provided by non-profit and voluntary organizations like the Canadian Red Cross.

Fourthly, from an organizational effectiveness angle, volunteers acquire work-related knowledge and skills essential to the mission of the Red Cross. The procedural and dispositional learning acquired by volunteers is directly related to overall performance of the Red Cross both in terms of services and values: the aggregate of individual volunteer performance in Meals on Wheels, disaster relief, transportation, and other services for seniors constitutes a significant indicator of the effectiveness of the organization. While literature on volunteer training and non-profit performance is scarce, studies have shown that organizations that have a strong commitment to learning, and provide training for their employees, perform significantly better than those without training programs in terms of their productivity and revenue (Betcherman et al., 1997; Saks et al., 2002). Moreover, our findings on the number and type of learning opportunities offered to volunteers reaffirm the literature, which suggests that non-profits have positive attitudes towards training (Akingbola, 2005; Beattie, 2002).

The fifth finding suggests that, while the Canadian Red Cross still attracts the altruistic and traditional volunteer that our sample represents, like many other organizations that rely on volunteers, its volunteer profile is shifting. One of the main features of this shift is the decline of long-term, regular volunteer work and the increase of short-term commitments. Like other volunteer organizations, the Canadian Red Cross is working more and a more with the new volunteer, who as

Hustinix and MacDuff describe, tends to be more pragmatic, is more inclined to do a cost-benefit analysis before volunteering, and believes in a balance between individual needs and organizational needs (Hustinix, 2001; MacDuff, 2004, 2005). This goes hand in hand with the administrative changes that have been occurring at the organizational level.

The sixth and final finding focuses on the way volunteers learn in their volunteer experience with the Canadian Red Cross. The most common way of learning was informally, for example through observing or talking with others or learning by experience. This is despite the numerous non-formal learning options and opportunities that the Canadian Red Cross-Toronto Region offers through workshops, courses, and orientation and program sessions. This finding is not extraordinary given the natural connection between learning of a dispositional nature and informal learning (Schugurensky, 2006). This may also be an indication of the capacity challenges of Red Cross. While Red Cross has the training programs and there is continuous volunteer recruitment, the ability to regularly provide required training to new volunteers is curtailed by funding. Similar to other non-profits, a significant percentage of Red Cross revenue is government contract funding which often does not support volunteer training (Akingbola, 2004).

## *Conclusions*

As stated earlier in the chapter, knowledge and learning are cornerstones in the maintenance and development of non-profit organizations. In the context of the "new economy", governments are reducing funding for non-profits while at the same time the economy and community still benefit from the value of volunteers' time and efforts in different areas of the service sector. The fact that the 161,000 nonprofit organizations providing social services (arts and culture, health, housing, association, and advocacy contributed about 6.3 percent to the Canadian gross domestic product in 2003 (Hamdad & Joyal, 2007) further highlights the critical need for funders to support training and learning in these organizations.

In light of the recent changes that have brought a reduction of resources to organizations like the Canadian Red Cross-Toronto Region, alternative options to foster learning must be sought out. A possible option is to create a culture of learning within the organization in a way that would cultivate volunteers' awareness of their own knowledge and empower them to share it by teaching others in various informal ways. Additionally, as mentioned, dispositional training and development should be seen as citizenship and community education, and incorporated into the funding formula for services provided by non-profit and voluntary organizations like the Canadian Red Cross. This could be another way to attract funders.

Cultivating an attitude of continuous teaching and learning in informal and non-formal settings could help the organization nurture and make the most of the learning experience of its volunteers. Further research could be done to demonstrate the connection between dispositional training and community and citizenship

education, and its benefits for institutions and society at large. The Red Cross should take initiative in terms of expanding and diversifying the learning experiences of its volunteers; in this way, the organization could benefit from a bountiful learning harvest. A look at what is happening inside the organization, in terms of who is learning, what and how, can go a long way towards strengthening the Red Cross's capacity to serve those in need.

## NOTE

[1] We use the terms training and learning interchangeably to describe non-formal and informal learning opportunities.

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J. ADAM PERRY

# 4. LIVING AND LEARNING THROUGH SOLIDARITY AND STRUGGLE: ASSESSING THE INFORMAL LEARNING OF FRONTIER COLLEGE LABOURER-TEACHERS

## THE FRONTIER COLLEGE LABOURER-TEACHER PROGRAM

Founded in 1899, Frontier College is Canada's longest-standing literacy organization and the labourer-teacher program is its original program. The founder of Frontier College, Alfred Fitzpatrick, a Presbyterian minister from Pictou, Nova Scotia, envisioned a world where an education was available to not only the wealthy, urban middle class, but also to isolated frontier camp labourers working in Canada's mines, lumber camps and railway camps (Fitzpatrick, 1920/1999). Canada has a long history of frontier development, which more often than not has relied on the labour of newly arrived immigrants – the target group of Fitzpatrick's educational experiments. Fitzpatrick's one lasting innovation has been that of 'labourer-teachers' – volunteers, usually Canadian students on summer vacation from university, who, now as then, live and work alongside labourers while teaching literacy and basic skills to their worker colleagues. The goal of the original labourer-teacher program, in the early days known as "The Reading Camp Association", was "The Education and Social Emancipation of the Semi-Nomadic Labourers in the Frontier Lumbering, Mining, and Railway Construction Camps of Canada" (Morrison, 1999a, p. 4).

Since the beginning of the 20th century, however, the landscape of Canadian labour on the frontier has changed dramatically and with it the Frontier College labourer-teacher program. From its inception until the final decade of the 20th century, Frontier College was sending volunteers to a diversity of workplaces across Canada to work with mostly new immigrant workers in the mining, logging, construction, and railway repair industries. Throughout the later half of the 20th century, the Frontier College labourer-teacher program gradually phased out its work in these industries; and since 1990 has been working in agricultural settings with migrant farm workers from Mexico and the Caribbean. These farm workers come to Canada to work through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program, which for the past 40 years has been responsible for importing temporary offshore farm labourers to work in rural Canadian farming communities. Many of these workers "come to the same Canadian farms year after year and many spend a greater part of their working lives on Canadian soil rather than in their homelands" (Preibisch, 2007, p. 4).

*F. Duguid, K. Mündel & D. Schugurensky (Eds.), Volunteer Work, Informal Learning and Social Action, 79–100.*

In shifting its focus from new Canadians to transmigrant workers, Frontier College has experienced a dramatic shift in the application of its program. Historically, the labourer-teacher program recruited more privileged middle-class Canadians to go and work with less privileged working-class new Canadians. Over its lifetime, the program has had several roles and identities, perhaps most famously in its second decade as a catalyst to 'Canadianize' new immigrants or as an anti-union force whose goal was to combat "Bolshevism at its source" (Krotz, Martin & Fernandez, 1999, p. 19). Today, Frontier College works from a model more typical of an international development organization, sending more privileged Canadian volunteers from the Global North to work with less privileged men and women from the Global South, in this case temporary foreign labourers who reside and work in Canada for 6 to 8 months of the year before returning to their families in their home countries.

Frontier College still recruits the majority of its volunteers from the student bodies of Canadian universities, hiring mostly students who are looking for summer work. The core responsibility of the volunteer labourer-teachers is to provide either English as a Second Language (ESL) or basic literacy instruction to their migrant agricultural learners. While Frontier College offers no remuneration to their volunteers, the labourer-teacher program is unique in that it is able to offer volunteers paid employment in addition to their volunteer work, as Frontier College develops agreements with farmers, who are always in need of labour, to hire labourer-teachers as general farm hands. This agreement includes providing housing for labourer-teachers in the bunkhouses set aside for migrant labourers. The responsibility of the labourer-teacher is thus two-fold: while they are responsible for organising and facilitating non-formal adult education classes on their placements, they are simultaneously expected to work the same long work hours as their migrant worker learners.

This chapter is distinctive in its focus on the informal learning of Frontier College volunteer labourer-teachers, as opposed to examining the learning of the learners, namely temporary migrant labourers. The data collected for this study suggest that labourer-teachers feel as though they learn more from their experiences as labourer-teachers than they are able to teach to their learners. This article examines the structure and process of the labourer-teacher program and the effects the program has on the informal learning of its volunteers. It focuses on the process of learning through what volunteers consider a process of 'solidarity' with their learners, as well as learning through their intimate experience of what they deem to be a 'struggle', namely managing a hectic and exploitative workplace context. The chapter engages with the words of labourer-teachers themselves to demonstrate their perceptions of how a process is developed that facilitates significant learning outcomes for volunteers. The chapter simultaneously reveals participants' frustrations with not having the resources, training or opportunities to act upon their learning. This absence is the result of reluctance on the part of Frontier College to engage in a process of reflection and action with their volunteers and learners, thus truncating the critical learning opportunities for both. As shall be discussed below, while Frontier

College encourages their volunteers to prioritize a process of cultural synthesis and student-centred learning, the organisation's obligation to maintain relationships with employers prohibits volunteers from incorporating a pedagogy of praxis. Frontier College thus ignores potential opportunities for facilitating an emancipatory learning process among their learners and their volunteers.

## METHODOLOGY

This chapter is based on the analysis of interviews conducted as a part of a research project investigating the informal learning of Frontier College labourer-teachers. The approach taken was qualitative in Shank's sense of "a systematic empirical inquiry into meaning" (2002, p. 11). By uncovering the significance of participants' learning, the guiding idea of this research is to offer unique insights into and to bring to light the meaning of the labourer-teacher experience. For Shank, the qualitative researcher strives to be a searcher, discoverer, and reconciler "of meaning where no meaning has been clearly understood before" and that furthermore the understanding of meaning is incomplete without the understanding of its role in practice and daily experience (Shank, 2002, p. 11). The method of inquiry of this study is also phenomenological in so far as the guiding principle has been that "experience is not indistinct and unstructured chaos; it appears as differentiated and structured" and that the purpose of conducting qualitative research is to uncover the "meaning, clarity, and discrimination" of experience (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 51). The approach, therefore, has focused on the meaning that events and situations contain for those labourer-teachers who have agreed to participate in this study (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

A former Frontier College labourer-teacher myself, I approached four former and two present labourer-teachers to be involved in this research project and all agreed to participate in an in-depth semi-structured interview. That everyone who was approached agreed to participate in this study is indicative of the importance that their contribution to the labourer-teacher program has had on their lives, and on how they wanted to gain an outlet for their experiences. In the words of one participant, Paul[1]: "participating in the program has been the most transformative experience of my life. Being able to vocalize and reflect on my experience allows me to understand myself better." Participants also expressed how it was powerful to reflect with a researcher who has also been a participant in the program, as their commonality of experience was a validation of the participants' own experiences. On accepting the invitation to be interviewed, some participants expressed their excitement at having the opportunity to share their stories, and yet others said they felt honoured to have been asked.

All six of the participants had worked as labourer-teachers in the past 3 years[2]. Two of the six were just finishing their placements when they were interviewed, although both of these interviewees had participated in the program in previous years, and five of the six interviewees participated in the program for more than one agricultural season. All participants were in their early to mid-twenties when they worked as labourer-teachers, and although four of the participants had worked with Caribbean farm workers to a

certain extent, all of the participants worked primarily with Mexican farm workers. The participants of this study worked in a wide variety of agricultural settings, from small family-owned tobacco farms in Ontario's tobacco belt of Norfolk County, to medium-sized orchards and tree nurseries in the Niagara Region, to large tomato and cucumber greenhouse operations in Leamington, Ontario. While Frontier College does not keep formal records of the hours worked by labourer-teachers, between the teaching and the manual labour the participants of this study claimed to have worked between 60 to 100 hours a week for the duration of their placements. Very little has been written about the Frontier College labourer-teacher program since its change in direction in 1990, and what has been written has been from a purely historical perspective.[3] It was therefore necessary to conduct an interview with the director of the labourer-teacher program in order to elucidate how the program in its present form is run.

## THE FRONTIER COLLEGE LABOURER-TEACHER PROGRAM AND VOLUNTEER LEARNING

### *Recruitment and Training*

When asked about the learning experience of labourer-teachers, Robert, the national director of the program, claims that the program does not sell itself to potential volunteers as a learning experience. Frontier College makes it clear to their volunteers that the program is not about their learning, but rather it is about the learning of their learners. In his own words, Robert claims that "Frontier College does not recruit volunteers who are looking to consume an experience which would then by definition become about them and their role as the consumers of some product. We have even told people that we don't care if they have a good experience, we don't care if they are happy at the end of this. We just care that they are effective."

According to Robert, the labourer-teacher program's attitude toward the experiences of their volunteers is a direct response to what in the international development literature is known as the phenomenon of volunteer-tourism. Simpson (2004) describes this phenomenon as organizations that recruit youth from the Global North to go and 'do' development work in communities in the Global South. Through a review of organizational literature and qualitative interviews with youth participants, Simpson (2004) argues that the majority of organizations that run volunteer-tourism programs offer a shallow understanding of development. These international development organizations, Simpson argues, are more concerned about the participants' consumption of cultural experiences than they are about genuine development or social change. Consequently they create "a space populated by the existence of consumable experiences of 'the other', which is the central commodity for sale, mainly through tourism" (Simpson, 2004, p. 683). As a result, the volunteer-tourist is instructed on "what to expect and how to consume the experience" (Simpson, 2004, p. 683). Simpson discusses how the way in which volunteer-tourist organizations package their programs effects the experiences of the volunteers. She

argues that by presenting international development as a consumable experience these programs allow youth volunteers to reproduce a sense of distance from the 'other' and where learning to construct a socially-just world develops only peripherally, if at all (Simpson, 2004). I argue however, that Frontier College's unwillingness to engage with a pedagogy of praxis that actively supports a process of reflection and action risks mimicking the very phenomenon the organization attempts to avoid: that of facilitating mere consumable experiences of 'the other', in this case of a racially segregated class of indentured labourers in Canada. As I shall discuss, the student-centred approach that Frontier College incorporates does indeed facilitate genuine relationships at the level of everyday living in the workplace and in the bunkhouse. That notwithstanding, volunteer experiences suggest that when their own process of learning is not harnessed to the possibility of critical action, their presence on farms is bound to reproduce the very uneven relations the program attempts to unravel, thus limiting the potential for social change.

Before labourer-teachers are placed on farms, Frontier College hosts a week-long orientation that aims to prepare volunteers for their placements. The primary function of this week-long session is to a) familiarize volunteers with the political and social context in which migrant workers' lives unfold and b) provide basic training in student-centred literacy instruction. In the words of Robert:

> We want to orient labourer-teachers to teaching, with a focus on student-centred teaching. We want to orient them to the learners and the realities of their lives, not just at work but the cultural, social, legal reality. We spend a lot of time probing case studies and the ambiguous situations that labourer-teachers can find themselves in.

Orientation includes a continual rotation of guest speakers who are able to approach the issue of temporary labour migration from a number of angles. The list typically includes: representatives from the United Food and Commercial Workers, the large Canadian trade union has brought forward a series of legal challenges that promote the protection of the rights of migrant farm workers (Basok & Carasco, 2010), a handful of academics whose research examines aspects of sexism, racism and labour exploitation in the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program, as well as consular officials from participating sending nations. Sessions also include anti-oppression training and workshops and discussions that are intended to dissect the role of labourer-teachers on farms in multiple contexts. Most of the orientation session, however, is focussed on training labourer-teachers to be student-centred adult educators. Produced in 2008, the labourer-teacher training manual describes student-centred learning as drawing on the "specific needs of the workers… rather than being carried out with a structured curriculum" (Steele, J. & Coupland, K., p. 9). While the overall goal is to develop "essential literacy skills" among learners, the manual makes reference to Paulo Freire and the centrality of student-centred learning to liberation pedagogy. Labourer-teachers are taught that for Freire, "Literacy was the first step in liberation education, providing access to unlimited

information that can then be used to improve one's overall quality of life" (p. 8). That notwithstanding, volunteers are not instructed in how to facilitate a process of reflection and action with their learners. For example, no mention is made of codification techniques[4] or the need to facilitate a dialogue with their learners about the social and political knowledge they received during their initial orientation.

### *Informal Learning*

The findings of this research suggest that by shifting the focus from the youth experience to the learning experience of the beneficiary, the Frontier College labourer-teacher becomes more receptive to learning. In the words of Canadian adult educator, Michael Collins: "in remembering to let the learner learn, the teacher has to be open to being taught" (Collins, 1991, p. 49). This echoes the words of one participant of this study: "There is no way that I could have done anything *but* learn from my migrant worker learners" (Barbara). In emphasizing the genuine needs of the beneficiaries however, the Frontier College labourer-teacher program does not acknowledge the very authentic learning outcomes of their volunteers as an integral element of the development process. As I argue throughout this chapter, while the labourer-teacher volunteers experience a great deal of learning during their placements, no effort is made by Frontier College to consolidate this learning through reflection and action. As a result the labourer-teacher program loses a valuable opportunity to engage in the systematic development of their volunteers' learning. To illustrate: Anna, a labourer-teacher for several consecutive agricultural seasons, describes her experience with her own learning and the labourer-teacher program by claiming that her learning is merely a:

> by-product of the program. It is probably true that we take away more than we put in, but at the same time the focus is really on the people you're working with and the issues that they are dealing with, and not your own learning.

Although the labourer-teacher program does not take an overt political position on the rights of migrant workers in Canada, the unique structure of the program does create a space where volunteers can develop a "deepening awareness of the reality of the situation" (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 109). This deepening awareness leads to volunteers' gaining feelings of social responsibility that are never collectively harnessed and as a result are allowed to languish, thus diminishing what Elsdon (1995) calls the ripple effect of volunteer learning.

The majority of labourer-teachers do not return to the program for subsequent seasons, and since those who do return to the program are rarely sent back to their original placements, maintaining the relationships that were allowed to develop in their initial placements is virtually impossible. In criticism of this aspect of the program, one participant felt as if Frontier College were in the business of dispatching "an army of service providers" rather than building on the relationships and trust that develop between learners and students (Paul). Each year a new batch

of labourer-teachers will participate in the program, many of whom will have life changing experiences and eventually return to the normalcy of their previous lives.

## LABOURER-TEACHERS LEARNING MORE THAN THEY COULD TELL

All of the participants were of the opinion that they had learned more than their learners, even though, in keeping with the mission of Frontier College, every participant prioritized the learning of their learners before their own. When participants were asked directly about what they had learned, all participants claimed that they learned a variety of technical skills while working as a labourer-teacher, such as Spanish, various farm-related skills, and two even commented on how they learned salsa dancing during their time as a volunteer labourer-teacher. However, participants also spoke of a deep learning that was hard to pin-point and difficult to explain. It is this learning that is of interest to this study. In answering general open-ended questions about their work as labourer-teachers, participants revealed knowledge which had become tacit; knowledge that one participant claimed was more spiritual than rational, as she could not imagine it could be described or grasped through "reason alone" (Kate). I argue that by and large, the participants of this study had learned more than they could tell (Polanyi, 1983).

## THE 'HOW' OF LEARNING: SOLIDARITY AND STRUGGLE

For all of the participants, the Frontier College labourer-teacher program was an intense learning experience, and all participants felt that they had learned more as a labourer-teacher than they were able to teach to their migrant worker learners and colleagues. For example, when asked directly about their learning, Anna claims that the labourer-teacher program had "completely changed her life"; while Dennis claims that it was the "most intense educational experience" of his life. When asked to elaborate on why the learning was so intense, participants talked about how the very structure of the program facilitates a process of profound learning. Specifically, participants discussed a) learning by living in solidarity and b) learning through struggle.

### *Learning Through Solidarity: Living and Working Together*

Labourer-teachers learn about the issues faced daily by migrant workers through the relationships they develop with their learners and colleagues. Margo talks about how this was integral to her learning: "Learning people's stories makes policies seem more real than learning them from a book or in a class in university. You get a much better idea of what it means to be a migrant worker in Canada." In addition to living and working together, the student-centred approach to adult education that labourer-teachers are expected to employ also contributes to volunteer learning. For labourer-teachers, all of the content of their teaching encounters derives from learning about

the lives and experiences of their learners. At orientation, labourer-teachers are instructed in how to create a learning environment where pedagogical encounters begin from the experiences of learners and where learners are not treated like empty receptacles needing to be filled by outside experts: a space where dialogue is encouraged and can be practiced. By creating an educational space where labourer-teachers are encouraged to foster an authentic interest in their learners' lives and experiences and to strive for a democratic environment for learning to take place, labourer-teachers cultivate openness to learning with their learners. By facilitating learner-centred ESL and literacy lessons, the participants of this study felt as if they had no choice but to put themselves in a position where they were open to learning.

Many educational theorists, notably those in the mould of liberation theory, argue that authentic adult education encounters begin with educators claiming a position of solidarity with their learners (see Freire, 1970/2006). For Australian educator Griff Foley, solidarity in adult education means "to support and provide resources for learners, to challenge and extend them, but never to patronize or try to control them. It means educators using their power to create educational situations in which learners can exercise power" (Foley, 2001, p. 75). This position, says Foley, may mitigate the negative consequences of educators' invasion in the lives of their learners. The act of solidarity involves educators "recognizing the invasiveness of their work and struggling with learners to build a different sort of relationship" (Foley, 2001, p. 75). Frontier College does not use the language of solidarity to describe their work with migrant farm workers. Instead, the organisation utilizes the concept of 'inclusion' to describe their approach to the pedagogical work of labourer-teachers. While labourer-teachers are encouraged to include themselves in the work and daily lives of their learners, they are also instructed to approach their work from the college's historical and ongoing philosophy of 'All Welcome'.

While Frontier College avoids the language of solidarity, all the volunteers in this study claim that an act of solidarity with their learners was fundamental to their work as adult educators. Volunteer labourer-teachers are placed in a situation where they are not only expected to teach ESL and basic literacy skills to migrant agricultural workers, but where they are also expected to live and work on Canadian farms with their farm-worker learners. The feelings of solidarity that the participants experienced are derived from the experiences of both living and working with their farm-worker colleagues and facilitating student-centred teaching and learning encounters with their learners. The Frontier College volunteer teachers, unlike activists from other non-profit, non-governmental or labour organizations that work with migrant workers, are in a unique position to develop close relationships with workers as they live, work and generally share their lives with migrant workers for the duration of the Southern Ontario agricultural season. Furthermore, as their role is to live, work and teach with migrant workers (and not to advocate on their behalf), participants feel as if they are more open to listening to the interests of migrant workers than their activist counterparts, as labourer-teachers have more

opportunities to become more directly involved in the daily lives of their colleagues. Although individual participants do end up leaving at the end of their placements, it is felt that the labourer-teacher program at its best strives to create spaces where migrant workers are empowered to "become actors in their own situation. When so much about the situation is just pushing them into sort of passive positions, it's vital even just to provide people with a place to assert their own needs" (Dennis).

Beginning from a position of solidarity is meant to diminish the negative effects of cultural invasion that can accompany literacy education, a relationship that Freire (1970/2006) describes as teacher-centred, where educators begin from their own standpoint and inform the content of their curriculum and their actions from their own values and principles. The relationship that Freire is intent on avoiding involves educators imposing their own experiences and beliefs onto others, essentially transmitting their ideology into the cultural milieu with which they come into contact. The act of solidarity that the labourer-teacher participants illustrate, however, is more closely related to Freire's concept of cultural synthesis which, as Freire describes in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, requires an openness to learning "with the people, about the people's world" (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 180). This relationship is defined by learners who are integrated in the process of learning and who are co-authors of the thematic content of curriculum. This, for Freire, defines the act of solidarity. He says: "solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is solitary; it is a radical posture" (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 49). By no means, however, does building culturally sensitive relationships with learners expunge all power imbalances between teachers and their learners, for as we ascertain from Foucault, power is a part of people's everyday lives and is exercised at every moment of personal interaction (Foucault, 1980). By engaging in friendship with their learners, the awareness of inter-personal power disparity is heightened for the labourer-teachers, who often develop an uncomfortable understanding of their middle-class privileges, as shall be discussed in more detail below. These relationships tend to highlight the "favorable, mobile, and dominant position vis-à-vis the structures of power/knowledge" that the Frontier College volunteers, as middle-class, educated Canadians occupy (Alcoff, 1991, p. 30).

Barbara gives one example of teaching a group of women on her farm placement. She talks about how she was ready to teach English for shopping or getting around town, but instead her colleagues wanted to learn how to respond effectively to racist or sexist comments made towards them by their employer. Barbara moulded her lessons in English response to the needs of her learners, who gained the capacity to defend themselves at work. In doing so Barbara developed stronger relationships with her learners and learned more about the reality of her colleagues' lives in Canada. Barbara's practice can be described as what Foley (2001) calls a 'radical yet ordinary' method of facilitating adult learning, where negative learning is identified, in this case "learning to stand there mute when someone is insulting you" (Barbara) and where positive learning, in this case resistance to disrespectful behaviour, is fostered. This type of learning encounter, Foley claims, is radically educative for both the learners

and the educators (2001, pp. 83-85). Indeed, it is precisely these types of everyday micro-level forms of action at which labourer-teachers excel. In the words of Robert:

> I think if you empower individuals you can have transformative change in their own life. So I do think that is doable through the power of learning. I can think of individual cases where helping workers learn a few key words in English we see sometimes their eyes light up and people realizing how some people in town may have been saying things that were really quite derogatory and they'll be standing up for themselves the next time they encounter that person. I think that's a transformative moment for the workers to challenge racism through the power of the word.

While Frontier College does not openly train labourer-teachers to organise and facilitate a Freirian style pedagogy of praxis, organisationally, Frontier College views the form of individualized student-centred learning that Barbara describes to be the definitive means of facilitating empowering moments for their learners.

### *Learning Through Struggle: Managing a Challenging Work Environment*

In addition to the student-centred learning environment that labourer-teachers are encouraged to foster, and the close relationships that can develop between labourer-teachers and their colleagues, participants claim that learning happens as a result of the general responsibilities and expectations of the labourer-teacher – work which takes place within what one participant describes as a highly chaotic work environment. All participants felt they were placed in a difficult workplace, regardless of the relative kindness or toughness of their respective employers. Through experiencing this difficulty, the participants were transformed and had genuine insight into the experiences of their workmates. In the words of Dennis: "You are up against so many barriers. Getting a sense of all the interests and the complexity of the issue and developing skills in trying to deal with all of that. You are learning through that struggle." And Paul: "There is something very radically educational about the work we are doing, because we have to suffer a little bit and learn from that suffering." The struggle, as described by the participants, could be expressed as three-pronged: firstly, participants speak of the struggle to accomplish the physical labour; secondly, bearing witness and sharing in the experiences of migrant workers' everyday struggles, and thirdly, of juggling a variety of competing interests.

First, with respect to the physical labour, it is important to point out that with the exception of one person all of the participants of this study were either university graduates or university students on summer vacation at the time of their placements. For these educated Canadian volunteers, hard physical labour was outside of the realm of what was considered desirable work. Although the physical labour aspect of their work was paid and cannot be considered a part of their volunteer work, all participants discussed the importance of the physical work in gaining the trust and building relationships with their learners and colleagues. The physical labour

is hence foundational to and cannot be separated from the realm of their volunteer activities. In the words of one participant:

> The fact that we were co-workers gave us an instant bond. Even though you can never get past the fact that you are an outsider, you can share the experience that you are working the same job, especially since it's a hard job, and you are all experiencing the same aches and rashes (Barbara).

Margo talked about the importance of the physical labour to create a level playing field in order to gain the respect of her colleagues: "I always try to work the same hours as the migrant workers and I don't take the weekends off like other [Canadian workers]. I would never do that, so I think there is respect there because of that." Anna, who sustained a shoulder injury as a result of the manual labour, talks about how the physical struggle of doing the work reinforced her relationships with her colleagues and solidified her learning around the issue of labour migration. She says:

> I feel it in my body, in the aches and pains and difficulties. Actually doing the work and having injuries to show for it act as reminders of the experience in a way that intellectually I don't think I'd have gotten if I had just worked on these issues in an intellectual way (Anna).

The second part of the struggle, described as that of bearing witness and sharing in the experience of migrant workers' everyday struggles, was transformative for all of the participants regardless of their workplace. Those participants who felt they had been placed on a farm with a challenging employer felt they had learned from sharing in their colleagues' particularly strained workplace circumstances. Barbara speaks of this:

> The farmer treated his labourer-teachers with the same disrespect that he treated everybody else with. It was an eye-opening experience just to know people could be treated that way at work and the personal realization as to why somebody might allow that to keep going on.

Similarly Carmen describes how, even though she felt it would have been better to somehow have been able to change the behaviour of the farmer, "just having someone there taking stock, seeing what's going on and to a certain degree experiencing it for themselves is important even if nothing comes of it." However, volunteers who were placed with more considerate employers were also aware of the importance of bearing witness to their colleagues' struggles. Paul, who developed respectful relationships with both of his employers, reflects on his experience of sharing in his coworkers' struggles:

> There is something in just going in and trying to share and experience or even understand the experience of people who suffer oppression from a larger political or social system. It would be difficult to come out of that situation without a greater perspective or analysis on the lives of migrant workers.

Anna, when reflecting on one placement where she had also developed a good relationship with the farmer, expresses a similar sentiment:

> I felt like having the opportunity to work on the farm and share in the lives of my colleagues afforded me so much insight into the issues and problems inherent to the Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Program and just the daily toil in general. These are insights that other Canadians just never get because they haven't lived through it.

Struggling to accomplish the physical labour as well as bearing witness and sharing in the experiences of migrant workers' everyday struggles were often described by participants as integral aspects of the process of joining in solidarity with migrant workers. However, the third component of struggle, described as the necessity to juggle the interests of a number of divergent stakeholders–including the growers who invite Frontier College onto their workplaces– complicates the process of solidarity. Unlike other civil-society organizations that advocate for the collective rights of migrant workers in Canada, Frontier College cannot be seen as taking sides politically, because the survival of the labourer-teacher program is dependent on the continued interest of those employers who invite volunteers onto their worksites. Without the support of sympathetic growers, the labourer-teacher program would no longer be granted access to Ontario's largely isolated and invisible migrant workforce. While these relationships are usually initiated and cultivated in the long term by Frontier College administrative personnel, volunteer labourer-teachers are expected to maintain at the very least the appearance of political neutrality, thus suspending any political or historical analysis they may have developed prior to becoming labourer-teachers or that they may be developing as a result of their bourgeoning relationships with their learners. Activist labourer-teachers could lose the College valuable placements. Carmen describes this struggle thus:

> That was so hard. I spent a huge amount of energy all summer just keeping my feelings bottled in and really trying to keep up those relations. I don't think it's necessarily okay to keep quiet about what we see. You feel like you're betraying the workers. I think that labourer-teachers are a strong voice and I think we should be saying more than we are saying.

Also Barbara:

> Once you begin to hear stories of situations that your colleagues find themselves in as guests in our country, I don't know that you can remain neutral. Remaining neutral in the face of that takes a lot of discipline that I know I didn't have and that I wasn't really willing to have either.

Struggle is a key learning tool for the labourer-teachers. The difficulty of the physical labour, bearing witness to their learners' daily struggles and the need to juggle a variety of competing interests in a politically sensitive environment result in moments of genuine growth and often profound insights into the lives of their workmates.

## WHAT WAS LEARNED: CONSCIENTIZATION AND THE LABOURER-TEACHER?

> "… we can stay with Freire or against Freire, but not without Freire" (Torres, 1993, p. 140)

Living and working with migrant workers, sharing their stories, eating all of their meals together, and sharing all of the minutiae of everyday life was transformative for all of the participants. As mentioned, labourer-teachers talked about a wide variety of learning outcomes as a result of their work as labourer-teachers. All participants talked about learning how to conduct a variety of new tasks, for example becoming more proficient at teaching, improving their Spanish skills, as well as increasing self-confidence and gaining an appreciation for the value of hard work. However, the process of solidarity and struggle that the participants experienced as labourer-teachers also resulted in political and cultural learning; namely, participants developed a deeper understanding of power and privilege. Often, this understanding was developed through labourer-teachers' engagement with micro-level forms of resilience and resistance. For example: facilitating educative moments that resulted in individual learners developing the capacity to defend themselves in English against exploitative behaviour in the workplace and the community. All in all, there was a general sense among the participants of this study that their experiences resulted in a measure of 'politicization'. While it is true that the reflection/action component of emancipatory pedagogical practice is truncated and that labourer-teachers can easily return to their privileged lives once their placements are complete, Torres' comment above suggests a need to understand what it means for these volunteers to have felt 'politicized' as adult educators. While there are clear limitations to the conscientization process for Frontier College labourer-teachers, it may be a useful exercise to analyze participant responses through this lens.

As I have argued, the priority that Frontier College places on student-centred learning and cultural synthesis, in addition to learning through the struggle of managing a challenging work environment, results in the openness of labourer-teachers to learn from their learners. A window of opportunity is thus opened for volunteers to experience the depth of learning that Freire describes. Central to the experience of labourer-teachers is the transfer of knowledge from the Global South to the Global North and the learning that this transfer produces for the volunteers. Labourer-teachers learned about privilege and oppression, the significance of being a witness to injustice, and the importance of listening and not always speaking on behalf of others. Participants gained a deeper understanding of the issues faced by migrant workers and learned to better understand their own status and role in Canadian society. Barbara reflects on her time as a volunteer:

> Just being in solidarity, bearing witness and being open to others and to the possibility of action, if that is what is wanted, is so important. Even just my own personal reflections and just coming to an understanding of what my role is in the larger system is so important.

For Freire, in addition to cultural synthesis, becoming an ally with those less privileged also means a retreat from privilege and is integral to the act of joining in solidarity with others. In light of this, it must be reiterated and stressed that labourer-teachers do not perform a permanent retreat from their privilege. That said, their decisions to work on farms and live together with migrant farm workers, however temporary, provided participants with what may be described as a process of 'epistemological distancing' as theorized by Freire (1997, p. 92). By choosing to engage in difficult and undesirable work in solidarity with migrant workers, Frontier College volunteers confront a difficult social reality. This choice and their resulting intimate relationships with co-workers provide labourer-teachers with a lens through which they may witness their own relation to privilege and oppression. For some participants this process became a guiding principle of their work as volunteer labourer-teachers. In the words of Paul:

> I think the idea of solidarity and becoming an ally is embedded in the work that we are doing, especially because we are putting ourselves in a position that is not coveted by society. I mean, for the most part we are university educated Canadians, and being a general labourer on a farm, it's like you're downgrading yourself and it's not really fun. It's not like poverty tourism; it's just hard work.

For Freire (1970/2006), the process of cultural synthesis constitutes a rebirth for the privileged educator. This constitutes an epistemological shift in understanding what counts as knowledge and action. Collins (1987; 1991) describes this shift as a deliberate effort by educators to engage in the dialogical process where the teacher becomes also a learner, and the learner becomes also a teacher. Trust, claims Freire, is a likely result of this dialogical process, and for Collins this learning has both socio-political and deeply personal implications; the dialogical process is an act of "friends educating friends" (Collins, 1987, 1991; Freire, 2006). For these participants, the personal aspect of this process of solidarity brought about deep learning on the subject of privilege and oppression as well as their social location in Canadian society.

Living in solidarity and learning through struggle provide the volunteer labourer-teachers with the opportunity to gain insights on their role in the oppression of others. As Bishop (2002) explains, this is an integral step to those with more privilege becoming an ally to those with less privilege. Frontier College is aware of the difficult workplace situations in which labourer-teachers are often placed. In the words of Robert:

> If someone could do a survey you would probably find that we are working more proportionally with farmers who are the best-practice type employers. However, we have some farmers who are deplorable in their practices in dealing with people and who are oblivious to that fact and have continued to invite us onto the farm year after year.

For the participants of this study, being a witness to such conditions as an employee and co-worker left a lasting impression. In the words of Kate: "I think it was important

for me to see the kind of desperation and isolation that a lot of migrant workers experience." Similarly, Carmen talked about how as a Canadian she felt complicit in what she called the systemic disrespect toward and exploitation of migrant workers:

> Basically the farmer was just bringing in these people to work for him for low pay and to get as much work from them as he needed and then sending them back home to Mexico again. There was absolutely no respect there whatsoever and the Canadian government and Canadian citizens were in support of this. I was walking into this horrible situation that I wasn't prepared for.

For labourer-teachers who participated in this study, their personal and everyday experiences in the workplace and in the community exposed their embeddedness and complicity in an unjust situation. This realization offered volunteers an opportunity to question previous beliefs and attitudes toward issues such as globalization, racism, and their own role as educators and community development practitioners.

## EMPATHIC IMAGINATION AND THE CONSCIENTIZATION OF THE PRIVILEGED

When the educator becomes immersed in the context of those with whom he or she is working (as according to Freire's concept of cultural synthesis), privileged educators are given the opportunity to reflect on and come to an understanding of the social construction of privilege; in some cases for the first time. Participants often felt uncomfortable with their position of privileged outsider. Carmen, for example, was always conscious of her outsider status:

> I wasn't experiencing what they were experiencing. It didn't matter that I was doing the exact same thing; it was a different experience. I often felt like I was this little "do-gooder" sweeping in to save the day, which is so ridiculous.

It is clear from Carmen's sentiments that labourer-teachers struggle with their role as mere consumers of an exotic community development experience. Frontier College attempts to mitigate these social relations by employing a student-centred approach to their work. Overall, for these participants, focussing on the needs of their learners tended to bring relations of power into sharper focus. The work of cultural synthesis facilitated an understanding of privilege as a social construction for the novice adult educators involved in this study. This is an important step in the transformation of privilege, for "a deepened consciousness of their situation leads people to apprehend that situation as an historical reality susceptible of transformation" (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 85). As adult educators, making the conscious effort to work in solidarity with others "demands that we not only *think* differently about ourselves and others, but *live* differently in the world" (Berger-Knorr, 1997, p. 14). For Foley (1999), this type of learning is gained informally and experientially. Formal education rarely addresses the social construction of privileges such as gender, race or class, resulting in what Kincheloe has referred to as a "plague" of power illiteracy among students in the Global North (1999, p. 176). Concerned with the way in

which some white people come to understand the historicity and social construction of their racial privilege, Kincheloe describes a process of dialogue he calls 'empathic imagination' where white people attempt to understand the perspective of non-whites. This process involves listening to others and taking them seriously. As a phenomenological experience of challenging the boundaries of privilege, it is a necessary part of learning for critical pedagogy.

