CHAPTER 11

Education and the Civil Commons

Jennifer Sumner

Although the idea of the commons has recently been gaining in popularity, there is little precision about its meaning. This anomaly leaves the term open to conceptual vagueness and parochial application, making it difficult for scholars to analyze, practitioners to grasp, and policy makers to enact. In contrast, the concept of the civil commons has been clearly defined—"the organized, unified, and community-funded capacity of universally accessible resources of society to protect and to enable the lives of its members as an end in itself" (McMurtry, 1998, p. 376). Universal healthcare programs, environmental legislation, conventions on the rights of women and children, workplace safety regulations, and public education systems are some of the many examples of the civil commons. The traditional commons—shared natural resources on which people depend, such as grazing land, water sources, and forests—are a subset of the civil commons because they all protect and enable human lives.

This precise conceptualization opens the door for understanding the commons as an inherently pedagogical concept. Using the civil commons as an analytical tool, a normative political ideal, and an actually existing phenomenon, this chapter will engage with education for the commons,

J. Sumner (✉)
University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada
e-mail: jennifer.sumner@utoronto.ca

© The Author(s) 2017

A.J. Means et al. (eds.), *Educational Commons in Theory and Practice*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-58641-4_11

education as a commons, and education by the commons. In particular, the chapter will investigate forms of education that promote the civil commons, public education systems as unrecognized expressions of the civil commons, and the pedagogical opportunities that the civil commons offers.

While all of these educational intersections are crucial in and of themselves, the chapter will also link them to the concept of sustainability, which involves building the civil commons (Sumner, 2007, 2011). This conceptualization has cascading implications regarding the role of education and its pedagogical potential for contributing to a world that is socially just, economically fair, and environmentally sound.

The Commons

First used in written English in 1479, the term *commons* has been defined as the undivided land belonging to the members of a local community as a whole (OED Online, 2016) and also includes other natural resources like water. Over human history, the commons have been used for a wide variety of cooperative activities, such as livestock grazing, fuel collecting, and food gathering. As Jules Pretty (2002, p. 6) explains:

> For as long as people have managed natural resources, we have engaged in forms of collective action. Farming households have collaborated on water management, labour sharing, and marketing; pastoralists have co-managed grasslands; fishing families and their communities have jointly managed aquatic resources. Such collaboration has been institutionalized in many local associations, through clan or kin groups, water users' groups, grazing management societies, women's self-help groups, youth clubs, farmer experimentation groups, church groups, tree associations, and labour-exchange societies.

Contrary to Hardin's (1968) ill-informed concept of the "tragedy of the commons," rules and traditions have long prevented overuse of the commons, so that they are able to provide a means of subsistence for numerous families over time. For example, in Kenya during the dry season, people keep themselves alive by feeding their goats the pods from acacia trees, each clump of which is controlled by a committee of elders who decide who should be allowed to use them and for how long (Monbiot, 1998). Nobel Prize winner Eleanor Ostrom (2011) has updated such rules in her study of common water resources:

1. Define clear group boundaries.
2. Match rules governing use of common goods to local needs and conditions.
3. Ensure that those affected by the rules can participate in modifying the rules.
4. Make sure the rule-making rights of community members are respected by outside authorities.
5. Develop a system, carried out by community members, for monitoring members' behavior.
6. Use graduated sanctions for rule violators.
7. Provide accessible, low-cost means for dispute resolution.
8. Build responsibility for governing the common resource in nested tiers from the lowest level up to the entire interconnected system.

It is rules such as these, forms of institutionalized collective agreement based in human agency, which point to the larger concept of the civil commons, of which the traditional commons are a part.

The Civil Commons

A recently developed concept with an ancient pedigree, the civil commons gives a name to all the collective projects people have planned to ensure that life is less "nasty, brutish and short" than it might otherwise be for many. The civil commons has been defined as any cooperative human construct that protects and/or enables universal access to life goods (McMurtry, 1999). In other words, the civil commons is cooperative, not competitive, in its mode of engagement. It is a human construct, not a naturally occurring phenomenon, and so must be built by human agency. It enables universal access, not paid access, and it provides life goods, or means of life. For people in pre-industrial England, these life goods would have included such items as food and fuel. In modern times, these life goods have expanded to encompass clean water, adequate shelter, education, healthcare, open spaces, and a safe workplace. According to McMurtry (1998),

> The nature of the civil commons can be expressed as follows: *It is society's organized and community-funded capacity of universally accessible resources*

> *to provide for the life preservation and growth of society's members and their environmental life-host*. The civil commons is, in other words, what people ensure together as a society to protect and further life, as distinct from money aggregates. (p. 24)

For McMurtry (1998, p. 370), the civil commons is "the middle term between life and more comprehensive life" because it makes the basic resources of life available to all its members.

