Learning and Education for a Better World: The Role of Social Movements
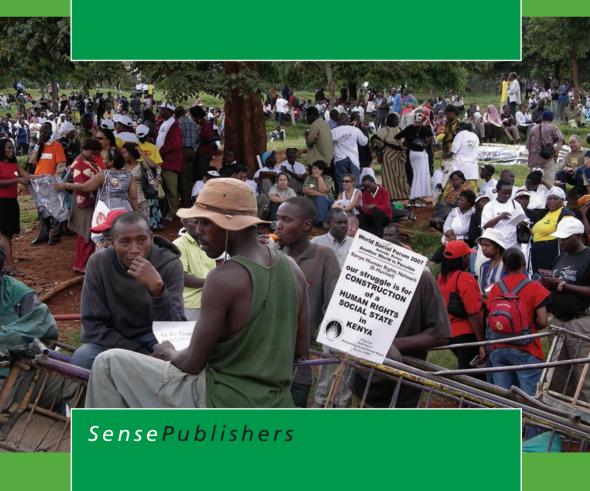
Budd L. Hall, Darlene E. Clover, Jim Crowther and Eurig Scandrett (Eds.)

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Learning and Education for a Better World

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Learning and Education for a Better World

The Role of Social Movements

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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PREFACE

LEARNING AND EDUCATION FOR A BETTER WORLD: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The publication of '**Learning and education for a better world: the role of social movements'** is to be welcomed most warmly. This is such a timely collection of essays, bringing together critical reflections on experiences of social action from across the globe. Previous publications have demonstrated the importance of learning in social movements along with the importance of learning from experiences of participating in social movements (e.g. Eyerman and Jamison, 1991, Foley, 1999 and Kane, 2001). As these writings have demonstrated, these have been two-way processes of learning, acquiring knowledge and skills in order to take action more effectively, and learning through reflecting on the experiences of social action that follow, engaging in movements for social justice and social change. We need to build upon these earlier studies though. Because, as '**Learning and education for a better world: the role of social movements'** so clearly demonstrates, the case for this type of learning is becoming more and more urgent in the current economic, social, political, environmental and policy context.

Since the end of the Cold War, neo-liberal perspectives and policy agendas have become ever more predominant. Back in the Reagan / Thatcher years of the 1980s, the case for neo-liberalism was already being promoted, epitomised by the slogan that 'There is no alternative'. This slogan has greater resonance than ever in the contemporary context. Public policy discourses have become increasingly dominated by the argument that priority has to be given to the interests of private profitability, even if this too often entails rising unemployment together with reductions in public services to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. People are being invited to believe that they have to suffer – and preferably to suffer in silence rather than take to the streets – to believe that there is nothing else that can be done.

Even more disturbingly in relation to the concerns of this particular book, neo-liberal perspectives have come to wield increasing influence over the structures of learning and education (as several chapters so clearly demonstrate). Processes of marketisation have been infiltrating the very institutions, including the schools and universities that should have been concerned with preserving the space for the production of critical thinking and challenging debates. The scope for challenging the predominance of neo-liberalism is being potentially undermined, along with the scope for developing alternative approaches, prioritising human needs before the requirements for private profitability. Meanwhile the economic, social, political, environmental and cultural effects are being experienced globally with increasing

inequalities within and between nation states. Bankers have been continuing to enjoy their bonuses whilst the poorest and most vulnerable have been experiencing the sharpest reductions in their livelihoods and well-being.

This has, of course, been increasingly challenged. A range of social movements, including the 'Occupy' movement, have been raising fundamental questions about the very nature of capitalism, and the specific impact of the neo-liberal policies that have been producing these growing inequities, in different contexts. As this book so clearly documents, learning has been central to these movements, typified by the seminars that accompanied the 'Occupy' movement outside St Pauls Cathedral in the City of London, for example.

Individuals and communities can and do come to develop critical and more creative understandings of their situations, just as they can and do come to develop critical and creative strategies for change. But praxis doesn't automatically occur spontaneously. Nor do new generations of activists necessarily acquire the theoretical tools that they need in order to make sense of their rapidly changing worlds, providing them with the theoretical basis for developing strategies that effectively demonstrate that another world is possible.