From the literature of international development studies, Kapoor (2004) claims that the type of phenomenological experience that Kincheloe (1999) is describing as the expression of the 'empathic imagination' is fundamental to developing an ethical relationship between those from the Global North and those from the Global South. That notwithstanding, to be privileged allows one the *choice* to be or not to be in solidarity with others. As such, the deconstruction of privilege in teacher-learner relationships cannot constitute a suspension or elimination of privilege. For adult educators to enter a situation and choose a path of solidarity is itself an exercise in privilege and does not entail the surrender of one's social location. Dennis comments on his heightened awareness of his own privilege:

> I have no illusions to the fact that I never stopped carrying my privilege and how my course was smooth in countless ways. My brief glimpse of the experience is immeasurably different from someone who does that work for 25 years because that's the best option they have.

The subverting of interpersonal relationships in this context is not a neutral action; it is political and is part of an analysis of power relations. The process of coming to a deeper understanding of privilege involves a "reversal of information and knowledge production so that they flow from South to North" (Kapoor, 2004, p. 641). Paul discusses what he calls his 'unlearning of privilege' and the transfer of knowledge from Global South to Global North:

> When talking to my colleagues, an analysis of oppression and privilege was always so clear – they have such a clear understanding of it because they have to negotiate those relations more than a middle-class white person from Canada whose life is so pampered. It's difficult for a white middle-class man like me to see the structures of oppression because I am so embedded in that oppression, but my migrant worker colleagues seem to understand it so clearly. Maybe it's Canadians that have to unlearn their privilege, maybe that's the reason to do this work. I think it's taught me more about social justice than anything I've ever done. It's allowed me to develop a level of analysis of privilege that I wouldn't have developed otherwise.

The development of an ethical relationship between those who are privileged and those who are less so begins with an understanding of the historicity of privilege and learned prejudices (Kapoor, 2004). As we have seen from Freire, a deepening understanding of the historicity of one's reality is an integral step in the transformation of that reality. Hence, the process of 'unlearning' corresponds to Freire's concept of

conscientization and is an essential element in transforming behaviours that reinforce privilege and oppression.

## THE BROKEN SPIRAL OF LEARNING

I argue in this section that the knowledge gained by labourer-teacher volunteers remains dormant, or unable to be told, as a result of Frontier College's individualist structure. Politically, Frontier College is unwilling to take a stand on the treatment of migrant farm workers and pedagogically the organization is averse to incorporating a process of reflection and action. For both their learners and their volunteers the process of conscientization is clearly broken. In order for the process of conscientization to occur, the process of reflection and action must take place at the end of the learning cycle, before beginning the cycle of learning anew (Bishop et al., 1988). In the case of Frontier College labourer-teachers, the process of adult learning that Bishop et al. describe if practiced, could result in powerful consequences for volunteers' learning.

It is interesting that for some of the more entrepreneurial labourer-teachers, their learning experiences do, to a certain extent, culminate in analysis, strategic planning and action within the workplace and in the local communities during their placements. Margo talks about the possible ripple effects of labourer-teacher learning:

> The people that do this program are very dynamic, they want to make changes, they want to do good work and they don't really want to get paid for it, so I think when you have that kind of worker good things come of it.

When asked about their experiences of 'taking action' in their role as labourer-teachers, participants discussed their experimentation with micro-forms of action that occurred in the workplace or in the local community, unbeknownst to their employers. Some of the participants discussed how they were able to use their privileged status as Canadians to talk to their fellow Canadian farm workers about some of the issues faced by their migrant colleagues, including the issue of racism and bullying in the workplace. Carmen, for example, talks about sitting around in the farm lunchroom with other Canadian farm workers and subtly initiating discussions on the treatment of migrant workers on the farm. Barbara also talks about trying to initiate dialogue with the farmer's wife while working together in the packing plant: "My fellow labourer-teacher and I would try to facilitate a dialogue with the boss's wife and the two Mexican women that we worked with. We would try to find commonalities to talk about, like kids for example." In addition to finding windows of opportunity to facilitate dialogue or challenge perspectives in the workplace, three of the labourer-teachers interviewed also organized community events. Paul organized a community dinner where a number of community stakeholders were in attendance, including both migrant agricultural workers and local residents (including farmers and local politicians); Barbara organized a picnic with her colleagues and several local residents that she had met at the library in town; and

Margo and her labourer-teacher colleague organized a community play starring locals as well as migrant workers from both Mexico and the Caribbean. Margo also organized a language exchange group composed of Mexican learners and a group of locals who wanted to learn Spanish. This group was still meeting when she left her placement at the end of the summer. When participants were asked about the ripple effects of their learning at the community level beyond the local, people talked about feeling a sense of social responsibility, but of not having the space or the support to put their learning into action. Participants talked about the difficulty of maintaining the friendships they had developed as volunteers and of the importance of sharing their stories informally with friends and family.

What is most significant about volunteer labourer-teachers implementing various strategies to complement their ongoing learning is that each encounter or event was planned and put into action by individual volunteers who felt strongly motivated to take action. A key point to underline is that organizationally, the Frontier College labourer-teacher program does not offer a space for volunteers to collectively reflect on their learning for the purposes of critical analysis, strategic planning or action, resulting in a missed opportunity for those volunteers to share their experiences with each other and in their communities. In the words of Robert, Frontier College is a literacy organization that politically is:

> ...in the liberal middle whose mission it is to emancipate or empower individuals but not really to overthrow oppressive conditions. I think that at their best our volunteers can strain at the boundaries of those two positions: the liberal middle perspective and the radical perspective. But, Frontier College as a whole is situated in such a way that political advocacy is not likely to happen.

He continues:

> If we were more advocacy driven, or even perceived to be that way, I mean if we became known as a group of people that run around and make a lot of noise in town and then present a somewhat kinder, gentler face to the farmer, that could create conflict or pose a threat to the other literacy work that we do.

Carmen describes her frustration at this situation:

> My understanding from Frontier College was that the most important thing was to keep up relations with the farmers and that we weren't supposed to speak out about or discuss what we had seen or experienced. That was hard for me and I don't at all feel comfortable about that.

Carmen's expression of frustration is a sentiment that was expressed across the board by all participants. Participants all agree that the labourer-teacher program offers volunteers a space and the conditions to maximize informal learning through a learner-centred approach to teaching and intimate everyday contact with learners. Frontier College's organizational need for neutrality and an individualized approach to pedagogy, however, serve to disempower both volunteers and their learners.

Disturbingly, while the structure of the program does allow for volunteers to engage in some micro-level forms of social change education, the need to maintain relationships with farmers ensures that delinquent employers may continue exploitative behaviours without consequence.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter is to engage in the discussion of informal learning of volunteers and to draw attention to the learning that takes place for Frontier College volunteers when the unique structure of the labourer-teacher program is examined. Other studies could examine the experiences of a number of other stakeholders, including the learning that takes place for the migrant workers – the true mission of the labourer-teacher program. If labourer-teachers are correct in their impressions that they had learned more than their learners, it is ironic to think that in prioritizing the learning of their learners it is the volunteers who undergo the more transformative learning experience.

That said, the analysis of the data collected for this research suggests that by actively rejecting the volunteer-tourism model common in international development youth organizations, and by prioritizing the learning of their learners over the experience of their volunteers, the Frontier College labourer-teacher program develops a structure where cultural synthesis, solidarity, student-centred learning, and the struggle to work in a taxing workplace environment enable transformative learning for their volunteers. In highlighting the informal learning of labourer-teachers within this context, however, it is not the intention of this project to convey the Frontier College labourer-teacher program as the perfect antidote to volunteer-tourism.

Even though volunteers start a process of conscientization and begin to experience more critically their role as middle-class Canadians and understand their role in the process of global inequality, Frontier College's need to maintain political neutrality and their disinterest in the experiences had by their volunteers result in the breaking of the labourer-teachers' cycle of learning/reflection. While dynamic individual volunteers sometimes do make the effort to plan community events or facilitate dialogue based on the learning acquired informally while working as a volunteer, Frontier College does not provide a space for labourer-teachers to actively reflect on their experiences for the purposes of strategic planning and action, thus inhibiting possible ripple effects of volunteer learning in the community at large.

## NOTES

1 In order to minimize the risk of participants being identified, both their names and the specific details of their workplace scenarios have been changed.

2 Data for this project was collected during the spring and summer of 2007.

3 For historical information on the Frontier College labourer-teacher program see: Cook, 1987; Martin, 2000; Morrison, 1989, 1999a, 1999b; Quigley, 2007; Robinson, 1960; Wilde, 2012.

4 For an examination of codification techniques refer to Freire (1973).

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# 5. THE EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANTS WHO VOLUNTEER TO ACCESS THE LABOUR MARKET: PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF "VOLUNTEERISM"

## INTRODUCTION

National surveys such as the Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (CSGVP), and the Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL) survey reveal that the volunteering patterns and activities of immigrants and Canadian born volunteers are similar, donating time and energy to their communities (Volunteer Canada, 2007). The growing trend of immigrants doing unpaid work in the public, non-profit and private sectors explicitly to increase their employability, however, raises some interesting conceptual questions about the very definition of volunteer work and issues of power and exploitation in the workplace. Each year, thousands of immigrants encounter daunting barriers in their attempts to find employment that matches their education, skills and work experience. Among these barriers are the non-recognition of foreign credentials, linguistic difficulties, limited social and professional networks, and lack of "Canadian work experience". A common strategy undertaken by many newcomers to access the labour market is to do volunteer work (Couton, 2002; Mirchandani, Ng, Coloma-Moya, Maitra, Rawlings, Shan, Siddiqui & Slade, 2010; Slade, 2011; Teo, 2004).

Although there are many studies on voluntary work in Canada, little is known about the extent, modes and effectiveness of volunteers' acquisition of new skills, knowledge, attitudes and values, and the relationship between formal, non-formal and informal learning among immigrants who seek improved access to the Canadian labour market through volunteering. This chapter reports on a qualitative empirical research project entitled 'The Informal Learning of Immigrant Volunteers', one of 13 projects in the "Changing Working Conditions and Lifelong Learning in the New Economy" research network, coordinated by the Centre for the Study of Education and Work at the University of Toronto. The main concern of the national network was an exploration of the current forms, contents, and outcomes of organized educational, training and informal learning activities in Canada's 'new economy' (Livingstone, Myles, Doray, Hubich & Collins, 2004). The "Informal Learning of Immigrant Volunteers" project was undertaken in partnership with the community organization 'A Commitment to Training and Employment for Women' to investigate

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the connections between informal learning and the volunteer work undertaken by immigrants to improve their access to the labour market.

This paper is presented in five sections. First, we outline the context, methodology and demographics of the study. Next, we present the findings, highlighting volunteer experiences, informal learning and labour market outcomes of the participants. Third, we outline the participants' recommendations on how to improve the volunteer experience. Following the recommendations we draw out some thoughts on the study, and end with a short conclusion.

## THE STUDY

Approximately 250,000 immigrants migrate to Canada every year and are classified into three groups: Economic Class (skilled workers, business immigrants); Family Class (spouses, partners, children, parents and grandparents of existing Canadian citizens); and Protected Persons (convention refugees). Since 1995, the majority of immigrants (approximately 60% annually) have been in the Economic Class in which suitability is determined by the Points System. Points are awarded for education, work experience, age, English and French language facility, arranged employment in Canada, and the educational qualifications of the principal applicant's partner or spouse (Gogia & Slade, 2011). The explicit goal of Canadian immigration policy continues to be to attract the "best and the brightest" people to Canada (Kenney, 2012); the result of this stringent selection process has been the creation of a large pool of highly educated newcomers.

Research indicates that immigrant education and work experience is consistently undervalued in Canada (Alboim & the Maytree Foundation, 2002; Basran & Li, 1998; Boyd & Thomas, 2002; Creese & Wiebe, 2009; Gogia & Slade, 2011; Grenier & Xue, 2011; Li, 2001; Reitz & Bannerjee, 2007; Reitz, 2007; Reitz, 2001a; Slade, 2011; Slade, 2012). Studies have estimated that the lack of recognition of skilled immigrants' credentials and prior learning impacts Canadian economic performance by approximately $15 billion annually (Reitz, 2001b). The links between immigration status, unemployment, poverty and racial origin have been investigated, and it has been shown that there exists a racialized and gendered labour market where people of colour, particularly women, are over-represented in low income sectors (Galabuzi, 2006; Guo, 2010; Guo, 2009; Jackson, 2002; Kunz, Milan, & Schetagne, 2000; Mirchandani, 2003; Ornstein, 2000; Sangha, Slade, Mirchandani, Maitra, & Shan, 2012; Shan, 2012; Shan, 2009; Xu, 2012). According to the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC), although 76% of new immigrants have at least one type of international credential, such as a university degree, 70% experienced barriers in gaining access to the Canadian labour market at an appropriate level (Statistics Canada, 2003). The biggest barrier to finding appropriate employment for immigrant professionals was the lack of "Canadian work experience" (Statistics Canada, 2003). LSIC also revealed that immigrants experience "occupational skidding"

(Kofman, 1999) as six out of ten immigrants who were employed at the time of the survey were not working in the profession or occupation in which they were educated and experienced (Statistics Canada, 2003). The barriers are especially profound for immigrants in professions that are regulated in Canada, such as engineering. A survey of internationally educated engineers from more than 60 countries showed that only 16% were employed in engineering-related job, 54% were unemployed, and 30% were employed in survival and non-engineering jobs (Dang, 2005; see also Slade, 2008).

### *Methodology*

This study was conducted in partnership with 'A Commitment to Training and Employment for Women' (ACTEW), a non-governmental organization that delivers employment and training services to women in Toronto The first draft of the interview guide was reviewed in a focus group with 15 representatives of community-based agencies and revised according to the feedback. In addition to being a member of the community advisory focus group, ACTEW was responsible for recruiting the study participants, conducting the interviews and transcribing the tapes. In total, ACTEW conducted 38 semi-structured individual interviews. After the individual interviews were analyzed, a focus group with seven Chinese immigrant volunteers was conducted to further investigate certain issues, such as the effects of the volunteering experience on different types of learning and on the job search process. This brought our total number of participants up to 45.

We chose to focus on Chinese immigrants because the largest number of immigrants to Canada since 1998 is from China and a high percentage of them are professionals. Participants for this focus group (conducted by Daniel Schugurensky, Yang C. Luo, Bonnie Slade and Hongxia Shan) were recruited through a posting on a Chinese language listserve. Interestingly, the call for participants for the focus group was read by a Chinese journalist who worked on a Chinese community television station. She expressed interest in videotaping the focus group and reporting on this project for future broadcast. All of the participants agreed to be videotaped during the focus group, demonstrating their willingness to share their volunteer experiences, no matter positive or negative, with other newcomers who were also seeking access to the labour market.

### *Demographics*

In total, we interviewed 30 women and 15 men from 17 different countries. These individuals entered Canada as members of all immigration categories. Forty-three participants (96%) had completed at least one university degree and had on average 10 years of professional work experience prior to immigrating to Canada. Professions of the participants included medicine, engineering, business administration, teaching (grade school as well as university), psychology and information technology.

The vast majority of the participants had been in Canada for five years or less. Table 1 shows the age breakdown for the participants. It is interesting to note that 58% of the group was under the age of 35. This is a higher percentage than the WALL survey in which 48% of the sample was between the ages of 18 and 24 years; and 37% was between 25 and 34 years. The younger ages of our sample indicate the effects of the immigration selection process which prioritizes younger people.

*Table 1. Age breakdown of the participants*

| *Age* | *Men* | *Women* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 29 and under | 3 | 6 | 9 (20%) |
| 30–34 | 6 | 11 | 17 (38%) |
| 35–39 | 4 | 7 | 11 (24%) |
| 40 plus | 2 | 6 | 8 (18%) |
| Total | 15 | 30 | 45 (100%) |

## THE FINDINGS

### *Volunteer Experiences*

The concept of volunteering for work experience was not one that most participants were familiar with prior to their arrival in Canada. It was mostly through informal communication with other more established immigrants that participants learned about volunteer work as a strategy to enter the paid labour market. According to one participant:

> I have a friend who worked at this place, and when I met her, she said, what do you want in Canada? At the time, I was really, really new here, and I had no experience, I had no chance to meet people, and I had no chance to speak English. I told her quite frankly about my frustrations. She asked me, how about you work as a volunteer. If you work as a volunteer, you can meet people, speak English, and if you can get a chance to volunteer in Canada, the volunteer experience is very, very important. Someday it will be very useful for you. That's why I decided to do it.

People also turned to volunteering after their job search process had proven to be unsuccessful in finding an appropriate position:

> This is a totally new concept – never done this before, never even thought about it. I have relatives in Canada and they said that I could get a job the next day. I came in with the expectation that I would get a job the day after I arrived. I didn't. I said that I am not going to work for free. And then you come down and realize that this is the only way.

The overall purpose for volunteering for all of the participants was to improve their access to the labour market. The specific reasons for volunteering included: "to gain Canadian work experience" (47%); to improve understanding and use of English, especially work-related language (36%); to learn about "Canadian culture" (22%); to get a job (20%); to network (18%); to be in a "real" Canadian workplace (16%); to meet people (11%); to have something to do (9%); and to get involved in Canadian society (7%). It is important to note that those who indicated "it was something to do" had arrived in Canada as refugees and were not legally allowed to work as they had not been granted a work permit.

The volunteer work placements were brokered through a community-based agency (usually through an employment assistance program) or negotiated on their own. The site of volunteer work included the non-profit (82%), for-profit (16%) and public sectors (2%). The length of time for the volunteer placements varied widely. Some participants volunteered two or three hours per week; others worked close to full-time hours for a fixed period of time, usually three months but one participant worked full-time for five months.

Ideally, the volunteer job placement process included an initial interview to determine suitability, an orientation to the workplace and the specific job tasks, feedback on performance, recognition for work well done, an evaluation at the end of the placement and a reference letter to aid in the volunteer's job search for paid work. Many participants reported that they had an in-depth interview for the volunteer work placement. While most organizations conducted initial interviews, other elements, such as training, ongoing feedback, recognition, exit evaluations and reference letters were unevenly performed. Some interviewees expressed frustration and disappointment at receiving no recognition from the organization for their volunteer work. For example, one woman who had had a volunteer placement a few months earlier with the Ontario Government, reported that she was still waiting for a reference letter, a critical tool for her job search. Moreover, formal evaluations specifically associated with learning within volunteer work were very seldom provided by organizations. Volunteers reported that more regular feedback would have not only enhanced their learning from the placement but also would have been helpful in their subsequent job search.

Volunteer tasks varied from placement to placement – network administration, website development (for those with computer skills), looking after kids (summer camp), arts and crafts for kids, teaching computer software classes, setting up and maintaining computer networks, general office support, wrapping gifts, accounting, filing tax returns, administrative assistance, and interpreting for people who had limited English. Some of the tasks required only general and basic skills, such as gift-wrapping at a shop, while others needed professional skills and technical knowledge, such as computer network setup, and knowledge of particular software.

Some participants reported feeling completely integrated into the workplace; some even worked side by side with paid employees doing similar work. One computer

programmer, for example, volunteered for three months developing software code as part of a software development team. Because the participants hoped to secure paid work from the volunteer placements, they worked very hard to make an excellent impression on the management of the organization. One participant said, "When I do data entry, I try my best. I don't even take a break". Another participant indicated that it was difficult for her to make suggestions for improvement while she was in the volunteer placement:

> I have spoken up but sometimes I don't always feel comfortable because I'm new to the organization. Just like any new employee I'm looking for acceptance, not wanting to change things, not change things but not wanting to be too demanding.

### *Informal Learning*

Participants indicated that the informal learning from the volunteer work placements was more significant than formal job-related training. This finding, consistent with the results from the CSGVP and the WALL surveys, suggest that volunteer work is one of the main sources of informal learning for immigrants in adapting to their new environment in Canada. One of the identified aspects of informal learning was communication skills, including the ability to practice speaking English, which was reported by 40% of the participants as the most important learning acquired during the volunteer experience. Other key aspects of learning were the value of networking (36%), knowledge of Canadian workplace practices (25%), adapting to and understanding "Canadian culture" (16%), increased self-confidence (16%) and working in a diverse workforce (13%). For one participant, how to work in a multi-cultural environment was the most important learning:

> Of course I learned about myself and I learned about other people, people who have different personalities and different cultures. For me…people come from different cultures but we're all the same. We may speak different languages but we're all same. Before, when I lived in China it was very closed, and we don't see many other people from different countries so since I came here it just opened my eyes…wow! This is a realization!

Participants reported most of the learning was acquired through informal contacts with others, including discussions with other volunteers and staff members, observations and unofficial mentoring. Even when the volunteer position involved working primarily on their own (for example, computer programming or making contact with people over the telephone), participants still indicated that the most valuable input to their learning process was the time spent informally with others:

> Although I spent less time with other people, I think I learned more from those times. I have 10 years of [international] work experience so [the volunteer

> tasks] are not difficult. The information that the other employees passed on to me, that information really made a difference.

Very few participants mentioned technical or "hard" skills that developed specifically from the volunteer work placement, such as learning a new computer program or how to use a cash register. This finding seems to contradict the CSGVP and WALL surveys. The latter reported that those born outside of Canada are more likely to report learning about "hard" skills, such as using computers and new equipment. However, it should be noted that our sample represented a highly educated population born outside of Canada. Most likely, they had already acquired these basic "hard" skills through their professional work in their home country, and these skills are easier to transfer to a new context. In contrast, their soft skills learning pertained to social, cultural and environmental issues:

> I think the volunteer experience helped me most to adjust myself to the Canadian workplace culture. It helped me to improve soft skills, such as the way I deal with the manager and also how to be a team player working together for a project.

### *Labour Market Outcomes and Issues*

Consistent with the results of CSGVP and the WALL surveys, most participants in our sample felt that what they learned through their volunteer placement was valuable and helpful to them in their job search in Canada. A large majority (91%) indicated that they would volunteer again for "Canadian work experience" and seven percent would do it again but with some changes (less time, more closely matched to their profession). Only one participant indicated that they would not volunteer again for the purposes of gaining "Canadian work experience". Many people felt that volunteer work was a necessary route to paid employment:

> For us new immigrants, you have to go into employment in this way [volunteering] because no one will accept you, no one will believe you can do the job.

In relation to the outcomes of the volunteer experience, at the time of the interviews only 13% of participants were in a job that matched their skills and experience. Most of the participants were either unemployed (42%) or underemployed (44%). Underemployed included those who were working in their own fields but at a much lower level (and pay) than their qualifications, as well as those in unrelated "survival" jobs characterized by low pay and irregular hours. Underemployed skilled immigrants experience a double jeopardy when trying to find an appropriate job in their profession. Not only do their skills become outdated in light of changes in their fields, but they also suffer a deskilling process with respect to their original capacities. Women were more likely than men to be underemployed (53% vs. 27%), however unemployment was experienced more prevalently by men (53% vs. 27%).

Only 10% of the women and 20% of the men were employed in a job that matched their skills and experience. One woman summed up her journey as follows:

> I used to be a civil engineer. I did some other little work, like I worked for government … when I came (to Canada) I was doing all kinds of jobs like housecleaning, home worker, then I did a little bit of office work.

Of the participants, only 29% did a volunteer job related to their professions. The majority (71%) volunteered in jobs unrelated to their profession. For example, a woman engineer from Russia did a five-month placement doing data entry at a Ministry of the Provincial Government. A male accountant from Indonesia volunteered at a community organization helping out in a computer room. A male engineer from China volunteered at a community organization teaching children crafts, and a woman doctor from Bangladesh volunteered at a community organization doing administrative work. While 69% of volunteer placements took place in community organizations, only 16% of participants had a background in social services.

Exploitation is another issue that emerged in our interviews. When asked to reflect on their volunteer experiences and provide suggestions for the volunteer placement and related organizations, some volunteers expressed their concerns that some companies were likely to take advantage of volunteers and merely intended to use their labour to cut down expenses. While emphasizing what she had learned during volunteering, a young woman who majored in computer information management challenged the use of volunteers in for-profit companies:

> When I look at it now, at the time the company needed someone to do their website but it was only for a short amount of time, so the employer wants it to be free because they don't want to pay a lot of money for somebody else who has already been here for a long time. That's why they choose us… I know volunteering in the co-op is a positive ways of getting new immigrants into jobs but in other ways some employers take advantage of the newcomers.

Many of the participants in the study had done more than one volunteer work placement. One man, a university professor in mathematics from China, had completed five volunteer placements and was not able to secure paid work appropriate to his qualifications. He had volunteered in for-profit software development companies in the hopes of getting a paying job. His experience suggests that some employers have come to rely on the free labour of highly skilled immigrants:

> I became a volunteer at a small company. Their product had some problems and I worked as a JSP programmer at home, modifying this computer code. When I worked out the problems, I sent an email to them and told them what I had done. After one month, the team leader told me now you finish your job, there is no job, if you want continue, ok, there is no pay. If you want, we can give you three months volunteer work reference. If you want more, because you did a good job, I can give you half a year volunteer work experience.

This volunteer experience did not add to his social networks, knowledge of Canadian workplaces or his facility with English, as he did the work on his own from his home. After he had this experience, he was told of a hiring opportunity at a new software company. When he contacted the manager, expecting a low rate of pay, he was told, "welcome as a volunteer", instead of as an employee. He decided to accept the work as a volunteer:

> When I got there, I found almost all of the Chinese programmers were volunteers. First you have to volunteer there for about two months, and then they will think about if you will be hired or not. I asked another person how he found the volunteer job at the company and he said that he posted his resume on the Internet. The company found these resumes on the internet and asked him if he wanted to volunteer…every time when I finish a programming project as a volunteer, they don't need me any more. You have to go.

Other participants also commented that they were not the only volunteer in their workplace. These observations raise questions about the prevalence of employers using volunteer labour to fill labour needs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE LEARNING OF THE PARTICIPANTS

We asked the participants for recommendations as to how volunteer placements could be improved. The suggestions focused on two areas: how the placement organization could improve the volunteer experience and advice for potential volunteers in approaching volunteer work. The vast majority of suggestions were geared towards how community-based organizations, and other public and for-profit workplaces that accept volunteer workers, could improve the effectiveness, learning and quality of experience for both the volunteer and the organization. There were four main recommendations for how workplaces could make the volunteer placement more valuable for the volunteer:

> Provide more opportunities for one-on-one training.
>
> Establish formal feedback mechanisms to maximize learning for the volunteer.
>
> Structure volunteer placements more like student internships (more formal, some pay).
>
> Consider volunteering as a mutual giving. Assume that the person is there to learn something not just to do something.

In addition, the participants had some strong advice for immigrants who were considering volunteering for work experience:

> Do something that puts you in contact with people as much as possible, but be clear about where you are volunteering. It has to be in tune with your skills and where you want to go. Ensure that your volunteer work is in the same field as

your education and work experience. In this way, you can meet people in your field and get valuable experience for your job search.

Learn to identify transferable skills. Use the migration experience as an opportunity to switch professions to something you might have always wanted to do.

Never ever accept work without very clear duties and responsibilities. Companies have to be very clear in what they want from you and you need to be very clear about what they will get from you.

## DISCUSSION

Participants reported varied dimensions of informal learning in volunteering. They built up knowledge about life in Canada in general, such as the environment, the culture, and political issues. This finding is consistent with research by Guo (2007), Schugurensky and Mündel (2005) and Livingstone, Myles, Doray, Hubich, & Collins (2004), all of whom argue that volunteering is a valuable source of informal learning, although difficult to describe, evaluate and measure due to its tacit nature. The participants also improved or learned skills suitable for the Canadian working environment, such as understanding and speaking English, interpersonal skills, technologies and office skills. Meanwhile, through volunteering, people established better understanding of values, attitudes and behaviours accepted in Canadian workplace, specifically how to interact with others in the context of Canadian culture or the specific culture of a certain company.

Volunteering is one path immigrants will take to enter a professional field in which they are previously trained and recognized in another country. But can these unpaid work placements really be considered "volunteer work"? As described in Chapter One, Cnaan and his colleagues (1996) proposed that volunteer work exists on a continuum composed of four categories: the extent of free choice; remuneration; formal/informal structure; and, the intended beneficiaries. The data from this case study really pushes the boundaries of this framework.

First, is this work freely chosen? Although strictly speaking, these placements can be considered freely chosen, participants indicated that informal pressures of the labour market that require "Canadian experience" among job applicants are the underlying push for immigrant volunteering. Many participants felt that they had no choice but to access the labour market in this manner. Although 96% of participants had at least one post-secondary degree and relevant work experience, they faced great difficulty in having their credentials recognized by employers. An important motivation for their volunteer work was to find a way to have their credentials validated by a Canadian employer in order to facilitate a move into their former professions. The volunteer work was not seen as their destiny, but only a path to desired paid work. In a sense, informal learning in volunteering was a mediator between volunteer work per se and desired jobs.

In Canada, unpaid internships are on the rise. It is now common for youth or people entering new areas of work to spend time gaining work experience either through volunteering or working at reduced wages on internships or placements as part of formal educational programs. For example, in order to qualify for competitive teacher education programs it is necessary to have a great deal of volunteer classroom experience; this criteria applies equally to Canadian-educated and internationally-educated candidates. Many professional degree programs, such as engineering, include a "professional year experience" program which gives the students an opportunity to work in an actual engineering environment for a modest salary. While a Canadian-educated engineer may or may not have gained work experience through a paid internship prior to graduation, it is highly unlikely that they would have to volunteer after graduation to gain relevant work experience. New immigrants with professional qualifications, however, are often unable to get any relevant paid work experience and, to a certain extent, are forced to volunteer to try to gain a foothold in their area of expertise in Canada.

With respect to remuneration, this case study forces an expansion of the Cnaan, Handy and Wadsworth framework. The vast majority of participants in this study received absolutely no remuneration for their labour. In fact, those participants who found their placements through co-op programs actually had to pay in order to volunteer. The co-op programs offered by the school boards, for example, charge up to $110 for an 18 week course with a three month placement. Paying to volunteer is a practice that is not accounted for in the Cnaan et al. framework. Another example of shifting employee costs to volunteer workers was the situation in which a software engineer was approached by a for-profit software company to compete for a volunteer position. After being selected from a pool of candidates, he was told that he had to pay all his own workplace related costs, including the cost of his workplace insurance. The volunteer job ended up costing this immigrant professional a great deal of money for transportation, insurance and other related costs. At the end of his three month placement, he was not hired by the company, not given any money to cover his expenses and was not credited for his intellectual property.

The structure of immigrant volunteer work can be formal, through immigration settlement organizations, or informal. There was a mix of experience among the participants in that some volunteered through formal employment preparation programs while others simply approached an organization or a company as an individual. Both of these avenues into volunteer work carry the potential for labour market exploitation; an extreme situation was the Chinese mathematics professor who "volunteered" for a for-profit company by working from his home writing software code.

Finally, the goal of this volunteer work is for the participant to find a paid job. The intended beneficiaries are the volunteers themselves and their families. In this respect, this case study fits within the Cnaan et al. model, straddling two of the three subcategories: benefit oneself and benefit/help friends and/or relatives.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed at exploring the learning dimension of volunteer work done by immigrants seeking "Canadian work experience" to gain access to the labour market. Our findings indicate that informal learning constitutes an important component of the immigrants' voluntary work experience. Participants in this study valued their informal learning about "Canadian culture" and communication so much that they rated their volunteer experiences very positively despite the fact that only 13% of the participants found employment matched to their education, skills and experience after they had completed their volunteer placements. The volunteer work undertaken by immigrant professionals and the conditions under which they employ volunteer work as a strategy to obtain Canadian work experience raises important questions about the limits of what can be considered volunteer work.

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# 6. "LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER": VOLUNTEERS' LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN HOUSING CO-OPERATIVES[1,2]

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports findings from an inquiry into the learning of housing co-operative volunteers. The volunteers who participated in this study are involved in the self-governance of their housing co-operatives. These mini-democracies are an excellent context in which to tease out some of the informal learning of volunteers related to the democratic process. Two main research questions guided this exploration. First, what do housing co-operative members learn through their volunteer work in the co-operative? Second, how do they learn? The first question relates to the content of the learning, and the second to the process by which such learning is acquired.

In order to set the conceptual and institutional context for the presentation of the findings, we introduce the paper with a general discussion of housing co-operatives and learning. The findings on learning include both content and process dimensions. The learning content is presented in six areas: self-governance; housing co-operative; leadership; attitudes and values; political efficacy; and other competencies. We explore the learning process dimension through different analytical categories: conferences; workshops; materials; mentorship; daily interactions; networking; and learning by experience. The chapter closes with a series of conclusions and recommendations that emerged from the research process.

## HOUSING CO-OPERATIVES AND LEARNING PROCESSES

### *Learning in Housing Co-operatives*

Our study was conducted in partnership with the Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto (CHFT) and the Ontario Region of the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada (CHFC). Canadian housing co-operatives adhere to the seven co-operative principles: 1) voluntary and open membership; 2) democratic member control; 3) member economic participation; 4) autonomy and independence; 5) education, training, and information; 6) co-operation among co-operatives; and, 7) concern for community (Canadian Co-operative Association, 2004). These seven principles set

*F. Duguid, K. Mündel & D. Schugurensky (Eds.), Volunteer Work, Informal Learning and Social Action, 115–140.*

the context for the learning acquired by co-operative members, particularly those who volunteer their time on committees and boards.

The functioning of the co-operative depends on the volunteer efforts of members. As Goldblatt (2000) states, "The Canadian co-op housing model has emphasized participation, with members being strongly encouraged to volunteer some of their time to assist on a formal or informal basis with the co-op's ongoing operations" (p. 144). Co-operative members' sense of ownership and concomitant political efficacy is at the same time necessary for co-operatives' functioning and a very rich site for their learning. As articulated:

> Co-op housing is member-controlled housing. The members who live in a co-op are the ones responsible for running the co-op. Each member has a vote and every year members elect a Board of Directors from the membership. Most co-ops hire staff to do the day-to-day work. Members make the big decisions about how the buildings will be maintained and how the business of the co-op will be managed. Members work together to keep their housing well-managed and affordable. (Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto [CHFT], 2004)

Simultaneously, housing co-operatives promote a sense of co-operation and of community. These sixth and seventh principles recognize and embrace the diversity of communities outside and within the individual housing co-operative community.

A particularly important principle for this study is the fifth one. Enshrined in the fifth principle, housing co-operatives promote sharing information, training to develop new skills and knowledge, and learning in a wide range of areas and issues. Indeed, the Canadian housing co-operative movement makes use of a variety of non-formal educational activities such as the annual national conference of the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada and regular local workshops for board members on a broad range of topics. For example, one member told us, "When I was training for the Board we did workshops on things like accountability, conflict of interest, privacy issues…. So there were quite a few workshops, even things like legal responsibilities, because we deal with things like evictions." In this case study, we explore both the learning acquired through these non-formal educational venues and through informal interactions, which are usually not intended for learning.

Housing co-operatives, like many other co-operatives and community groups, suffer from what is known in the literature as the 'free-rider' problem. As Fulton (2000) explains, "the free-rider problem says that benefits of collective enterprises often accrue to the members regardless of whether they contribute actively to the maintenance of the collective enterprise" (p. 287). For many of the co-operative members in our study, participation and recruiting volunteers was definitely an issue. As one interviewee noted:

> If you took participation out of the mix, most of the people in co-op are nice people socially, pay their rent, and are not causing problems in that way.

> The problem is participation. Not everyone wants to do that and a lot of people renege on the commitment that they have signed off on.

For many, it was difficult to speak about this without sounding magnanimous about their own volunteering activities or making normative statements about the (usually lower) volunteering activities of others. Many members spoke about the need to find new members who have the "co-op spirit". As one interviewee pointed out:

> [It is important] that the person really understands; they may not agree with everything, that's OK, but that there is a willingness to dialogue, to understand, or to try to learn about what being a member of a co-op involves.

However, despite the low participation levels that members tended to describe and the free-rider problems observed, co-operative structures provide safe, clean and friendly community-based housing. Fulton (2000) claims that this success is due to the great pains co-operatives take to educate their members. It is precisely the educative elements of housing co-operatives that drive our study.

A particular aspect of learning in housing co-operatives relates to issues of governance and democracy. Following the writings of participatory democracy theorists and educators like Rousseau, Mills, Dewey and Pateman, it is possible to suggest that one of the best ways to learn democracy is "by doing". Based on the insights of participatory democracy theory, we advance the proposition that active participation in small group democracy has an educative effect: it encourages the capacity for self-governance and group work, facilitates the broadening of perspectives and the disposition towards the common good, generates greater feelings of political efficacy, increases political capital, nurtures the interest for participating in public affairs, and overall contributes to the development of an informed and engaged citizenry. As one member asserted:

> Within the co-op structure it is pretty much expected that you are going to be involved as a member of the community as much as possible from the onset of your being a member (which is essentially the time when you move into the co-op). So I realized quite quickly that if I didn't get involved in volunteering within the co-op things would not get done. And I have been fairly active in the co-op since the beginning. I have served on a number of committees.

Based on this proposition, one hypothesis that guided our fieldwork is that the educative effect would be particularly evident in the area of self-governance. Housing co-operatives constitute a particularly good setting for self-governance learning, because the decisions made by boards and committees have a significant impact on the daily lives of members (Mündel, Duguid, & Schugurensky, 2004). The members regularly engage in decision-making in a wide variety of issues, ranging from setting the monthly housing charge (i.e. co-operative fee), to the selection of new members, to hiring a co-operative manager, or to establishing bylaws related to pets. A second related hypothesis is that these processes help participants to develop and

refine important democratic values and attitudes like listening to others, clarifying personal values and the values of others, considering the merits of different options, becoming more sensitive to diversity and social justice issues, and self-confidence. They also help participants to develop a variety of political skills, from leadership to community-building skills. Prior confirmations of this hypothesis have been found in studies on participatory budgets in Latin America (e.g., Schugurensky, 2006) and in studies on housing co-operatives (e.g., Richmond & Mook, 2001). We confirm our hypotheses as well as contribute to these confirmations through the findings in this study.

While we focused on the contribution of mini-democracies to the development of more democratic individuals, communities, and processes, we also acknowledge that 'real mini-democracies' have problematic processes and dynamics, as they often reflect issues of power and unequal opportunities present in society at large. We also explored this in this case study. For example, paradoxically, there is also a challenge for small-scale democracy, especially in conflict situations, because co-operative members have to face each other the day after the meeting took place. This means that a conflict in a meeting can have unavoidable negative consequences for the daily lives of those involved, and this could impact the fairness of the decision-making process.