To differentiate the civil commons from traditional commons, McMurtry (1998) points out:

> I have introduced the concept of "civil commons" to distinguish it from the traditional "commons"—the shared natural lands upon which an agricultural village economy depends. I mean by the civil commons both the traditional commons and all other universally accessible goods of life that protect or enable the lives of society's members. … the concept of the civil commons subsumes both the traditional commons and the built commons of universally accessible social goods evolved by public sectors since the Industrial Revolution and, in particular, since the end of World War II. (p. 399)

As a relatively new term, the civil commons differs from other conceptualizations of the commons, such as put forward by Hardt and Negri (2009). For these authors, the common is distinct from public and private forms of property: "the political project of instituting the common … cuts diagonally across these false alternatives—neither public nor private, neither capitalist nor socialist—and opens a new space for politics" (Means, 2014, p. 127). In contrast, the civil commons extends into and transforms both the public and private arenas. For example, although many forms of the civil commons are informal (such as neighborhood care teams or barn raisings), a great deal of the civil commons has become codified and administered by the state. According to McMurtry (1998, pp. 371, 376), "democratic government itself is the civil commons in one of its most powerful capacities of shared growth," and at its most developed stage, government "becomes one with the civil commons, but is as yet far from achieving this full representation of the commons interest." The civil commons also extends into the market, through commons-oriented enterprises such as fair trade, non-profit organizations and cooperatives, which operate both within and against the market in

complex ways and in the process seek to transform market relations (see, e.g., Raynolds, 2002).

The civil commons also differs from the public sphere, a contested concept that is not typically associated with the provision of life goods. Habermas (1987) maintains that the public sphere is based in communication: "the institutional core of the public sphere comprises communicative networks amplified by a cultural complex, a press and, later, mass media," which can be viewed from the systemic perspective of the state as "the environment relevant to generating legitimacy" (p. 319). Feminists, on the other hand, understand the public sphere (and its correlate the private sphere) as based in gendered power relations, with the public sphere being "the stereotypically masculine world of politics and paid employment" which is often used to limit women's lives and make their economic productivity invisible (Johnson, 2000, p. 240). Neither conceptualization addresses the concrete foundation of all civil commons formations—life goods—without which we could not flourish, and which capitalism will never provide, unless profit is involved. In this way, the civil commons challenges the capitalist project with a working alternative and disrupts neoliberal conceptualizations of privatization and austerity. As McMurtry (2001) notes, in opposition to the dominant money-oriented values embedded in global capitalism, not one civil commons institution or practice is developed or financed to generate profit for private investors. This is undoubtedly at the root of the myth of the tragedy of the commons and the underlying impetus to the longstanding enclosure movement.

Enclosure of the Commons and the Civil Commons

In 1968, Garrett Hardin, a professor of biology, wrote an article about what was at that time referred to as "the population problem." In this article, he argued that the commons could not work as a concept because of human greed, based on "the tendency to assume that decisions reached individually will, in fact, be the best decisions for an entire society" (p. 1244). The result, he maintained, is a tragedy—"the remorseless working of things" (p. 1244). The solution he put forward involved "private property or something formally like it" (p. 1245).

There have been many counter-arguments to Hardin's thesis since it was published. Feeny, Berkes, McCay, and Acheson (1990) argued that Hardin had developed an incomplete theory. Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen (1999) pointed out that Hardin's arguments contain all the

ideology and justification of globalization, liberalization, and privatization, while Röling (2000) maintained that Hardin did not distinguish between the commons and an open-access resource. In his book, *Deep Economy*, McKibben (2007) added that "The 'tragedy of the commons' really reflected what happened when hyper-individualism came into contact with older, more community-oriented ideas about the land" (p. 199).