The book is so timely, precisely for this reason. Between them the different chapters bring a series of critical reflections on ways of connecting theory and practice together, linking people's reflections on their learning from their experiences with the authors' reflections on the learning to be gained from more theoretical debates. The potential tensions between different approaches and contexts for learning emerge, together with the implications for promoting learning and education for a better world. There are reflections on the tensions that have been inherent in providing university-based programmes of popular education *with* rather than simply *for* social movement activists. And there are reflections on the key relevance of varying theoretical approaches and practices, if activists are to be equipped to build alternative strategies for progressive social change and environmental justice. **Learning and education for a better world: the role of social movements** offers invaluable tools and understandings for all those who share these goals. This book is to be commended to the widest possible readership.

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AND EURIG SCANDRETT

INTRODUCTION

To be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing.
Raymond Williams

Recently two of this book's Editors participated in an academic conference with other scholars deeply concerned about the issues of our times: injustice, violence against women, the deeply destructive nature of unbridled capitalism, the willingness of most political regimes to sacrifice both human and natural welfare in the interest of economic growth. There were more but you get the idea. It could have been a conference on any of the social science or humanities disciplines in almost any part of Europe or even, North America in the second decade of this 21st century. The mood of the conference mired in the awareness of the impact austerity measures being implemented by the British government and indeed reeling from a series of cuts to community groups, libraries, universities, or the social services where many of these people worked or at least knew of people, who worked in them, was dark. Dark as an Edvard Munch painting, the one with the open mouth, the silent scream pouring out. The session we facilitated was about the arts, learning and social movements. At one end of the debate that erupted was an angry, weary veteran intellectual with a lifetime of rational radical critique, a veteran of leftist and generally progressive intention. At the other end of the spectrum was an angry young woman whose suggestion for a way forward, in England, was violence. She argued for the right of both men and women who wanted to fight with the police to do so. She resented groups like the radical, civilly disobedient yet peaceful Rebel Clown Army who intervene in demonstrations to prevent violence, preferring instead groups such as the Black Block whose tactics De Cauter, De Roo and Vanchaesenbrouck (2011, p. 13) "show uncanny similarities" to terrorist attacks. Still another woman from a former Eastern European country talked of how a right wing movement that had just finished a campaign in her country using the arts and other social learning tools to build support for neo-Nazi action. In the dynamics of the moment, efforts to share ideas about how poetry and other art forms could be used in contexts of social movement learning hit a wall of nihilism, hopelessness and despair.

Why do we mention this in the introduction to a book about social movements, education and action? This story is important for us to reflect and learn from. Firstly, it serves to underscore the deep ruptures and profound grief generated by the crisis neo-liberal politics and policies are creating as they move beyond the poorest and most marginalised persons to encompass the middle class

of academics, professionals and social sector workers. These are dark times indeed, for many more than just a few. Secondly, our story draws attention to the fact that social movements in and of themselves are not always progressive or making for a world that many of us may feel would be better. Religious intolerance, misogynist principles, restrictions of human rights, racism and exclusion are the stuff or catalysts of movements such as the Tea Party in the USA, the Neo-Nazi movements in parts of Europe as well as all religious fundamentalist movements world-wide. Thirdly, our story tells us that within movements that work contrary to a better, more just, sustainable and equitable world, the arts and other popular educational activities we use or put into practice are being appropriated.

The theorizing we offer in this collection aims to deepen our understanding of the rich interaction of education, learning, teaching and action; a world of social movement learning that builds on the ideas of all the movements and intellectuals who have gone before us in the pursuit of an engaged and democratic life. This book in fact offers something that the above anecdote could not do as the setting of that story was within the more limited professional academic spaces where scholars share ideas amongst themselves; spaces that are not in and of themselves, social movements. This collection of studies and reflections recognises yet goes beyond a sense of hopelessness and emotional inertia we encountered, to give visibility to rich and varied stories of how ordinary people in literally every part of the world are resisting, organising and learning to overcome a world that we do not like but have no recipe to change.

Our book is about shack dwellers in South Africa, about the struggle for an authentic educational system that has meaning in Austria, about the political ecology of environmental movements in India and Scotland, about Raymond Williams and Antonio Gramsci as resources of hope, about the lessons of 40 years of popular education in Latin America, about the positive yet challenged role of the arts in social movements, about feeding the imagination for a new world in South Africa, about the use of film in building capacity within movements, about social media in the Egyptian revolution and the Occupy Wall Street movements, about privileging knowledge from grass roots movements over professional civil society networks in Asia, and about how learning by one person in one organic farm is connected to a global vision of the relationship of humans to the rest of nature.