### *Learning processes*

In our own conceptualization of informal learning, we distinguish between informal learning as setting and informal learning as process. This is an important distinction, because in the discussions on informal learning they are usually conflated. Informal learning as setting refers to the place or site in which learning takes place, for example a housing co-operative. Informal learning as process recognizes that informal learning can also occur within formal and non-formal educational settings. A typical example of this is the learning acquired through the 'hidden curriculum' in the formal education settings of schools (e.g., Apple, 1971). Another example is the informal learning acquired in non-formal education spaces like workshops and conferences. As we will report later, one of our findings is that much of housing co-operative members' learning comes from the informal interactions that take place in the coffee breaks during workshops and conferences. This suggests that non-formal educational activities can create the conditions in which crucial informal learning can flourish.

Another way of learning is through experience. Learners' life experiences outside as well as inside formal educational institutions are increasingly seen as important dimensions of learning (Michelson, 1996; Miller, 2000). Miller (2000) states that "as the contexts in which learning takes place diversify into the home, the workplace, and cyberspace, there is a need for the development of new approaches to practice in experiential learning and of fresh theoretical models to inform practice" (p. 83). In this case study, we explore and consider where experiential learning and learning

through experience diverge and how this relates to the housing co-op volunteer learning context.

Miller's call for the development of new approaches in experiential learning literature has not gone unanswered. Multiple definitions of experiential learning have emerged; the following is a commonly understood definition: "Experiential learning can be defined as a knowledge creation process through which new experiences are integrated into prior experiences and transformed into relevant, durable and retrievable knowledge suitable for use in the learners' environment" (Ndoye, 2003, p. 354). Usher helps to distinguish between learning through experience and experiential learning. "The former happens in everyday context as part of day-to-day life, although it is rarely recognized as such. Experiential learning, on the other hand, is a key element of a discourse which has this everyday process as its 'subject' and which constructs it in a certain way" (quoted in Miller, 2000, p. 73). This discourse is embedded in certain ideological positions, sets of values, and processes of experiential learning, much of which has been defined by David Kolb (1984) who built on previous studies conducted by authors like Dewey (1938), Lewin (1951), and Piaget (1970). Perhaps it is an oversimplification, but another way to understand the distinction between learning through experience and experiential learning is along the boundary between informal and non-formal learning. That is, the reflective act is akin to the intentionality of the learning act implied by non-formal over informal learning.

Where experiential learning diverges from learning through experience is in the active application of reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. Kolb's model is helpful in this matter with his six characteristics of experiential learning. First, this learning is best conceived as a process, and not in terms of outcomes. Second, learning is a continuous process grounded in experience. Third, learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world. Fourth, learning is a holistic process. Fifth, learning involves transactions between the person and the environment. Sixth, learning is the process of creating knowledge. In this approach, experiential learning is understood as the process of creating knowledge through the transformation of experience (Kolb 1984, pp. 25–38). Kolb's model identifies four sequential phases in an experiential learning process: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Although most participants in our research claimed that they learned "by doing," we decided not to undertake a psychological study on the learning process in order to test Kolb's phases. Instead, we decided to focus on the content of the learning acquired through volunteer activities, and, to a lesser extent, on the ways in which research participants identified that such learning was acquired.

As stated, learning through experience and experiential learning differ in a number of ways. One difference is the presence (or lack) of Kolb's second phase reflective observation. Through reflective observation members can work individually or collectively to conceptualize alternate ways of, for example, doing "co-operation", thus advocating for actively experimenting with new practices,

procedures and outcomes. These phases can be undervalued, eliminated, or fractured in terms of the processes and outcomes of experiential learning. Miller (2000) is especially concerned that the reflection process is often abandoned by the learners, but also by adult educators. She asserts that reflection can often take a long time, can be a considerable challenge and sometimes does not happen at all. Ultimately for critical and constructive experiential learning to happen, it is extremely important that reflection be built into the process, that there is enough time allotted to the processes that precede and follow the experience, and that there is enough active energy put into making experiences constructive learning ones. These are not processes only for the learners. Miller (2000) also supports the position that educators need to be actively involved in an examination of their own processes of learning and change, and of their own discursive practices in the context of reflection on their personal and professional activities. This could also be said of co-op housing educators, managers, board members and committee members, as well as all housing co-op members.

Another way of learning for housing co-operative member volunteers is through the mentoring process as mentors or mentees. In general, mentoring can be described as a vehicle for handing down knowledge, maintaining culture, supporting talent, and securing future leadership (Darwin, 2000; Friedman & Phillips, 2002; Kram, 1983). "Both in its stress on the individual and its recognition that adults should be actively involved as planners and participants in their own learning, mentoring is connected to the theories and practices that have become attached to the concepts of lifelong learning and the learning society" (Friedman & Phillips, 2002, p. 272). Mentoring is a process that can be planned and explicit, or can be informal and implicit.

There are a number of different types of mentors and ways of mentoring. For example, older member to younger member mentoring sometimes implies an intense relationship of nurturing and commitment, with a clear difference in age or experience between the two members. This is a traditional example of mentoring framed in the language of paternalism and dependency, and stems from a power-dependent, hierarchical relationship often aimed at a maintaining the status quo (Darwin, 2000). This often produces very good long-term results. Another type of mentoring is peer-to-peer mentoring. Linda Kram (1983), one of the early mentorship researchers within the corporate work world states that "peer relationships appear to offer a valuable alternative to the (traditional) mentor relationship; they can provide some career and psychosocial functions, they offer the opportunity for greater mutuality and sense of equality, and they are more available in numbers" (p. 623). A further example of mentoring is mentor-apprentice. Through this kind of mentoring relationship one person is often more connected with the context, thus the results spur an efficient and excellent learning scenario for the apprentice. In this study on housing co-operatives, we found examples of all types of mentoring, but as we will see mentorship was not very well exploited.

Most of the learning of housing co-op volunteers is from their daily lived experiences within their community of residence. What we will see below is the extent to which reflection and reference to experience is present in the learning sites we identified. For example, we will try to see the extent to which mentoring assists in housing co-op volunteers' reflection on experience and in active experimentation. While our study focuses predominantly on the content of members' learning, we also gain insight into some of the links between learning and experience.

## THE STUDY: METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

The housing co-operatives in our study are comprised of a diverse population of residents. While some of the housing units are subsidized through various government programs (the most common being 'rent-geared-to-income'), there are also many units that are rented at 'market rates'. The result is a community that is an astonishing diversity of not only income levels, but also of race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, ability, etc. This is a very rich foundation on which these 'mini-democracies' are built. One of the central arguments of this paper is that learning from each other in all their diversity is one of the predominant ways in which co-operative members and indeed the co-op movement as a whole learns.

Although housing co-op members who sit on boards and committees do not tend to label what they do as volunteer work,[3] we conceptualize it as such because it falls within the common definition of work that is freely chosen, unremunerated, and of some benefit to the community. Our fieldwork was carried out in Toronto, with the assistance of the Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto (CHFT). A preliminary interview guide was designed collaboratively with the CHFT.[4] It was subsequently modified after pilot interviews and a focus group with experienced co-operative board and committee members. The sample includes 40 co-operative members (23 women and 17 men).

While we were diligent about recruiting participants representing the diversity of housing co-operative movement, we were limited to those who volunteered in committees and boards, as well as those who would come to an interview. Interestingly, our sample included one-third retirees. This is significantly higher than in the general Toronto population, where people over 65 represent only 14% of the city's total population (City of Toronto, 2004). This difference is not entirely surprising, as retirees have more disposable time both to volunteer and to participate in interview sessions. This is further supported by Hall et al (2006, 2001) and Susan Stowe's chapter in this book.

The formal education levels of our sample were also significantly higher than that of the general population of Toronto. According to the 2001 census, for the general population of Toronto (age range 20–64), 82% have completed high school, 25% have completed a community college/technology program and 31% hold a university degree (Statistics Canada, 2004). Among our participants, all

had completed high school, 75% have completed a community college/technology program, and 43% hold a university degree. The relatively high level of formal education of housing co-operative volunteers mirrors the reality that over 80% of volunteers in Canada have postsecondary education (Hall, McKeown, & Roberts, 2001).

In the pilot interviews we started with open-ended questions soliciting members' views on their learning about self-governance issues. Given the elusive and tacit nature of informal learning, this strategy was proven largely insufficient to stir up memories and recall past experiences. In order to elicit responses, we then suggested 10 possible themes of learning and change, and invited members to speak about them. We also kept an open-ended question for additional themes that were not considered among the original 10. This strategy proved very fruitful in assessing the type and the intensity of learning, and in retrieving stories that helped to illustrate statements. Moreover, as co-operative members began to think about their learning regarding those 10 themes, they also managed to retrieve other themes, to the extent that through small increments at the end of the 40 interviews we had built an inventory of 32 themes of learning in housing co-operatives. The themes were grouped in six areas.

*Table 1. The six areas of learning and some of the themes*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Self-Governance*<br>a) social and interpersonal skills<br>b) accountability, responsibility, and transparency<br>c) public speaking, communication skills, and language<br>d) listening and interpreting<br>e) diplomacy, conflict resolution, and consensus building | *Housing Co-operative Management*<br>a) regulations, bylaws, and building codes<br>b) maintenance, repairs, and construction<br>c) staff liaisons<br>d) member selection, education, and support | *Leadership*<br>a) managerial and organizational skills<br>b) mentoring<br>c) coordination and treatment of volunteers |
| *Democratic Attitudes and Values*<br>a) co-operative principles, values and philosophy<br>b) concern for the common good<br>c) multiculturalism, respect for diversity and openness<br>d) an increased interest in international issues | *Political Efficacy*<br>a) self-esteem and self-confidence<br>b) contacts with politicians and elected representatives<br>c) political interest and knowledge<br>d) civic and political engagement | *Other Competencies*<br>a) financial and budgeting skills<br>b) office and clerical skills<br>c) writing newsletters, documents<br>d) computer skills<br>e) gardening skills |

Since we were interested not only in the content of learning acquired, but also in the intensity for each specific learning theme, we asked members to rank their knowledge, skills, and attitudes on a five-point scale twice: before beginning volunteer work and at the time of the interview. If a change had occurred, we asked them to elaborate on the learning experience, clarifying the role of the co-operative experience in the process and to elaborate on the learning experience. In reporting these data, we have grouped the 5-point scale into three levels of learning and change: low (1 and 2), medium (3), and high (4 and 5). While it can be argued that self-assessments lack the rigor of more 'objective' evaluations of learning conducted through pre- and post-tests, members' reflections on their learning provided valuable data about the impact of their experiences in the housing co-operative. Moreover, we hope that this emerging information is further complemented by other studies using different methodological strategies. In any case, we found that asking members to rank themselves was a good way to elicit their tacit learning.[5]

In fact, many respondents commented that they had not realized the breadth and depth of their learning from co-operatives until the moment of the interview. We also solicited members to provide information about the different ways by which learning was acquired. Again, because of the tacit nature of their knowledge on the subject, we supplied the members with a few suggestions about different learning processes: conferences, workshops, face-to-face interactions, email, Internet, observing others, mentoring and 'learning by experience'. We asked them to rank each process as low, medium, high or not applicable with respect to the impact each way had on their learning. Members then commented and expanded on their experiences in relation to these different learning avenues.

## AREAS OF LEARNING

For the purpose of analysis, we grouped the 32 learning themes mentioned by members into six areas: self-governance, management, leadership, attitudes and values, political efficacy, and other competencies. Table 1 above provides a summary of the learning themes noted by participants, grouped by areas. In the next six sections, we will address the specific learning themes that relate to each of these areas. We recognize that our groupings are arbitrary, in the sense that some themes could fit in more than one area. However, a different arrangement of themes and areas would not significantly alter the nature of the findings.

### *Self-Governance*

The area of self-governance includes five themes that relate to deliberation and decision-making. Housing co-operatives nurture self-governance skills because of the diversity of people represented and the strong relationships formed between people living together. These factors are compounded when members volunteer in

committees and boards, which deal with self-governance dilemmas more often than not. For example here a member describes:

> There is always dissention in the ranks. There is always when you have 'true democracy', you always hear different voices and don't see eye to eye. Don't have one uniform way of doing things. Sort of like learning how to get everybody to feel that a) their voice is being heard, b) that their needs are being met. That is huge and really tough. We really strive, and it is a struggle, and it is for everybody, because there are times when you feel completely frustrated; you can be very diplomatic or not.

Through the interviews, members reported that their learning about self-governance was dramatic. Only one third reported having high self-governance skills when they started volunteering. Among the rest, 40% ranked themselves as low, and 25% as medium. Today, nine out of ten (92%) rated their current level of self-governance skills as high. In other words, while only a minority felt prepared to work effectively in self-governance bodies at the beginning of their terms, today that proportion has tripled.

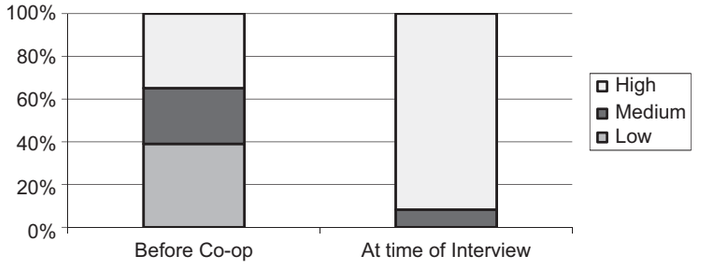


*Figure 1. Changes in self-governance competencies.*

Several members noted that before moving to a co-operative they did not have any real opportunity or need to engage in collective decision-making through consensus building. One of them made a comparison with past volunteer experiences, pointing out that the homogeneity of the group and the characteristics of the process had provided scarce avenues to nurture self-governance skills. "Prior to living in the housing co-op, there wasn't much need for consensus building. As an activist in an activist group, we were already all on the same side. We didn't need to build consensus really." In the housing co-operative, however, the heterogeneity of the groups and the need to make decisions together urge members to quickly develop consensus-building skills. This also involves listening skills (e.g., "allowing people to finish talking before making up my mind about their argument"), as well as interpretation skills. This means being able, first, to interpret what another member

is trying to say, which requires an open attitude, and second, to relate the argument to the context and to previous interactions with that member.

Indeed, members reflected on the peculiar challenges and opportunities that arise from participating in formal governance processes with their neighbors. On the one hand, it is easier because "knowing people in the co-op, you know if they are meaning to sound horrible or if they are just not expressing themselves well." On the other hand, as another member commented, an effort must be made to avoid board work "getting personal."

In summary, the data suggests that members' engagement in deliberation and decision-making processes with neighbors is an excellent way to learn about the different skills related to effective self-governance.

### *Housing Co-operative Management*

In order for members to work effectively in boards and committees, they need to develop certain skills and knowledge that are necessary for the management and daily running of a residential unit. Self-perception of learning in this area was significant. Whereas over three quarters (77%) of respondents stated that they had a low level of understanding of co-operative housing skills and knowledge before their volunteer work in the co-operative, 85% ranked themselves as high today. As a veteran member noted:

> Most people who come to the co-op have never been managers before, have never fired or hired staff, never been involved in repairs, etc. They don't have the people skills to be an employer. It is a great learning curve for everyone.

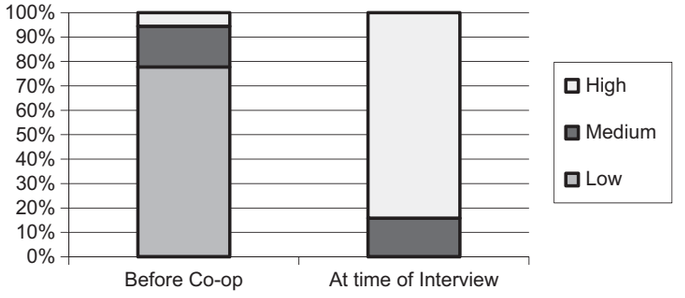


*Figure 2. Changes in co-operative housing management abilities.*

This was the area of learning with the greatest relationship between non-formal education (e.g., orientation courses, workshops, and conference sessions) and informal, experiential learning (particularly learning acquired by working with

paid staff). Some of this learning was transferred effectively to other settings, including the labor market. For instance, a young member reported that "learning about staff and staff liaisons has helped me now in the job that I am in: how to deal with staff, how staff deals with members." Another member mentioned that this learning allowed him to act as a consultant for a new condominium association that was stalled in writing its bylaws. The learning also helped members to demystify internal policies of the co-operative, which are sometimes seen as the product of autocratic management, and not the result of democratic collective processes. As one interviewee recalled, "I always thought that someone just put the bylaws together. It never occurred to me that we could come together to put them together." This comment also speaks to the development of internal political efficacy, a topic we address below.

### *Leadership*

The majority of interviewees (68%) reported that they started with low or medium leadership skills, and after participating in various co-operative activities 96% ranked themselves as having high leadership skills.[6] Many mentioned that learning leadership skills took place in a context of equality among peers, that members took different leadership roles, and that the concern for the common good was of foremost consideration in every process. As one member stated, "we were on a team, so it was teamwork mostly." This emphasis on rotational leadership and democratic processes can be explained by the collaborative spirit that permeates the culture and bylaws of housing co-operatives.

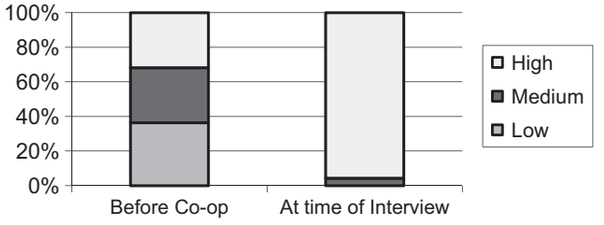


*Figure 3. Changes in leadership skills.*

The regular rotation of committee and board members led us to expect some degree of mentoring of new members by more experienced ones, and also of incoming leaders by outgoing ones. We found that while some members were very clear about the importance of mentoring, others had not thought about its importance prior to the interview. It seems that mentoring is an area in which the housing co-operative movement could work deliberately to nurture more learning opportunities and more sustained learning conditions.

### *Democratic Attitudes and Values*

The interviews revealed that members acquired more than skills and knowledge through their involvement in committees and boards. On the first theme, an overwhelming majority pointed out that they originally moved into co-operatives exclusively for affordability reasons. However, all but two stated they were planning to continue living in their co-operative because they had found community and were committed to the co-operative principles:

> My co-op is like a small community. I think of [my co-op] as my community. So that is why I moved in, because of the community, people are friendly; people help each other, fight with each other, mourn with each other, celebrate with each other, get pissed off with each other. Anything that can happen in a community, can happen in a co-op.

Therefore, while many members' initial motivation for moving into a co-operative was financial, central reasons for continuing to live in the co-operative are the co-operative principles, as well as the sense of community. One member suggested that these principles form an ideology grounded in mutuality, respect, participation, and learning. Although members seldom made direct references to the seven principles of the co-operative movement, their reflections on attitudes and values echo these principles. They mentioned that involvement in committees and boards played a key role in the acquisition and refinement of attitudes and values and facilitated a shift from self-interest to a concern for the common good. As one member put it, "There is no point having a co-op unless you can also be concerned about other people's welfare." Most of the learning about attitudes and values contributed to members' overall ability to participate in the co-operative's self-governance.

Another change in attitude worth mentioning is that around ownership. Many respondents noted that they acted differently here than in rental housing because in the co-operative they were part owners. Rather than leaving garbage in the hallway, they are now more inclined to pick it up because keeping up the buildings will ultimately result in lower housing charges for everyone. Some members reported that this opportunity allowed them to revisit their own prejudices and attitudes (e.g., sexist, racist, homophobic attitudes) and observed that they experienced positive changes in this regard. They added that the work in committees and boards allowed them to meet different people, and that they became more tolerant, open, and respectful of diversity. Finally, several interviewees commented that by working with people from other parts of the world in committees and boards, they became more curious about cultural, historical, social and political issues of other countries, sparking an interest for – and sometimes an active engagement in – international issues. An increased understanding, respect and openness regarding diversity is expressed in this member's quote:

> I think living in a city like Toronto, it is somewhat inherent for a Torontonian to understand these issues to some degree. But living in the co-op because

> again you are living so closely with your neighbours and you do see a lot of different skin colours, and hear a lot of different languages, and we have had people from every imaginable walk of life – from income, to race, to creed, to sexuality, to religion – you name it. I had been exposed to a lot of different types of people in living in the co-op. And that is a really good thing. A total learning experience, again not all of it has been pleasant and easy, but it has been a good learning experience. I have mellowed; I have become more tolerant, more inclusive in my thinking. That has been a big part of my development in the co-op.

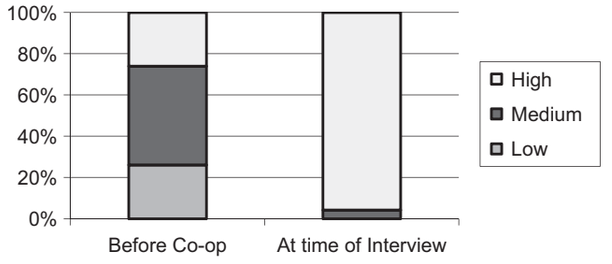


*Figure 4. Changes in democratic attitudes and values.*

### *Political Efficacy*

Political efficacy is understood as the confidence to influence political decisions. Interestingly enough, out of the overarching six areas, political efficacy was the one in which members experienced the least amount of increase. Whereas almost 60% reported having low political efficacy before joining committees and boards, 60% ranked themselves with high political efficacy at the time of the interview. This means that 40% perceived themselves as having either low (16%) or medium (24%) political efficacy today. However, a qualitative analysis of the interviews indicates that increases in internal political efficacy (that is, within the housing co-operative) were much larger than increases in external political efficacy (at the societal level). As one member noted, "I never had that opportunity before to know what I could do." This statement on internal political efficacy was reiterated, albeit in different formulations, by several members. For instance, another interviewee said: "I know more about how decisions get made, how things get run. If I felt strongly about the need for a new bylaw, I would know how to make a difference." Comments about external political efficacy were less frequent and not as clearly stated, though there is evidence that some members had increases in this area too. One member, highlighting the development of both internal and external political efficacy, made the following comments:

> …and the biggest thing that I learned was that there is nothing to be afraid of. You may have to go after them a few times, whether it is the politicians, or your own Board of Directors. But you keep hammering away and eventually they get tired of doing it and they are going to start listening to you… or they will call security!

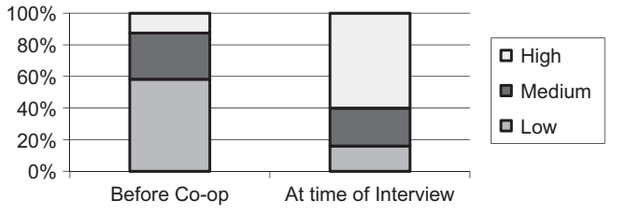


*Figure 5. Changes in political efficacy.*

Issues of political efficacy were also apparent in comments about the need to influence not only decisions within the housing co-operative, but in broader contexts. As one participant observed:

> Even as an entire group we aren't on our own. We have to think of bigger and bigger communities. How do we take what [our] co-op is doing and apply that to what our neighbourhood is doing, and apply that to Toronto, to Ontario, to Canada. But at the same time we also learn how we can help ourselves because of what these other parts of communities are doing. It's a back and forth thing.

### *Other Competencies*

In addition to learning acquired in relation to the five areas outlined above, members reported a variety of skills and knowledge gained in other areas as well. This learning was often of an instrumental nature, in the sense that it has a close connection to specific tasks. The breadth of learning acquired through committee and board work was impressive. Examples provided by interviewees include skills and knowledge in areas like finances and budgeting; office management and clerical skills; document writing and newsletter production; computer skills; gardening; language skills; and research skills. One of the most frequent references was to computer learning. Several interviewees noted that their committee and board tasks helped them to develop and improve their computer skills. As one member recalled, "I had never used a computer until I came here. I got to use it in the housing co-op because everything had to be in writing before you could say something and it would be accepted." Others made references to finances. "I find working with the finance committee, with my background not in economics and not being a numbers person, I am learning through the co-op." Another significant source of 'learning by doing' was pointed out by many members of the gardening committee. "It is the perfect committee because

we have no meetings. The people who are on the gardening committee work on the garden in the summer. So there are no rules, no meetings, just real work." The garden committee is one reflection of members' need to 'get their hands dirty.' This form of learning is highly experiential and a primary way many members gained knowledge and skills. Another member, a Latin American immigrant, explained that the committee work provides her with a unique opportunity to improve her second language skills: "At home we don't speak English, and at my work [as a beautician] I barely speak with my clients, so the committee is one of the only chances I have to practice English."

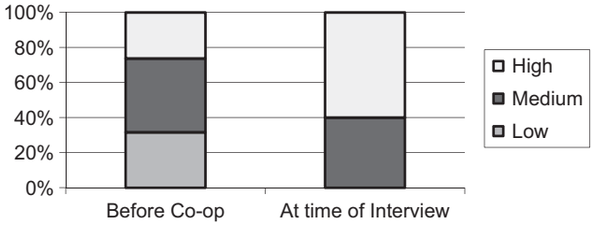


*Figure 6. Changes in other competencies.*

## WAYS OF LEARNING

We now turn our attention to the different ways in which members reported having learned the content of the above six areas. In the interviews, we asked each member to talk about the different ways in which they learned, and also to rank them according to their level of importance or intensity (low, medium, or high). As in the area of content, we suggested a list of possible "ways" or "sources" of learning, including conferences, workshops, face-to-face interactions, e-mail, Internet, observing others, mentoring, and 'learning by experience' ("by doing it"). We also invited them to add any other methods, ways or strategies through which they learned in their volunteer work in housing co-operatives. During the interviews, it became clear that in the 'real world' the categories that we proposed were not cut and dry. Indeed, in many cases members discussed the overlapping nature of the "ways of learning" suggested. For example, the category "mentoring" easily blends into "observing" and/or "learning by doing it."

In order to present the data, we organized the sources of learning in several categories: mediating learning tools, non-formal learning events, mentorship, unintentional and intentional informal learning, and "learning by experience," a diffuse category that was often referred to as "learning by doing." On the non-formal side of the continuum, we can find structures, procedures, dates and times, codified text, and a certain degree of planning and control over the teaching/learning process. On the informal side of the continuum, we can find learning experiences that are often unintentional and unconscious, but nonetheless provide a rich source of skills,

knowledge, values, and attitudes. Members usually acknowledged the importance of all sites and ways of learning, and some made the point that they need to see themselves as subjects – and not objects – of the learning process:

> I think that all of these things listed here are really important. Many are structured and organized by either the co-op or the federation, but I also think that keeping your eyes open, being aware of what is going on in the co-op is a huge part of the process.

### *Mediating Learning Tools*

Although to a lesser extent than non-formal learning settings such as conferences and workshops, materials (or mediating tools) were frequently mentioned as important sources of learning. Two types of materials were described in the interviews: printed materials – manuals, newsletters, newspapers, bylaws, rules and regulations, and the like; and electronic materials – predominantly e-mail and the Internet.

Interviewees were divided in how they perceive printed materials impacting on their learning. About half of the interviewees rated printed materials as having a medium impact on their learning. It was clear in the interviews that some members prefer to gain information through reading, while others prefer oral communication. Indeed, on one end of the spectrum, one interviewee asserted that one evening "I went home and read my manual cover to cover." On the other end, another member, discussing the manuals produced by CHFT and CHFC, declared that reading was not particularly an appealing activity: "I am not really into the reading thing. I would rather hear it." In between these two approaches, another member put them in perspective, noting that printed materials are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for learning about housing co-operatives:

> There are quite a few printed materials by CHFT and CHFC. There is a bookshop to CHFT. All very helpful. Of course reading books isn't going to give you the full experience.

In regards to electronic materials, about 75% of the interviewees reported that they had a low use (or no use at all) of e-mail or the Internet for learning related to the co-operative. Indeed, throughout the interviews, co-operative housing members rarely thought of the Internet and e-mail as places of learning for them. When asked about the Internet as a learning source, one responded with surprise: "Over the Internet, I hadn't thought of that, I am always in contact with people." At the same time, several interviewees mentioned that the housing co-operatives websites are important spaces for sharing information among co-op members and for building a sense of community. Members positively commented on the website of the national federation (CHFC):

> The national organization has a very good website. There is a lot of good stuff in there from other co-ops in the country. Sharing information, and sharing problems and solutions.

Overall, members highlighted the importance of good printed and electronic materials to assist them in gaining valuable knowledge for the performance of their duties in committees and boards.

### *Non-formal Learning Events*

Workshops and conferences were frequently cited non-formal learning events. Many interviewees referred to conferences as a high source of learning. A particularly important conference frequently pointed out was the annual national conference of housing co-operatives – often referred to as "the National". In these annual conferences, members represented their co-operative and had the opportunity to interact with other co-operative members from across Canada. In terms of learning, this conference serves a double purpose: learning new things from other co-operative members, as well as learning the similarities and differences between what is done in their own co-operative and in other co-operatives. The latter can help to reassure delegates that they are "on the right track." In the words of one interviewee:

> At the 'National' you learn about the other people's experience and you sometimes confirm stuff that you are doing was OK or you find out that you are totally missing the mark.

The data revealed that fewer women than men commented on the conferences as a high source of learning. We don't have a clear explanation for this, but it certainly raises questions. For instance, are fewer women than men going to the all-expenses-paid annual national conference? If so, why is this the case? Are there systemic barriers in place that bar them from participating, such as lack of daycare or the ability to take time off? This topic merits further investigation.

Almost all interviewees had participated in at least one workshop during their tenure at the housing co-operative, and a large percentage of them (about 85%) referred to workshops as a high source of learning. This suggests that non-formal learning in housing co-operatives is not only popular but can be used as an effective learning method for members' education and participation.

Some workshops take place within the housing co-operative setting, while others are held in outside locations. When talking about attending workshops downtown, some members from a Scarborough housing co-operative noted that the learning was much higher when "the workshop came to us." They were referring particularly to cases in which "the downtown people" (i.e. CHFT staff and/or 'experts') came to the co-operative on a regular basis to address a specific issue of concern to members. It was mentioned that in such situations the workshop facilitators (who were sometimes experienced co-operative members in leadership positions, and sometimes people with a particular expertise) were more able to make the content relevant to the needs and interests of the housing co-operative members.

Workshops are open to everyone and deal with a great variety of issues including conflict resolution, diversity issues, budgeting, or how to be a board

member. Interviewees' comments on workshops were mixed. Some mentioned that workshops were their primary source of learning, and that they were extremely helpful in understanding certain issues in the co-operative, as well as in providing skills to solve specific problems. A minority, however, expressed that the workshops were not helpful to them. In between these two groups were those who expressed a mixed feeling, noting that workshops seemed useful at the moment of taking them but not as much afterward. As one interviewee pointed out, "in the workshops you learn lots of neat ideas and you think it may work but once you go home you forget everything."

This raises concerns about workshops, especially in relation to the discontinuity of the learning and its relevance to address concrete problems in the housing co-operative. Sometimes this connection is not evident at the moment of the workshop, but suddenly becomes clear later on. Another interviewee explained this as follows:

> Sitting in a study group or a workshop can touch on some of the things that you haven't experienced, but eventually it all connects. Sometimes you sit in a workshop and wonder why am I here? Two months down the road, aha! It does work! Or, now I know what they were talking about.

As the above quote suggests, this connection may be established in a serendipitous way. However, leaving it to chance is risky, because a great deal of energy and resources are channelled into workshops. Thus, it is important for the housing co-operative movement to develop appropriate strategies to ensure a closer relationship between the learning acquired in different workshops, on the one hand, and their application to the reality of housing co-operatives, on the other. Greater attention could be paid to the 'reflective observation' and 'abstract conceptualization' stages of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory.

### *Mentorship*

About half of the interviewees considered mentoring interactions as a process for learning. Member volunteers embodied the full gamut of mentoring types. One young woman referred to her mentor not as somebody who taught her one particular skill at one particular point in time, but as somebody who took on a long-term, caring and nurturing relationship. This young woman referred to her mentor as someone who took care of her beyond the call of duty: "One of the women in our townhouses has always looked after me. She has taken me under her wing." This traditional type of mentoring relationship has great merit in the co-op housing system because it bridges different generations, allows for the transfer of knowledge, builds new skills, and energizes old and young. Other peer-to-peer types of mentoring helped member volunteers within housing co-ops understand the hows and whys of co-op housing, as well as help to build skills and knowledge. Within the co-op housing setting peer-to-peer mentoring can help form the "glue" for community building. Many members also described important learning through a mentor-apprentice

relationship with staff. For instance, some interviewees reported having learned a lot from the building manager. There were regular references to the development of a strong connection between co-op volunteers and staff. This relationship was so strong in some cases that staff and members also developed a friendship.

In all cases of mentorship (that is, older members or peers or staff acting as mentors) co-op members reported they had the opportunity to learn valuable skills, attitudes and knowledge through the help of specific and knowledgeable individuals with whom they felt they had built a relationship. However, in none of the cases were the mentorship-apprenticeship relationships formalized through co-op structures or procedures. Instead, they predominantly remain informal implementations and therefore informal learning processes.

All of the types of mentoring found in the housing co-op movement can help members learn to reframe attitudes, emphasizing the importance of interdependence over dependence, and intimacy over emotional distance. Knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired from mentoring should be seen as an active process in which curiosity is encouraged and learning becomes a dynamic, reciprocal and participatory process (Darwin, 2000). Given the importance and potential of these kinds of relationships and for the learning that happens because of them, it would be interesting for the housing co-op movement to encourage the different types of mentoring connections.

However, what should be carefully avoided is the notion that mentoring in its varying forms can replace all other ways of learning. Friedman and Phillips (2002) describe a common occurrence in organizations where fewer learning opportunities are provided due to reduced capacity in personnel and training departments with the expectation that mentoring processes and programs are picking up the slack. Instead mentoring should comprise only one of a multitude of ways of learning for members to take advantage.

### *Unintentional or Intentional Informal Learning*

Face-to-face conversations and networking were described as two areas where informal learning frequently occurs. For example, one member replied that significant learning takes place in "face-to-face conversations when you are discussing [something] with other people who have 'been there' so to speak or have information on specific areas that you haven't run into before". This member's experience speaks volumes. Daily interactions were perceived by many as significant sources of learning. Indeed, about three out of four interviewees (75%) identified face-to-face interactions as a high intensity way of learning. In discussing issues related to co-operative housing governance, one member observed that casual face-to-face interactions provide very good opportunities to learn, but also to solve together unexpected problems that come up. Face-to-face interactions also help to create relationships of mutual trust, which are important for asking candid questions, as well as for a good learning environment in general. Both women and men declared that they use face-to-face

interactions with people on a regular basis to discuss issues and obtain information. This form of face-to-face dialogue is crucial for the effective running of housing co-operatives. References to learning through face-to-face interactions were not exclusively restricted to oral communication but also to observing others perform a particular task, be it moderating a meeting, fixing a plumbing problem, or gardening. In fact, about 60% of respondents ranked observing others as a high intensity way of learning. One woman explained the pedagogical power of observation in these terms:

> I have got to see them do it; they have got to show me a couple of times and then I am right into it. I am much better being shown rather than giving me something to read.

Networking is not a category that we suggested a priori to the housing co-operative members. Instead, it emerged from the interviews themselves. Some members mentioned that through the volunteer work in committees and boards they learned basic networking skills or further polished existing ones. Some talked about learning certain diplomatic skills that are deemed important to engage in small group democracies, and others noted that the networking skills acquired in the housing co-operative were later put to use in other contexts. While many comments regarding learning through networking were similar to the ones made in relation to face-to-face interactions and observing others, a slight difference was noted in the sense that networking comments alluded to an additional element—one of small 'p' political savvy. Networking is at the same time a learning outcome and a way of learning. Comments on networking also made reference to understanding issues of representation and self-confidence. As one member observed, "You have to remember each time that you are talking to someone, that you are not just a member or Mr. Joe Blow, but that you are representing the board."

The data from the interviews suggest that networking itself allowed members to gain knowledge and skills in a variety of areas. Among them were connecting with others effectively, learning how to 'work a room', building alliances, putting ideas in motion, and a general understanding of what to say, to whom, and at what time.

### *Learning and Experience*

Six out of ten members described instances of learning through experience in their routine of living and volunteering in their place of residence – their community. However, given the tacit nature of the member learning we have spoken about, many members did not enter into the interviews with a conscious understanding of their learning experience. When they elaborated on their ways of learning, the experiences of learning by doing were passionately illustrated with colourful vivid descriptions, emphasizing how significant this way of learning is for co-operative members. One member exclaimed: "Nothing beats doing it!"

The examples of learning through experience that members described often emphasized the connection between the voluntary nature of their work and the collaborative and participatory ethos of co-operatives. As one interviewee noted, "We are all volunteers. The whole system is volunteer. So I learned a lot by doing it." Indeed, learning through experience allowed members to guide themselves through the activity, learning as they go what works, what doesn't work, and what should be done. Often the members are thrown into a situation to learn on their own. This fosters a strong sense of autonomy marking their own learning style and learning from their own mistakes. One member raised the question, and then answered in a clear and straightforward manner: "How did I learn? By screwing up; by making so many mistakes; by saying the wrong thing; by being blasted by the membership…. I learnt by doing it: some of it right, lots of it wrong."

In other words, for many interviewees learning by doing constitutes a "trial and error" system in which the learner is attentive to mistakes in order to avoid repeating them in the future. When this "learning from mistakes" becomes a collective activity, the impact is much greater and starts moving into the domain of experiential learning. One member illustrated this point with the example of a meeting: "When there is a bad meeting, we often look at what went wrong and what we can do different to develop a more positive tone."

Here we return to the difference between learning through experience and experiential learning reviewed in the framework section. Because of the amorphous nature of learning through experience, members also expressed a sense of not really knowing where the knowledge or skills came from. One member captured this issue in the following quote, "I have learnt everything at CHFT basically through osmosis." Where experiential learning departs from learning through experience is the conscious decision to move through processes of reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The distinction here is that learning from experience is unintentional whereas experiential learning includes a reflective stage, which by definition is intentional. Therefore, the learning from experience can result in tacit knowledge but experiential learning would result in explicit knowledge. Our data suggest that there are currently few deliberate attempts at facilitating experiential learning. There are certainly instances of this type of learning noted by interviewees, but these seem to occur in an ad hoc manner—and are often significant learning moments.

Enhancing member volunteers' experience and learning, and making it tangible, usable and more explicit, would be of great benefit to the housing co-operative movement. It would be highly advantageous for co-operative housing member volunteers to reflect on what they have learnt, either in the community setting or on their own. This would help advance, retain and foster the new knowledge, skills or attitudes that they have learnt. As Elwood (2004) states often there is "a disjuncture between spatial stories and experiential practice, a moment that can foster critical rethinking of their previous conceptions, validation of experience that falls outside the cultural mainstream, or motivation for further investigation and expansion of their knowledge" (p. 60).