In contrast to Hardin's perspective, Monbiot (1998) maintained that "for human beings, as for the biosphere, the tragedy of the commons is not the tragedy of their existence but the tragedy of their disappearance" (p. 362). Hardin's article illuminated a longstanding propensity, both in theory and in practice, toward the enclosure of both the commons and the civil commons—most recently illustrated in the global phenomenon known as "land grabbing" (White, Borras, Hall, Scoones, & Wolford, 2012). The most famous enclosures took place in England during the Industrial Revolution. Driven by wealthy landowners who wanted to turn the commons into private sheep farms so they could profit from the international wool trade, the enclosure of the commons has been described by Polanyi (2001) as "a revolution of the rich against the poor" (p. 37). Polanyi described how the enclosures had a powerfully unsettling effect:

> The war on cottages, the absorption of cottage gardens and grounds, the confiscation of the rights in the common deprived cottage industry of its two mainstays: family earnings and agricultural background. As long as domestic industry was supplemented by the facilities and amenities of a garden plot, a scrap of land, or grazing rights, the dependence of the laborer on money earnings was not absolute; the potato plot or 'stubbing geese,' a cow or even an ass in the common made all the difference; and family earnings acted as a kind of unemployment insurance. The rationalization of agriculture inevitably uprooted the laborer and undermined his social security. (p. 96)

Without the means to feed, house, and otherwise care for themselves, thousands were forced to migrate to the cities. In a scenario reminiscent of today's displaced rural people in the global economy, they formed a desperate mass of starving humanity living in urban slums, with the lucky few who actually found work in the new "satanic mills" of the Industrial Revolution forced to endure brutalizing conditions.

In modern times, the enclosure of the civil commons became particularly widespread after the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s in the form of structural adjustment programs forced on developing countries by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in return for loan guarantees (Palast, 2001). As a prerequisite for receiving loans, these

supranational organizations required developing countries to sell off their public resources to the private sector, including civil commons institutions that provided water, electricity, healthcare, telecommunications, and transportation. Their explicit objective was to inculcate solely economic motivations in the rich as well as in the poor (Berthoud, 2010), thus wiping out the social motives that lay behind much of the civil commons formation.

In the same vein, the financial crisis of 2008 entailed the world's greatest shift of public wealth to private hands by using nearly $16 trillion in public funds to prop up the international financial system (Ellwood, 2014). This unprecedented maneuver defunded for generations to come the public sector that provides so many forms of the civil commons—yet another modern form of enclosure. A disheartening confirmation of this trend was recently reported by Oxfam (2016a), which produced a briefing paper showing that the wealth of 62 people was equal to that of the poorest half of the world's population, while the richest one percent owned more wealth than the other 99 percent. To facilitate this transfer of wealth, multinational companies and wealthy elites are using tax havens and thus "refusing to pay the taxes that society needs to function" (Oxfam, 2016b, p. 1). It is these taxes that often pay for the life goods of the civil commons, such as education and healthcare. This ongoing funneling of wealth to the top tier of society confirms the enclosure trend set in motion with the rise of capitalism.

The enclosure of all forms of the commons is indeed immanent to capitalism, which must continually expand or face stagnation. One of the ways capitalism has facilitated expansion is through enclosure, beginning with the English enclosures right up to the present day. In other words, "capitalism has to continue the colonial enclosure of other people's commons if it wants to continue its constant growth or accumulation" (Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999, p. 149). In this way, capitalism is structured to attack the shared base of people's lives—the civil commons—as a competitor against its program of profitable control of all of societies' life goods (McMurtry, 1999). Neoliberal capitalism has accelerated this trend. In the words of McMichael (2013), this "savage regime" is premised on the redistribution, rather than the production, of wealth, thus moving the "common wealth" of communities around the world into private control (p. 45). As Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen (1999) have pointed out,

> the very global institutions that represent the capitalist world-market system use the mechanisms of violent intrusion, enclosure, division, fragmentation, segregation, and then hierarchisation and centralisation to get access to the resources that are still controlled and used by local communities as commons. (p. 144)

Enclosure of both the commons and the civil commons clearly represents a revolution of the rich against the poor. Enclosure also instantiates what David Harvey (2006) has aptly described as "accumulation by dispossession," that is, modes of accumulation that dispossess the majority of their means of life, such as schemes for the privatization of water, electricity, education, and healthcare. Such dispossession can be facilitated by what Naomi Klein (2007) refers to as the shock doctrine, spurred by real or manufactured crises to move public wealth to private control. Like any form of social action, enclosure is learned—not only through economics courses but also any other educational endeavors that assume a neoliberal perspective, resulting in an enclosure of the mind as well as the commons. But enclosure can also be unlearned, or not taught in the first place, and be subsumed by education for the civil commons, education as a civil commons, and education by the civil commons.