We hope that readers will see as we do that one powerful contribution to social movement learning is the rendering visible of the extraordinary scope, diversity, range of actors, breadth of means and methods and indefatigable energy of those who are immersed in the educational work, the teaching and learning, the formal and informal sharing and knowledge-making that is the world of social movement education and learning. We believe that this book, when read through the combined lens of the chapters, offers new insights into the theories of how social movements work, deeper insights into the theory and practice of adult education in context of political struggle, and new resources for hope.

THE CHAPTERS

Equality, Anne Harley argues in the first chapter of this volume, *We are poor, but not stupid*, has to be the basis for educational engagement with social movements if the experience is to be one of liberation. Her argument draws mainly on the visceral experience of social movements of the poor and disposed who have experienced the hardships of a neo-liberal road to (market) freedom in post-apartheid South Africa. Six activists, three from a shack dwellers movement and three from a rural network that connects local struggles for protecting people's rights, produced their own book – *Living Learning* – which was based on their experiences and reflection during a course on participatory development that Harley co-ordinates. The author also uses the view on equality argued by Jacque Ranciere, in his account of *The Ignorant Schoolteacher*. Unless critical education is premised on equality, in the sense of accepting that everyone counts and everyone thinks, it will result in an unintended exercise of domestication. Increasingly, however, demands to increase student numbers and introduce more selective entrance requirements threaten to undermine this work by filtering out the poorly educated who have been the target students for this provision.

Elisabeth Steinklammer's chapter, *Learning to resist: Hegemonic practice, informal learning and social movements,* takes us to Austria where there has been widespread resistance "from below" against the underfunding and re-structuring of education in particular and neo-liberalism in general. Her chapter, presented through the lens of critical theoretical notions of power and hegemony, revolves around the questions of what can be learnt by participating in the protests. Steinklammer argues that in order to sustain hegemonic order, people must internalise and thereby adopt such practices. But critical practices of resistance education, as she illustrates through various examples, have the power to openly encourage struggle and resistance by providing spaces for critical social and self reflection and learning where diverse social movement actors can develop collective, political strategies and new forms of cooperation.

The organic intellectuals of subordinate social groups, such as those Harley's works with are also the focus of Jim Crowther and Emilio Lucio-Villegas' chapter entitled *Reconnecting Intellect and Feeling*, where they develop an account of educational work in communities by drawing from the interrelated analyses of Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams. In the context of a crisis of democracy, where there are no fundamental political alternatives posed to the politics and policies of austerity and where a discourse of the common good has withered, the hope for a better future for all has to be developed with and through communities of endurance and struggle. Only a radical democratic project of cultural renewal from the 'bottom up' will provide the intellectual and practical resources, as well as inspiration for social transformation. The authors argue that radical education has a role to play, not in terms of acting as a substitute for organic intellectuals, but by helping to sustain and deepen the dialectical relationship between activist community leaders and their social base. Too often education acts as a siphoning off process, which weakens resistance rather than

enhances it. Their argument is illustrated by drawing on examples of 'participatory budget' projects with local social movements in Seville.

Building on evidence from learning in environmental justice movements in Scotland and India, Eurig Scandrett in his chapter *Social Learning in Environmental Justice* argues that the theoretical approach of political ecology allows us to understand these struggles, not as disparate, restrictive, 'not-in-my-back-yard' local campaigns nor as peripheral forms of environmentalism, but as a distinctive species of social contestation in the conditions of production as well as new forms of accumulation by dispossession and resistance to it. Emergent social movement activity generates dialectical processes between subaltern knowledges and values and their incommensurable dominant and canonical opposites, the latter of which are increasingly commodified. These processes, which ascertain what constitutes 'really useful' knowledge for a project of subaltern emancipation, occur in formal, popular and incidental forms of education in which professional educators may have a limited role.

Forty Years of Popular Education in Latin America is Liam Kane's insightful chapter of lessons from that particularly rich vein of education and social movement experience. Indeed, taking education seriously is a *sine qua non* for learning from Latin America. The idea that 'all education is political' is as relevant in the North, as the South, though it comes with the warning to continually ensure dialogue between 'expert' and 'grassroots' knowledge and enable people to become subjects of change, not followers of leaders. From Freire's approach to teaching literacy to participatory techniques, to Boal's 'theatre of the oppressed', Kane argues that Latin America has produced imaginative ways of putting the principles of popular education into practice. Many have already been adapted for use throughout the world and are an invaluable contribution to the toolkit of would-be activist-educators. Kane also argues that importantly, Latin American academics work with social movements, lending their specialist knowledge as a response to a curriculum dictated by movements.