As we can see, the majority of the learning activity is indeed informal throughout these different ways of learning. It is informal both in terms of the site, but also in terms of the process. There is also evidence of non-formal or more intentional learning modalities. Except for the case of instrumental learning of specific skills—making coffee, operating the photocopier—it seems that the non-formal (often experiential) forms of learning are significant for the housing co-op members. We now turn to some concluding thoughts about this case study.

## CONCLUSIONS

This case study explored the learning acquired by members of housing co-operatives who perform volunteer work in committees and boards. The breadth and depth of the learning acquired by members from participation in co-operative boards and committees is significant. However, needless to say, the intensity of learning is lower among participants in single committees, and higher among participants in multiple committees and in boards.

A great deal of the informal learning acquired by housing co-operative members was tacit and unconscious, but the interviews elicited it and made it explicit. The interview process helped members to retrieve a variety of learning experiences. It also helped them to name the learning and to encourage reflection on it. A key point of experiential learning is the centrality of reflection in the learning process. One of the challenges in our interviews and focus groups was precisely to find ways to make this tacit learning explicit, and to give members a chance to reflect on it. Indeed, this is the same challenge faced by those interested in recognizing and facilitating the learning of housing co-operative members: creating opportunities in which the immense volume of experiences of volunteers form the basis for their learning.

As we saw, across the different areas in which the volunteers learned, there is a rich and varied amount of learning that takes place. We grouped their learning into six overlapping areas: self-governance, management, leadership, attitudes and values, political efficacy, and other competencies. Meaningful changes in knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes were reported in all areas. The area with the least degree of change observed was political efficacy (understood as the confidence to influence political decisions). Increases in political efficacy were more noticeable within the co-op than in members' engagement with the external world. Many members noted that they were engaged in ways that they had rarely been prior to moving to a co-operative.

We also identified 'ways' or sources of learning: mediating learning tools, learning events, mentoring, informal learning, and learning through experience. We found that implementing all these ways of learning is vital to the housing co-operative movement. Members of housing co-operatives are diverse in background and in needs. Thus, actively fostering the many ways by which members learn will further hone the learning of knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for mini-democracies, as well as encourage the continuous participation of member volunteers in the management and running of their housing co-operative.

Overall, the predominant way of learning experienced by housing co-operative members is what we can call "learning from each other"; for example, we found informal mentoring to be important. We found in this study that the housing co-operative movement provides a great variety of non-formal and informal learning opportunities for its members. In spite of education/learning being one of the seven principles of the co-operative movement, this often goes unnoticed not only to outsiders, but also to co-operative members themselves. Despite the informal and incidental character of most of the learning, it was clear that this learning influenced the financial and organizational 'success' of co-ops, and provided both the lubricant for community involvement and that feeling of belonging that so many members welcome, hone, and enjoy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Housing co-operatives could highlight learning as a direct benefit that arises from volunteering on boards and committees. Making this more explicit could aid in curriculum development and could strengthen housing co-operatives' existing volunteer recruitment strategies. This could also help to make boards and committees even more inclusive than they are today.

In a group as diverse as housing co-operative members, it is important to provide a wide range of ways people can engage in learning processes. For example, this could include nurturing informal mentoring connections, as well as designing and implementing permanent non-formal programs that promote mentoring as ways of learning, volunteering and participating in co-operative life. Mentoring should not become the panacea justifying the downloading of large amounts of work to unpaid volunteers under the guise of positive learning outcomes of mentoring; however, the formalizing of mentoring programs could be advanced so that experienced board and committee members could nurture the incoming generation of volunteers.

We also see there to be a real need for housing co-operatives move beyond learning through experience to experiential learning. We understand there to be rich and diverse experiences within the housing co-op movement in Toronto. Once elicited from the interview processes, members were able to indicate that they had in fact learnt a great deal from their volunteer experience. It is important to provide opportunities for members to identify and to value their informal learning experiences, to reflect on them, to share the lessons of those experiences with other members, and to use those lessons to improve the collective welfare of the housing co-operative and the co-operative movement as a whole.

## NOTES

[1] We would like to thank the people at the Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto and the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, Ontario Region whose work inspires this study. We also acknowledge the support of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council.

[2] This chapter is a revised version of the article: "Learning from each other: Housing co-operative members' acquisition of skills, knowledge, attitudes and values," which was published in the *Co-operative Housing Journal* in 2007.

[3] In the co-operative movement member contributions are generally referred to as 'participation', as opposed to 'volunteer work'.

[4] For detailed information regarding methodology please see Duguid, Slade and Schugurensky (2006).

[5] When we speak about changes in learning, we are more accurately talking about self-reported changes in learning. For brevity's sake, we have chosen to refer to this as a change in learning throughout.

[6] We have chosen the term 'leadership' to include the learning acquired in relation to these three themes. We recognize that this is not an exhaustive list of leadership skills, attitudes, and values. Our findings only take up issues of learning about leadership within the housing co-operatives that were raised by participants of this study.

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BEHRANG FOROUGHI & ERICA MCCOLLUM

# 7. LEARNING PARTICIPATORY CITIZENSHIP: EXPLORING THE INFORMAL LEARNING OF TENANT VOLUNTEERS AT TORONTO COMMUNITY HOUSING CORPORATION (TCHC)

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the informal learning of tenant volunteers who represent their communities in the Tenant Participation System (TPS) of Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), the largest public housing provider in Canada. The Tenant Participation System is a pioneering state-sponsored practice of community-based social housing governance in a major urban setting. The Tenant Participation System represents a model for more direct citizen engagement as it provides opportunities for tenants to work with each other and with management to address issues affecting the community. As tenants take on new responsibilities and tasks, this participation provides an opportunity for the development of new skills, attitudes and knowledge. Indeed, we argue that a participatory process such as this has great potential to encourage citizenship learning and the development of a different political culture through 'doing democracy' on a regular basis. In this chapter we will outline the motivations that lead to tenants to become volunteers in their communities, and will report on the diverse spectrum of informal learning acquired by tenants through their volunteer engagement as tenant representatives. Moreover, in this study of volunteer tenant representatives we describe the different forms that volunteer positions can take and we make specific connections between informal learning, citizenship learning, and the enhancement of the culture of democracy.

Citizenship in the participatory mode, or as a membership in political community, is "mindful of the extent to which citizens take it upon themselves to participate in civic and political life" (Mettlre, 2002, p. 362).[1] Democratic citizenship, understood as active citizenship, is promoted through allowing citizens' voices in crafting policies that deeply affect their lives (Lukensmeyer & Brigham, 2002; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003; Fung & Wright, 2003). Rousseau, in his classic work *The Social Contract,* argues that the very qualities that are required of individuals for governance to work successfully are those that the process of participation itself develops and fosters (Rousseau, 1762/1968). This work emphasizes the fact that there is an interrelationship between the working of institutions and the psychological qualities and attitudes of individuals interacting with them (Pateman, 1970/1999). Building

*F. Duguid, K. Mündel & D. Schugurensky (Eds.), Volunteer Work, Informal Learning and Social Action, 141–158.*

on Rousseau's argument, Pateman suggests that large housing developments are good sites to provide the opportunity for residents to participate in decision making. She contends that in this particular context "the psychological effects of such participation might prove extremely valuable" (1999/1970, p. 109).

Instilling more engaging local governance structures, and accommodating deliberative and participatory approaches in policy making and public service delivery, scholars argue, will advance and develop democratic learning and competencies among the citizenry (Box, 1998; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003; Fung & Wright, 2003; Schugurensky, 2003). In other words, through rearranging governance processes, removing bureaucratic impediments to local participation, and providing deliberative public spaces for the active engagement of individuals and communities, informal citizenship learning is integrated into the domain of local governance. In this format, learning is not designed but as Wenger (1998) suggests, it is "designed for" (p. 32), and individuals, while exercising and consolidating their rights, reshape their subjective experience of what it means to be a citizen (Mettlre, 2002). Although this connection is assumed, there is little research on the kinds of learning that occur at local forums where volunteers participate in planning for the affairs of their communities. This study is, therefore, an endeavour to explore the pedagogical and psychological effects of such participation on volunteer tenants active within the Tenant Participation System of the TCHC.

The Interviews and observations were predominantly focused in one Community Housing Unit (CHU). Our argument derives from the findings of qualitative, open ended and in-depth interviews with 20 participants: 10 tenant volunteers (4 males, 6 females; 6 visible minorities, 4 Caucasians; 5 adults, 2 youths and 3 seniors) and 10 staff from the Toronto Community Housing Corporation. We also conducted observations of tenant council meetings, property management meetings, decision-making processes, and the interactions between tenant representatives, staff and the managers of one council over a year. This community was a key site of interest because it was an inner city neighbourhood that faced a number of challenges along with the prospect of a major mixed-use redevelopment of the housing stock. This situation created extensive opportunities for discussion and problem solving in the community. The focus on one tenant council allowed us to pair our own observations over a year with interviews of the participants and staff we observed. This enabled a rich understanding of the processes, interactions, and perspectives involved in the tenant participation system.

The tenant participants in our study were purposively sampled to ensure a variety of age groups (from youth to the elderly), levels of engagement (from those who had low levels of participation at the meetings to those who were very active) and perspectives on the Tenant Participation System (from those who appeared to be quite critical and combative to those seemed to be quite amenable and positive). Although the majority of the tenants interviewed were from one community, a few tenant representatives from other CHUs were also interviewed in order to triangulate our findings. Staff members were sampled based on the key positions they held within the Tenant

Participation System. We interviewed the manager and community engagement staff at our target community as well as those involved in the city-wide policy making and implementation of the tenant participation system. We also interviewed a small number of CHU managers who accepted our invitation to participate.

In the earlier interviews we realized that the tenant respondents were not eager to answer personal questions. For this reason, we decided to avoid asking questions on their income, education, marital status, life history in social housing and other personal questions. We have been careful to preserve the anonymity of our participants by masking any revealing characteristics or locations. The common denominator among the tenant volunteers is that they have been formally representing their communities at the Tenant Participation System for at least one year.

This chapter is organized in four sections. In the first one we present the context of this study, describing the main features of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation and the Tenant Participation System. In the second section we analyze the different motivations that led participants to volunteer for the tenant representative position. In the third section we discuss the informal learning that tenants acquired while they acted in their volunteer role as community representatives, and we outline the benefits of such learning to the individual, to the community and to the public housing management processes. We conclude with a review of the results and connect them to the broader literature on participation and citizenship learning.

## RESEARCH CONTEXT

### *Toronto Community Housing Corporation*

In December 2000, the Social Housing Reform Act transferred financial responsibility of social housing from the province to local governments. Upon the approval of the Social Housing Reform Act in January 2001, the City of Toronto voted for the amalgamation of the Toronto Housing Company and the Metro Toronto Housing Company into the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), which has become responsible for the provision of public housing across the Greater Toronto Area since January 2002.

The TCHC is the second largest housing provider in North America and the largest in Canada, providing housing for 6% of Toronto's population. It includes 58,500 units, which house 164,000 tenants. Almost all of the tenants living in Toronto Housing (93%) pay rent geared to income, while the rest pay market-based rent. In 2005, the average annual income of a household in the TCHC was $13,964, which was well below the city's average. Families comprise the largest proportion of residents in the TCHC at 38%; seniors represent 31%, and single adults account for 33% of the residents (TCHC, 2006e). Refugees, immigrants and people with special needs make up a significant proportion of the tenant population.

The TCHC has a vision to be "the pre-eminent social housing provider in North America that sets the standards and benchmarks against which other not-for-profit

housing providers are measured" (TCHC, 2002, p. 4) To achieve its vision, the TCHC is committed to creating "healthy sustainable communities" by implementing a community-based management approach that engages tenants in decisions that affect them, their homes and their neighborhoods (TCHC, 2006a). As part of the community-based management approach, the governance of the housing portfolio is conducted through decentralized districts called Community Housing Units (CHUs). Across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) the Housing Corporation is divided into 27 CHUs. Community Housing Units span defined geographical areas in the city and include a number of buildings and neighbourhoods which all share a CHU manager. Managers are responsible for all aspects of the CHU including security, maintenance, finances, and directing the CHU staff, at the same time they are accountable to the participation structures.

### *Tenant Participation System*

When the TCHC was formed, a joint working group of tenants and staff negotiated a consultation plan to develop a community-based management format. After a year of consultation with over 5,000 tenants, the TCHC designed the Tenant Participation System, which was inspired by the practice and success of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil.[2] The participation system provides a structure for tenants and staff to communicate and deliberate on issues in the community, decide on priorities, and help improve how the TCHC functions on a community level (TCHC, 2006d). TCHC documents refer to the establishment of community-based service delivery as a priority for the corporation (TCHC, 2003); and the Tenant Participation System reflects TCHC's stated commitment to a good governance agenda.

The Tenant Participation System works in a decentralized manner. Within each Community Housing Unit, the manager develops local business plans and allocates resources in partnership with the tenant council, also known as the "CHU council". Each CHU council develops an accountability framework so that tenants can keep the TCHC accountable on decisions made and issues that need to be addressed (TCHC, 2006d).

Tenants who volunteer to act as representatives to the CHU councils must participate in elections, which take place every three years. This electoral process is extensive, involving nominations, campaigning and an election day held in each housing complex across the city. Tenants over 16 years of age can nominate candidates, run to be a representative and vote for a tenant representative. The first election for CHU council representatives was held in 2003 and the second round of elections was held in April 2006. The 385 tenant representatives across the 27 CHUs who undertake volunteer work at the council have the responsibility to advocate for the interests of the tenants from their building or community, help tenants keep informed about issues in the TCHC, and engage them into the participation process. They are also expected to enable better communication between the TCHC and the tenants, as well as bring forward tenant opinions and concerns to the management and staff.

Within the framework of the Tenant Participation System, tenant representatives are also involved in budget allocation at both their Community Housing Unit and at the city-wide level. At the CHU level, through their input into the local business plans, volunteer representatives have the opportunity to influence the funding priorities. Through an annual city-wide participatory budgeting exercise, the TCHC aims to allocate scarce capital dollars democratically in areas with the highest impact on tenants' lives. In 2003, a working group of tenant volunteers and staff developed criteria for distributing $9 million (13% of the total capital budget of the TCHC) among the 27 CHUs. That original framework continued to be used year after year. According to the agreed upon plan, 60% of the total amount is allocated according to the size of the CHUs, 20% is equally distributed amongst the CHUs, and 20% is to be decided by tenant representatives based on the capital funding needs of each CHU.

The participatory allocation of the capital funding (worth $1.8 million) occurs once a year. The volunteer tenant representatives in each CHU council bring forward priorities from their communities that are not covered under the current CHU budget. Upon deliberation and voting within the CHU council, each council chooses one priority to be taken to a city-wide forum of volunteer delegates from all the 27 CHUs. The delegates introduce their proposals, present the type of the project and the associated cost, explain to the forum how it would enhance the health of their community, and give details about the urgency associated with it. Then as a group, participants deliberate on each proposal. Finally, the delegates cast their votes to rank the projects. Tenant delegates vote through a process called 'dot-mocracy', in which each tenant receives several dots to attach to community projects other than their own, which they believe should receive the estimated funding. The $1.8 million is then distributed to the projects with the highest number of votes. In a nutshell, the tenant participation system and the participatory budgeting exercise provide an opportunity for volunteer tenants to get involved in a variety of activities within their CHU and beyond. In the following section, we will discuss and analyze the motivating factors that led many tenants to their volunteer involvement in the management of their housing communities.

## TENANTS' MOTIVATIONS FOR VOLUNTEERING

The tenant representatives' volunteering work begins with an election process. This involves a series of activities organizing community meetings, outlining and speaking about the community needs and priorities, and finally planning and running a campaign. Once the tenant representatives are elected, their volunteer work continues, and they dedicate their time and their reputation to the functioning of the Tenant Participation System. Minimally, they attend tenant council meetings once a month and a few community meetings, tenant forums and specialized committees throughout the year, but their duties normally go well beyond these activities. In fact, some tenant representatives expressed concerns about the amount of time they

dedicated to the role that they feel as though it is taking over their lives. The time commitment is so significant that several tenant representatives described their role as an "unpaid second job."

In this section we explore why tenant volunteers feel compelled to dedicate their time and energy towards participating in the governance of their housing communities. In particular, our interest was to explore what would motivate these tenant volunteers to dedicate long hours towards an extensive list of responsibilities and activities that they are expected to engage with as the representatives of their housing communities. Among them are the following:

- Educating themselves on what is happening at the TCHC and in their communities
- Informing their fellow tenants of the CHU budgets and plans
- Delivering the needs and opinions of their fellow tenants to the CHU council
- Monitoring the public works at their communities
- Participating in specialized committees at the head office
- Taking part in short-term social and community programs linked with the TCHC

## BRINGING CHANGE TO THE COMMUNITY

Tenant volunteers gave diverse answers about why they were motivated to volunteer. The most frequently mentioned one was the need to improve their community and the living conditions of their building. Many volunteers often made reference to specific changes they wanted to see in their communities and saw this role as a way to bring about those changes. Others saw "problems in their community and wanted to do something about it." They recognized that the problems in their buildings were not "getting enough attention from the management and that this might be remedied through the tenant representative's role." One tenant volunteer believed that her community was a "neglected one", and thought that this representative role could be a good venue to put her community on the agenda. Another tenant representative clarified that she was unhappy about the unresponsiveness of the CHU management to address the needs of her fellow senior tenants. She said she chose to be a representative to "make sure that the problems are listened to." Another tenant representative explained that in her building there was a missing link between the management and the tenants, and added: "I ran to become a tenant representative to fill this gap."

Some tenants volunteered to address more specific needs in their CHU or buildings. One representative complained about the drug deals occurring in a complex, and was motivated to volunteer as tenant representative to address this situation. Another tenant discussed that she had seen new immigrants who were fearful to speak up and voice their housing concerns to the management: "They believe if they speak up, they would be thrown out of the housing." Her reason to come forward and be a representative was partially to "speak out for the majority who can't speak up, specifically for non-Canadians." Many of the comments expressed by the volunteers

showed an awareness of and concern for the issues facing their communities and the belief that the Tenant Participation System provided the opportunity to make a positive impact on those issues. The representative role had the potential, in the tenants' view, to allow them to make changes that would benefit themselves and others by addressing deficiencies they saw in their communities and in the functioning of the TCHC.

These motivations of the volunteer tenant representatives have some similarities to the motivations of Canadian volunteers captured in the Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL) survey and in the Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating (CSGVP) that were reviewed in Chapter Two. The WALL survey reported that 83% of Canadians who volunteer do so to help their community, and the CSGVP found that 60% of respondents reported volunteering because they were affected by the cause. The motivations of the tenant representatives suggest that by providing opportunities for volunteers to impact the issues that affect them and their community, public housing organizations can expand the practice of the participatory mode of citizenship. In other words, as volunteers realize changes through their participation, their civic engagement is reinforced.

## LEARNING

The second most frequent motivation for participation put forward by volunteers was the belief that such representation would provide an opportunity for them to educate both themselves and their community on various issues related to the TCHC. The TCHC was a new entity along with the Tenant Participation System, so the curiosity to get to know the organization among the general tenant population was high. Indeed, a substantial number of tenants said that they chose to become representatives simply because they were curious to know more about the new TCHC and how decisions were made and budgets allocated at this new enterprise. A self-titled "controversial" tenant explained that the main reason why he wanted to get involved was to get familiarized with the whole TCHC and the new social housing management in Toronto: "I simply wanted to know who does what, who supervises whom and what the management structure of TCHC is all about, and so on and so forth." A recent resident said that upon residing at the TCHC he decided to do volunteer work in the community. Through his engagement as a tenant representative he wanted to find out where in the TCHC he could "find the money to do community work." He also wanted to know "who was who in the Corporation," and was eager to find out about the types of community work he could help with at the TCHC communities.

Respondents with limited background in Canadian social and civic life, particularly youth and immigrants, also explained that they ran to become volunteer representatives because this was an opportunity to gain an understanding of how civic procedures are exercised at the local level. One of the youth tenant representatives said: "I chose to participate to know deeper about what goes on and how rules

are made and how decisions are made in the city." She further discussed how the knowledge she hoped to gain was not simply for her own benefit but to take back to her community. This finding does not follow the trend often seen in volunteer research, where learning is rarely noted to be a motivation for volunteering. In this setting, though, tenant volunteers are supposed to make decisions for property management and local governance purposes, an opportunity seldom offered to ordinary citizens. Therefore, learning has been an expectation in this volunteer position, and as it happens to be, the more volunteers have learned about the workings of TCHC and become competent, the more they practically got engaged in CHU activities.

## ACTIVISM

Another factor behind some tenants' motivation to volunteer as tenant representatives was their personal histories of community involvement and activism. It was this history that helped lead up to their engagement as tenant representatives. These volunteers expressed a hope to continue to do social activism or community development through involvement in the Tenant Participation System (TPS). One participant explained how past involvement in his community was a determining factor in persuading him towards becoming a tenant representative: "Prior to TPS, I was involved in some of the neighbourhood's initiatives. Then at the time of election, I decided to become a tenant rep. It was an opportunity for me to do social activism through involvement in the TPS." A senior tenant who has been living and involved in social housing for almost three decades explained that because of all these years of community work, she chose to be a tenant representative, and added: "I have been representing my community anyway."

For social activist tenants, the combination of their tendency to participate in community activism and the knowledge and experience that their background provided made it more likely that they would step forward as tenant representatives. Some of these volunteers said that they wanted to apply their community organizing skills to the new participatory space. Overall, these tenant representatives often made reference to the fact that their previous community work experience helped them to step forward as candidates to represent their community and move into this volunteer role. This relates to the findings of the CSGVP survey, which found that a majority of respondents (over three quarters) were motivated to volunteer because it allowed them to put their skills and experience to good use while providing them with opportunities to further develop those skills.

## PEER ENCOURAGEMENT

A fourth motivation to volunteer noted by some tenant representatives was the encouragement of other fellow tenants or staff from their local social service providers. One tenant representative explained that she was encouraged to run by

people that she knew through her other community involvements. Another tenant representative talked about how other tenants in his building encouraged him to run because they felt he was would be appropriate for the job. "Whatever you say we will accept," said a group of tenants to an old timer, who, due to her many years of community care, was encouraged by other tenants to run and voice their concerns. This finding highlights the important role played by the community in fostering the active participation of certain individual volunteers, and likewise, the individual's power to impact their community's well-being through encouraging and supporting fellow citizens.

The four motivations discussed above were not mutually exclusive. In many cases, it was a combination of factors -from the more personal and instrumental to the more collective and altruistic ones- that inspired tenants to voluntarily step forward to be representatives of their communities. Some considered this as an opportunity to gain valuable knowledge and experience that would help them become more effective and educated both as representatives of their housing communities and individually for their life in and out of social housing. Others recognized that volunteering as a community representative could bring important benefits to the community and would also provide an opportunity to speak up for the needs of their fellow tenants, particularly for those who are more marginalized and silenced. Many of the volunteers interviewed, particularly those with a history of community activism, felt that they were specifically qualified to take on the role of a tenant representative, and that was also a motivating factor to step forward.

The motivations and actions of the tenant representatives reflect the diverse definition of volunteering within the tenant representative role itself, as this position involves differing dimensions of volition, remuneration and intended beneficiaries (see discussion on Chapter One of Cnaan, Handy & Wadsworth, 1996). The extent of volition of the representatives varied, from tenants choosing the representative position on their own, to being encouraged or pressured by other fellow tenants or the community staff, to feeling as though they had no choice but to take on the role so that they could gain the benefits their community deserved and because no other qualified person was willing to take on the role. Similarly, the intended beneficiaries factor was not constant. Some tenants were focused on personal benefits such as gaining new skills, confidence or respect, although many spoke of contributing to their community or helping those who could not speak for themselves or paving the way for future generations. In fact, the only common dimension related to the four dimensions of volunteerism proposed by Cnaan et al. (1996), was that of remuneration, because in the Tenant Participatory System all representatives were unpaid.

## INFORMAL LEARNING

In the previous section we reported that some volunteers of the Tenant Participation System noted that they were motivated to represent their communities because they

thought that this space would provide them with opportunities to exercise leadership within their housing communities, but also with opportunities to learn and grow individually and collectively.

In this section we will further delve into tenants' informal learning as it pertains to their acquisition of new knowledge and skills and changes in their attitudes and practices. Being mindful of the need to learn how decisions are made and resources allocated within the TCHC, some volunteers even described that they pursued self-directed informal learning projects, while others explained that they learned through reflections on their experiences within the Tenant Participation System.

The informal learning experienced by tenant volunteers, then, occurred both intentionally -as a result of conscious planning- and tacitly –unrecognized at the time of its occurrence, but later acknowledged through self-reflections during our interviews. Overall, we found that tenant representatives heavily relied on informal learning to enhance their effectiveness as advocates for their communities. This finding is not entirely surprising. As noted in Chapter Two, volunteers spend proportionately more hours learning informally in their volunteer work than in any other sphere. Despite the intertwined and multi-layered nature of informal learning, we have grouped the informal learning acquired by tenant volunteers through their involvement in the Tenant Participation System in four overarching themes: learning confidence, learning to connect with different communities, learning political efficacy, and learning to improve participatory management.

### *Learning Confidence*

An important outcome of learning that impacted self worth and eventually political efficacy was the development of confidence as tenant volunteers learned that they could become effective and respected as real decision makers. A tenant with two decades of community activism experience argued that people living in social housing "have been put down all their lives by housing staff; they believe they are among the lowest people, and they have no self worth." However, she explained, in the Tenant Participation System, tenants are in a position where their ideas matter and they are able to act based on them, and this significantly elevates their self-esteem. This learned self-confidence, in turn, seems to lead tenants to further their engagement within and beyond their housing communities.

During the interview process, both staff and volunteers acknowledged significant changes in practices among tenant representatives. These changes were often the result of learning new and relevant knowledge and skills, especially in the early stages of engagement. For instance, many interviewees referred to the earlier council meetings where the CHU manager had to chair and lead the session. A few meetings later, the tenants themselves were confident and able to chair their own sessions, take minutes and facilitate the council meetings. A tenant representative described her first experience chairing a council meeting as truly "exciting" and expressed her satisfaction for being able to manage the session successfully. One of the CHU

managers described changes in tenant behaviour even after a short while in their new role as volunteer representatives:

> Tenant reps change through the process. I compare them with the older ones, and I realize that they have changed and learned stuff… Tenant reps organized stuff. As they grow, it has been a help for the CHU and the council. As they understood how budget works it helped. They also know how to apply pressure, how to negotiate much better now.

One of the tenant volunteers explained that her advocacy role within the CHU council has helped her improve her public speaking skills, which she refers to "a life skill" that could be used in different places. She proudly reported that now she speaks at various events and meetings on behalf of her community. Another tenant representative explained how she was too shy to talk about her concerns in the first months of the council. However, she gradually overcame her shyness:

> Eventually I got used to it; I got used to the whole idea that everyone is going to have their own issues and if you have issues then don't hold it back you have to say what is on your mind or your issues are never going to be solved… I made it my priority that I am going to say what I have to say.

Other volunteer tenants recounted that their participation in the governance system helped them overcome their fear of authority. As this tenant explains:

> I had no prior involvement in anything before; I have always avoided approaching any kind of authority before [joining the TPS]… If you take a small step and you do it successfully it gives you some confidence and you go for the next step and then other steps.

Along the same lines, another tenant representative noted that she is no longer intimidated by people in positions of authority: "What participation taught me is that I am never intimidated by titles; people at any rank are still people." This positive change has radically transformed the tenant-management relationship and what staff referred to as 'the culture of complaint' in the organization. One of the respondents described the change with these words:

> Instead of passive and tedious nagging and begging that the management "has to do this and that"… TCHC has opened up for tenants to be part of the CHU management. So if you do not participate you should not complain, but if you do participate you could.

The importance of gaining self-confidence should not be underestimated. It forms the cornerstone from which participants have the courage to learn how to affect the wider community and create political efficacy, as will be explored below. Probably inspired by Gandhi's famous dictum, one volunteer, after enumerating the challenges that need to be addressed in public housing, concluded by saying that "we can now be part of the change we would like to see."

### *Learning to Connect*

The Tenant Participation System mandates that tenant representatives reach out to tenants within their communities and neighbourhoods. The volunteers described how these activities have increased their connections with their neighbours and people in their CHU as well as in other CHUs. As one tenant representative recalled,

> I have made friendships not only in my own CHU but in all other 26 CHUS … Honestly, I built a relationship with these other individuals and… [they became an] extended part of my family.

Through their interactions with other volunteers, tenant representatives also gained a greater understanding of the problems and needs of people in their community and in other CHUs. Some volunteers, for instance, learned that the problems that they experienced in their building were also experienced by tenants in other buildings, generating a feeling of belonging to a larger community:

> Not only us in [our] CHU… but also in CHU [X] and in CHU [Y]. They got the same graffiti problem, and they got the same security issue... You know you get to hear these things! And you say hey, I'm not alone in all of this.

Other volunteers noted that learning about their own community and other communities broadened and deepened their understanding of other people's lives, their problems, and their perspectives on certain issues:

> TPS has been a great learning opportunity… I have definitely developed a better vision after this experience. I look for things that I did not look before. I am much more aware of the challenges [other people have] that are completely different from my own experiences.

> Something you think is so trivial to you is explosive to the other person… So it's a good experience. I see myself different in the way that I have gained more knowledge… I have seen a lot of different things in different perspectives.

Indeed, several tenant representatives indicated that as a result of their volunteer work in the participatory system of Toronto Community Housing they undertook new practices, and that their involvement extended well beyond the CHU level. Many tenants who had little prior participation reported attending and even organizing a variety of community meetings, sometimes engaging with the larger political system. In one instance, a group of tenant representatives invited one of the mayoral candidates to their complex to seek her political stand on the issues in their neighbourhood. One tenant representative described how she learned about the importance of developing new practices in order to make a real impact: "you would like to see something happen in the community, you have to make it happen yourself." She also described how she felt an increased sense of belonging to her community through her role as a tenant representative.

One of the staff respondents explained that the improved feeling of the self, community and the process also motivates tenants to further reach out to learn about problems in their neighbourhood so that they can raise issues and propose solutions to the management, and then she added:

> Some have started initiatives on their own. Some have started their safety committee. I helped with [this CHU] association and then it led to other initiatives. As they get involved they get initiatives on their own which is very good.

In sum, changes in tenants' attitude towards their community, towards the TCHC, and towards the wider political structures, as well as their social and political behaviour, are distinctive outcomes of volunteers' participation and learning. This informal learning described by the volunteers encouraged them to broaden their engagement and become more active and participatory citizens.

### *Learning Political Efficacy*

Most volunteers reported that their knowledge about municipal and provincial politics significantly improved as a result of the tenant participatory system. As tenant representatives learn about the wider political structures governing social housing at the local level, they are willing to voluntarily broaden their participation to apply pressure to other levels of government in relation to certain issues or demands. For example, some tenants explained how, as they gained an understanding of jurisdictional limits and responsibilities, and realized the financial limitations of the TCHC to provide and maintain quality housing, they have exerted more force towards other agencies and actors beyond the housing agency or even the municipal government. Those volunteers started to advocate to the provincial level for increased resources to improve the quality of the housing portfolio. Other volunteers mentioned that they now know how to make the TCHC move into action by applying pressure via other levels of governments both vertically and horizontally. For example, some of the tenant representatives described how they now talk to their councillors or other elected officials about their housing issues.

As part of their engagement with the tenant participatory system, the volunteers became involved in budgeting processes at both the CHU level and the city-wide capital funding forum. They explained that, as a result of these activities, that they are now more aware of how decisions are made and resources allocated at the TCH. They reported acquiring a better understanding of the criteria and mechanisms associated with allocating monetary resources. They also emphasized that they have been able to develop insights into how they could effectively impact the bureaucracy. For instance, one volunteer observed: "I learned what button to push to get something done… I learned how the system works, who you should get hold of to get something done." Developing a better understanding of the budgeting criteria allows tenants to apply their efforts to impact budget decisions that they feel

are urgent for their constituencies and also enables them to keep the management accountable as they describe how they now monitor the quality of the work at both their buildings and the CHU level.

Associated with increased knowledge and active involvement in the TCHC and wider political arena is an increased sense that one can impact what once were political decisions taken in remote locations by distant people. This feeling of confidence started with the satisfaction of witnessing the impact of their efforts in their own local communities. For instance, one young tenant volunteer who worked hard through the participatory budget to secure funding for a meeting space in her community housing unit described how proud she feels of her contribution to achieving such space:

> I guess it sort of made me feel like I mattered, especially this year when I got to be the speaker, it really felt good, knowing that not only my community wanted the money that we needed but that now I have a place that I can look at every day when I pass by it and say that was me.

Some tenant representatives have now elevated their political engagement beyond the TCHC. For example, one of the respondents decided to run for the city council. In sum, our findings suggest that as volunteers felt that their knowledge, skills and abilities can have an impact on the political system, their levels of political efficacy increased. Then, we argue that the increased sense of political efficacy is, at least in part, a consequence of volunteers' informal learning through participation in the TPS.

### *Learning to Improve Participatory Management*

Confirming the theoretical claim about the educational dimension of participatory democracy, we found that the learning acquired by the volunteers through the Tenant Participation System strengthened the quality of the process itself. As the volunteers gained experience and skills through their participating, the projects proposed and the deliberation around those projects improved over time. Volunteer tenants are expected to act as members of a decision-making body through which they gradually develop a spectrum of knowledge and skills, and this, in turn, improves the decision-making process itself. Indeed, many respondents argued that this not only increased their personal growth but also enhanced the CHU management practice itself by improving the working relationships between tenant representatives and the TCHC and the efficiency of the CHU councils.

Through their engagement, tenant representatives learned how to better resolve conflicts, chair council meetings, organize group work and make collective decisions. One representative explained his experience as a Chair:

> One of the things I learned was how to chair the meeting and so I did it; I listened to everybody's business… like a judge… set the stage…read the minutes, confirm them… made notes…I balanced it out… you got to wait for

> everybody gets a chance…if you do not balance it you are going to choke… you got to be fair so everybody can put what they want to put in…you cannot get hot-headed… you can't be for one side; you have to be for everybody.

It can be argued that such learning leads to better quality chairing, and better quality chairing leads to a better participatory democracy process. Another volunteer mentioned how her council had become more accepting of each other and tolerant of conflicts and differences. Staff also observed changes in attitude towards the representatives from racial and ethnic minorities within diverse tenant councils. One volunteer representative explained that she now feels that she is part of her CHU management team while keeping her independence from the TCHC staff. Another tenant representative said that she now knows the health promotion officer well and works with him as a team. These experiences in the Tenant Participation System are similar to those found by Abers (2000) in describing the transformation of participatory councils in Porto Alegre, Brazil: as budget council members learned how to better facilitate meetings and participants gained deliberative skills, the meetings changed from chaotic (with people interrupting and speaking over each other), to more respectful and organized.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study we have explored some connections between volunteering motivations, activities and informal learning within a project where tenants practice active participation on issues that affect their communities. As noted in the WALL and CSGVP studies discussed in Chapter Two, people are motivated to volunteer for a variety of reasons, and a common one is that they see a real need or potential for change in their community. Learning is rarely seen as a motivation for volunteering. In this case, however, many tenants volunteered out of a desire to learn: to learn more about their community, the TCHC, and civic/political procedures. Such motivation often came from a history of community involvement and activism, but sometimes also from the encouragement of other tenants or staff. These motivations also reflect the diverse definitions of volunteering (see Cnaan et al. 1996 table discussed in Chapter One): each participant had varying amounts of volition (from choosing to participate on their own to being encouraged or pressured by others) and intended beneficiaries (from personal benefits to contributing to the community to supporting future generations). In retrospect, the volunteers acknowledged that their position as tenant representatives provided them with an opportunity to educate themselves and the community on the workings of TCHC, in hopes of securing more attention and resources for their communities.

Overall, tenant volunteers learned a great deal of knowledge on practical and civic procedures at their CHU and beyond. They also developed a variety of social and leadership skills. They gained self-esteem and confidence in their potential. They broadened their social capital and heightened their political activism. These increases in knowledge and skills as well as the changes in attitudes and practices

helped volunteers to increase their political efficacy, to enhance their managerial efficiency and to improve the Tenant Participation System itself.

This informal learning developed through the Tenant Participation System acted as a catalyst in different ways. Learning related to increased self-confidence and overcoming fear of authority helped to radically transform the traditional tenant-management relationship into "be[ing] part of the change we would like to see", and allowed volunteer tenants to become more active and engaged citizens. This in turn helped foster learning within and beyond the CHU community, in the areas of communication, collaboration, leadership and political efficacy. An increased understanding of the needs within one's own community was connected to one's understanding of the needs of other CHUs and an increased understanding of how change happens at each level. In addition, the skills learned through the participatory process also resulted in increased managerial efficiency – a self-looping process whereby the participatory project improves through time and through the very act of participation.

The learning reported by tenants supports the argument posed by participatory democracy theory that participation in local governance encourages citizenship learning and promotes better democracy by providing people with the very tools they need to participate (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003; Pateman 1970/1999; Rousseau, 1762/1968; Schugurensky, 2000, 2003). Through volunteering as representatives, tenants developed knowledge, skills and attitudes that support the participatory mode of citizenship. This includes increased knowledge of how governance structures function, as well as increased communication and negotiation skills. This enabled the tenant representatives to act more effectively inside the TCHC and even in wider political arenas such as municipal politics. Tenant representatives also reported increased confidence in themselves and their ability to impact decisions. Tenants also reported increased connections to and knowledge about their communities and the people who comprised them. The learning also helped to ensure a smoother functioning of the Tenant Participation System itself. For example, there was evidence of increases in knowledge about the Tenant Participation System itself, increases in skills such as public speaking, and improved relationships both among tenants and between tenants and management. In short, the learning reviewed in this study provides evidence to support the claim that the act of participation enhances democratic processes as participants learn needed skills, knowledge and behaviour through the practice of decision-making.

It is pertinent to acknowledge that there are many challenges involved in constructing a participatory process: it requires substantial investments of time and capital as well as a restructuring of relationships and culture within an organization. Therefore, it is important for proponents of participatory models to show substantial outcomes that make these 'costs' worthwhile. There are a number of positive outcomes that proponents associate with participatory governance, like empowerment, transparency, fairness of decisions, and an increase in acceptance of decisions. In this chapter we focused on another impact of participation that justifies the implementation of participatory processes but is seldom researched: the informal

democratic learning acquired by the volunteers, and the impact of such learning in the quality of the participatory process. Further research on the political and democratic learning produced through participation can help to strengthen the argument that these spaces provide real learning opportunities which can support democracy through enhancing democratic competencies. In addition, by better understanding the learning that can happen in these spaces we open up the possibility for creating stronger conditions or enabling factors to continue to support such learning.