Education and the Civil Commons

Working collectively for shared outcomes has a long history. Humans survived as a species because they cooperated (Leakey & Lewin, 1977), and the propensity to work together runs deeply in our genes. This propensity is highlighted by the concept of the capitalist camping trip. A philosopher at All Souls College, Oxford, G.A. Cohen (2001) proposed a camping trip based on the principles of market exchange and strictly private ownership. For example, the person who catches the most fish demands that he have better fish for dinner than anyone else; another person who finds a bounteous apple tree demands reduced labor, more room in the tent, or more bacon for breakfast than anyone else in exchange for the apples; and yet another person recognizes the campsite from descriptions his father gave him, so announces that only he can eat the fish from the pond that his father stocked 30 years earlier. The ridiculousness of the conceptual scenario is immediately clear, given that on real camping trips people contribute gear, skills, time, and energy to the mutual enterprise, ensuring "that there are no inequalities to which anyone could mount

a principled objection" (p. 59). What is also clear is that humans self-organize differently on their own time, and this is the power behind the civil commons. This power can be harnessed through three forms of education: education for the civil commons, education as the civil commons, and education by the civil commons.

Education for the Civil Commons

Education can be used for a range of purposes—to promote conformity to the status quo, to encourage questioning and critique, or to foment revolution and change. The first purpose is the most dominant, with few educational courses, programs or institutions "teaching to transgress" (hooks, 1994). In fact, not many of educational encounters teach about sharing and cooperation, let alone the civil commons, particularly in the age of neoliberal capitalism, which rewards competition, individualism and private ownership. For example, in a survey of contemporary economics and business textbooks, Schugurensky and McCollum (2010) found very few examples of the social economy, in spite of its ubiquity in society today. From this finding, we can predict that the civil commons suffers the same fate, given its overlap with the social economy. There are a few exceptions to this educational lacuna, however, that can provide the basis for modeling education for the civil commons. One example took place at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto with a course called Commons, Communities and Social Justice, which took place in the winter of 2015. The course focused on all aspects of the commons, opened with a component on the civil commons, and was taught in common by a number of faculty members. It was premised on the observation that while industrial capitalism grows via the enclosure and outright destruction of the commons, human wellbeing and sustainability today depend not only on the protection of the commons but its extension into most areas of human experience. From this initial stance, the course went on to explore the concept and political significance of the commons and commons-related policy, education activism and debates in the economic, social, political, cultural and spiritual realms.

Education as a Civil Commons

Education can also be understood as a form of civil commons in and of itself. While long reserved for the wealthy and privileged—from the

Roman Empire to Victorian England—education opened up to the less privileged with the rise of democracy and the establishment of public education systems. These public education systems are, in effect, cooperative human constructs that enable universal access to the life good of education—now a human right and the gateway to other rights. According to UNESCO (2016), "Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights." Tellingly, however, UNESCO reinforces the neoliberal subject by adding that education "promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important development benefits" while ignoring the collective provision on which most education is based. The reasons for this collective provision are, paradoxically, made clear in the following sentence: "Yet millions of children and adults remain deprived of educational opportunities, many as a result of poverty," and reinforced in phrases such as "economically and socially marginalized adults and children." Thus, even a dedicated supranational organization such as UNESCO toes the neoliberal line, ignoring the collective origins of education while touting its individual benefits.

The value of education as a civil commons can be summed up in the words of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF, 2016), which sees public education as a public good: "Public education is the cornerstone of tolerance and democracy within our diverse society." Universal, publically funded education began in many countries with the recognition that children needed to be taught basic knowledge and morality in order to function fully in society. Free education for the poor was introduced in Scotland in the early seventeenth century (Moore, 2006) and universal education spread throughout Europe over the next few centuries.

The concept of universality is crucial to public education, as it is to all forms of the civil commons. Universality involves the decision not to exclude specific groups from the provision of life goods, but to open them to everyone. For example, one of the five pillars of the Canadian healthcare system is universality—it applies to all Canadians, not just a portion of the population. This is based on Canadian social democratic commitments to the universality of publically supported programs and the belief that universal social programs would lead to a collective sense of self-benefit and a commitment to the programs, as well as social cohesion and a population not divided into "haves" and "have nots" (Davis & Tarasuk, 1994). Universality ensures not only that the needs of everyone are addressed, but also that everyone has a stake in the provision of life goods and thus does not begrudge them to anyone else. In terms of education, universal access

to both formal and informal education, with the goal of knowledge sharing, enables a more comprehensive understanding of both the subject matter and the world (Woodhouse, 2011). However, "this potentiality can only be realized where institutions are in place capable of creating the conditions for human learning as a good for all participants" (p. 85). This last statement highlights the potential limitations of a concept like universality, particularly in terms of liberalism, which may espouse formal universality (i.e., universal rights under the law) but harbor informal systems of exclusion based in racism, patriarchy, classism, and so on. The civil commons provides a robust alternative to liberal notions of universality by juxtaposing universal entitlement and market rights, which by definition involve exclusion through the price mechanism and hence enable informal systems of exclusion. To emphasize this juxtaposition, McMurtry (1999, p. 217) clearly defines universally accessible as "available without market price or other exclusionary fence to it, where need and choice concur with the common life interest served" (p. 217). To further differentiate the civil commons from liberal notions of universality, he goes on to emphasize how the civil commons selects for what serves the life sequence in two senses: regulation and enablement. First, it evolves a framework of law and regulatory protection for human and environmental life; and, second, it provides goods to directly enable human or environmental life to grow. One of these enabling goods is education.

Experiments to include higher education as a form of civil commons have taken place in a number of countries. These experiments are situated within a larger context of the deliberate undermining of all levels of education by the neoliberal market. In the words of Janice Newson (1992, p. 234), "The principles that benefit markets undermine the objectives of education and conversely, education that achieves its intended purposes cannot serve well as a marketable commodity." At the University of Saskatchewan, Woodhouse (2011) explains, this larger market context expressed itself as reduced budgets, fewer faculty, more students, increased emphasis on research for the market and the centralization of university governance. In the face of this shift from the institution's founding ideals as "the people's university" (p. 78), resistance emerged from a number of sources and coalesced in 2002 as the People's Free University (PFU). This civil-commons construct opened its doors in the fall of that year to 200 students aged 12 to 82 from a range of social classes and ethnic backgrounds who enrolled in six different courses. In practice, the PFU "provided learning experiences to anyone regardless of their ability to pay" (p. 79), backed by a philosophy of inclusiveness and a "conscious

effort to balance practical and theoretical subjects" (p. 80). Although this experiment only lasted a few years, one aspect stands out for Woodhouse: "the concept of universal accessibility enabling a fuller realization of life through education is a defining characteristic of both the civil commons and the PFU" (p. 86).

A similar experiment took place in the United States some years earlier called the Free University Movement. Described by Draves (1980) as encompassing a new vision of learning, free universities were supported by a community of scholars who believed that learning was a process that could be taken on by anyone at any time. In a similar fashion, several popular universities have appeared in France in recent years, such as the Université Populaire de Caen in Normandy and the Université Populaire d'Argentan, both of which offer alternative visions to further totalization of the global market (Woodhouse, 2011). In addition, several countries currently offer free tuition at the post-secondary level, such as Scotland and Cuba.

Education by the Civil Commons

Woodhouse (2011, p. 80) describes the civil commons as "an interlocking set of institutions supporting and promoting life by providing universally accessible life goods such as publicly funded education, health care, and clean water and air." Such civil commons institutions share the goal of universal provision and protection of life-requirements and life-standards (Noonan, 2011). These institutions offer a myriad of educational opportunities, not only by their very existence but also through a range of pedagogical endeavors. Such endeavors can be understood as public pedagogy—the combination of top-down educational influences through cultural forms and bottom-up teaching and learning found in communities, hobby groups and social movements (Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2010). In particular, public pedagogy focuses on how informal cultural institutions, including civil commons institutions such as libraries, parks and historical sites, can both help to shape dominant forms of knowledge and hegemonic representations, and become sites of contestation and resistance (Sandlin, Wright, & Clark, 2013). For example, libraries can teach people to be flexible in the global market by offering seminars on how to update your résumé or teach people to self-organize by hosting workshops on setting up a cooperative or starting a community food hub. Parks can discreetly steer campers away from areas that are clearcut by

logging companies or become sites of confrontation as in the anti-logging protests in Clayoquot Sound, British Columbia. And historical sites can reinforce the dominant view of history or provide descriptive memorials to counter-hegemonic groups, such as plaques honoring the Underground Railroad or battered women.