## NOTES

[1] In contrast to the participatory mode, 'citizenship' has traditionally had a more limited usage, being defined as a legal status in which the State extends social, civil, and political guarantees upon citizens through law and public policy.

[2] For more information on the origins of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre see Abers 2000. For a discussion on the learning dimension of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre and other Latin American cities, see Chapter Eight in this book.

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# 8. VOLUNTEERS FOR DEMOCRACY: INFORMAL LEARNING THROUGH PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

## INTRODUCTION

In many places all around the world, millions of people devote enormous amounts of time and energy every year in their communities to civic activities. A small proportion of people do this as part of their paid jobs. Among them are elected and appointed officials, professional politicians, technical staff, union and business leaders, researcher-activists, coordinators of advocacy groups, community organizers in nonprofit organizations and the like. Most participants, however, engage in these activities on voluntary basis, without any remuneration, often because they believe in a cause, are affected by an issue, or want to improve the quality of life or the quality of democracy in their localities. Taking into account the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 1, this kind of civic engagement can be considered volunteer work because it is freely chosen, unpaid, benefits the larger community, and is often part of an organization (normally a non-profit, a public agency, or a community group).

The literature on this topic (e.g. Keeter et al 2002) identifies three main forms of civic engagement. The first one, *community involvement*, refers to improving one's local community and helping others, and includes activities like participating in a neighborhood association, supporting a non-profit through fundraising, working in a soup kitchen, volunteering in a homeless shelter or a community garden, or organizing community events to bring people together to interact or solve problems. The second, *electoral participation*, refers to engagement with institutional political processes, mainly through voting regularly in local, state and federal elections, but also through active participation in electoral campaigns. The third form is called *political voice*, and refers to the many ways in which people express opinions about social and political issues and exercise their agency to protest or support particular policies through strategies like letter-writing, boycotting, 'buycotting', lobbying, attending demonstrations, partaking in social movements, and the like. If we understand civic engagement as "individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern" (APA 2012), these three categories probably encompass most instances in which people engage.

*F. Duguid, K. Mündel & D. Schugurensky (Eds.), Volunteer Work, Informal Learning and Social Action, 159–176.*

Comprehensive and useful as it is, however, this typology does not recognize a fourth mode of civic engagement that has being gaining momentum in the last two decades. This form, which can be called *collaborative public action,* refers to the involvement of ordinary people in local democracy. Unlike the previous three forms, this is a type of civic engagement in which people and government work together through democracy processes to find solutions to issues of public concern, and translate those solutions into actions. The institutional arrangement that makes this type of civic engagement possible is known as participatory democracy or participatory governance.[1] This should not be equated to pseudo-consultation mechanisms and tokenistic exercises but to genuine processes of deliberation that are bound to real and substantive decisions.

One of these processes is known as participatory budgeting, a democratic practice of deliberation and decision-making in which community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. Participatory budgeting, or PB, started in 1989 in Porto Alegre, a city of 1.5 million people in Southern Brazil. Since then, it has been implemented every year without interruption, and in the last two decades it expanded internationally to more than 1,500 cities in all continents. Because of its positive impact on transparency and accountability, on the activation of neighbourhood associations, on equitable resource allocations, and on the development of a more democratic civic culture, participatory budgeting has received awards from the UNESCO, the World Bank, the OECD, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat) and the Bertelsmann Stiftung Foundation (Reinhard Mohn Prize) for its contributions to local governance and participatory democracy. Likewise, an international study that evaluated 57 experiments of public participation considering five criteria (selection mechanism, form of involvement, role in decision-making, transferability and resource implications) ranked participatory budgeting among the top three democratic innovations in the world. Moreover, participatory budgeting has been considered as a model of empowered participatory governance (Fung and Wright 2003) and also an example of a 'real utopia' (Wright 2010). Probably as important, participatory budgeting provides an entry point for many previously disenfranchised people to engage in civic and political activities, in associative life, and in local governance. Indeed, unlike most existing processes of deliberative democracy and public engagement, which tend to attract a high proportion of white, affluent males with postsecondary education who are familiar with municipal agencies, participatory budgeting attracts a high proportion of women, racialized groups, and people with lower levels of income and schooling who have little or no previous experience at all interacting with the government bureaucracy. This inclusive dimension of PB makes it special in the family of participatory democracy experiments.

Democratic theorists like Carole Paterman (1970) and Jane Mansbridge (1995) suggested that participatory democracy processes have a significant "educative effect" among volunteers who take part in them, but observed that we lacked empirical evidence to support such claim. This chapter responds to the questions and challenges raised by Pateman and Mansbridge, by investigating the learning that

takes place through participatory democracy. Thus, this chapter explores the civic and political informal learning acquired by ordinary citizens who voluntarily contribute significant amount of their time and energy to participatory budgeting processes. It is based on extensive fieldwork in three Latin American cities: Porto Alegre (Brazil) Montevideo (Uruguay), and Rosario (Argentina). Overall, it was found that as a result of their volunteering activities, participatory budgeting delegates acquired a new repertoire of democratic and political knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, dispositions and practices that are seldom acquired in civic education classes. Indeed, some participants from marginalized communities referred to participatory budgeting as "our school of citizenship".

Although it may sound like a cliché today, it is no less true that one of the best ways to learn democracy is by doing it, and one of the best ways to develop effective civic and political skills is by observing them in the real world and exercising them. In other words, it seems that the old model of apprenticeship, based on observation, modeling, trial and error, and regular social interaction still has something to contribute today to educational theory and practice. Education is not understood here exclusively as a schooling process, but also as an experience-learning process that takes place in daily life and in a variety of community spaces. One of those community spaces is participatory democracy. In this space, volunteers learn and develop capacities not through decontextualized content, but by interacting with peers and dealing with real life situations.

This chapter is organized in five sections. The first one provides a general overview of participatory budgeting and its main impacts on the quality of democracy and on community life. The second section discusses the notion that one of the best ways to learn democracy is by doing it, and explores the pedagogical dimension of participatory democracy. The third section explores the connections between informal learning and participatory democracy, and introduces the "sixty four thousand dollar question" posed by Jane Mansbridge: "does participation make better citizens?" In order to address this question, the third section presents the methodological approach used to elicit the learning and change experienced by volunteers of participatory budgeting. The fourth section discusses the main findings, organized in four main areas of learning and change: knowledge, attitudes and values, skills, and practices. Finally, the fifth section offers a summary and some concluding remarks.

## PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Participatory budgeting is a process that involves participants in determining the allocation of a budget or parts of a budget. It can be used -and has been used- in a variety of institutional and community settings, but throughout its relatively short history, participatory budgeting has been applied mainly at the municipal level, often in cities, but in rural areas as well. Participatory budgeting is a democratic practice that lasts several months and combines large assemblies with smaller meetings of delegates elected by their communities. It is usually aligned with the

annual budget cycles of the municipality, and is organized in five main phases: diagnosis, deliberation, decision-making, implementation and monitoring. People's involvement in participatory budgeting ranges from attending a general assembly and voting on spending priorities to volunteering as community representatives in a series of regular meetings for several months. Volunteers not only make decisions about budget allocations, but also about the rules of engagement themselves. To avoid the concentration of power and know-how in a small and elite echelon of volunteers, in most participatory budget processes the elected representatives must rotate after one or two cycles, thus nurturing the emergence of new generations of community leaders.

In the case of large cities, the city usually is divided in districts. In Porto Alegre, for instance, the participatory budgeting process is organized in 16 regions. In each region, volunteers in different neighbourhoods develop their lists of investment priorities in infrastructure, such as paving, housing, healthcare, sewage, storm drains, street lightening, sports and recreation facilities, potable water, childcare units, cultural centers, reforestation, bridges, sanitation or traffic lights. Through a process of deliberation and decision-making that involves the careful consideration of the different options, direct negotiation between neighbourhoods, and voting, an overall list of investment priorities for each region is developed. In addition to these 'Regional Forums', another group of volunteers participate in a parallel process (known as Thematic Forums) for city-wide issues that are not neighbourhood-specific, such as education, health, social services, transportation and economic development. Throughout the entire participatory budgeting process, elected and appointed municipal officials provide legal and technical advice, but they are not allowed to vote. In many participatory budgets, decisions are guided by equity criteria. This means that those areas of the city that have more deficits in infrastructure or services receive special consideration during the decision-making process. At the end of the process, the participatory budgeting volunteers present their proposed budget allocations to the elected municipal council for final approval. Interestingly, in the two decades of the Porto Alegre participatory budgeting there have been periods when the municipal council has been hostile to the process, but community support for the process has protected most of the decisions and budgets have been often approved.

The impact of participatory budgeting can be observed in seven main areas. First, participatory budgeting increases transparency and accountability in city financial allocations. As more community members volunteer in this public process, the opportunities for corruption, waste and 'clientelism' (patronage) diminish significantly. Second, because it draws on the knowledge that people have of their own reality and in their collective intelligence, participatory budgeting increases efficiency in resource allocations. Local volunteers, once invested in the process, make sure that money is spent wisely and that the investments are relevant to the needs of local communities. Indeed, participants have incentives to develop their capacities and master the information necessary to making good decisions because

they must live with the consequences of bad ones. Third, participatory budgeting nurtures community mobilization. Through formal and informal meetings, people get to know their neighbours better and feel more connected to others in their area. Moreover, participatory budgeting stimulates the creation and growth of community organizations and civic associations (Abers 2000, 2001, Baiocchi 2005).

Fourth, budget allocations tend to be more fair and equitable. Because everyone has equal access to information, to deliberation and to decision-making, the playing field is equalized. When volunteers spend considerable time and energy analyzing the local reality and discussing ideas, and use their collective intelligence to make decisions, they usually end up prioritizing projects that address the greatest community needs. Indeed, participatory budgeting processes tend to re-allocate municipal investments to the poorest regions of the city. Fifth, participatory budgeting promotes a more democratic and deliberative political culture in which ordinary people have more power to influence decisions on issues that affect them directly, and this, in turn, promotes higher and better levels of civic engagement, especially among previously politically marginalized groups. Sixth, as participants feel ownership of their projects, there is an increase in community pride and consequently in the preservation and caring of public property. Last but not least and directly related to the main topic of this book, participatory budgeting is an informal educational space of civic and political education. Through their participation, volunteers gain a deeper understanding of complex political issues and community needs, and acquire a great deal of learning about local democracy.

## LEARNING DEMOCRACY BY DOING DEMOCRACY: THEORETICAL CLAIMS

The idea that the very act of participating in deliberation and decision-making has a high pedagogical potential can be traced back at least to Aristotle and Rousseau. For them, the main function of participatory governance is educative, using the term "education" in the same broad sense that permeates Freirean thought, and pointing to the development of responsible social and political action. Likewise, for J.S. Mill, who wrote during the mid-1800s in England, it was at the local level where the real educative effect of participation occurs. This is because the issues dealt with at this level directly affect the individuals and their everyday life, and also because it is at this level where ordinary citizens stand a better chance of being elected by their peers to serve on a local body or committee. It is by participating at the local level, claimed Mills, that the individual really "learns democracy." In his own words,

> We do not learn to read or write, to ride or swim, by merely told how to do it, but by doing it, so it is only by practising popular government on a limited scale that the people will ever learn how to exercise it on a larger one. (Mill, 1963:186, quoted in Pateman, 1988 [1970]:31).

Like Mill, G.D.H. Cole argued that it is through participation in self-government at the local level and particularly in local associations that people could learn democracy more effectively.

Following Rousseau, Mill, and Cole, Carole Pateman (1970) contended that the existence of representative institutions at national levels is not sufficient for democracy. She argued that other spheres nurturing political socialization (what she called "social training") for the development of the individual attitudes and psychological qualities that are necessary for good quality participation had to be created and invigorated.

In Pateman's framework, the justification for a democratic system in the participatory theory of democracy rests not only in its effectiveness for a more transparent governance, but also –and primarily- on the human results that are accrued from the participatory process, particularly political learning. She conceptualized the participatory model as one in which maximum input (participation) is required, and where output includes not just policies (decisions) but also the development of the social and political capacities of each individual. This means that political capacity is both a result and a precondition for good participation, and that there is constant "feedback" from output to input. A central point in Pateman's theory is that once the participatory system is established, it becomes self-sustaining because the very qualities that are required of individual citizens if the system is to work successfully are precisely those that the participatory process develops and fosters. Hence, in a virtuous circle, the argument goes, the more people participate, the better able they become to do so, and the higher the quality of the process and its outcomes. The development of political capacities, then, takes place through informal learning that is experienced through the process of participation itself (Pateman 1988 [1970]).

This suggests that one important learning dimension of participatory democracy has to do with the development of certain psychological attitudes that nurture more participation. These psychological attitudes are closely connected to increases in political efficacy, that is, the confidence in one's capacity to influence political decisions and impact upon the political process. Given the contemporary spread of the so-called democratic deficit expressed in high levels of electoral absenteeism and low trust in political institutions, there is an urgent need for ordinary citizens to increase their levels of political efficacy by participating in politics and being able to make a difference. As Pierre Bourdieu (1991) pointed out, the fact that professional politicians have monopolized the political field is not a natural phenomenon, and can be challenged through social action. This is particularly important for lower income groups, since studies of political efficacy usually find a correlation between socioeconomic status, political efficacy, and political participation: higher income groups tend to have a higher level of political efficacy, and tend to participate more and more effectively. Hence, the educative effect of participation for the development of political efficacy is especially relevant for those marginalized groups that are underrepresented in participatory democracy and have less experience with these processes.

A change in psychological attitudes is not the only educative effect discussed in the literature on participatory democracy. For instance, Rousseau, Mill, and Pateman also speculated that participatory democracy would result in the broadening of outlook and interests, and would help people to appreciate the connection between their self-interest and the common good. They also argued that participatory democracy was likely to generate increased familiarity with democratic procedures and the learning of democratic skills. They contended that participatory democracy would provide a better understanding of the relationship between local decisions and the wider social and political context and, conversely, the influence of the broader social and political environment on the local reality. Moreover, the theoretical literature on participatory democracy claims that when people learn to participate at the local level, they often transfer the newly acquired knowledge, capacities and confidence to other civic and political spheres. A related argument on this 'expansive effect' of participatory democracy is the transition from narrow self-interest to the common good. In this regard, democratic theorists argue that there is a connection between agency and the development of civic virtues. Rousseau, for instance, claimed that through participation people learn to gain cooperation from others and to widen their horizons, and in this way learn that the public and private interests are linked. For him, the logic of the participatory system itself is such that participants are forced to deliberate according to their own sense of justice, and eventually they have to reach a common ground in order to make the deliberation possible.

## INFORMAL LEARNING IN PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY: THE JANE MANSBRIDGE QUESTION

As discussed in the previous section, in her 1970 book *Participation and Democratic Theory,* Carole Pateman, building on the insights of traditional thinkers of participatory democracy, argued that the justification of participatory democratic processes rests largely on their educative effects. At the same time, she recognized that these educative effects still remained largely unknown because most literature on the topic was speculative and normative rather than based on empirical research.[2] Twenty-five years later, at the 1995 conference of the political science association, Jane Mansbridge (1995:1) took up this issue again by raising an intriguing question: "Does participation make better citizens?" She replied to her own question with these provocative words: "*Participation makes better citizens. I believe it, but I can't prove it. And neither can anyone else*". Mansbridge's argument was that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to identify the exact nature of the changes experienced by those who take part in participatory democracy with the blunt instruments of social science.

Mansbridge's comment posed an exciting question to all those interested in the connections between informal learning and participatory democracy. Although I immediately recognized that it would be very difficult to provide definitive answers, I decided that I wanted to make a modest contribution to address Mansbridge's

challenge by exploring this issue through empirical research. Hence, I embarked on a journey that would take me, alone and with collaborators, to Porto Alegre and other cities, to explore whether the volunteers of participatory budgeting had experienced any changes as a result of their participation, and whether those changes were consistent with some of the claims of participatory theorists outlined in the previous section. I decided to focus on changes in civic learning, political skills, and democratic dispositions and practices. This was going to prove a more difficult task than originally thought. I started the exploration by asking an open-ended question about learning to volunteers who had been active in participatory budgeting for over a year. This strategy produced disappointing results. Volunteers said that they probably learned some things, but were unable to say what they were and to go beyond generalities.

In retrospect, this should not be surprising. Informal learning is not always conscious and intentional. In many cases, informal learning occurs in "natural" ways, through lived experiences and group socialization. This type of informal learning often results in tacit knowledge, and it is difficult to express. As Michael Polanyi (1967: 4) insightfully observed in the opening pages of *The Tacit Dimension,* 'we can know more than we can tell'. That is the way we learn, for instance, our first language, which includes a vibrant, rich and complex tacit system of symbols and rules that underpins and shapes many subsequent learning processes. It is assumed yet unidentified by the learner. When we talk, we pay attention to the idea that we want to express, and are only tacitly aware of the rules of grammar and syntax that we are using. This is also the way we internalize some important values, attitudes, dispositions, behaviours and even our understanding of the social world throughout our lives.

To a large extent, the learning aspect of their participatory budgeting experience was invisible and unconscious to most volunteers, in the same way that it is invisible and unconscious to many of us when we attend community meetings. Then, it became clear to me that in order to have a meaningful conversation about informal learning with the volunteers of the participatory budget, I had to overcome the methodological challenge predicted by Jane Mansbridge through prompts that could trigger a conversation and elicit the tacit knowledge of the volunteers. The strategy was simple, but proved effective. The interviews with volunteers were organized in three parts. The first part was about their personal biography, their history of civic and political engagement, and their reasons to join participatory budgeting. The second part was about their own experiences in participatory budgeting, including likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, and related topics.

The third part of the interview was about their learning. It started with an open-ended question about learning, and then proceeded through a series of indicators organized in four categories of democratic and political learning: knowledge, attitudes and values, skills, and practices (KASP). For each indicator, and using a 5-point Likert scale, volunteers were asked to rate their knowledge, attitudes, skills and practices before participating in the participatory budget process, and at the

moment of the interview. For each indicator, whenever a change (positive or negative) was indicated, volunteers were asked to elaborate on their learning experience and to provide concrete examples and stories. Indeed, the most interesting element of the interview was not the pre-post changes reflected in the numbers, but the fascinating stories of learning and change conveyed by the volunteers.

At the end of the interview, volunteers were invited to add more indicators to the list and to rate themselves in those indicators twice using the time dimension. Interestingly, I started the first interviews with only 10 indicators of learning and change, and over time the list grew to 56 indicators. As interesting was the fact that, when we finished the conversations, many volunteers said that they appreciated the opportunity to realize how much they have learned through the process. This is consistent with previous research on informal learning. Tough (1971), for instance, reported similar reactions from participants when they became aware of their own learning after being interviewed. I recognize that the self-reporting of learning and change only provides a partial picture of the real learning that went on. I also acknowledge that the attribution effect is not necessarily self-evident, as volunteers go through other parallel learning experiences in settings other than participatory budget. Self-reporting, then, could be complemented with ethnographic and participatory approaches, observations, longitudinal studies and other methodological strategies. At the same time, the fact that volunteers were able to elaborate on their responses and provide concrete examples and stories to illustrate their numbers gives some confidence that the data has a good degree of reliability and can provide a small piece to the puzzle and a modest contribution to the emerging body of research that attempts to address the challenge posed by Jane Mansbridge.

## VOLUNTEERS' INFORMAL LEARNING THROUGH PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

In the general assemblies of participatory budgeting, local communities develop a general list of spending priorities and elect delegates to represent them at the participatory budgeting council. These delegates devote significant time and energy to participatory budgeting processes, talking with neighbours, and participating in meetings for several months in which they consider a wide range of potential projects and deliberate on their costs and their benefits to the communities they represent. This work is unpaid and done on voluntary basis. The informal civic and political learning acquired by the volunteers through their involvement in participatory budgeting was organized in four main areas: knowledge, attitudes and values, skills, and practices (KASP).

### *Knowledge*

Most volunteers reported substantial increases in their knowledge of politics, of municipal budgets, of their citizens' rights, of the criteria and mechanisms to allocate funds, and of the needs of their own communities, including technical knowledge

about zoning regulations and soil and air pollution. An interesting finding, particularly among volunteers from neighbourhoods that have benefited from more public investments in the past, is that they became more familiar with the needs of other communities. Laura, for instance, remembered that when she first heard that some neighbours wanted more trees in her neighbourhood, she thought that it was an important need. However, when she went to a poorer community to attend a meeting, as soon as she got off the bus she noted that "there was no street, no grass, no sewer system, no nothing", and then made a connection to the city budget: "I'd been in neighbourhoods like that before, but it wasn't until then that I realized that providing these basic services for neighbourhoods like that was the real need". Likewise, Ana, a volunteer from a relatively affluent neighbourhood recalled that she attended a general assembly in a nearby shantytown. She was interested in advocating for more lighting for her local park. However, when she observed the disastrous conditions and lack of basic services in the area where the meeting was held, she became aware of the contrast between her need and the needs of other people. Moreover, she said, "this was the first time in my life in which I met people in that area as fellow citizens in a civic space. Before I had met them as gardeners or mechanics or maids or carpenters. This was a powerful learning experience". This interclassist dimension of participatory budgeting helps to create 'bridging' social capital (in the sense of cooperative connections with people from different walks of life), in addition to the 'bonding' social capital that is generated in each community through meetings and mobilization to identify and address common needs[3]. Knowing more people from other neighbourhoods and groups also helped volunteers to expand their circles, create new friendships, and establish ad hoc alliances and sometimes also long-lasting coalitions between their communities. The volunteers also reported that through participatory budgeting they got to know elected and appointed official in city hall, a potential predictor of political efficacy. The volunteers also acquired a high amount of useful instrumental and technical knowledge about politics and government, especially regarding the inner workings of city hall and the specific mechanisms and regulations used to allocate public funds. They reported increasing knowledge connecting expenses and revenues, and a better understanding of the different sources of revenue and the different types of expenses. For instance, in the interviews the volunteers talked about learning the difference between fixed and discretionary funds, and about the politics of federal, state and municipal funding. They also learned that a large portion of the municipal budget is already devoted to wages and to fixed costs like the maintenance of roads and health centers, leaving limited funds for new infrastructure.

### *Attitudes*

Volunteers also reported significant changes in attitudes as a result of their experience in participatory budgeting. The most significant changes were a higher confidence in their own potential to influence political decisions (political efficacy) and a deeper

concern for city problems and for the common good. As Graciela noted, "at the beginning of the process I was mainly concerned about my street; now it is about our city". Similarly, Carlos said: "At the beginning I came because of my little pothole, and then I discovered that there are bigger holes than mine. There are potholes in my street but it is still transitable; there are settlements where not even the ambulance or the firefighters can enter". The interviewees also indicated that they now attribute more value to the importance of citizen participation in local government, feel more solidarity towards marginalized groups, experience more connection to neighbors and to the community, and are more interested in community participation.

Additionally, many noted that they learned to be more tolerant and respectful of other volunteers and of the pace of deliberative democratic processes. As Mauro, a particularly hyperactive volunteer acknowledged, "at the beginning I wanted to get things done soon, reach our decisions faster, and then I learned to respect the time of the process, and became less impatient; I learned that true democracy may be slow but in the end it is important to consider all the perspectives and to arrive together at a decision". A few participants reported developing more democratic and open-minded attitudes towards other groups. One woman, for instance, mentioned that she and her husband had homophobic tendencies in the past, but after interacting with a gay couple in the participatory budgeting they learned to respect and appreciate them, and eventually cultivated a friendship that otherwise would have never emerged.

Several volunteers reported a more caring attitude towards public property. As they learned that municipal resources originate mainly from citizens' tax contributions, they became more inclined to preserve public infrastructure and reduce the waste of resources. Interestingly, Luiz, a young volunteer in a poor area of the city actually asked me to register his learning increment from 0 to 7, even if the range of the scale was 1–5. After my initial surprise, he explained that in the past he was involved in a local gang and expressed his frustrations through vandalism of public property. "Now -he added- I know how many public telephones are vandalized in this city every month, how much money does it cost to fix them, and how many school lunches we could cover with that money. Every time I see youngsters vandalizing public property, I tell them: 'There go the school lunches of your siblings'". As a result of the participatory budget, this young volunteer made new connections about vandalism, repairs and school lunches, and developed a deeper appreciation for the preservation of public property.

Moreover, some volunteers made comments that connected their increased concern for public property with their increased political efficacy. Simona, for instance, noted that in the past, if she had observed a broken traffic light or a sidewalk in bad repair, she would ignore it because she was not directly affected and thought that in any case nobody would listen to her complaint. In her words: "Before I thought: why should I care about some traffic light if I knew my thoughts wouldn't count? Now, because I think my idea will be considered, I'm more motivated to pay attention to problems in the city and see what I can do about them. For example, now if I see a sidewalk in bad repair, I see that sidewalk as a problem to fix."

In Porto Alegre, Montevideo and Rosario, participants also reported a significant increase in their trust in the municipal government. The trust has been expressed in several re-elections of the progressive governments that started participatory budgeting, but also in the expansion of community participations. Volunteers reported that at first they were skeptical of the process, forecasting another disappointing tokenistic exercise carried out by the government. Over time, however, as people witnessed immediate returns on their participation, they began to trust the process, continued their involvement, and new groups that were observing from the sidelines engaged in the participatory budget. In Chicago, people re-elected in a landslide Joe Moore, the city councilor who started the participatory budgeting in the 49th district and who almost lost the previous election. When I asked him how he explained this, he replied: "I take the result of the last election as a sign of popular support for participatory budgeting and any similar initiatives that nurture citizen engagement and promote participatory governance. I take it as a sign that people in the 49th ward want to be active participants in governing rather than being passive observers of government. I also take it as a sign that people are hungry for more open and transparent ways of making decisions that affect them." Interestingly enough, in Porto Alegre, Montevideo and Rosario, the trust in local government increased, but the trust in politicians in general remained low overall.

### *Skills*

The most frequently mentioned skills were the development of new competencies to monitor governments' actions, to contact government agencies and officials, to rank priorities, to read budgets, to survey their environment, and to develop proposals for local projects. Susana reflected on her new skills:

> If a few years ago someone had asked me to talk about the reality of my neighbourhood, I would have been unable to articulate an answer. For instance, I didn't have a clue about doing a survey about land use: how many residences, how many retail stores, how many blocks, how to identify my neighbourhood in a map, how to interpret a local development plan. I learned all this through direct experience. I lived in this area all my life but never saw it from this perspective, paying attention to family housing, retail, industry, abandoned houses, rental properties, motels, tenancies, student residences, vacant lots…

In addition to these instrumental skills, there were references to analytical skills like the ability to understand and interpret official documents, as well as the ability to 'read' political dynamics in the city. The volunteers also frequently reported newly gained social, interpersonal and leadership skills like working in groups, interacting with neighbours, coordinating teams, and organizing and chairing meetings. Moreover, they acquired a variety of deliberative skills like listening, speaking in public, negotiating, persuading, making collective decisions, dealing with conflicts, and reaching consensus. More significant gains in public speaking

skills were noticeable among women and those with no previous experience in deliberative settings. Cecilia, for instance, mentioned that in the past she didn't dare to talk about politics at the dinner table because her husband and her father in law monopolized the conversation and did not believe that she had anything valuable to contribute. After two years in the participatory budgeting, she felt confident enough not only to express her opinions at home but also to use a microphone in a large room. In some cases, where people had a high self-perceived level of competencies in a particular area, the gains were negligible. For instance, a volunteer noted with a smile, in reference to conflict resolution skills, that she was a mother of five children and an early childhood educator, so she was already highly competent in solving conflicts.

The ability to listen, a precondition for a genuine deliberative democracy to flourish, is usually taken for granted. However, several volunteers, particularly the most vocal and assertive ones, acknowledged that at the beginning they did not have the necessary listening skills for a fruitful dialogue to take place, and developed these competences through the process. Alicia, for instance, said that participatory budgeting helped her to become a more careful and respectful listener: "Before I would always interrupt, but now I say to myself 'wait' and let the other person speak. I know that if I disagree later I can say what I want then." Along the same lines, Pedro, one of the most outspoken volunteers, recognized that before he would "second guess" what other people were going to say and turn off, but through the deliberative process he learned to listen until the end and in many cases was surprised by the insights of other volunteers who he previously underestimated. Last but not least, it was not uncommon that volunteers transfer some of the democratic skills and dispositions developed in the participatory budgeting to other situations and institutions such as families, schools, churches, workplaces or community associations. Others started to participate more actively in the formal political system (with some even running for office at the municipal level) and started to become more interested in provincial and national politics. This horizontal and vertical 'spillover effect' of participatory democracy is still an under-researched topic and deserves more attention.

### *Practices*

As a result of their experiences in participatory budgeting, many volunteers reported changes in actual practices and everyday activities. A great majority reported doing new things that were not part of their lives before, like monitoring public budgets regularly, evaluating the quality of public works, attending community meetings, formulating ideas and proposing solutions for community problems, and seeking out information about political and social issues. Many volunteers reported that after participating they became more proactive and assertive, diversified their activities, replaced confrontational or authoritarian behaviors with more democratic ones, exercised leadership, and incorporated more community-oriented actions into their

routines. As noted above, some volunteers who used to engage in monologues and interrupted frequently when other participants were speaking, over time adopted new practices of active listening. Other volunteers reported that increases in self-confidence led to new practices, like speaking in public using a microphone or asking probing questions to politicians and city hall bureaucrats. One female volunteer, an amateur artist, noted that before participatory budgeting she used to paint in the private space of her house, but at the moment of the interview she was more comfortable engaging in public spaces: "Now, I go out to take classes, I go to exhibits, and I try to get my paintings displayed. This changed during the participatory budget because when all of us were treated as equals, I learned to assert myself more."

Other volunteers mentioned that participatory budgeting helped them move from a "culture of protests and demands" to a "culture of proposals, solutions and actions". A male volunteer, who was also a community activist, reported that he found a new venue to channel the demands of his grassroots organization: "Before the participatory budget, I sometimes organized roadblocks and trashed the streets in order to get attention to our cause. Now, when we have serious problems in the community we can usually go through the budget and avoid damaging or disrupting city streets"[4]. Similarly, other volunteers talked about new practices related to the preservation of public property.

The interclass nature of the participatory budget previously discussed nurtured feelings of solidarity and challenged stereotypes, generating new practices that were unthinkable before. For instance, a middle class woman remembered that one cold and windy evening she was driving through a run-down neighborhood and noticed a family walking along the side of the road with a baby and many bags. She stopped and offered them a ride: "They were extremely gracious and piled into the car, and I dropped them off close to where they needed to go. I never would've done this before the participatory budget, but now I feel more comfortable and open with different people."

For some volunteers, becoming more aware of their citizen rights and duties led to the more active exercise of those rights. As one male volunteer reported, "through the participatory budget I learned new ways to assert my rights, for example what government offices to contact and how to contact them if certain rights are violated." Voting was a practice that did not change very much in the three South American case studies because voting is mandatory to begin with. As an interesting aside, in the case of the participatory budgeting in Toronto public housing, the tenants' participation rate in the vote to allocate funds in their complexes is often higher than the participation rate in the Toronto municipal elections. Moreover, in many cases volunteers reported an increase in their civic and political involvement, and some decided to run for local office. Because participatory budgeting delegates cannot serve more than two or three consecutive cycles, there is a high rotation of volunteer representatives, and hence a multiplication of leadership capacities. In this regard, one volunteer noted that participatory budgeting is "a factory of new community leaders".

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Volunteers engage civically in various ways. The most typical forms of civic engagement discussed in the literature are community involvement, electoral participation, and political voice. A fourth type of civic engagement, collaborative public action, has received considerably less attention. It refers to spaces and processes of co-governance that brings together community volunteers and government officials. Participatory budgeting, a member of this family of civic engagement, is an open and democratic process of participation that allows residents to make decisions together on municipal budget allocations. This includes neighbourhood discussions and regional forums about priorities regarding investments in local infrastructure, and thematic forums on citywide issues such as transit and public transportation, health and social assistance, economic development and taxation, urban development, education, culture, and leisure. While the model is far from perfect, participatory budgeting has promoted a more efficient, transparent, and accountable administration of public resources. By using equity criteria in budget allocations and bottom-up processes, it has also improved the living conditions of marginalized communities by reversing previous priorities that used to favour higher income areas. As importantly, participatory budgeting is a school of citizenship where volunteers from all walks of life learn democracy together.

To properly function, participatory budgeting requires the commitment of a great number of volunteers willing to devote countless hours of unpaid work every year to do research in their communities, attend many meetings, participate actively in often long and sometimes tedious deliberations, engage in occasionally frustrating and difficult decision-making processes, and monitor the implementation of the approved projects. As one participant pointed out, "it is encouraging to see that in these difficult times there are so many people who devote time and effort to solidarity and to the common good, to improve their neighbourhoods and our city". These volunteers are learning democracy by doing it. Such learning, however, is informal and typically unknown even to the learners themselves. In the interviews, however, participatory budgeting volunteers were able to elicit the learning acquired through the deliberation and decision-making process. The learning curve was particularly pronounced among volunteers who never attended community meetings before and had little experience of civic engagement, and have lower levels of schooling: they reported twice as much learning as the more experienced and educated group of volunteers (Lerner and Schugurensky 2007).

This chapter has shown that, as a result of their participation in local democracy, volunteers develop a broad repertoire of civic and political knowledge, attitudes, skills and practices. They gain new knowledge about how the local government works, and how to negotiate with city hall agencies. They learn about the trade-offs that are needed in making budgetary decisions. They also learn about the real cost of projects, and the sources of revenue. They learn about the social reality and the people of their neighbourhoods and of other parts of the city. They learn a variety

of democratic skills, from holding a good meeting in which everyone is respected and allowed to speak, to listening attentively, compromising, settling disagreements, collaborating with others, and voting on complex issues after considering several options. They learn to speak in public and to develop a higher level of self-confidence and political efficacy, thus nurturing a new generation of community leaders. They also learn to empathize with the needs of other groups, develop new solidarity practices, and transit from an initial position of self-interest to a concern for the common good, that is, from looking only at one's street as the centre of the universe to a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the community as a whole.

Additionally, through their participation, volunteers develop a feeling of pride and ownership over their neighbourhood and with it more caring attitudes and a deeper appreciation of public property. They also learn to organize, mobilize and create new community associations and to pressure government agencies to fulfill their mandates. Over time, the learning also reaches a collective level, as groups develop a more deliberative culture, becomes more cohesive, apply more fair procedures and criteria in their decision-making processes, and are more willing to reach consensus or find reasonable compromises. As Virginia reported,

> The democratization of participation has been an educational process for everyone. We learned to become more tolerant, open and flexible, to listen to each other better, to respect each other, and to generate together good processes for making good decisions.

Returning full circle to the Mansbridge challenge, if we consider more knowledgeable, skilled, democratic, engaged, and caring citizens to be better citizens, then the evidence suggests, at least preliminarily, that participatory democracy makes better citizens. For the volunteers who donate so many hours of work to the process, participatory budgeting seems to provide a powerful civic learning experience that can potentially be applied to other settings. Indeed, the learning that is acquired through participation (be it related to attitudes, knowledge, or skills) often has an expansive effect. This means that, as people become more familiar with, and more effective in, local democracy, they also become more interested (and sometimes even more engaged) in broader issues of regional, national, or international scope.

## NOTES

[1] Broadly speaking, participatory governance has two expressions: self-governance and co-governance. Self-governance refers to the democratic structures and processes set in place by a group, organization or institution in order to make decisions without external interference. Based on shared leadership rather than top-down managerial approaches, this type of participatory governance can be observed in a variety of community organizations, institutions, and workplaces, from neighbourhood associations to working co-operatives. Co-governance refers to the structures and processes of collaboration and co-ordination between two or more groups, organizations and institutions to make decisions. In workplaces, for instance, governance is shared by management and workers. In local governments, it is shared by public officials and residents. Participatory budgeting, the topic of this chapter, is a case of the latter.

[2] One of the few exceptions was a pioneering study on the Yugoslavian Workers' Councils undertaken by Kojala (1965). This study showed that over time participants move from discussing ways to manage their most immediate environment to dealing with policy issues and decisions that transcend their immediate environment.

[3] For a discussion of bonding and bridging social capital, see Putnam 2000.

[4] For an elaboration of these learning experiences, see Lerner and Schugurensky (2007).

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# 9. CREATING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES[1]: THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF VOLUNTEERING IN COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS[2]

One of the classic types of volunteer work takes place in community-based organizations that seek to make their communities a better place. In this chapter we report on a study conducted with volunteers in several community-based organizations that are associated with the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition (OHCC). They range from minor sports associations to local food security groups and from church councils to hospital boards. Some of these organizations work to fill gaps in social services in their communities (e.g. a food bank) while others actively work to make a change in their community (e.g. many environmentally focussed organizations).

One of the key findings was that voluntary work in community-based organizations has significant transformative potential. This transformative potential can be identified both at the individual level of the volunteer as well as at the collective level of the communities to which the volunteers and their organizations belong.

We will start with some considerations on volunteering and informal learning that in our view are particularly relevant to this case study. Next, we will lay out the methodology and sample, including the collaborative relationship with OHCC. The bulk of this chapter deals with the content and modalities of volunteers' learning. We conclude with some recommendations for community-based organizations seeking to benefit from the breadth and depth of their volunteers' learning.

## INFORMAL LEARNING AND VOLUNTEERING: FOUR CONSIDERATIONS

Given that the literature on both informal learning and volunteering has been reviewed extensively in previous chapters, in this chapter we will only make a few references to that portion of the literature that is particularly relevant to the community-based organizations that comprise this case study. From the outset, we would like to put forward four considerations. The first one has to do with the relationships between informal and non-formal learning. As we have seen in the chapter on Housing Co-operatives, non-formal education—in the form of workshops and other similar educational ventures—create spaces where informal learning can take place. In community-based organization volunteers, this informal learning is often connected to critical reflection (e.g. Mezirow, 1998), which can lead to

*F. Duguid, K. Mündel & D. Schugurensky (Eds.), Volunteer Work, Informal Learning and Social Action, 177–194.*

changes in habits of the mind as well as frames of reference (Brookfield, 2002; Mezirow & Associates, 2000). While from an analytical perspective it is insightful to consider the differences between informal, non-formal and formal learning, in the real world of volunteer learning, these categories are not as clear-cut. We are continually amazed at the range of learning activities that take place at all manner of events in which community-based organizations, and their volunteers, are involved.

Our second consideration relates to the impact of research into this learning activity on public policy or even transformative social action. One of our concerns with an approach to informal learning research cataloguing the breadth and depth of individuals' learning is the potential for this to be used as a justification for withdrawing state and employer funding for education and training. We are also concerned that this can contribute to the further commodification of education and a shifting of responsibilities to the individual learner (Apple, 1982; de Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; Gorman, 2002; Newman, 2002; Parker, 2003). Nevertheless, in terms of social action, exploring the tacit knowledge of volunteers involved in community-based organizations is not simply academic curiosity; it can also serve an emancipatory or transformative purpose. As we will see later in this chapter, among the different types of learning that take place among volunteers, their critical reflections on their own learning are the most likely to result in long-lasting social change.

A third consideration shifts our focus to the nature of the volunteering itself. For operational considerations, in this case study we have used the classic definition of volunteer work: freely chosen, unremunerated and of benefit to the community. As we saw in previous chapters, there are many other ways in which this definition can be refined. An aboriginal participant in this study raised an important concern:

> I have somewhat of a problem with the definition of volunteer work as something that is freely chosen. There are different expectations and responsibilities within different cultures. For example, it is assumed that one will give back to the community within Aboriginal cultures, and this is integral to gaining respect, learning, and expectations within a culture…there is a recognition that volunteerism is necessary to the survival of a family and a community so participation is essential—it is a duty and a 'given' that one will do it.

Studies on volunteering, like ours, often focus on the so-called formal volunteering (part of an organization or structure) but, as this participant challenges us, there is often a significant overlap between the formal and informal volunteering (e.g. helping a neighbour shovel the sidewalk). In fact, in some instances, there may be an expectation that, for example, one helps a community elder. In this chapter, we focus on the learning that results from participation in community-based organizations; volunteers' motivations for participation do not really enter into the debate.

A final consideration is related to the previous one in terms of the line drawn around the concept of who is a volunteer. Many participants in this study moved between paid and volunteer work within a given community-based organization

or while working on a given issue, depending on funding availability and life circumstances. For researchers, this can be somewhat problematic if our goal is a strict assessment of learning from volunteer activity only. Given this reality of the "intermittent volunteer" (alternating between paid and volunteer work), we have focused more on the learning from participation in community-based organizations–acknowledging that in most cases, the majority of this work was unpaid (and in all cases of benefit to the community). Given the broader context of downloading of responsibilities of the state to voluntary organizations (e.g. Neysmith & Reitsma-Street, 2000; Smith & Lipsky, 1993), these intermittent volunteers are ideally placed to be taken advantage of because of their commitment to a given cause. That is, as responsibilities for certain functions of the welfare state, for example, caring for the elderly, are transferred to the voluntary sector, the vagaries of funding formulas and granting envelopes can result in budgets that change drastically from year to year. This can lead to a great deal of unpaid "volunteer" work that was previously paid. Certainly not all instances of intermittent volunteering are this extreme, but it is certainly a phenomenon worthy of consideration and further investigation.

## METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

The 42 volunteers who participated in this study are part of the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition (OHCC), a network that brings together a broad-based group of social, environmental, economic, and political associations (Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, 2000, 2004). Using a variety of approaches, the OHCC facilitators promote the development of communities that are liveable, equitable and sustainable. The Healthy Communities model "is a process whereby people from many sectors—seniors, youth businesses, labour, local governments, community groups, environmentalists, educators and faith organizations—work together to create a clean, safe and friendly, and vibrant place to live, work and play" (Caton and Larsch, 2000, p. 5). This model works across sectors, demographics and levels of government.

Based on our review of the limited literature on informal learning and volunteering, our own experience as volunteers in numerous organizations, prior work with OHCC, and discussions with OHCC staff, we developed a preliminary interview guide. We got feedback on this guide through a focus group with OHCC staff and volunteers. Indeed, throughout the process, OHCC was an active participant in preparing the interview guide and conducting interviews for this case study.

In designing the interview guide, we faced two main issues. Firstly, volunteers have many stories and experiences that they wanted to share—many not immediately related to their learning. Secondly, much of the learning was tacit. Therefore, our task became one of designing an interview guide that would keep the interview focused as well as elicit volunteers' immense and intense learning. The result was an interview that started with an initial open-ended question about learning followed

with prompts on different areas of learning. Animators of OHCC, who already had a good rapport with the interviewees, conducted the majority of the interviews.

In terms of the characteristics of the sample, 30 participants (71%) were women and 12 (29%) men; 90% had some post-secondary education, and 31% held a graduate degree. Only one participant was younger than 29 years old, and 56% were older than 50 years old, and the rest were in the 30-49 age group. Only one interviewee was a full-time employee in the private sector; the rest worked in the non-profit or public sector either as employees or as self-employed consultants/ project and campaign managers. There was one politician and two municipal government employees. One fifth of the sample (21%) was retired (42% of the men while only 13% of the women). The 42 interviewees volunteered with more than 170 different organizations, from local chapters of international organizations (e.g. Amnesty International) to local river protection societies; from executive positions on a hospital board to literacy work in prisons; from coaching a sports team to serving on the executive of a workplace union. On average they volunteered at least 10 hours a week. The communities in which volunteers were interviewed were from across Ontario; the majority took place outside of the large urban areas of Toronto.

An important limitation of this case study relates to the fact that the vast majority, if not all, of the interviewees that consented to participate are "super volunteers" or part of the 20% of volunteers who do 80% of the volunteer work in our communities. This aspect of the sample composition is understandable given our convenience sampling related to the work of the OHCC. The volunteers that OHCC staff were able to identify were ones where the level of interaction was significant enough to recommend participation in the study. Therefore, it is not surprising that these volunteers did a significant amount of volunteering in numerous organizations. This undoubtedly has an impact on their learning processes as well.

## INFORMAL LEARNING AND COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS

As noted above, the informal learning reported by participants was grouped in five categories: instrumental skills (e.g. computers, writing proposals, policy development), process skills (working with others, working with diversity, facilitating), factual knowledge on particular issues (e.g. environmental regulations, AIDS in Africa, homelessness, wife abuse), dispositional learning (attitudes and values such as embracing conflict or valuing diversity), and political and civic learning (e.g. political economy of volunteering, the politics of municipal bylaws).

### *Instrumental Skills*

Perhaps the most diverse learning took place in the instrumental skills category: the many skills needed for the day-to-day activities of community-based organizations. These range from computer skills—both specific programs for specific tasks and more general technological literacy—to technical skills such as First Aid, CPR,

casualty simulation, distress line operator, etc and from operational skills such as making coffee in percolators for 300 people to other skills such as operating audio-visual equipment for large functions. Once interviewees started uncovering their tacit learning, this area of instrumental skills is one where they were really amazed at the range of skills they had acquired through their volunteering.

Our data suggest that there may be a relationship between volunteers' initial skill and educational attainment levels and the level of complexity of the tasks assigned to them. This can impact the level of learning where the lesser skilled volunteer is given the less complex task—taking tickets at the door of the event—from which little learning results while the more skilled volunteer is given a more complex task which results in significantly more learning. While this is not particularly different from other sectors or areas of society, it is an issue that community-based organizations should want to pay attention to, particularly if one of their goals its greater social equality.

The instrumental skills identified throughout the interviews correspond not only to what Leontiev calls an action (the low-level individual and automatic action) but also to "individual and collective activity driven by a goal and the uppermost level driven by an object-related motive" (cited in Engeström & Miettinen, 1999). Learning to use a spreadsheet also allowed volunteers to learn budgeting skills and priority setting: "we had to make decisions on whether projects and activities were within our mandates. Since this was public money, there was a high degree of accountability". Volunteers often reflected on the larger social context in which their individual volunteer actions or activities took place. We will explore this in greater detail below.

To summarize, it is clear that volunteers learn a great variety of instrumental skills through their participation in the activities of community-based organizations. There is certainly the possibility of "scaffolding"– where acquisition of skills increases in complexity through the course of a volunteer's association with a given organization. Secondly, while organizations often provide opportunities for volunteers to learn and experiment with new skill sets, they can also reinforce existing inequalities by segmenting volunteer workers according to their prior cultural capital. Unless organizations deliberately set out to foster meaningful learning—in this case skill development—for all their volunteers, they are likely to simply perpetuate current inequalities.

### *Process Skills*

We noted a whole other set of skills related to the effective functioning of community-based organizations. These process skills related to dealing with the fact that organizations are made up of people that have to work together in order for anything to be accomplished. That is, many volunteers spoke about learning a range of skills related to "playing well with others." Anyone who has spent time in community-based organizations will be able to attest to the presence of conflict. In fact, a major

learning for many volunteers was developing the courage to "risk conflict" rather than trying to avoid it or wish it away. Getting issues out in the open, in a respectful manner was hard, but often resulted in successful negotiation of a wide range of issues that the volunteers in this study faced.

Related to conflict resolution, many volunteers spoke at length about developing public speaking skills:

> When I started working with [this organization], I wasn't all that comfortable with public speaking. But I had to do it. I'm just thinking now how that came about, having to speak at public forums, and presenting your ideas. That was a new learning for me. Although when you're in university you're expected to present your ideas, it's a smaller setting, and you knew the students, and it was a discussion type of thing. But when we were doing these presentations in public settings, that was a new learning experience for me to get up and speak in a public way. That was something that I learned how to, and I'm still learning. But because the issues are so important to me personally, I feel I have to do it, especially about environmental issues.

As we can see in this quote, there is a significant difference in public speaking when the issues are something that are deeply personal—as is often the case in the work of community-based organizations. Learning how to communicate what are deeply held personal convictions, in a public forum and in a way that can lead to successful furthering of organizational goals, was very significant for many volunteers.

Decision-making was another key process mentioned by volunteers. This includes not only making a certain decision but also awareness of different decision-making models and the applicability of a given model to a given situation or organization. It also includes learning about inclusivity and ownership of an issue as seen in these two different quotations:

> In general, I have become willing to wait and not implement without total buy in. Things used to be run by 51% vote back in the 70's and not everyone had to be in agreement or their opinions listened to.

> I've learned that if a group feels like they're part of the decision-making process, they are more likely to follow through on their action items to do, their commitment to show up for meetings and events, and will continue their participation long-term.

Another common story told to us by participants was about the unequal burden of volunteering among members of a community. Some of them made references to the so-called "80/20 rule", meaning that in many organizations approximately 20 percent of the volunteers do 80 percent of the work. This includes those who stay on until the wee hours to clean up after an event has concluded after the majority of the volunteers have gone home. These perceptions based on the daily experience of volunteers are confirmed by data from large surveys. For instance, the Canada

Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participation recurrently finds that only 25% of volunteers contribute close to 80% of volunteer hours, and that the top 10% of volunteers contribute 52% of all hours (Statistics Canada 2007, 2009).

This imbalance can lead to frustration towards other volunteers and community members:

> Someone always doesn't fulfil their obligations that they promised. You have to be able to compensate in a hurry. I learned to keep my expectations in balance and that there can be disappointments volunteering...it is the busy people you can count on to get things done.

This suggests that not all learning acquired by volunteers leads necessarily to building or strengthening communities, and highlights the importance of critical reflection (e.g. Mezirow, 1998) while eliciting and processing tacit learning. If *volunteers* were given a chance to reflect on why people seem unreliable or why few volunteers do most of the work, there is the possibility that they would see those as related to larger structural issues and not merely to the fact that "some people can't be counted on." This relates back to one of the key tensions in informal learning research in that the absence of an established or formalised learning process can and does result in learning outcomes that are not necessarily conducive, in this case, to the fostering of community sustainability.

Other process skills—developed mainly by the many participants who volunteer in boards and other decision-making bodies—were similar to skills associated with human resource departments:

> As a board member of one women's collective that I was involved with in the early 90's, I had a bitter learning experience in handling issues of racism and employee relations. I was on the personnel committee at the time along with another board member and we had both been fairly involved in trying to address problems among the staff. At one point, our native counsellor approached us to tell us that one of the non-native employees had made a series of racist comments to her. At that time (1993 or thereabouts), women's centres were still in the process of implementing policies around equity, racism, and diversity, but we were still all very new at dealing with the practical issues that arose. So following our hearts, my co-personnel member and I fired the non-native employee, without giving her so much as a chance to tell her side of the story! That experience, and the damage control that inevitably had to happen afterwards, provided us with an enormous amount of material to revisit, evaluate, and learn from.

This illustrates the tense and conflictive environment in which volunteer learning often takes place. It also underscores the potential of what can be seen as negative experience to be very enriching for volunteer organizations if they engage in collective critical reflection to evaluate past actions and to develop strategies and policies to avoid repeating mistakes.

### *Factual Knowledge about Specific Issues*

A further category of volunteers' learning relates to the amazing expertise volunteers acquire related to either organizational missions or the specific projects they are involved in. Volunteers actively engaged in research and learning activity on topics ranging from poverty and housing to zoning bylaws and from the chemical compositions of common building materials to the relationships between global human rights abuses and local actions. As one volunteer noted, "I went from not knowing about hungry people in my community to doing something about it. I didn't even know that there was a food bank before starting to volunteer."

For some volunteers, participation in a specific organization facilitated an understanding of a given topic in a more nuanced or multi-dimensional manner:

> In the work that I've done with women's organizations over the years, I've deepened my knowledge around the issues of violence against women and children. I already had some knowledge from my studies but the work really helped me to understand that knowledge in a more practical way.

As hinted at in the above quote, much of the factual knowledge that volunteers gain about the given "issue" of their organization is acquired through formal education or non-formal learning such as workshops both of which in some way relate to "experts" in the field. We found that for some, practical engagement with issues through volunteering facilitated a bridging of theory and practice:

> I think I also experienced transformative learning in my involvement with sexual assault centres. I remember one training session in particular that we received totally blew me away! The analysis of the strategies of oppression of women and children was so powerful, because it paralleled the strategies of oppression used in low intensity warfare. Making that connection was really powerful for me.

Learning through volunteering can indeed be an individually transformative experience as this "a-ha" moment indicates. This quotation also shows one of the limitations of dividing learning into neat categories when the real world of volunteering—and volunteers' telling of their learning—are much more overlapping. We have placed this learning here into this category knowing that it could also fit below under "political and civic learning." This volunteer deepened her understanding of the structural dimensions of oppression both in her community and in other places in the world.

Another interesting finding was volunteers speaking about how they transferred the learning of specific issues from one volunteer setting to another volunteer (or paid employment) setting:

> [My organization] has taught me to work from an ideology that people want authenticity in their relationships, and to break down the structures separating us from one another. It's also helping me how to heal ways in which we've been hurt.

> For example, it helped to address the impacts that internalized oppression has on all our groups. It also helped me to work on my assumptions about other groups.

One of the knowledge pieces (and arguably also process pieces) of this volunteer's learning related to breaking down barriers between individuals. As indicated, this knowledge acquired within one volunteer setting was often transferred to another.

### *Dispositional Learning*

One of the hypotheses of the broader study, upon which this book is based, was that volunteering would lead to dispositional or attitudinal learning and shifts. We conjectured that in some instances this dispositional learning would be transformative for both the individuals involved, but potentially for their organizations and communities as well. We did find evidence of this type of learning that was transformative and, as the reader will note, this cuts across numerous case studies contained in this volume. Before delving into the specifics, it is important to highlight the tension that exists between "positive" and "negative" attitudinal shifts. As in the section on process skills, there is the potential for volunteers to learn skills that are more or less conducive to the growth of healthy communities. We already saw an example above related to the so-called free-rider issue: many community members do not volunteer, but still receive the benefits of the volunteer activity.

By and large, most of the cases of attitudinal transformation reported by participants were positive. Many of these changes occurred as a result of a combination of informal learning and non-formal education sessions that helped to elicit tacit assumptions and provided opportunities for critical reflection on experience. A recurrent theme in comments on attitudinal changes was open-mindedness and respect (a key learning that cuts across most case-studies):

> I was raised Salvation Army. Volunteering opened my eyes to a new way of thinking about people's sexuality…. Even acceptance has that hint, respect, not just tolerance. I don't think 'just tolerate.' They are just the same as I am; no difference except in their sexual orientation. People are people!

Indeed, we noted among several participants significant attitudinal shifts that implied challenging previously held assumptions, a process known in the transformative learning literature as a shift in frame of reference (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Some volunteers also developed an appreciation of the importance of self-reflection and awareness in order for them to contribute meaningfully to their communities. As one participant put it, "to be an effective human being/citizen, I feel it is important to learn about myself—my strengths, weaknesses, limitations, abilities, skills, and understanding what I value."

Many volunteers spoke about the development of empathy towards other community members. For example, "I learned a lot about survival skills and needs that people struggle with" or "I learned that a mother in South Africa is a person, not just a statistic. That she doesn't feel the way I do. I learned empathy and have

a heightened awareness that my world is not the only norm." This speaks to the volunteer's increased empathy as well as an understanding not only of the micro context of her volunteer organization or community, but also the macro context into which those fit. It is to the learning of the macro context that we now turn.

### *Political and Civic Learning*

The learning we have catalogued to this point has focused predominantly on the local concerns addressed by given community-based organizations. In this section, we deal with skills that move beyond the micro to broader contexts including the regional, provincial, national and even international. That is, many volunteers acquired skills and knowledge that facilitated their participation in governance processes of their particular organizations but they also learned political and civic skills that relate to policies of entities much larger than one organization.

One area noted particularly by interviewees who also worked in the non-profit sector was related to government cutbacks and the subsequent downloading of state responsibilities to the voluntary sector.

> Sometimes volunteer work is empowering for those involved. It can often help others and be an enabling force. However, it can also become too focused and lead to insular thinking. When the government downloads so much work to unpaid volunteers, a siege mentality can develop about work. Often, funding becomes competitive or a battle and not a cooperative process.

> If you prove you can do a good job, and you care about your objectives, other organizations in the government and private sector will try to take advantage of that to offload what should be paid work to non-profit organizations.

> The regrettable fact is that the neo-conservative trend in the management of federal, provincial, and municipal economies has covertly downloaded many of the services previously provided from tax revenues by civil servants or social service contractors to the volunteer sector.

In this series of three quotations related to cutbacks and downloading, we can see the variety of viewpoints on the phenomenon. One trend in these comments is a normative one regarding who should be providing services. There was a strong sense that there are a series of services that should be provided by the state and that downloading those to the non-profit sector is incorrect. A corollary to this expressed particularly in the first quotation is that this can often lead to narrowing the view and range of operations of an organization. Once a group is providing an important service, then it finds itself in a struggle to keep that work happening. Many activities that are seen to detract from that goal—for example working for broader structural change or addressing policies that are related but not directly connected to their organization's mission—can be left by the wayside in the struggle to stay solvent and serve "their" population.

A third trend in these quotations is the evidence of a reflexive kind of volunteering: volunteering that encourages reflection on the role of volunteering within broader systems. In the interviews, some research participants reflected on the different functions that their organization(s) played in their communities and beyond. This was often brought into stronger relief with the additional pressures associated with downloading. To this point, many of the reflections reported have been negative or critical but that is not the whole story. Volunteers also recognized the important contributions of their activities in the local political and civic realm. "Volunteering has increased my awareness of the importance of local leadership and how much the social organizations are not able to do without government support and also the value of volunteers."

It is worth noting that many study participants spoke positively about developing partnerships between the state, community-based groups, and the public, as proposed by the Healthy Communities model. Our sample was drawn from volunteers who participate in organizations connected in one way or another to OHCC and thus are more likely to have a predisposition towards the partnership model for community sustainability or have already adopted that approach. This does not mean that there was a homogenous view of the role of the local, provincial, or national state. For instance, one participant noted that government involvement was counterproductive:

> If the Clean Air Committee had stayed community-based, it would have been more effective. Once city staff became involved, they attempted to take it over and we lost the drive we had at the beginning. It's hard to change policy if people who write policy are in your group. They disempower you.

Comments like this recognized the contribution of the Healthy Communities strategy in addressing the 'silo effect' (one group working in isolation from other groups on issues that are interlocking), but argued that there is a role for developing proposals separately to a certain extent. They contended that not every meeting or group should need to combat the silo effect at all times. These volunteers noted that while there is a clear need for deliberation with other groups in order to develop new policy, there is also a need for groups with a potentially alternate view to caucus independently prior to open deliberation. This suggests that, through a difficult process filled with frustrations and accomplishments, volunteers are learning to negotiate the tensions between deliberation and caucusing.

We also asked volunteers whether they engaged in any group or collective learning, and about the relative impact of such processes. Some of them suggested that in order for groups to be effective in nurturing social change, there would need to be learning not only at the level of individuals but also at the collective level. Regional conferences seemed to play an important role in facilitating collective learning and seeding the soil for collective action:

> The learning that we've done as a group in the context of these conferences has led to the creation of a nucleus or a movement that we have now. For

> example, it is as a result of the Healthy People Healthy Places conferences that we were successful in passing a resolution to make Healthy Communities one of the four priorities of [the municipal] Council, and to engage politicians in the Healthy Communities process here locally.

This volunteer spoke at length about the development of a movement aligned with the primary principles of the Healthy Communities model, and pointed out that this does not occur without a change in the functioning of council.

To reiterate, the political and civic learning of community-based organizations often reached beyond the specific organizations and takes a systems approach to understanding the relationships to the political economy. Social change is often an explicit or implicit goal of many of these organizations and it is learning in this category that is most likely to assist in that goal. Volunteers evidenced learning and awareness of the relationships between different orders of government and the ways in which their organization could or should interact with them. We trust that this learning will contribute to more socially just and environmentally sustainable communities.

## LEARNING MODALITIES

To this point we have focused predominantly on what community-based volunteers have learned. We now shift focus to explore how it is that much of this learning was acquired. Broadly, as inclusion of this case study in this book suggests, volunteers' learning modality was informal. But what does that mean? What does that look like in the real world of volunteering and learning? One research participant commented that the process of acquiring skills, knowledge and dispositions was "accidental learning." We found this to be an apt description of the ad hoc and seemingly random ways in which volunteers learned the breadth and depth we have only scratched the surface of above.

A common phrase that volunteers repeated was that they learned by doing. "I learn best through experiential learning and volunteer work provided me an opportunity for hands on practice. I learned desktop publishing by doing church programs." There was a tendency to call this type of *in situ* learning "experiential" as it is the result of learning from concrete experiences. However, as students of experiential learning (e.g. Kolb, 1984) know, experiential learning—as opposed to learning from experiences—has a reflective phase in which concrete experiences are the basis for abstraction and building of new theory. The key distinction here is the nature of the reflective act. For many research participants, their learning from the volunteer experiences resulted from informal and unstructured moments of reflection. In the classic definitions of experiential learning, the process of reflection and abstraction is at least a semi-structured (if not more rigorously structured) moment.

Some volunteers did mention reflection:

> I have talked to lots of volunteers different places, and had lots of chats after meetings—those standing out by the cars in the freezing cold or rain and trying

> to figure out what the heck went wrong and I've decided that the whole process is crucial. It can depend on how the agenda is done, how everyone's opinions are asked for or even just acknowledging everyone's input even when not everyone was able to agree on the next action.

What we see here is evidence of reflection though it is not planned. After the conclusion of a meeting, a debriefing breaks forth in which volunteers reflect on what worked and what did not and trying to make adjustments for improvement next time. This reflective activity is seen as quite important by some volunteers:

> It is so crucial that I actually name what I have learned. It is not a piece that comes easily to me. I identify the learning often hearing it from other people, that is what it meant to me. I am not happy if I don't get that opportunity… we're always so busy doing that it is hard to take the time to build that in.

The point we are trying to make here about learning by doing is that there are at least two different types. In the first case, we have learning that the volunteer is hardly aware of having learned—the tacit learning. Much of what we know as humans is in this realm. There are many things that we have learned to do, but are not really aware of having learned them, nor all of the steps involved. Much of this learning is in the realm of kinesthetic ways of knowing. The classic example is of riding a bicycle, particularly how we navigate a curve. We know how to make the bicycle go in the desired direction, but most of us would be hard-pressed to explain how we make that happen—yet we know how. Much of volunteers' learning is of the same nature. Volunteers have acquired factual knowledge about the issues relevant to their organization. In many cases, they are not particularly aware of what they know or that they learned it, but they can cite, for example, relevant bylaws related to zoning of their neighbourhoods and communities.

The second type of learning is one that is the result of some-type of reflective activity such as standing out in the freezing rain or even a facilitated check-in about an event that was recently completed. In these instances, the reflective acts also result in awareness of having learned or grown—even if they happen in an "accidental" manner or by happenstance. The reason that the distinction between these two types of learning from experiences is particularly relevant is because of their relationship to the content of what is being learned. It is our contention that reflection—particularly in a group setting addressed next—is less likely to result in "negative learning" than learning from experience in which learning is an implicit act. As we saw above, some volunteers learned that you just can't count on others to pull their weight. While that was certainly a given volunteer's learning and experience, it does not necessarily lead to greater social justice or environmental sustainability (and hence could be seen as "negative"). If there is critical reflection on activities, it would seem that there is a strong likelihood that the learning that results can be more in step with social change goals.

A further reflection to make about volunteers' learning is related to the fact that they are generally part of groups when they are volunteering. The groups can often

act as a facilitator of learning. For many volunteers, working as a member of a larger group led to important learning. It interesting to note that when we asked volunteers about where they spent their volunteer time, they (and we) were quite surprised to discover that for many, the majority of their time is spent on their own contributing to a collective venture rather than in a group activity.

> I might have gained more hard skills working on my own. In a group, learning seemed to be less intentional and a lot more accidental. I didn't set out to learn something, it kind of happened… when you are in a group, you can see what they think and what their experience was or if it's something that they have known for a long time, then I can learn from their experience. You benefit from different approaches—if one person is left brain and another one right brain.

We can see here an appreciation of the diversity of a given group to volunteers' learning. Having people who approach an issue or a group process in a different manner can trigger the reflective act and lead to enhanced learning.

> I have learned through reflecting with other volunteers, discussing situations with them, hearing their points of view, their understanding of an issue, challenging those ideas or thoughts, observing people interact in group settings and particularly in controversial issues and see how people react and behave.

This quotation also speaks about another key learning modality: conflict. Throughout many of the interviews, volunteers would comment on the conflicts they had faced or other types of negative experiences they had encountered. However, this was also seen to be a great source of learning (indeed, in the study done on housing co-operatives, volunteer board members spoke about needing to "risk conflict" to move forward, but also to learn). To translate this into the language of transformative learning, it would seem that learning results from the collision of two different points of view. Often, what results is a new point of view which can contribute to a change in habit of the mind or even frames of reference.

Not all learning was informal though. Many volunteers referred to the importance of non-formal education, especially orientation sessions that provided relevant information for performing a task or that facilitated the learning of particular instrumental skills. Among the examples mentioned were specific procedures for working with prison inmates, budgeting procedures of a certain state funding body, or knowledge related to the organizations' issues such as the landlord-tenant act or the legislation regulating industrial pollution. Most of the non-formal education examples alluded to by the interviewees were face-to-face, but a few made reference to significant learning acquired through online courses.

A particular type of learning through social interaction—mentoring—deserves special mention, because it was highlighted with emphasis by several interviewees. As one volunteered noted,

> The most significant way that I've learned in the past 25 years of volunteer work was from mentoring and doing the work. I could not tell you what I remember from orientations, but I could pick out people and activities that have taught me.

Sometimes, interviewees referred to mentoring relationships without necessarily using that term in their accounts: "A staff person introduced me to a lot in terms of the history, administration, public awareness and training. She really did educate me about the running of the organization over a two year period."

The array of mentoring relationships described by volunteers ranged from the informal to the formal, that is, from those that occurred on an ad hoc basis, often unplanned and unrecognized, to those that are part of the institutional arrangements of the organization. Among the different learning modes mentioned in the interviews, mentoring (be it formal or informal) seemed to be a particularly efficient way to shorten the learning curve of the 'learning by doing' style, because the 'junior' volunteer can benefit from the trials and errors of the senior one.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The picture we have painted here is indicative of the breadth, depth and complexity of volunteers' learning. For analytical purposes, we divided learning into five different categories including instrumental skills, process skills, factual knowledge about specific issues, dispositional learning and political and civic learning. Because most of this learning is tacit, we had to probe and suggest different areas in which learning took place. Once we started this process, interviewees and volunteers were both surprised at the volume and intensity of learning activity.

We also found that there are a variety of learning modalities. In part, these map to different learning styles of individual volunteers, but they also represent the different "cultures" of the different community-based organizations people volunteer in. A key aspect of this learning is its connection to the concrete experience of volunteering. In some instances, there are formal or informal reflective activities that make this experiential learning rather than the more implicit or tacit learning from experience.

This leads to a key recommendation related to reflection. The goal of many of the community-based organizations that comprise this study is to leave the world a better place—socially and ecologically. The data that emerges in this study suggest that critical reflection can play an important part of achieving those broader goals. As one interviewee commented, "reflection is not a normal small-town activity. We just go ahead and do it and then move on to the next task." We would argue that for many organizations—rural or urban—the focus is much more on doing rather than reflecting or learning. While there certainly are volunteers and organizations that do value reflective activity, for many, it is not seen as important as, for example, providing meals to seniors or doing literacy work with inmates.

So, critical reflection is important particularly to achieving the change goals of many organizations. Even if there are some individuals and organizations that do not

appreciate fully the value of this activity, there are many instances where it does take place and perhaps can be modified slightly to receive greater benefit. One participant spoke about report writing:

> A significant way of learning was trying to write that report and summarize and more debunk than debrief that more people than I had given credit to thought similarly about the community and what should be here, but hadn't verbalized it up until then.

Since these interviews have been completed, we have heard many folks involved in community-based organizations give talks where they reference a report they are currently working on. For a variety of reasons beyond the scope of this piece (though downloading is certainly an important one), these organizations produce a great deal of reports—often to fulfil funding requirements. While this can be a reflective moment for the individual writing the report, it is often seen as a bureaucratic task that is not desirable. We suggest that it is possible to take advantage of this significant activity to be a building block for collective reflection.

We argue that volunteers' learning is more likely to contribute to long-lasting social change when there is a process—to use the language of Kolb's experiential learning model—of taking concrete experiences, developing and combining that with abstract knowledge, and then making it concrete once again. To put it in Freire's framework, emancipatory learning should be understood as praxis, that is, as a constant dialogue of reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it (e.g. Freire, 1970/2000; hooks, 1994). Elicitation of volunteers' informal tacit learning and critical reflection on this learning are two key moments in this process. If volunteers do not really know what they know, then it is unlikely they will be able to act on their knowledge in a reflexive way. As Eraut (2000) points out, it is possible to use tacit knowledge in action, but this is not a conscious application of learning. For instance, understanding current structural inequities requires more than instinctive or routinized knowledge.

In sum, for the vast and varied informal learning of volunteers to redress socially unjust and environmentally destructive systems, we suggest that volunteers and volunteer organizations engage in reflective exercise through which tacit learning can be made explicit and acted on critically. The informal learning from volunteer work that we have reported here likely only begins to surface the breadth and depth of volunteers' learning. A progressive approach that takes advantage of this learning would harness this learning for social change through various action-reflection cycles (Freire, 1970/2000). This would avoid a narrow approach that could use the elicitation of this learning for merely certification and market-oriented ends. It is neither possible—nor desirable—to develop a proposal that works in all situations. Instead, it is our hope that volunteer organizations can strengthen the reflective activities that many of them already do, albeit in an often ad hoc manner. This would help organizations fulfill the social change or community improvement mandates that many of these organizations promote. To us, it is clear

that adult educators can play a central role in developing and facilitating this type of activity.

In order to achieve this potential, we also recommend further research and analysis. For example, our attention is drawn to the fact that much of the work done by volunteers is conceived as caring work—systemically women's work. Our sample is too small to be considered representative, so it would be interesting to explore to what extent volunteer organizations support and challenge patriarchal patterns and the role critical reflection does and can play in establishing new patterns. Another area for further research is to draw a finer distinction between different types of volunteer organizations and their learning opportunities and orientations. It was often difficult for our volunteers who volunteered in many different organizations to associate specific learning with specific volunteer work in especially areas such as process skills or the political economy of volunteering. Our findings suggest that organizations that are more service provision-oriented are less likely to provide learning opportunities to see how actions and activities fit into the larger system and how they either enable or challenge the status quo. It is our belief that pursuit of these and other research will enable volunteers and volunteer organizations to take advantage of the predominantly tacit learning that occurs and use it to support their mandates of social and environmental justice.

## NOTES

[1] We want to express a special gratitude to the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition for their collaboration with this research.

[2] An earlier version of this paper appeared as Mündel, K., & Schugurensky, D. (2005). The 'accidental learning' of volunteers: The case of community-based organizations in Ontario. In K. Künzel (Ed.), *International Yearbook of Adult Education* (pp. 183–205). Cologne: Böhlau-Verlag.

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# 10. LEARNING THROUGH VOLUNTEERING IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: THE CASE OF THE FRENTE CÍVICO

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a reflection on volunteer learning and community development by examining the case of the *Frente Cívico*, a social movement in Cuernavaca, México set out to protect a regional cultural historic site from being destroyed in order to make room for a big-box store. The purpose of this study is to further understand the content and processes of informal learning within social movements. This case shows the unique forms of learning possible for volunteers engaged in community development projects. As noted in the introduction to this book, in community development it is possible to identify three main models of practice: social planning, locality development, and social action (Rothman 1987). The case discussed in this chapter is a clear example of the social action approach.

Although participation[1] in a social movement is not typically considered "volunteering", most social movements exist and survive because of people who volunteer. Considering the various levels on the scales of volition, remuneration, structure and intended beneficiaries (Cnaan, Handy & Wadsworth, 1996; see Chapter One), there are few grey areas in terms of volunteering for the *Frente Cívico*. Although it is impossible to speak for all of the participants in the movement, it is safe to say that the majority were there by free choice and had no remuneration. The organization's structure is formal: it was developed for the purpose of facilitating the participation of people interested in its goals and values, and was formally registered as a non-profit civil association. Regarding the fourth and last dimension of Cnaan et al.'s framework, the act of volunteering for the *Frente Cívico* was largely altruistic, because the volunteers themselves would not receive any material benefit from their actions, although they would have enjoyed the preservation of the site together with the rest of the local community. Even when considering the more dichotomous definition of volunteering and its four main characteristics of being freely chosen, unpaid, part of an organization, and benefiting the community, much participation in social movements can be considered volunteering. In the example of the *Frente Cívico* this is certainly the case. One significant aspect of volunteering in a social movement is that the volunteer activities tend not to be individually directed, but rather collectively organized. Collective volunteering usually involves actions that are designed, organized, and supervised by the group in spite of the individual participant's intentions or preferences (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003).

*F. Duguid, K. Mündel & D. Schugurensky (Eds.), Volunteer Work, Informal Learning and Social Action, 195–218.*

Social movements, both old and new, are significant sites of learning (Welton, 1993, Livingstone, 2000), yet learning in social movements comprises only a small portion of the literature in the non-formal and informal learning fields. An area of study known as 'social movement learning' has emerged, but the links between this and the non-formal and informal learning processes are still little explored. Indeed, very little of the research to date has addressed the actual competencies that people gain through volunteering in social movements. This chapter will make a contribution to address this gap by exploring what volunteers learn through their experiences in social action-oriented community development. In doing so, and building on the literature on social movement learning and on experiential learning processes, we aim to bring insight to the various processes of learning found in social movements.

This first part of this chapter will describe the history and development of the *Frente Cívico* movement. The second part will analyze the learning experienced by the volunteers who participated in the movement. The discussion of learning has been organized in five sections: issues, skills, strategies, critical analysis, and learned hope. The conclusions provide a reflection on the non-formal, informal and experiential learning processes that took place within the movement.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: CASINO DE LA SELVA[2]

In the early 20th century, Manuel Sanchez constructed a hotel in the then small but growing city of Cuernavaca. The hotel's architect, Félix Candela, built a unique and dramatic structure, with a similar style later used to design the opera house in Sydney, Australia. The hotel was first called Hotel de la Selva and later, with the introduction of gambling, was renamed Casino de la Selva. The hotel lot covered a single city block, approximately 9.5 hectares, and was a large green space full of gardens and hundreds of trees of many types. The government of Lázaro Cárdenas eventually closed the Casino, yet the name stuck and is still used today even though there has not been a casino there for over seventy years. For a number of decades the *Casino de la Selva* (Casino in the Jungle) functioned as a hotel for middle and upper class citizens from the state of Morelos and all over México, as well as for tourists and ambassadors from around the world. The hotel attracted a variety of local and international figures, including Rita Hayworth and Al Capone. During the 1950s and 1960s, Sanchez invited many famous, as well as struggling, Mexican and Spanish artists (including Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco and Jose Renau) to come and paint the walls and hallways of his hotel, and invited sculptors to fill the gardens and walkways with their work. The hotel featured significant artwork, including murals of famous Mexican painters and a vault that Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez called the "Mexican Sistine Chapel". Thus the *Casino de la Selva* became famous for its over 1400 square meters of original painted murals, as well as countless other unique artistic creations in and around the hotel.

The *Casino de la Selva* changed ownership and eventually became the property of the state of Morelos due to back-taxes that were owed. Over time the hotel's grounds, swimming pools and tennis courts were opened to the public. The site was used for an annual spring fair, as well as for art exhibitions and other community events. The state government covered the cost of maintaining the building and the site through tax revenue and, in 1992, paid to have the murals professionally restored. Over the past seventy years the *Casino de la Selva*– although it has gone through short periods of change or of little use– has been an almost constant part of social life in Cuernavaca. In the year 2000, *Casino de la Selva*, valued at $63 million US dollars, was quietly and illegally sold to a big-box chain (Costco) for $10 million US dollars. In the beginning of 2001, there were rumours in the city that there were new owners who were intentionally destroying the murals.

## THE FRENTE CÍVICO MOVEMENT

Over a period of six months, as more people realized that the *Casino de la Selva* had been sold and was in the process of being destroyed, concerned citizens met together and decided to form an organization to deal specifically with the issue of the sale and destruction of the *Casino de la Selva*. They called themselves *El Frente Cívico Pro Defensa del Casino de la Selva* (The Civic Front for the Defence of the Casino in the Jungle). The *Frente Cívico*, as they became more commonly known, was made up of three major organizations: CCCAM (the Cultural Care Council for the Arts of Morelos State), SERPAJC (Service, Peace and Justice of Cuernavaca), and the Guardians of the Trees.[3] In addition to these three groups, there were also other citizens, some of whom were from a centre-left party (PRD, or Democratic Revolutionary Party), and others from various Base Christian Communities, as well as a group of committed young volunteers. Although the total number of volunteers fluctuated over time, there are estimates of between 50 and 100 regular members and approximately 20 or 30 core volunteers who played leadership roles in the movement.