Education, the Civil Commons and Sustainability

While the links between education and the civil commons are vital in many ways, a further connection reinforces the importance of these links. That is, the civil commons is the foundation of sustainability (Sumner, 2007, 2011). Put another way, sustainability involves building the civil commons—environmentally, socially, and economically. To convey the primacy of the environment, the relationship among these areas can be understood in terms of nested hierarchies (Sumner & Sanders, 2016), with the economic nested within the social, which in turn is nested within the environmental.

Using the framework of nested hierarchies, environmental sustainability involves building and maintaining cooperative human constructs that protect and/or enable universal access to *environmental life goods*, such as organic certification, clean water bylaws, and public space formation (e.g., provincial parks and town squares). As the real bottom line in any understanding of sustainability, the environment is crucial to the survival of human and planetary life. Wright (2004) made this clear in his scan of past civilizations and predictions for current ones when he stated that "The lesson I read in the past is this: that the health of land and water—and of woods, which are the keepers of water—can be the only lasting basis for any civilization's survival and success" (p. 105). He vividly described how many civilizations collapsed when they crossed this line. Over millennia, however, there is also evidence that the health of land, water, and woods has been protected by the civil commons. Common grazing lands, communal water sources, and sacred groves are examples of cooperative human projects that have ensured universal access to environmental life goods.

Nested within environmental sustainability is social sustainability, which involves building and maintaining cooperative human constructs that protect and/or enable universal access to *social life goods*, such as laws ensuring old-age pensions, declarations of women's rights, and setting up neighborhood palliative care teams. This definition complements Clark's (2006) understanding of the social aspects of sustainability, which

comprise three main elements: commitment to fair and just labor practices, gender equality, and the preservation of communities and culture. These elements include such civil commons areas as gender, race/ethnicity, and class equity laws, minimum wages, union organizing rights, volunteer opportunities, food bank and communal kitchen establishment, and the observance of public celebrations.

And nested within social sustainability is economic sustainability, which involves building and maintaining cooperative human constructs that protect and/or enable universal access to *economic life goods*. The economic aspects of sustainability are recognized as being dependent on the other two hierarchies, and include such civil commons areas as cooperatives, credit unions, community currencies, public procurement, minimum wages laws, fair trade, food hubs, and the social economy.

All in all, the more a society builds the civil commons the more sustainable it becomes; the more it encloses the civil commons, the less sustainable it becomes (see Sumner & Sanders, 2016). This argument has cascading effects in a world plagued by unsustainability. For example, if sustainability involves building the civil commons, then compound terms like sustainable development gain new meaning. Through the lens of the civil commons, sustainable development involves development that promotes the civil commons, not private entrepreneurship. Projects that build public health clinics, public schools, or public libraries would all be examples of sustainable development, whereas projects that encouraged people to start their own businesses would not. The concept of sustainable globalization (Sumner, 2007) would involve globalizing the civil commons, not the rights of transnational corporations as is currently the case through transnational trade agreements.

In the same vein, sustainability brings new meaning to the field of education, particularly because sustainability does not come naturally, but must be learned (Sumner, 2003). Since every social encounter provides an opportunity for learning, "learning must become a way of life if we are to learn our way in to a more sustainable world" (p. 25). Just any type of learning, however, will not suffice. Sustainable learning involves learning that is based on building the civil commons. In essence, sustainable learning

> is a participatory, transformative process that involves learning through social action, developing critical consciousness and encouraging dialogical engagement, all within a life-values perspective. Sustainable learning is a process of building the capacity and power of people to recognize, name and

> confront the impacts of corporate globalisation and to change the present unsustainable situation. It should enable people on both sides of the North-South divide to make sense of the complex local-global dynamics in order to create solidarity around a common sustainable vision of individual and community well-being based in building the civil commons. (p. 28)

The association of sustainability and the civil commons has also been applied to the field of adult education. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto offers a course called Adult Education for Sustainability. The course is based on the three main and enduring traditions of Canadian adult education: first, a set of unyielding social purposes, informed by passion and outrage, and rooted in a concern for the less privileged; second, a systematic and sustained philosophical and critical analysis that develops the abilities to connect immediate, individual experiences with underlying societal structures; and three, a keen attention to the specific sites, locations, and practices where such purposes and analyses are made real in the lives of Canadians (Nesbit, 2006, p. 17). Sumner (2008) argues that these three traditions open the door for adult educators to engage with sustainability and the civil commons because building the civil commons reflects the social purposes of adult education and focuses concern for the less privileged into civil commons projects. In addition, by providing universal access to life goods, the civil commons allows adult educators to critically analyze neoliberalism and its inherent unsustainability. And finally, the civil commons helps adult educators pay keen attention to the sites where it plays out in the life of Canadians, such as education, healthcare and the environment. In this way, adult education for sustainability allows adult educators to honor their traditions and continue them into the future.