The *Frente Cívico* became legally registered as a civil association in June of 2001, and almost immediately thereafter it began a legal process in the courts against the state government in an attempt to prevent the destruction of the *Casino de la Selva*, the murals, the trees and the site itself. During this time several *Frente* committees were appointed to investigate, learn and document what was significant about the location under dispute. The group documented in detail the 1400 square metres of original paintings and murals, the 700+ trees (many over 100 years old), plants and small wildlife, and mapped the surrounding area of two hospitals, a seniors residence, and numerous primary and secondary schools. This place was also the location of an unexcavated Olmec ruin, where over 200 objects of archaeological significance had been found and documented. The *Casino* is also near the main 'people's market' where many people from Cuernavaca and surrounding areas make their living. Furthermore, adjacent to the site there already exists a large grocery

store called *Comercial Mexicana*, owned by Costco. In a short time, the *Frente* volunteers, as a result of their collective learning, were in a position to argue that this was a completely inappropriate location for the two large box stores that were scheduled for construction.

In light of these factors, *Frente Cívico* decided that this struggle would be best directed as a struggle against Costco international using that location, instead of against Costco in Cuernavaca. Many volunteers in the movement were against neoliberalism and its corporate agenda, and were concerned about multinational dominance over local businesses. In this context, there was a conscious, though not unanimous, decision to focus their fight against Costco international locating box stores at the *Casino de la Selva* site. Their plea was that the company should choose another site outside of the downtown area, one that held less social, cultural, historical and community significance to the city and its people.

It is important to note that most decisions within *Frente Cívico* were made through assemblies. Assemblies were part of the weekly or daily meetings of the movement where everyone had the opportunity to speak, share information and give opinions, followed by a majority rule vote. The only requirement for participation in the vote was participation in the movement (no matter how limited) and being present at the assembly. This allowed for an unusually equal say between the very vocal or highly educated members and those who are more commonly marginalized in this society like youth and street vendors. In many cases, volunteers who were asked to lead 'fact-finding' missions or be spokespeople to the media were often seen as the leaders of the movement. Yet, the actual 'leadership' were those 20 male and female volunteers who were the most active and committed members. The practice of decision-making through assemblies, coupled with an intentional system of horizontal leadership, created an active democracy among the members.

The main strategy followed by *Frente Cívico* volunteers was non-violent direct action, relying heavily on Ghandi's principles of *ahimsa* (non-violence) for challenging oppressive powers. The volunteers of the group SERPAJC (Service, Peace and Justice) actively taught other movement members about these principles and related social action strategies. For example, *Frente Cívico* members investigated which government office was in charge of the environmental impact study. Once the location was clear, they held a 'sit-in' and hunger strike, chaining themselves to office desks for a day and a night, until they were allowed to speak with the head of the department and receive a copy of the impact study. The high value attached to democracy within the movement and the belief in non-violence shaped the structure of the movement. These elements place the *Frente* in the category of a 'new' social movement.[4] One of the major symbolic non-violent direct actions taken by the movement was a two-month blockade of one of the many entranceways to the site of *Casino de la Selva*. This seemingly limited act brought much attention to the struggle of *Frente Cívico* and opened up many opportunities to educate local residents. This location also gave opportunity for volunteer members to hand out information flyers and hang banners that raised awareness about the issues at stake.

Although this blockade was mainly symbolic, it was able to slow down some of the destruction of the *Casino de la Selva*.

The *Frente* also decided to lobby for a referendum. With the changing of the government in the previous election, the state of Morelos had failed to select the three officials for the positions of the *Consejo de participación ciudadana* (Council of citizen participation) in charge of managing a state referendum. The *Frente Cívico* pressured the government to appoint people to these positions by gathering 20,000 signatures from citizens of Cuernavaca, requesting a referendum on the issue of Costco in the *Casino de la Selva*. When the government refused, the movement decided to take on the referendum for themselves, learning all the steps for this extensive undertaking. The result was an overwhelming 'no' to Costco in the *Casino de la Selva* and 'yes' to a cultural park on the site instead. Despite it, those in power ignored these results and allowed Costco to continue the destruction of the site.

In June of 2002 there was a closed meeting within the state government to approve the environmental impact study of the area. The study was presented and approved in less than two hours – another illegal act by the government since the impact study should allow a minimum of two weeks for review. This approval opened the way for Costco to begin cutting the trees in the *Casino de la Selva* the morning of August 21, 2002. That was a pivotal day for the *Frente Cívico* movement. From the blockade outside the walls of the *Casino de la Selva* movement, volunteer members realized that the trees were being cut down, and spread the word in a systematic manner. Many movement members arrived, as well as people from nearby neighbourhoods, including a squatters' settlement also threatened by the construction of the mega-stores. With the increase in numbers it was decided that they would take over a second entrance in an attempt to prevent the entry of further machinery for felling trees.

By the evening, approximately 60 people (not including members of the local media who had come to film the protest) had two blockades firmly in place as well as a partial blockade of the street. At around 8 p.m., 400 state police arrived in full riot gear and announced their intention to remove the blockades. With the protestors outnumbered seven to one, the police started grabbing and arresting people, beating with clubs those who resisted and even some who did not. The police arrested 36 people, some of whom were merely bystanders, but many of whom were core members of the movement. Fortunately for the *Frente Cívico* and the protesters, there were several reporters who witnessed and filmed most of the violence and repeatedly broadcast it on the news over the next few days. These broadcasts drew a high level of response from many citizens in Cuernavaca who, although they may not have participated, supported the struggle of the movement against Costco and were appalled at the use of violence by the police.

The day following the arrests, August 22, 2002, there was a 3,000-person march denouncing both the police brutality and the state government who authorized it. The next day, 8,000 people protested outside of the State Attorney's Office. Coincidentally, there was a cultural festival organized for the 24th and 25th of

August in the *zócalo* (the main city square), which turned into an opportunity for education of the population and for organizing further protests. On August 26, the protesters were released from prison, and the following day they led a march of 15,000 – the largest march in the history of the state. However, these protests had little effect on altering Costco's actions.

In the following months, from September to December, there was a slow decline in the momentum of the movement. Costco cut down all the trees and bulldozed the buildings, completely destroying everything of value. As a result, many people felt that there was nothing left to fight for, yet many of the core volunteers of the movements continued with their struggle on a number of levels. The main concerns were the legal charges against those who had been arrested. Other activities were planned as well. In early November, for *El Dia de los Muertos* (the Day of the Dead), *Frente Cívico* made an *ofrenda* (traditional shrine) outside of the *Casino de la Selva* in mourning of the destruction. During the rest of November, there began the discussion of entering the site to occupy it. The date set for this action was December 15, which was considered the last opportunity to gain back the site. Since not everyone was in agreement, in the end this action was cancelled.

Over the next year, several smaller actions occurred. In January 2003, the *Frente* discreetly sent two of its members to Costco's shareholders meeting in Seattle, USA, where they interrupted the proceedings with their testimonies of Costco's actions in Cuernavaca. This had a profound impression on many of the shareholders who were unaware of the situation, with the outcome that Costco now has a policy that requires a cultural impact study to be done before any deal is made, both in the United States and elsewhere. Around February 2003, the *Frente Cívico* volunteers held a 13 day hunger strike in the government palace, with a round-the-clock sit-in lasting 81 days. They were eventually evicted by the police when a number of the members went to another meeting held on the issue, leaving the sit-in with too few people to protect it.

Despite the incredible efforts and the many successes of *Frente Cívico* and all those who supported this movement, the *Casino de la Selva* was destroyed, including the hotel, the murals, the ruins and the trees. Costco claims to have saved and restored the murals, supposedly now on display in a small museum on the site, but their destruction has been clearly and irrefutably documented in the award winning film by Pablo Gleason (2003), *El Casino de la Selva: La defensa del patrimonio* (The Casino in the Jungle: The defence of the patrimony). On September 5, 2003, an inauguration was held for the two new big-box-stores and the small museum that stands on what was once the beautiful and irreplaceable *Casino de la Selva*.

After the inauguration of Costco, many of the volunteers returned to their original groups and took up various other struggles. At the same time, new movements and organizations were being born from this struggle. One member called *Frente Cívico* the '*matriz*' (the womb) of social struggle. Another interesting and significant result of this movement is that other social movements from all over México have contacted and continue to contact volunteers of the *Frente* for advice, counsel and support for their own particular movements.

## LEARNING IN THE FRENTE CÍVICO

The field of social movement learning takes an educator's view of the vast field of social movement analysis. Social movements have been analyzed for many years by political scientists, sociologists and specific social movement scholars. Approaching social movements from these diverse perspectives has resulted in analyses on wide-ranging aspects of social movements, from membership to the impact of the social and political context on social movement outcomes (McAdam, 1996). However, until the mid 1990s, very little attention had been given to the learning that occurs within social movements. As the first State of the Field Report on Social Movement Learning notes, social movement theory "focuses on what movements do and how they do it and not on what its members think. Knowledge is seen to be largely outside the sociologists' areas of competence according to them." (Hall et al. 2006, p. 7). In contrast, the field of adult education has had a long history of analyzing specific movements, including feminist, labour and environmental movements of the past and present, whose work has been combined, compared and added upon to form the emerging field of social movement learning. The State of the Field report tries to bring this literature into a cohesive whole, based on the belief that "a deeper understanding of the educational dimensions of social movements will be of use to social movement organizations and activists" (Hall et al., 2006, p. 5). Quite simply, social movement learning comprises two dimensions:

a) learning by persons this, Della Porta and Diani (1999, pp. 14–15) have outlined the four characteristics that are most frequently referred to by social movement scholars: who are part of any social movement; and
b) learning by persons outside of a social movement as a result of the actions taken or simply by the existence of social movements (Hall & Clover, 2005, pp. 584–589).

The most widely adhered to definition of social movements comes from Snow, Soule and Kriesi, who state that "Social movements can be thought of as collectivities acting with some degree of organization, and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture or world order of which they are a part" (2004, p. 11). Social movement scholars tend to refer to four main characteristics of social movements: informal interaction networks, shared beliefs and solidarity, collective action focusing on conflict, and use of protest (Della Porta and Diani, 1999, p.14–15).

The emerging literature on social movement learning attempts to bring to light the opportunities for learning within social movements, and documents the existence of the predominantly nonformal and informal learning that occurs within the movements. One unique aspect of social movement learning is its focus on the collective (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003). As Livingstone (2000, p.6) states, "the collective aspects of our informal learning, the social engagement with others, is

an integral part of any actual knowledge acquisition process". This collective learning is not without tension. Welton (1993) notes that the learning processes are different for each group and can be full of tension and conflict, both within the new movements and between them, yet movements can and do converge at crucial points of shared concern. This focus on the collective, through convergence on areas of shared concern, allows movements the opportunity of focusing on learning for the public good, as opposed to the dominant trend of learning for individual gain that has been identified by Baptiste (1999) and Finger (1989).

There has been a move to recognize that social movements are not merely important learning sites (as Welton, 1993, puts forward), but are also important arenas for knowledge production. John Holford (1995), in "Why Social Movements Matter," suggests a "move from the appreciation that social movements are important phenomena in the learning process of the individuals (and even collectively of the groups and organizations) which compose them, to a view that they are central to the production of human knowledge itself" (p. 101). Although the theoretical discussions around social movement learning are strong, particularly within the field of adult education, there is still little research on the actual learning that takes place within social movements. Hall et al. (2006) note that although many researchers speak of the importance of educational activities in social movements, few engage in in-depth studies. The literature that does exist has focused on the processes of learning, the amount of time and particular subjects of learning, as opposed to competencies gained (Livingstone, 2000). Finger and Asun (2001) and Hall et al. (2006) profess that social movement learning is a unique type of learning that would not otherwise have occurred in other circumstances or places. It is therefore imperative to study social movement learning in order to understand both what is learned and how this learning takes place.

Our analysis of learning within the social movement is based on information received through analysis of the two previously cited film documentaries, *Frente* movement documents, and from interviews of eight movement volunteers undertaken by Kate Rogers in 2006. These members were selected through the snowballing method of sampling, where a member suggested that she speak with a specific participant and so on. Of the eight people interviewed, four are women and four men, with an age range from twenty to sixty-some years old. All of the eight interviewees were part of the core group of movement volunteers, which consisted of approximately 20 to 30 people, in a movement of 50 to 100 participants in total.

It is perhaps obvious but important to note that not all volunteers learned the same things or at the same pace or depth (Livingstone, 2000). Yet the movement's need to have their members informed and to have them develop certain skills seemed to have prompted various strategies for promoting learning and sharing information, such as workshops, assemblies and communication chains (which will be discussed in further detail in the *Processes of Learning* section). Through participation in the *Frente Cívico* movement, volunteers learned about many different things.

These learnings are presented in five categories: learning about issues, learning skills, learning strategies, learning critical analysis, and learning hope.

### *Learning About Social, Political and Environmental Issues*

Through their participation in the *Frente* Cívico, volunteers learned about many issues and social problems. Among them were environmental issues, legal issues, community issues, the impact of big business on small business, art history and the destruction of art. Their learning about environmental issues included a detailed investigation into the environmental impact study: what the requirements were, how long the process should take, who approved this study, and what laws they had to abide by. Other learning in this area included tracking the promises made by Costco to protect some of the trees and to plant new ones. For example, the company promised and claimed to have donated and planted 30,000 trees, but the *Frente* committee could not find out when or where (or if) this had been done. They also investigated the ecological impacts of losing the diversity of the *Casino* site. They researched how many meters of green space their city had and then how many it should have according to the UN, and shared this information with the public. Learning about legal aspects of the struggle included learning about laws of land-use, land sale and construction, as well as about the law of cultural patrimony and other laws associated with the economy and economic impacts. *Frente* volunteers also had to learn how to contest charges placed on movement members at the time of their arrest.

Another form of learning about these issues for movement volunteers was through the need to share some of this information in order to educate the public. The volunteers put great energy into studying specific issues, writing about them, and informing the larger public about the results through information flyers, street dramas and banners for the education of the larger community. Moreover, *Frente Cívico* volunteers noted that the very act of teaching others was an important form of learning in itself. This finding confirms the insight provided by Hall et al. when they pointed out that "what we all know as facilitators of learning is that nothing is as powerful a stimulus to learning as the necessity to teach or inform others (2006, p.7)". This was particularly true for the *Frente Cívico* volunteers. The learning of the volunteers was therefore intimately connected with the teaching of the general public, including Mexican citizens and foreigners. This learning differs from the learning of many other volunteer groups in that it was not learning mainly for personal or group development. Rather, it was learning to directly affect the wider public and inspire informed collective action.

### *Learning Skills for Effective Horizontal Organization*

*Frente Cívico* volunteers learned many skills as a result of participation in the movement. The initial focus centred on learning how to form a new organization

and then learning how to create an appropriate and desired structure, in this case a horizontal leadership structure. This structure included the formation of committees in charge of investigating certain areas, like environmental issues, legal aspects, artistic history, and the like. These committees were also in charge of learning and applying skills such as document writing, preparing press releases, presenting in public, speaking to the media, designing and making banners, distributing information flyers, among many other activities. These are skills that are useful in a variety of settings and are essential in an effective social movement. Through these committees the movement chose to intentionally create ways to facilitate group learning. The horizontal leadership structure certainly contributed to facilitate group learning, but also meetings and decision-making processes.

There were also substantial skills learned surrounding communication and interpersonal skills in the context of working together as a group. Movement volunteers intentionally set out to learn from and about each other, and to learn how to work well together. Many interviewees commented on how they learned about the importance of working in and for community through participation in the movement. Others mentioned coalition building skills, and especially the challenges of uniting diverse groups and interests within the struggle. Another volunteer noted that through the internal democratic process the group learned increased tolerance and how to minimize differences. Some talked about the benefits of getting to know each other well in the movement ("learning about everyone's strengths, weaknesses and qualities"), and one participant felt that the personal growth and the collective learning of the group was in part due to the varying social-economic statuses of people involved. It is pertinent to note that many of these democratic, communication and interpersonal skills are similar to the learned skills cited in many of the other chapters of this book.

Another skill developed by the *Frente Cívico* volunteers was how to access and use effective the local and mainstream media. This is a particularly important skill for movements that depend largely on public support for their success. There was much discussion surrounding how to get the press involved and how to get positive media attention. Certain participants were involved in contacting local, national and international media, making press releases and building relationships with journalists in order to facilitate their access to media coverage. News of Costco in Cuernavaca came out in the local and in the international press (as far away as Korea) thanks to the learning done by participants on how to effectively contact international media outlets. Learning about media appears to be a unique feature of the social action oriented volunteers, and a feature that is distinct from the learning of other volunteer groups explored in this book.

### *Learning Strategies for Action*

Volunteers also reported learning many strategies as a result of their participation in the *Frente Cívico*. One of the first strategies undertaken by the newly formed group

of volunteers concerned the legal aspects of the sale of the *Casino* and the planned construction. This strategy focused on taking legal action to prevent its destruction and the Costco construction. A committee researched the topic in detail and confirmed that the sale of the *Casino de la Selva* was illegal because the appropriate processes were being bypassed in order to achieve the needed permits. There was also the long and challenging process of how to find and how to pay lawyers, so that the movement could initiate legal proceedings against the government of the state of Morelos. A committee of volunteers took this task, and relayed the information to the rest of the movement. Then, they decided as a larger group how to present this information to the public. Some volunteers refer to this process as a significant learning experience.

The central strategy for this movement was the use of the Gandhian model of non-violent direct action as a method of attempting to prevent Costco from destroying the *Casino de la Selva*. Various strategies of direct action were taught by using the expertise of SERPAJC (*Servicio, Paz y Justicia*) – one of the groups that was part of *Frente Cívico* and that has a history of working for peace through non-violent direct action, specifically with the Zapatista movement. They used that experience and knowledge to teach and prepare the other *Frente* volunteers in theories and strategies of social action. Through these activities, movement volunteers were learning how to tailor actions to specific needs, places and people in a way that would be non-violent and produce favourable outcomes.

Related to non-violent direct action, volunteers made a realization of the need to take radical actions in order to shift the power imbalance between the state and the movement. These strategies also involved the use of symbolic discourses and the use of religious/cultural symbols in movement actions. A few interviewees discussed their awareness of the importance and impact of symbolic actions, such as the effectiveness of the blockade of one site entrance even though there were many other entrances. They mentioned the positive responses of people, the increased public awareness of the issues, and how this increased pressure on the government. Also related to symbolic actions was the realization of the power and impact of religious/cultural symbols in a protest. For example, they spoke about the power of using a statue of the Virgin to help prevent a bulldozer from destroying their blockade. The realization of the power and impact of these types of actions and the importance of connecting them with the local cultural traditions was an effective strategy of the organization, and also an important source of learning for the volunteers.

The *Frente Cívico* volunteers also learned about strategies to raise awareness among the general public. For example, *Frente Cívico* volunteers approached the high commission of the United Nations and requested a visit to discuss issues related to the destruction of the site, and asked for a definition of 'social justice' and associated rights. The volunteers also studied and implemented strategies such as the use of drama and performance to create interest and to educate people. Some volunteers reflected about their learning about the importance of continuously explaining to the public what *Frente Cívico* was doing and why they were doing

it, because many people were unfamiliar with and surprised by the radical actions of the group. Movement volunteers were also aware of the need to approach the struggle from perspectives other than that of an activist. Some volunteers chose to approach certain issues in their role as parents, which helped others outside the movement to identify with them and with their motivations. The movement explored how to raise awareness of the international and local boycott of Costco. They did this through creating a document on what a boycott is, what a non-violent struggle is and what type of actions they entail. They explained that these things are legal and are important forms of exercising democracy. Volunteers had constant discussions on how to inform and raise consciousness of the general public, and some cited these exchanges as a source of learning. In some of these discussions, a volunteer used the word *conmover*, which was defined as "when the other person starts to move and is able to transform his or her actions." This implies that the intention was not to ask other people to take action, but rather to inspire them to take action as a result of their own motivation.

The *Frente Cívico* volunteers also learned about the different aspects of referenda and the legalities to implement them. This included researching the legal aspects of referenda, how they are implemented and by whom. Through their study process, the volunteers realized that the state government had not fulfilled its duties by neglecting to appoint the state council in charge of referenda. The movement also learned how to design information documents, and developed an educational guide that had three sections: what is a referendum, why do we want a referendum, and how is it part of democratic life and participation. For the referendum, the volunteers created a list of four questions, and in so doing they had to learn how to be impartial in their wording. Then they took to the streets and neighbourhoods of Cuernavaca, learning appropriate and effective ways to do door-to-door petitioning and poll taking for the referendum, as well as how to construct a database for the generation of referendum results.

One of the essential strategies was the decision of *Frente Cívico* volunteers to work against both the government and the company, instead of focusing on just one. Along these lines, volunteers learned how to unify various groups struggling around different elements of the same issue (for example, the environmentalists against the cutting of the trees and the art community against the destruction of the murals). In short, the *Frente Cívico* volunteers learned the strategy of unifying their struggle, both in terms of how they organized themselves internally and how they approached the external issues.

### *Learning Critical Analysis*

Although it is important to learn about the most urgent issues faced by the organization, it is important to note that the volunteers' learning did not end at those issues. Perhaps the most meaningful aspect of the movement was learning how to analyze, discuss, debate and move forward to address these issues and beyond.

Clover and Hall (2000) write about "how people learn not just about the issues and problems, but how to critically and constructively discuss and debate them, and then work collectively to define the future they want for their community and how they are going to get there" (p. 9). Some volunteers observed that the *Frente Cívico* was like a school of sociology and political science for the participants, but especially for the younger volunteers, because it helped them to locate the contradictions in Mexican society. Interviewees noted that, as a result of participation in the movement, they learned how to analyze and apply critical thinking skills, and gained a better understanding of society. This was probably one the most enduring and valuable learning outcomes.

One of the areas of learning to engage in critical analysis related to the discussions about the propaganda of the state government. Critical thinking skills allowed volunteer participants and those that came in contact with the movement to deconstruct the government rhetoric and reconstruct a clearer and more accurate understanding of the reality of the situation and of their contexts. An example of this took place when the government began referring to *Frente* members as 'terrorists'. Movement participants responded by researching the definition of terrorist, who they are and what they do, and then presenting this information to the public through flyers and television spots. A critical analysis was essential in this process of decriminalizing those who question the government.

Other learning surrounding critical analyses and government rhetoric was through the realization that the government sees 'development' and 'growth' as the highest form of achievement – the creation of streets, new concrete buildings and commercial spaces. The volunteers examined the different approaches to urban development and questioned the assumption that mega-stores always bring progress. Through their discussions, the volunteers developed a capacity to distinguish between the government approach to development and their own approach to development, which they understood as the creation of a healthy city through creating community spaces and active democracy. This analysis allowed the group to link this local issue with the broader issues of the globalization of the American culture and the neoliberal economic model, manifested in government and transnational companies' global destruction of cultural traditions and spaces. They also learned how to question government propaganda about jobs that would be generated by Costco by looking for statistics on the number of jobs generated by mega-stores in other cities and including this information in flyers that were distributed to the public. This involved a conscious choice to not just appeals to people's emotions about the issue, but also to provide a reasoned argument based on facts.

In addition, their critical analysis allowed *Frente* volunteers to better understand the role of mainstream media, particularly the influence of government and private economic interests on the media. Volunteers reported that they came to understand the relationship between the government and its power to shape people's understanding of their situations through control of the means of communication. This learning also appears to be unique to social movement volunteers, in comparison to other volunteer

groups in this book. There was a realization that the means of communication can and do transform reality. One interviewee used the example of *1984*, by George Orwell, and related this to what happens through the media in México in terms of framing reality through constructed images on television and in the news. Another movement volunteer pointed out that the means of communication are subordinate to the economy. This volunteer pointed out that their collective analysis turned to how to inform citizens of what was happening in a society where "the means of communications are controlled by hegemonic powers".

The *Frente Cívico* volunteers also reported significant learning in their analysis of the meanings and practices of democracy. Part of this learning involved critical thinking about different ways of implementing democracy, for example, the difference between voices truly being heard and considered versus a few people making all the decisions in the group (Freire, 1969/2004; Baptiste, 1999). This allowed movement actions to move to another level with the collaboration of different people with different perspectives. Similar to the volunteers of the Toronto Tenant Participation System (see Chapter Eight), there was also an analysis of how to promote participatory democracy within society. Movement volunteers realized the need to actively learn about creating a culture of democracy and then communicate that to the public. In this process, the *Frente Cívico* volunteers also had good discussions on how to get Cuernavaca residents involved in the decision-making process of the organization, so that everyone could have a say in what they want their city to be like. This included the need for people to know their rights (the right to breath clean air, drink pure water, and have well-paid work), and about what it means to be an active citizen.

### *Learning Hope and Political Efficacy*

A key learning of *Frente Cívico* volunteers was that social change is possible. For the volunteers participating in the movement it became clear that it is possible for a small group of committed citizens to confront and impact large social powers such as the government and multinational corporations. For the interviewees, this movement was a reminder of the importance of challenging injustice and of citizens' potential to have a positive impact on their society. A related theme was the unexpected learning that occurred through the *Frente*'s relationships with existing and emerging left-leaning community-based social movements. One volunteer participant referred to this as the unanticipated phenomenon of "contagion."

Indeed, the support received and given by the *Frente Cívico* allowed for these movements to develop a social strength that they would not have had without each other. This was demonstrated during the march of 15,000 people that included many other social organizations and movements from Cuernavaca and surrounding areas. This collaboration between movements gives an example of the opportunity for movements to be in solidarity with and learn from each other. This way, as a *Frente* volunteer suggested, each organization is not "starting from zero".

Connection, support, solidarity and learning between movements have the potential to strengthen the social power of a movement. Protesters on the blockade of the entrances stated clearly that they would have been forcefully evicted by police had it not been for the physical presence of other movements. These exchanges between social movements were significant in terms of learning solidarity, developing political efficacy and creating hope.

### *Linking the Learning of Frente Cívico Volunteers to the Literature*

The learning acquired by volunteers of the *Frente Cívico* movement confirms some postulations of social movement learning theorists. Moreover, this research adds new findings to the literature on *what* people actually learn through social movements, a previously under-researched area. Through recognition of learning in social movements, both participants and theorists can see the way that groups deal with "political opportunities" and "horizontal leadership" in a dynamic manner. Social movement theorists recognize that contexts are continually changing (McAdam, 1996). However, it is less recognized that the social movement volunteers are also in constant flux. As *Frente Cívico* volunteers show, through their collective learning they simultaneously change the three interrelated areas of their context, their group dynamic and themselves.

In contrast to the individual focus of much of the adult education literature, the case of *Frente Cívico* emphasizes the importance of group learning. This is not just the "collective self-education" suggested by Tobias (2000, p. 422), but rather it is an iterative process: it is the community that learns collectively. The movement also reflects the findings of Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003), in that actions are collectively-directed – i.e. designed, organized and supervised by the group, despite individual pressures. In this manner, social movements, therefore, may be a way that citizens have been combating the exclusive focus on the personal or individual that many adult educators herald as an increasingly alarming trend. In this way, social movements such as *Frente Cívico* offer hope for adult educators of a refocusing of learning on and for the public good. It is equally important to recognize the trends in competencies and issues learned in community development oriented towards social action. Although this is only one case study, many of the items learned echo the competencies and issues learned in other social movements and other organizational contexts like the ones discussed in other chapters of this book. The identification of these common areas of learning may encourage future social movement activists to learn from other groups, instead of re-creating the wheel for each new situation they have to confront.

The case of *Frente Cívico* confirms that significant learning does occur in social movement individuals and groups. In this context, the word *significant* is used to suggest that the learning that occurs is different in depth, form and content from learning in other aspects of life. For example, in the *Frente Cívico* movement, it can be argued that the volunteers who participated in organizing and in direct actions

would not have learned in other areas of their lives, to the same extent, about the complexities and interconnections of the neoliberal agenda and how it manifests itself through corporate and government connections. As Mathias Finger (1989) noted, "learning within social movements... has a more powerful impact on society than does all of the learning that takes place in schools" (cited in Hall et al., 2006, p. 8). Although this has not been (and perhaps cannot be) proven, it is a reasonable proposition that provides an interesting challenge for further research. One volunteer suggested that the chief value of the movement was the learning opportunities for the youth. He pointed out that educating young people and motivating their increased civic and political participation was "the most important heritage of the *Frente Cívico*" He added that "the struggle of *Frente Cívico* was worth it, if nothing else for this, for this legacy of young people who are here in favour of a change." Through these statements, this volunteer implied that this would not have happened outside of the setting of the movement. As noted above, this is an interesting hypothesis that calls for future research.

## PROCESSES OF LEARNING IN THE FRENTE CÍVICO

In the case of *Frente Cívico*, what volunteers learned was intricately tied to the processes through which such learning took place. Three overarching processes of learning emerged from the narratives of the volunteers: non-formal learning, informal learning, and experiential learning. Two of these processes (non-formal and informal learning) have been used as typologies in social movement learning theory (see Hall et al., 2006). The third, experiential learning, is well rooted in the adult education field (Kolb, 1984), but has not been used substantially in the social movement learning literature. When dealing with social movements, these processes of learning often overlap with each other, as there is not often an independent formal learning objective that would separate them. Clover and Hall (2000) mention a combination of processes "can most effectively support action for change at the community policy or market levels" (p. 17). The objective is always towards action after the learning, such that the social movement chooses whichever process of learning best fits their needs at a particular moment.

### *Non-formal Learning*

Non-formal learning is learning that is not formal (i.e. occurs outside of formal schooling) but is both organized and intentional, and usually short-term and voluntary (see Introduction and Chapter One). *Frente Cívico* is a social movement that has intentionally used organized forms of learning for its volunteer participants, especially through workshops, seminars and formal presentations for movement participants. These non-formal education programs and activities were often led by some movement volunteers who were also members of other groups like SERPAJ (one of the three groups that helped to form *Frente Cívico*).

One of the key areas of non-formal learning was non-violent direct action. This was done through workshops on the meaning of non-violence and on Gandhian principles. In these workshops, one of the main topics was direct action. This involved learning a) how to create specific actions that targeted specific people or situations; b) how to tailor actions to specific needs, places and people in a way that would be non-violent and produce favourable outcomes; c) how to construct their demands; and d) how to do surprise actions in order to get people's attention. As a follow up to the non-formal learning experiences, volunteers engaged in further learning for particular purposes. For instance, after a workshop on direct action, some volunteers had to learn who in the government was in charge of a certain permit, when it was scheduled for approval and then doing specific actions in that person's office, while providing opportunities for media attention.

Other themes that were covered through non-formal learning processes centred around learning laws of land-use, land sale and the processes of legal permits; learning about environmental issues; and learning about referenda and how to implement them. These topics were taught through workshops and seminars open to all participants. Sometimes they were taught by movement volunteers and sometimes by contributors from outside the movement. In some cases, these issues were researched by various committees of volunteers and then presented to the rest of the movement participants. This is an example of how the movement addressed the fact that not everyone could learn everything at the same time or in the same way outside of a more organized system. The intentional and organized process of disseminating information or learning skills was essential to the success of this social movement.

It is of significance that some of the non-formal group learning that *Frente Cívico* volunteers experienced was the result of previous non-formal and informal learning of individuals belonging to other social movements in the area. This suggests that there is a natural cycle of learning between social movements in an area (geographical or topical), although further research is warranted to see how much this takes place in other social movements. In fact, Hall et al. (2006) highlight the possibility of inter-movement learning as one of the main practical impetuses for the field of social movement learning. Through sharing the learning taking place in one social movement, volunteers can use this knowledge to ease the experience of the next social movement. Non-formal learning was an essential part of the learning processes of the *Frente Cívico* and, in combination with informal learning and experiential learning, brought the depth and breadth of learning within the movement to new levels.

### *Informal Learning*

Much of the learning of the *Frente Cívico* took place through informal processes, outside of a classroom (formal learning) or workshops (non-formal learning). As Livingstone (2000) says, "To study informal learning empirically, we have...focus

on things that people can identify for themselves as actual learning projects or deliberate learning activities beyond educational institutions" (p. 5). Schugurensky (2000) describes three types of informal learning: self-directed learning (intentional and conscious), incidental learning (unintentional but conscious), and tacit learning (unintentional and unconscious). The third one has been characterized as difficult to uncover, due to its unintentional and unconscious nature. The following section will therefore focus on each of these, although a greater emphasis will be placed on self-directed and incidental learning.

Using the definition of self-directed learning as learning that is both intentional and conscious, we could identify many aspects of self-directed learning that were articulated by movement volunteers. In general, interviewees indicated that there was a lot of learning surrounding communication and working together as a group. Although it could be argued that much of this learning or that some of the elements were unintentional, there was an obvious conscious intent to communicate well, to learn from and about each other, and to learn how to work well together. A practical example of this intentional and conscious learning was when the members developed a system of communication amongst themselves through the use of cellular phones and networks of communication for emergency purposes. Another example is the learning that occurred in terms of how to work together with people of different ages, social identities, cultures and sexes. Part of this involved intentionally addressing issues relating to gender and gender roles within the group.

Volunteers also expressed the intention of learning from each participant of the group and valuing their different ways of thinking and seeing a situation. This relates to the importance given by volunteers to everyone having their voice heard in the movement. One volunteer, who is an educator herself, used a Paulo Freire quote: "we educate each other mediated by the world." She explained this as referring to how we use our experiences that we live and how we educate each other through these experiences and through listening to each other.

Incidental learning, understood as unintentional but conscious learning, was also found throughout volunteers' experiences. Some of the incidental learning experienced by volunteers was around the topic of building community within their movement. Many interviewees commented on how they learned about the importance of working in and for community through participation in the movement and through the practice of democracy in the assembly. As well, many of the strategies learned were the result of incidental learning, such as the effect of public awareness on increasing government pressure, and the power and impact of religious and cultural artefacts and symbolic actions.

Tacit learning, usually acquired through socialization, remains one of the greatest gaps in the area of informal learning, due to the obvious difficulties in studying learning that is both unintentional and unconscious (Schugurensky 2000). As such, there were few incidents in the *Frente Cívico* movement that could be clearly defined as informal learning through socialization. However, the area of learning hope may be an example of this socialization. Although not explicitly articulated by

the volunteers of the movement, the theme of hope was recurrent in the interviews. This is somehow paradoxical because of the fact that the movement did not succeed in its main goal, which was the preservation of the *Casino de la Selva*. One important question about informal processes within a social movement is how and where the learning takes place. Clover and Hall (2000) say that "for activists and community organizations and groups concerned with planning for intentional learning within a social movement context, sensitivity to how and where the learning takes place is critical" (p. 17). Reflection on this question within the *Frente* led to an emphasis on the assemblies as a learning site. The assemblies and group processes constitute an excellent example of creating and facilitating processes of non-formal and informal learning.

### *Experiential Learning*

Experiential learning is more than just learning through experience. It is an intentional process of experience, analysis and action. This process has strong connections to the 'see, think, act' model that connects theory and practice with cultural action (Freire, 1969/2004). As mentioned in Chapter One, most volunteer activities involve learning through experience but do not generally fit the model of experiential learning, as they miss the connection between reflection and new action. In contrast, the learning processes that took place within the *Frente Cívico* movement can be considered part of the experiential learning model. Although the *Frente* was formed as a movement to prevent the destruction of the *Casino* site, one of its main goals was the learning of its volunteer members, as well as the learning of the larger community. This involved constructing opportunities for reflection and analysis of the group's experiences and actions. The process of reflection and analysis leads to new and deeper understandings, which in turn brings a new cycle of learning and action (Kolb, 1984). What is also unique about this case is that the learning of the *Frente Cívico* was not premised on individuals but it was rather collective. The learning comes from the group's experiences, is processed in group reflection and analysis and adds to the collective understanding of the situation, as well as modifies the group's actions. Moveover, as noted about, volunteers learned not just about the problem, but developed together a collective understanding of the situation and the actions that needed to be put in place in order to preserve a historic place.

Other results of the experiential learning process included the development of concrete approaches to analysis. There was an intentional decision to analyze the issues as they related to each other or, in other words, analyzing the plurality of the problem. This is not only an example of learning but also an example of knowledge creation within the movement. This also confirms Holford's premise (1995) that social movements go beyond acting as mere learning sites and become important in the production of knowledge. One aspect of learning and knowledge creation was *Frente* members approach to the analysis of the historic situation and then comparing it with the current situation. For example, they educated themselves on

issues of the economic reality of their area, and how and why it has changed over the past ten years. They found evidence to document that economic decline was attributed in part to job loss associated with the influx of mega-stores that put local stores and agricultural producers out of business. Thus, through the learning that took place in the movement, volunteers were able to discover new elements of their social, political and economic context and convey this new knowledge to the public.

When reflecting on the experiential learning of the *Frente Cívico*, the factor of political opportunities (McAdam, 1996) is a useful frame for understanding some of their success and failures as a movement. For example, many of the movement volunteers were aware that the *Frente Cívico* movement was able to proceed and achieve what it did because of the current and historical political context, and was limited in its achievements because of such context. A few people mentioned that the struggle against Costco had its roots in liberation theology (see Vigil, 2007), as well as in previous local movements and the social consciousness that came from them. One member said that if the fight for the *Casino de la Selva* had taken place before the year 2000, when the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was in power, the participants would have most likely been "disappeared" before the movement gained momentum, while others noted that if the movement had happened a few years later, it is likely that they would have succeeded. Thus, it is obvious, even to those immersed within the movement, that although the political context does not dictate what is possible, it does shape the reality in which the movement lives and grows through opening and constraining opportunities. A similar argument is advanced by Hall (2004) when he notes that "what comes out of social movement action is neither predetermined nor completely self-willed; its meaning is derived from the context in which it is carried out and the understanding that actors bring to it and/or derive from it" (p. 233). Thus through the process of experiential learning, *Frente* members were able to come to the understanding of political constraints and opportunities, and to shape the movement's actions accordingly.

Another significant and obvious experiential learning process was participants' learning from their own mistakes or from reflections on what they would change in retrospect. Many people interviewed reflected back on the moments and places where there was opportunity to win if things had been done differently. For example, a couple of volunteers stated that it was a mistake to take the big march (of 15,000 people) to the *zócalo* (the main city square) instead of to the *Casino* site for a re-taking of the land, and that this would have changed the outcome of the struggle. There was also reflection on the difficulties of incorporating more people into the struggle and in raising people's consciousness. Volunteers pointed out that Cuernavaca is a big city, and yet so few were actually involved in the movement. At the same time, they observed that although more people meant more power for the movement, it also meant less control and ability to predict outcomes, as was demonstrated on the evening of August 21, 2002, especially if there is not sufficient training in non-violent protest. Although much of this analysis took place post-movement, this is still significant experiential learning in that the *Frente* members were still involved

in supporting and counselling other social movements. Thus, the understanding gained from this experiential learning process was applied to create new cycles of action and reflection for other movements.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Although social movements are not typically considered as sites for volunteering, social movement participants can be considered as volunteers, as their work is unpaid and often they do it for the benefits of others. The learning of social movement volunteers has unique features and its study can contribute to the increasing body of knowledge on learning through volunteering. The *Frente Cívico* is an example of what Welton (1993) identifies as a conversion of movements, where various groups focused in completely different areas found motivation to work together and formally create a new organization, new learning opportunities and new knowledge. *Frente Cívico* confirms what Holford (1995) has postulated - namely the importance of knowledge creation within the movement. Through this continual cycle of learning, creating knowledge and generating actions, one can see the cycle of experiential learning in practice within the movement.

Hall (2002) argues that social movements not only allow for learning, but that this learning occurs at levels that cannot be replicated in other situations: "It may be argued that more adults learned about the nature of global market structures and the problems generated by them in the several days of the Seattle demonstrations before the WTO meetings than from any adult education conference yet organized" (p. 13). The same can be argued for the *Frente Cívico* in that there was obvious learning within the movement, but beyond that, this learning was unique and would not have taken place through the everyday activities of participants in contexts outside the movement. Some of the tangible learning included new knowledge about social, economic or legal issues, new skills (such as learning to strategize, to engage in critical analysis) and new attitudes, such as hope and political efficacy. A common feature of learning in social movements is the practicality of the learning for the purpose of taking action and the focus on the betterment of the community, not only the individual.

As one movement volunteer stated: "education is the base of everything we do." One of the factors that may have contributed to the breadth and depth of learning that occurred within this movement is the variety of processes of learning. Organized learning sessions, workshops and committees, plus self-directed learning about issues and actions, and the incidental but conscious learning together allowed participants to understand more than if these had not been done in combination. Through well-planned education and training sessions, plus reflection and evaluation after direct actions were taken, movement participants were able to take their learning to a deeper level than would have been possible without these reflections and intentional informal learning opportunities. Thus, this movement suggests that the combination of learning processes increases the effectiveness of the learning that occurs.

The informal learning processes within the movement fit the informal learning typology proposed by Schugurensky (2000). Most informal learning in the *Frente Cívico* movement was self-directed and incidental. It is likely that tacit learning was also present through socialization, but this is difficult to analyze as people learn while embedded in their environments. Yet, the area of learning hope may be an example of this unintentional and unconscious learning process. Although not explicitly articulated by movement participants, the theme of hope was recurrent in the interviews in spite of the fact that the movement did not succeed in its main goal (the preservation of the *Casino de la Selva*).

In terms of experiential learning processes, this intentional cycle of observing, analyzing and taking action was clearly present in the *Frente Cívico* movement. Without this reflection and analysis, the learning would have been lost, and new knowledge would not be generated. The presence of this learning model is significant in that it is not commonly identified in volunteer learning processes or in social movement learning theories. Yet, this form of learning is a powerful catalyst for creating new knowledge and new actions. Considering the effectiveness of this learning process, it would be useful to consider its application in other volunteer situations.

Another significant aspect of the learning in this social movement was the focus on the collective. This is seen through the intentional horizontal leadership structure and through the use of assemblies and committees. The individual learner fades into the background, and the benefits of their learning focus on the movement as a whole. Even when the individual has significant learning or previous experiences, these are used to enhance the whole and to advance the movement. Thus, this movement is an example of how volunteering can be focused on collective learning and not just on individual learning.

The following quotation perhaps best expresses the meaning and significance of the *Frente Cívico* movement in defense of the *Casino de la Selva* and the feelings of many volunteers who partook in this movement:

> And so I would like to confront directly the issue of hope. My hope is most seriously challenged by the fact of decline, of loss. The things that I have tried to defend are less numerous and worse off now than when I started, but in this I am only like all other conservationists. All of us have been fighting a battle that on average we are losing, and I doubt that there is any use in reviewing the statistical proofs. The point – the only interesting point – is that we have not quit. Ours is not a fight that you can stay in very long if you look on victory as a sign of triumph or on loss as a sign of defeat. We have not quit because we are not hopeless. My own aim is not hopelessness. I am not looking for reasons to give up. I am looking for reasons to keep on. (Wendell Berry, 2003, p. 122)

This seems to be the most significant learning by the members of the movement and by those who came in contact with the movement: that there is hope for positive

social change, even in the face of huge obstacles and unlikely odds, and that this hope does not depend on the winning or losing of a particular struggle. This is a most significant finding, because hope has not been identified by social movement learning theorists as a "learning", and yet people have long recognized the need for hope as a prerequisite for inspiring change. This learned hope is lived out through choices to act and to take part in the changing of this world.

## NOTES

[1] In this chapter the terms participating and volunteering are used interchangeably.

[2] The information on the history of the *Casino de la Selva* is mainly drawn from two film documentaries: *El Casino de la Selva: La defensa del patrimonio* (The Casino in the Jungle: the defence of the patrimony) by Pablo Gleason (2003); and *La Batalla del Casino de la Selva* (the Battle of the Casino in the Jungle) by Óscar Menéndez (2004).

[3] In Spanish, these organizations are known as: *Consejo Ciudadano Cultural para las Artes del Estado de Morelos* (CCCAM); *Servicio, Paz y Justicia de Cuernavaca* (SERPAJC); and, *Los Guardianes de los Árboles* (the Guardians of the Trees).

[4] According to Welton (1993) new social movements are characterized by four principles: concerns for ecology, social responsibility, grassroots democracy, and non-violence (p. 160).

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# 11. CONCLUSIONS[1]

## INTRODUCTION

Through this volume, we hoped to make a modest contribution to the collective understanding of the informal learning of volunteers. Although learning is a peripheral theme in the field of volunteerism, a few studies, including the case studies in this book, show that volunteers do acquire considerable knowledge and skills from volunteering. In the literature on volunteering, the predominant reference to learning is about training programs. Although these programs may be important to volunteer success, we have found they represent only a small fraction of the learning activity of volunteers. Each of the case studies presented in the previous chapters has shown that through volunteering people have gained or honed significant skills, knowledge or attitudes. This research helps to confirm and situate informal learning as a significant element of volunteer work.

## MOTIVATION FOR VOLUNTEERING

It is clear from the case studies presented in this book that people are engaged in a wide variety of volunteer experiences and that people have embarked on their volunteering journeys for many reasons. The literature on motivations to volunteer often refers to three main categories: a) altruistic or values-based motivations, usually connected to religious beliefs, support for a cause, or a desire to help others; b) instrumental motivations, like gaining work experience, exploring career paths, enhancing résumés and making contacts to increase future paid job opportunities; and c) social motivations, such as extending networks, making new friends, or responding to peer pressure in the community, an organization or the workplace (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Cappellarri & Turati, 2004; Handy et al. 2010). Learning for its own sake is rarely identified as a motivation to volunteer, and is usually seen as embedded in the second category of motivations, as part of human capital development for instrumental purposes. We agree with this characterization, but we suggest that some volunteers may also seek learning for its own sake or for improving their performance in altruistic-oriented volunteer work.

The learning factor as motivation to volunteer is not easy to elucidate. In the past, most research tools investigating motivations for volunteering have explored the opposite direction, that is, they have considered the application of prior learning to a

*F. Duguid, K. Mündel & D. Schugurensky (Eds.), Volunteer Work, Informal Learning and Social Action, 219–236.*

volunteer situation as a reason for volunteering. Statistics Canada, for instance, in the question on reasons for volunteering includes "putting skills and knowledge to good use" as one of the possible choices. This is an important factor: as reported in Chapter Two, for 77% of volunteers surveyed in Canada, this was one of the reasons that led them to volunteer. However, these surveys rarely address the potential learning that could be acquired through the volunteering activity as a possible motivation for volunteering. In our view, this represent a blind spot because learning can be a factor contemplated by people in their decision to volunteer and even in choosing to volunteer for a particular organization. The explicit consideration of learning as a factor to volunteer is more likely to occur among youth, recent immigrants and recently laid off workers seeking re-entry to labour market.

In our case studies, volunteers rarely referred explicitly to learning for its own sake as a key motivator, but they connected learning to four larger motivations that led them to do volunteer work:

a) paid work-related goals, as in learning to acquire "Canadian work experience" or improve "English language skills" by newcomers (see Chapter Five on immigrants);
b) for improvement of their own communities (e.g., see chapters on public housing tenants, housing co-operative residents, healthy communities members, participatory budgeting);
c) to help more effectively a particular community (e.g., see chapters on Red Cross and Frontier College);
d) to assist social justice awareness and social change (see chapter on Frente Cívico).

It would be interesting in future studies and national surveys to further explore the role of learning in people's motivations to volunteer, whether it is about learning for its own sake, learning for increasing employability prospects, or learning for improving the quality and effectiveness of their volunteer work.

## PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

These different motivations are to some extent a reflection of the current diversity of volunteers. As presented in Chapter Two, for most of the 20th century, the typical volunteers were middle class stay-at-home mothers and retired people, two groups that had more extra time than other social groups. In the 21st century, this 'classic' profile has shifted towards an increasingly diverse array of volunteer groups that also includes students, youth, full-time and part-time professionals, people with disabilities, single parents, recent immigrants and community activists, among others. As part of this shift, there has been a decline in long-term, regular volunteer work and an increase in short-term commitments. This trend has resulted in the rise of "episodic volunteers", that is, those who only engage in short and occasional tasks. Whereas the "classic" volunteer used to make unconditional, regular and long-term commitments, today's volunteers are more likely to request certain conditions

and to engage in a more irregular and erratic way. Another feature of this shift, particularly observable in voluntary organizations, is that the classic volunteer used to be more idealistic, selfless and altruistic, and tended to put community service and organizational needs first. The new volunteer, instead, tends to be more pragmatic, is more inclined to do a cost-benefit analysis before volunteering, and believes in a balance between individual needs and organizational needs, although some times their personal interest comes first. In addition, the traditional volunteer work was regulated and supervised by groups regardless of the intentions or preferences of individual members and collective needs took precedence over individual interests. In the new model, known as "reflexive", the focus has shifted to the volunteer as an individual actor (Geber 1991; Hustinx 2001; Hustinx & Lammertyn 2003; Macduff 2004, 2005).

From our fieldwork, we learned that volunteer work today comes in various shapes and forms. To some extent, the four traditional criteria to conceptualize volunteer work presented in Chapter One (freely chosen, unpaid, part of an organization, and of benefit to the community) are still valid, but their binary nature prevent the observation of the many shades of grey that lay between 'yes' and 'no'. The table proposed by Cnaan et al. (1996) and discussed in Chapter One is certainly more relevant to illuminate our case studies. Having said that, to make sense of those case studies we decided to make a few friendly additions to the original table. It is not our purpose to propose an alternative table that encompasses all volunteer work. Our intention is rather more modest: to incorporate some elements to the table in order to make sense of the reality of volunteer work that we found in the last few years.

### *Addition 1: Orientation*

To reflect the nature of our case studies, in this revised table we have added one dimension: the general orientation of the volunteer work. This dimension has three main categories: community service, community representation and community development. We will return to this later in this chapter. For the time being, we would like to clarify that these are ideal types that may overlap in the real world of volunteering. For instance, some volunteers representing their neighbourhood associations at a city-wide council may feel that they are not only representing their fellow residents but also providing a service to them, as well as promoting community development through organizing local activities or struggling for policy changes on issues affecting their community.

### *Addition 2: Volition*

Regarding the dimension of volition, the original table elaborated by Cnaan et al (1996) has only three possibilities: free choice, relatively uncoerced, and mandated. Although we are not sure whether mandated work (such as workfare or certain types

of service learning) should be considered volunteer work, we decided to leave the mandated category untouched because we recognize that for many people this is an acceptable form of volunteer work. At the same time, we decided to add the category of 'relative coercion'. For example, the case study on recent immigrants shows that this particular group of people would rather take a paid position if they had the choice. Since employers in the host society do not recognize their significant international work experience, these immigrants must undertake volunteer work to gain local experience if they want to apply for a paid job. Of course, this is not forced by any law, policy or regulation, and therefore is not 'mandated' in the strict sense of the world. However, given that these immigrants have little choice, we decided to add the category of 'relative coercion' to make sense of this situation. We did not include in this book cases of youth and people seeking a second career after being laid off, but we expect that, in a context of high unemployment, these groups would find themselves in a similar situation to the recent immigrants regarding the need to do volunteer work: they are not totally free, and they not forced either: they are coerced to do so by the dynamics of a particular labour market, which considers them as 'free labour'.

### *Additions 3 and 4: Remuneration*

In terms of remuneration, the original categories range from 'no remuneration' to a symbolic stipend. However, volunteers in different case studies described accruing non-reimbursed expenses through their volunteer work. Some volunteers, particularly low-income ones, talked about transportation and food expenses associated with their volunteer duties, and others mentioned occasional purchases that they had to make to ensure the viability of the activities. In these cases, the volunteers not only contributed labour to the organization, but also out of pocket expenses. We are not debating here whether transportation and food expenses should be reimbursed or not by organizations, and we are not saying that the volunteers who incurred in expenses by purchasing goods were expected to be reimbursed. These are normative statements that could be discussed somewhere else. Likewise, we are not discussing income and social pleasures forgone as a result of the time allocated to volunteering. All we are saying here, from a descriptive standpoint, is that the case studies suggest the possibility of considering 'negative remuneration' or 'non-reimbursed expenses' as a category in this second dimension. A related issue is that sometimes individuals could be performing a task as a paid employee for an organization, but during those periods in which funding is scarce the same person continues doing the same task unpaid, on voluntary basis, until the next funding cycle or grant arrives. In other words, the work is the same, but the remuneration is intermittent. As noted in Chapter Nine, 'recurrent' volunteers (who should not be confused with the one-shot, episodic volunteers) often accept this situation because they believe in the cause and the mission of the organization or have a commitment with a particular community.

### *Addition 5: Structure*

In the original conceptualization, the structure of the volunteer experience is defined as either formal (e.g. volunteering as part of an arrangement with an organization, sometimes written in an agreement or a contract) or informal (e.g. helping neighbours or friends). Based on our case studies, we suggest that in between these two possibilities there are some semi-formal structures that fall somewhere in the middle. We are talking, for instance, about volunteering in groups that are not necessarily formal organizations, like a grassroots community group or a social movement like Occupy or Frente Cívico.

Below is our revised version of the Cnaan *et al.* (1996) table presented in Chapter One. The revised table includes one additional dimension (orientation) and a few new categories that reflect the additions discussed in the previous paragraphs. The new text has been noted in bold.

*Table 1. Dimensions and categories of volunteer work (revised version)*

| *Dimension* | *Categories* |
|---|---|
| Volition | 1. Free choice |
| | 2. Relatively uncoerced |
| | 3. **Relatively coerced** |
| | 4. Mandated |
| Remuneration | 1. **Non-reimbursed expenses** |
| | 2. None at all |
| | 3. None expected |
| | 4. Reimbursed expenses |
| | 5. Stipend/low pay |
| | 6. Intermittent |
| Structure | 1. Formal |
| | 2. **Semi-formal** |
| | 3. Informal |
| Intended beneficiaries | 1. Benefit/help others/strangers |
| | 2. Benefit/help friends or relatives |
| | 3. Benefit oneself (as well) |
| **Orientation** | 1. **Community service** |
| | 2. **Community representation** |
| | 3. **Community development** |

Adapted from Cnaan *et al.* 1996, p. 371 (categories in bold are our additions)

## ORIENTATIONS

As noted in Chapter One, the different case studies explored in this book could be organized in three main groups, which we call ‘community service’, ‘community representation’, and ‘community development’. The first group is involved in

*providing services* to different community groups, usually as part of a non-profit organization or a non-governmental organization. The service orientation resembles what has been identified as the "traditional" profile of volunteer workers. These volunteers usually hold positions within the organizational structure that are often associated with specific tasks, and a timeframe attached to those tasks. Examples of the service orientation can be found in the chapters on the Red Cross, Frontier College, and recent immigrants.

The second group of volunteers discussed in this book is those who volunteer as *representatives of their community*, as is shown in the cases of the tenant volunteers at the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), the housing co-operative volunteers and the delegates of participatory budgeting. These volunteers are often elected or appointed by their communities, and undertake a wide variety of tasks, from administrative responsibilities to speaking with and on behalf of their communities, from attending numerous meetings to organizing activities, and from collecting ideas and concerns from community members to preparing oral or written reports.

The third group of volunteers includes those who are involved in community development, be it in the modality of social planning, locality development, or social action (for an explanation of these three approaches see Rothman 2001). Within this group, then, it is possible to find a continuum with volunteers are who are oriented towards promoting local community improvements within the boundaries of the existing social order, on one extreme, and those who are more oriented towards political action for radical social change, on the other. Examples of community development-oriented volunteerism can be found in the chapters on the Ontario Healthy Community Coalition and Frente Cívico.

Although the second and third groups have not been traditionally recognized as volunteers, we argue that for all intent and purposes they are volunteers because they undertake unpaid activities to help others and to improve society. Even if we go beyond that traditional definition and use the four dimensions advanced by Cnaan et al. (intended beneficiaries, structure, remuneration and volition), most people within these two groups would still be considered authentic volunteers.

Acknowledging the different expressions of volunteerism can help to recognize its multifaceted nature beyond its common base, and can also contribute to a better understanding of the links between volunteering and learning.

## THE BREADTH OF LEARNING

The preceding chapters have shown that volunteers acquire a great amount of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that relate to the specific contexts in which they volunteer and to their personal biographies. Among other things, these volunteers developed instrumental skills, interpersonal and communication skills, advocacy skills, political efficacy, self-governance skills, institutional and political knowledge about their organizations and specific issues related to the mission of

those organizations, and a broader understanding of social realities. Over time, they also developed and refined a variety of social and practical skills, as well as attitudes and dispositions that often were oriented towards the common good. This is consistent with the findings of the NALL and WALL surveys (see Chapters One and Two) and with prior studies on the topic (Andersen 1999; Elsdon 1995; Elsdon *et al.* 1995; Henry & Hughes 2003; Ilsley 1990; Kerka 1998; Mooney & Edwards 2001; Percy *et al.* 1988).

### *Instrumental Skills*

Volunteers gained many instrumental skills as a result of informal learning opportunities while volunteering. Many respondents spoke about acquiring a great variety of skills and knowledge that helped them to perform in the particular context of their volunteer work. Among them were finance and budgeting skills; office and clerical skills; computer skills; language skills; research skills; disaster and emergency preparedness skills; skills on finding out about regulations and by-laws; and skills on how to determine how funds are allocated and decisions are made in or by governments. In some cases, the learning was totally new, and in others the volunteer experience provided an opportunity to deepen and expand existing knowledge and skills.

Interestingly, in contrast to the CSGVP and WALL studies (see Chapter Two), these skills were not dwelt upon as the focus or ultimate learning of the volunteer experiences. Instead, they seemed to be listed in passing as important but not prominent skills, in comparison to the greater pertinence of informal learning related to social change and empowerment explored below.

### *Interpersonal and Communication Skills*

Volunteers reported learning skills, knowledge and attitudes related to working with others. Even the episodic volunteers in our case studies did most of their volunteering work with others, so it is not entirely surprising that we found a great deal of relational learning. Moreover, some volunteers reported that they revisited their own assumptions and changed their perspective on a particular issue or their attitudes towards a particular population group, a shift known in the literature as "transformative learning" (Mezirow 2000).

Additionally, enhanced communication skills formed the bedrock of many of the informal learning explored above. The very act of volunteering was suggested to often increase volunteers' communication skills leading to more effective results in several areas. Volunteers reported an increase in their social and interpersonal communication, which was tied to more effective teamwork and to the personal development of leadership skills. Some volunteers spoke about their newfound ability to speak publicly, and knowing how to present a position effectively so that others may hear. Other volunteers spoke about the listening skills they had developed, and

how this allowed them to understand better the various perspectives in the room. This in turn led to an increase in diplomacy and conflict resolution skills among the volunteers. The richer communication skills also led to an increased knowledge of how to connect with and affect wider communities, particularly in the immigrants, TPS, Frente Cívico, Healthy Communities, tenants, housing co-operative and participatory budgeting case studies. In some cases, this networking was vital to recognize the common issues among similar groups; in others, it helped volunteers to learn how groups could support each other to advocate for greater collective change.

With the exception of immigrant volunteers, who aimed from the beginning at improving their communication skills in English and to learn to relate to others in a Canadian workplace and other aspects of "Canadian culture", most knowledge in this area was tacit, and was only recognized upon reflection about their volunteer experience. It is interesting to note that some volunteers referred to learning episodes that led them to distrust other people due to negative experiences with them, be it regarding personality issues, failure to honor commitments, or other reasons. For instance, some volunteers learned that "certain people cannot be counted on".

### *Advocacy Skills*

Volunteers in some of the case studies (particularly housing cooperatives, tenant participatory system, Frente Cívico and participatory budgeting) reported the learning of advocacy skills.

Although these volunteers had different profiles, focused on different issues, and worked in different organizational, social and political contexts, they shared four elements that contributed to the informal learning of advocacy skills. First, they learned about issues. This involved intensive and deep learning on the issues that affected their communities, and this included the history of the issue, legal and policy ramifications, technical evaluations, negative and positive impacts of different interventions, and other aspects relevant to efficient advocacy efforts. Second, volunteers reported learning how to affect government policies and corporate actions. There was evidence of learning how to apply both vertical and horizontal pressure on the targeted group (government or corporate) in order to instill change. Third, they learned how to educate the general public and involve the community in a campaign. Finally, volunteers learned from other groups' successes. There was reference to the importance of learning from and building on the experiences of previous initiatives, including failed ones. Additionally, volunteers reported learning about strategies and tactics of non-violent direct action, about strategies to tailor a message to specific groups, and how to use surprise to advance support for a cause.

### *Political Efficacy*

A surprising finding across the studies is the extent to which participants learned that social change is possible, and that they can be an active part of it. In some of the

case studies, the empowerment felt by many volunteers through their volunteering experience led to a heightened sense of political efficacy. As expected, increases in political efficacy were more likely to occur in environments where volunteers participated in civic and political activities, and therefore were more noticeable in the cases of community representation and community development like the public housing Tenant Participatory System, the participatory budgeting and the Frente Cívico. In the cases of public housing and the participatory budgeting, the significant increases in political efficacy could be explained by the fact that most volunteers belong to traditionally marginalized groups and were elected by their peers to advance the interests of their communities. In the case of Frente Cívico, volunteers had the goal of a specific change in government policy and although they were not successful in achieving that particular goal they managed to form a coalition, garner public support for their cause, and secure a few partial victories.

In the cases of community service examined in this book there were only modest changes in political efficacy. This can be attributed to the nature of the work performed in service-oriented organizations, to the educational and social background of the volunteers, and to the features of the organization. Moreover, in the case of the recent immigrants, the main goal of the volunteers was to blend into the woodwork and avoid making waves, and this inhibits the development of political efficacy. In these cases, however, an increase in self-esteem and confidence could act as building blocks for a greater sense of political efficacy. For example, in the Red Cross, housing co-operative, Frente Cívico, Frontier College, Healthy Communities and Immigrants case studies, this increase in self-esteem was sometimes paired with the realization of how to talk with those in power, and how to push, maneuver and advocate for change from one's own position. In these cases, the political efficacy was connected to volunteers' relations within the organization rather than in relation to their impact on external actors and organizations. In the Frontier College case, there was a tension between the wish of the volunteers to push for more structural changes and the organization's wish to instill change at the personal level, which they resolved through learning mediation– when to speak up, when to bear witness, and when to listen to others. Further research on the promotion and dissuasion of political efficacy in different volunteer scenarios is needed.

### *Self-governance*

When opportunities for participation in decision-making were available, volunteers learned a great deal about self-governance and participatory democracy. Even when opportunities were limited, volunteers learned some of the basics of self-governance. In some cases, like Frente Cívico and the housing co-operative, the volunteers had to learn how to practically self-govern themselves. In other cases, like the Tenant Participatory System or participatory budgeting, the volunteers learned how to engage in participatory and democratic practices. Yet in other cases, like the Red Cross and Frontier College, volunteers learned how to include different

voices and perspectives in their meetings and events. These skills were often equated with learning how to better work with diversity – a capacity developed within the microcosm of the group that volunteers sometimes were able to transfer to relations and processes outside their organizations. Immigrant volunteers who participated in decision-making meetings in their organizations reported learning about the 'Canadian way' of running meetings, including procedural aspects like quorum, motions, and the elusive Robert's rules of order.

Volunteers reported having learned a variety of particular skills that helped them to build their capacity for self-governance. The most frequently mentioned skills were how to chair and run a meeting and give everyone a chance to speak (tenants); how to make sure that a few people don't steal the agenda and that the less powerful voices of the group are heard (Frente Cívico); how to respect and find solidarity with those whom one is serving (Frontier College); how to recognized one's privilege at the time of making decisions (Frontier College); diplomacy/conflict resolution (housing co-operative, participatory budgeting); how to approach authority or engage mayoral candidates (TPS, Frente Cívico); and how to move political bodies to action through vertical and horizontal pressure (TPS, Frente Cívico).

### *Values and Dispositions*

Through their interactions with different people, the immersion into unfamiliar social situations, and/or the acquaintance with the mission of the organizations in which they participate, volunteers sometimes deepened pre-existent values and dispositions, sometimes acquired new ones, and sometimes revised pre-existing ones and replaced them with new orientations. In the community service cluster of case studies, for instance, volunteers talked about an increased feeling of humility, empathy, respect, and compassion. Although the community service organizations tend to attract a relatively large proportion of altruistic-oriented volunteers in the first place, these volunteers often further developed that orientation through the volunteering experience by aligning their values with the ethos of the organization. Indeed, in many cases there was a correlation between the dispositional learning of the volunteers and the mission and goals of the organization or group.

In the case studies on community representation, volunteers talked about their transition from the self-interest of their own group of reference to the common good. They also reflected on the newly acquired disposition of volunteers to allocate more resources to the most disadvantaged groups as a result of deliberative processes and a deeper understanding of their realities. In this cluster we also found volunteers who reported changes in their attitudes towards minority groups, because regular interactions with members of these groups led them to challenge their own biases and prejudices. In the case studies on community development, volunteers already had a general disposition towards community wellbeing and social justice (that was the main reason that attracted them to those organizations in the first place) but some of them experienced disorienting dilemmas about the need to achieve smaller,

incremental, short-term local improvements, on the one hand, and the need to push for more structural, long-term changes and policy reforms. These situations led them to undertake introspective exercises of value clarification and their social/political commitments.

### *Social Awareness*

Many participants described how their volunteer experiences helped them to expand their understanding of particular social realities. Among other things, they reported learning about diversity, social justice, privilege, exploitation, environmental problems, social dynamics, connections between personal and community development, and international issues. The emphasis on certain themes depended on the mission of the organization and the context in which they volunteered; however having said that, power and politics were reoccurring themes throughout many of the case studies. In general, the knowledge acquired on particular issues interacted dynamically with the values and dispositions mentioned in the previous section: new knowledge shaped values and dispositions, and at the same time, some values and dispositions led volunteers to seek knowledge on particular topics.

For instance, Frontier College volunteers had a general orientation towards service and had an overall feeling of empathy towards migrant workers before going to the farms to provide a service: teaching English as a second language to migrant workers. Through their interactions with the farm workers, the volunteers learned about exploitation and oppression, and the sentiments of empathy turn into solidarity. In this context, volunteers seek knowledge about global inequalities, labour and migration policies, and workplace regulations. At the same time, they learn the political boundaries of their work due to institutional policies. Through this process, they are forced to learn how to navigate the tension between their new awareness of privilege, inequality and exploitation, on the one hand, and the need of Frontier College's to remain neutral in order to receive funding for its educational programs and obtain access to the migrant workers in the farms. Some volunteers from Frontier College and other case studies reported learning about hope, and about the important role it plays in providing impetus to work towards change.

## HOW VOLUNTEERS LEARN

One clear trend found in all the case studies is that informal learning was recognized by volunteers as the most significant way to acquire knowledge, skills, values and practices that are relevant to their unpaid work. They also noted that sometimes they were able to transfer this learning to other spaces, including other community work and even their paid jobs. Volunteers often made references to the prevalence of experiential learning and informal mentoring, and often used the expression "learning by doing". This learning was occasionally supplemented with non-formal educational processes like workshops, conferences and meetings.

Very few volunteers participated in formal education courses or programs to improve their volunteer work.

Learning by doing, then, was the most common source of learning for volunteers throughout the case studies. Learning through experience was explicitly cited in all the case studies. Sometimes instances of informal learning were clearly identified as distinctly demarcated learning experiences, as when acquiring a specific technical ability or advocacy skills. At other times, learning by doing took a more tacit form, where volunteers fell short of words to fully describe what, when and how was learned. Indeed, volunteers mentioned that much of their learning was often unplanned, and usually prompted by an urgency to solve a particular problem, by the need to change a particular way of doing things, or by the need to reflect collectively about a conflict. Sometimes they were able to recognize the very moment that a particular learning took place, and in other cases that recognition came later on, usually after some external prompting (like our interviews). This highlights the need for reflection and recognition of the learning experiences of volunteers.

Mentoring was seen as an important part of learning in several of the cases, although it was rarely formalized. In some cases, the mentoring arose organically to fill the learning needs of the volunteers. This was a often a process through which the past learning of one volunteer was passed on through mentoring to others, and seemed particularly important in volunteering that aimed to foster social change or in training the next generation of community representatives or service providers. Some volunteers, however, complained about their limited access to mentoring experiences.

It is interesting to note that in several of the cases, it was expected that volunteers would learn from the organizations, via the employers, paid staff, or other volunteers. However, in some cases, they learned mostly from other volunteers, from themselves (through trial and error) and from other individuals and organizations that had relevant past experiences. In some situations, they also learned important lessons from their clients or the population they served. The non-formal education setting of workshops and conferences also provided opportunities for volunteers to learn. Training programs tended not to be a focal learning site in the case studies covered, with the exception of the cases of the Red Cross and the housing co-operative. Where such programs were used, volunteers spoke about the threat of losing or forgetting what was learned during workshops because it was not put into practice.

Sometimes, like in the case of the housing co-operative, volunteers reported that there was as much learning (and occasionally more learning) during the "coffee breaks" of non-formal education workshop as at the educational sessions themselves. This informal learning within a non-formal setting points to the importance of examining learning opportunities as both sites and processes. In this case, the workshops, which were intended as non-formal learning processes, actually became the sites where more memorable informal learning processes took place. This situation has been also observed in other contexts, like professional development courses for teachers (see Clark, Livingstone and Smaller 2012).

## THE NATURE AND BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERS' INFORMAL LEARNING

In this book we did not examine informal volunteer work, like the mutual help that takes place among friends, neighbours, co-workers or family members. That is a topic for another publication. All the volunteering cases covered in this book dealt with volunteers attached to groups or organizations. An overarching finding is that this form of volunteering helps people learn skills, knowledge, values and attitudes that are beneficial not only to themselves as individuals, but also to the organization in which the work and sometimes also the community they serve. In this way, volunteer work and volunteer learning played a role in creating and strengthening the social fabric.

As we have seen, the volunteers as individuals gained or honed new skills, knowledge, attitudes or values based on their experience, their motivations, and the institutional, organizational and social context in which they operated. In many cases, the procedures and dispositions learned by the volunteers were related to the well-being of the organization. When the organization was thriving and able to commit support and resources to its volunteers, the volunteers in turn tended to pick up the energy and commitment of the organization. In contrast, when support and resources were weak, or when the organization was in a period of decline or standstill, the volunteers reflected this perspective. Interestingly, this relationship between the well-being of the organization and the learning ability of the volunteers was not apparent in the immigrants study, where there seemed to be a disconnect between the 'employer' and the volunteers.

Also apparent across the cases was that learning itself varied within the groups, at times being individual learning while at other times being collective. The informal learning of volunteers also often followed a cyclical pattern. The informal learning of an individual in one group, or at one time, could change into this individual becoming the teacher/presenter at a non-formal education session for another group, or at a later date. Regardless of whether the learning was at the individual or collective level, the *benefits* from learning while volunteering affected both the individual and the collective in different degrees depending on the features of the organization and the nature of the tasks. This relationship was often mutually beneficial, because as the individuals learned and improved their work, it strengthened the group and improved the quality of the collective enterprise.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

On first blush, many volunteers said that they were not engaged in an educational activity during their volunteer work except attending an occasional workshop or training session. In response to our initial open-ended question on learning, most volunteers had difficulties identifying particular learning episodes or learning outcomes resulting from their volunteering activities. This can be explained by the difficulties of recognizing informal learning and eliciting tacit knowledge.

However, once we prompted different areas of learning through a series of questions about changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and practices, the participants in all the case studies were able to recognize the amount of learning acquired in the different areas through their volunteering. Some examples of informal learning that volunteers highlighted, but were tacit, include how to deal with power, how to ensure that an agenda isn't overtake, how to see one's privilege or disempowerment, and how to deal with people from diverse backgrounds.

The case studies show that the informal learning of volunteers is context-specific. But, beyond the particularities of each context, it is clear that most volunteers gain a great variety of abstract and concrete knowledge. They acquire many instrumental, process and relational skills. They embrace new attitudes, dispositions, values and practices. The volunteers' intentionality of learning also differed, at times being deliberate and intentional, while at other times it was implicit and tacit. Sometimes the volunteers were aware of their learning; most often they were not. The type and amount of learning largely relates to the personal histories and motivations of the volunteers themselves, on the one hand, and the activities and the organizational culture of the volunteer organizations, on the other. Volunteers reported that they learned through individual activities (e.g., using a new computer program, preparing a report, reading a document) but also through group activities (e.g., community gardening, participating in committee meetings, discussing organizational strategies, solving a problem collectively, mentoring each other).

Overall, we observed that voluntary organizations provide few opportunities for volunteers to reflect individually and collectively on their learning experiences. This is understandable, because these organizations have limited resources and tend to focus on action and results. It is also unfortunate, because such reflective moments and spaces could greatly contribute to the improvement of the volunteer experience, the effectiveness of the organization, and the democratization of decision-making. Intrinsic to learning through experience was the opportunity for volunteers to reflect on their learning. Through this reflection, the volunteers often realized and came to appreciate just how much they had learned in their volunteer experiences. It also allowed them to shift their learning from learning through experience to experiential learning (i.e. a cycle of learning, reflection, action, and new learning). The process of interviewing for the case studies, then, became in itself a valuable learning opportunity, as was mentioned by volunteer participants in several of the case studies.

This finding has practical implications for those organizations that are interested in assisting their volunteers to get the most out of their experience. In providing regular and systematic opportunities to reflect on one's experiences and to share them with others, volunteers can use the reflection to build momentum for action and social change, and this can benefit the personal growth of the individual volunteer, the effectiveness of the organization, and the community at large. Conversely, the absence of these spaces for individual and group reflection represents a missing

opportunity that can actually inhibit social and organizational learning, and eventually can reduce the impact of the organization. Indeed, in terms of social action, we argue that exploring the tacit knowledge of volunteers involved in community-based organizations is not simply academic curiosity; it can also serve an emancipatory purpose. We suggest that volunteers in community organizations are more likely to affect long-lasting social change when they are able to reflect on their informal learning, draw explicit lessons, and act upon them.

A related theme is the importance of the *recognition of learning*. Across the cases, there seems to be a lack of recognition of the learning of volunteers – both by the volunteers themselves (in the case of their tacit learning), and by the leaders of their organizations (in both tacit and other informal learning experiences). We suggest that it is important to recognize and celebrate the learning of volunteers. Back to our previous point, the acknowledgment of this learning would provide the volunteers with a recognized and legitimated space and time to reflect collectively on their experiences, share ideas, draw lessons and plan their next actions.

Among all our case studies, probably the most unusual one is the case of professional immigrants, because it deviates from traditional research on volunteer work in two distinct ways. Firstly, unlike the high degree of freedom and choice that characterizes volunteer work the volunteer work of recent immigrants was highly coerced by pressures (in some cases discriminatory dynamics) of the domestic labour market. Secondly, unlike most volunteer work experiences (which take place in non-profit organizations, grassroots organizations and public institutions) some immigrants did their volunteer work in for-profit companies. The overwhelming majority of immigrants who participated in our research rated their volunteer experiences positively, as these experiences allowed them to improve work-related language skills, to familiarize themselves with a new work environment, and to expand their networks. However, at the time of the study only a small minority had been successful in finding a paid job in their fields. In most of the other case studies, participants often believed strongly in volunteering for its own sake, and traced that sentiment to their primary socialization.

As noted above, most of the volunteers acquired informally a great deal of knowledge and skills through their participation in their organizations, but they seldom recognized this knowledge and did not even consider a transference of such learning to paid work settings. The immigrant volunteers, in contrast, did recognize and value their informal learning from their volunteer placements, and expected to transfer that learning to their prospective paid jobs. The fact that most of them had not had the chance to find a paid job in their field suggests that not only their foreign work experience is devalued by employers, but their volunteer experience as well.

In closing, we embarked on this project with the intention of exploring the connections between volunteer work and informal learning. Based on our experience, we suggest that those who study informal learning of volunteers face at least four challenges. The first is the conceptual challenge, which consists in

better understanding the scope, significance, expressions and internal features of informal learning. The second is the methodological challenge, which relates to the need to develop creative research strategies to overcome the difficulties in eliciting informal learning. The third one is the challenge of recognition, which concerns the need to improve institutional mechanisms to assess and recognize informal learning. Finally, the pedagogical challenge refers to the need to purposefully design meaningful opportunities for relevant informal learning and for critical reflection on such learning, and to connect non-formal training programs with informal learning. The stories told by each volunteer and through the case studies, as well as the meta-analysis done through bringing the case studies together has given us a window into the world of informal learning in the volunteer world. This is a first look through that window and many more insights should be gained from taking further looks. We hope this research will spur others to investigate this little explored field and to consider the implications of informal learning in the volunteer context.

## NOTE

[1] Parts of this chapter have been extracted from a chapter titled "Volunteer Work and Informal Learning: Exploring the Connections" by D. Schugurensky, F. Duguid and K. Mündel in the book Lifelong Learning in Paid and Unpaid Work edited by D.W. Livingstone (2010).

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