Thus, in many ways, education that foregrounds the civil commons means education that prioritizes sustainability. In the age of neoliberalism, this is indispensable. It provides both a means to critique our current unsustainable state and a vision of a more sustainable alternative.

Conclusion

"The civil commons comprise the most civilizing aspects of human achievement and are distinguished by an ability to offer universal access to services which ensure the survival and growth of all organic life" (Woodhouse, 2011, p. 85). This is particularly true in terms of education,

which is not a panacea, but can contribute to building a more sustainable world if it centers on the civil commons. Education for the civil commons, as a civil commons, and by the civil commons all carry the potential to help us better analyze our choices, aim for an attainable ideal, and emulate actually existing models. Normalizing the civil commons through education would move it from the realm of what Welton (1991) referred to as "dangerous knowledge" to common knowledge, or even what could be termed "commons knowledge." This knowledge could help us to create a truly civilized world that features social justice, economic fairness, and environmental integrity.

References

Berthoud, G. (2010). Market. In W. Sachs (Ed.), *The development dictionary: A guide to knowledge as power* (2nd ed., pp. 74–94). London: Zed Books.

Clark, L. F. (2006). Globalization, corporatization and the organic philosophy: Social sustainability in question. In *Proceedings of the Third Annual Conference for Social Research in Organic Agriculture*, January 27, University of Guelph, Guelph, Canada.

Cohen, G. A. (2001). Why not socialism? In E. Broadbent (Ed.), *Democratic equality: What went wrong?* (pp. 58–78). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Davis, B., & Tarasuk, V. (1994). Hunger in Canada. *Agriculture and Human Values, 11*(4), 50–57.

Draves, W. (1980). *The free university: A model for lifelong learning*. Chicago: Association Press.

Ellwood, W. (2014). *The no-nonsense guide to degrowth and sustainability*. Toronto: New Internationalist/Between the Lines.

Feeny, D., Berkes, F., McCay, B. J., & Acheson, J. M. (1990). The tragedy of the commons: Twenty-two years later. *Human Ecology, 18*(1), 1–19.

Habermas, J. (1987). *The theory of communicative action* (Vol. 2). Boston: Beacon Press.

Hardin, G. (1968). The tragedy of the commons. *Science, 162*, 1243–1248.

Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2009). *Commonwealth*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Harvey, D. (2006). Neo-liberalism as creative destruction. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography, 88*(2), 145–158.

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.

Johnson, A. G. (2000). *The Blackwell dictionary of sociology: A user's guide to sociological language*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Klein, N. (2007). *The shock doctrine: The rise of disaster capitalism*. New York: Picador.

Leakey, R. E., & Lewin, R. (1977). *Origins: What new discoveries reveal about the emergence of our species and its possible future*. New York: E. P. Dutton.

McKibben, B. (2007). *Deep economy: The wealth of communities and the durable future*. New York: Holt Paperbacks.

McMichael, P. (2013). *Food regimes and agrarian questions*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

McMurtry, J. (1998). *Unequal freedoms: The global market as an ethical system*. Toronto: Garamond.

McMurtry, J. (1999). *The cancer stage of capitalism*. London: Pluto Press.

McMurtry, J. (2001). The life-ground, the civil commons and the corporate male gang. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies, 22*, 819–854.

Means, A. J. (2014). Educational commons and the new radical democratic imaginary. *Critical Studies in Education, 55*(2), 122–137.

Mies, M., & Bennholdt-Thomsen, V. (1999). *The subsistence perspective: Beyond the globalised economy*. New York: Zed Books.

Monbiot, G. (1998). The tragedy of enclosure. In D. Van DeVeer & C. Pierce (Eds.), *The environmental ethics and policy book: Philosophy, ecology, economics* (pp. 360–362). Toronto: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Moore, L. (2006). Education and learning. In L. Abrams, E. Gordon, D. Simonton, & E. Yeo (Eds.), *Gender in Scottish history since 1700* (pp. 111–139). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Nesbit, T. (2006). Introduction. In T. Fenwick, T. Nesbit, & B. Spencer (Eds.), *Contexts of adult education: Canadian perspectives* (pp. 13–22). Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc..

Newson, J. (1992). The decline of faculty influence: Confronting the effects of the corporate agenda. In W. Carroll, L. Christiansen-Rufman, R. Currie, & D. Harrison (Eds.), *Fragile truths: 25 years of sociology and anthropology in Canada* (pp. 231–249). Ottawa: Carleton University Press.

Noonan, J. (2011). Life value and social justice. *Studies in Social Justice, 5*(1), 1–10.

OED Online. (2016). Commons. *Oxford English Dictionary*. Retrieved January 14, 2016, from http://www.oed.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/view/Entry/37254?redirectedFrom=commons#eid

OSSTF. (2016). Public education. *Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation*. Retrieved January 25, 2016, from https://www.osstf.on.ca/en-CA/public-education.aspx

Ostrom, E. (2011). 8 principles for managing a commons. Retrieved January 30, 2016, from http://www.onthecommons.org/magazine/elinor-ostroms-8-principles-managing-commmons

Oxfam. (2016a). An economy for the 1%. Retrieved January 28, 2016, from https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp210-economy-one-percent-tax-havens-180116-summ-en_0.pdf

Oxfam. (2016b). Even it up: 62 people own the same as half the world, reveals Oxfam Davos report. Retrieved January 28, 2016, from https://www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/pressreleases/2016-01-18/62-people-own-same-half-world-reveals-oxfam-davos-report

Palast, G. (2001). The globalizer who came in from the cold. *The Observer*, October 10. Retrieved January 31, 2016, from http://www.gregpalast.com/the-globalizer-who-came-in-from-the-cold/

Polanyi, K. (2001). *The great transformation*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Pretty, J. N. (2002). *Agri-culture: Reconnecting people, land and nature*. London: Earthscan.

Raynolds, L. T. (2002). Consumer/producer links in fair trade coffee networks. *Sociologia Ruralis, 42*(4), 404–424.

Röling, N. (2000). *An idea called knowledge system*. Presentation at the University of Guelph Rural Studies Colloquium, October 23.

Sandlin, J., Schultz, B., & Burdick, J. (2010). *Handbook of public pedagogy: Education and learning beyond schooling*. New York: Routledge.

Sandlin, J. A., Wright, R. R., & Clark, C. (2013). Re-examining theories of adult learning and adult development through the lenses of public pedagogy. *Adult Education Quarterly, 63*(1), 3–23.

Schugurensky, D., & McCollum, E. (2010). Notes in the margin: The social economy in economics and business textbooks. In L. Mook, J. Quarter, & S. Ryan (Eds.), *Researching the social economy* (p. xx). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Sumner, J. (2003). Learning our way in: Sustainable learning and the civil commons. *Convergence, 36*(1), 21–30.

Sumner, J. (2007). *Sustainability and the civil commons: Rural communities in the age of globalization*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Sumner, J. (2008). Eating as a pedagogical act: Food as a catalyst for adult education for sustainability. *Kursiv - Journal fuer politische Bildung, 4*, 32–37.

Sumner, J. (2011). Serving social justice: The role of the commons in sustainable food systems. *Studies in Social Justice, 5*(1), 63–75.

Sumner, J., & Sanders, C. (2016). Taking the steps toward environmental sustainability: Implementing the official plan on Pelee Island. In L. K. Hallström, M. Beckie, G. Hvenegaard, & K. Mündel (Eds.), *Taking the next steps: Sustainability planning, participating and public policy in rural Canada* (pp. 199–215). Edmonton: University of Alberta Press.

UNESCO. (2016). The right to education. *United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization*. Retrieved January 22, 2016, from http://www.unesco.org/new/en/right2education

Welton, M. (1991). Dangerous knowledge: Canadian workers' education in the decades of discord. *Studies in the Education of Adults, 23*(1), 24–40.

White, B., Borras, S. M., Jr., Hall, R., Scoones, I., & Wolford, W. (2012). The new enclosures: Critical perspectives on corporate land deals. *The Journal of Peasant Studies, 39*(3–4), 619–647.

Woodhouse, H. (2011). Learning for life: The People's free university and the civil commons. *Studies in Social Justice, 5*(1), 777–790.

Wright, R. (2004). *A short history of progress.* Toronto: House of Anansi Press Inc.