Like Kane, Astrid von Kotze focuses on the concept of popular education and how it encourages activism. However, she takes a turn towards the imagination. *Composting the imagination in popular education,* and explores how 'popular education schools' in South Africa use creative practices to address issues of inequality, violence and abuse, crime and fear, economic hardship and silence and social marginalisation. The schools, part of a larger popular education programme, provide spaces for creative dialogue and critical reflection. But as von Kotze argues and illustrates, the clearly 'utopian' and most promising vision of radical change comes from tapping into and re-valuing the creative and imaginative faculties of the people of South Africa. She recognises, however, that this work takes courage and a strong sense of determination in order to provide alternative visions of the homeland.

Darlene E. Clover's chapter on *Aesthetics, society and social movement learning* sets the stage for understanding the potential and challenges of the creative learning aspects of social movements. She begins with a discussion of critical standpoints around the place of art in society and in particular, in relation to

knowledge and learning, emphasising complex metaphysical and epistemological considerations that have shaped – positively or negatively – contemporary aesthetic discourses, judgements and debates. Using two feminist aspects of cultural political discourse – political art and activist art – she explores two examples of cultural interactions in Canada. Clover's chapter highlights some of the primary education and learning dimensions by women and men who, she argues, work so imaginatively and courageously to create and re-create visions of a more just and sustainable world.

Stephen Brookfield's, *Radical Aesthetics: Ken Loach as social movement educator* argues that the work of filmmaker Ken Loach is an example of an aesthetic that ruptures the dominant consciousness that makes possible the dimension of liberation. Whilst this is intrinsic to Loach's approach to film making and significant throughout his artistic output, Brookfield mines one particular sequence from his 1995 film *Land and Freedom.* The film is set in the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s and the sequence, known as 'the Decision', portrays a debate amongst villagers who have just been liberated from Franco's forces, and members of the international militia who have liberated them. The conflicts over revolutionary ideals, pragmatic compromises and diverse personal aspirations are expounded in a shared spirit of collective emancipation and solidarity that, Brookfield argues, provides fertile material for the work of social movement educators.

Hall in his contribution, *A Giant Human Hashtag: Learning and the #Occupy Movement*, examines the role of social media as an element in the radical pedagogies of #OWS, the Occupy Wall Street movement, and delves more deeply into the pedagogical principles which characterised the movement during its initial physical occupational phase. Hall argues that while democratic knowledge and learning frameworks are extremely helpful in understanding the impact and power of any social movement, the Occupy movement has drawn more attention to the processes of learning, to collective thinking, to active listening and to the creation of new physical, intellectual and political educational spaces, than movements that have preceded it. As with all social movements formal, non-formal and informal learning, structured and experiential education happen both inside and outside of the #OWS movement. Although not without its challenges, key characteristics of the occupy pedagogies include People's Assemblies, the role of space in the occupation, facilitation methods for large-scale groups, the importance of listening, non-ideological discourse, direct action encased within the goal of creating new collective thinking. The #OWS movement has given visibility to the role of movement intellectuals and movement theorists, as well as anarchist scholars, in building the narratives of the movement.

Building Counter-Power From the Ground Up allows Aziz Choudry, an activist scholar with direct involvement in the Indian social movement scene, to reflect upon tensions over learning and knowledge production in international non-governmental organisation (NGO) and social movement networks contesting global free market capitalism, known as the 'global justice movement'. He discusses aspects of NGO/social movement activist networks opposing the Asia-

Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum during the 1990s, and more recent activism against bilateral free trade and investment agreements, (FTAs) in the Asia-Pacific region. Choudry compares and contrasts the dominant forms of professionalised NGO knowledge/action with knowledge/action emerging from grounded social struggles, and critiques the trend towards the NGOisation/NGO management of social change with particular focus on its knowledge/learning implications. The chapter argues that movements can create counter-power and radical alternatives to the prevailing world order by looking beyond dominant models of transnational NGO-driven campaigns and modes of action towards grounded local struggles against global capitalism.

Catherine Etmanski in her chapter, *Inch by Inch, Row by Row*, draws on her experience of working as a volunteer on organic farms in the Canadian province of British Columbia. The modern organic agriculture movement constitutes a social movement in response to the dominance of the agrochemical industry, and its praxis incorporates experimentation and knowledge generation in crop growing and animal husbandry. These skills, knowledge and culture are passed on through informal educational work to volunteer apprentices and activists such as Etmanski. Analyzing the complexity of learning and knowledge generation inherent in this praxis, she explores its practical, technological, philosophical, political, psychological, gendered and spiritual dimensions and makes a case for the organic movement as a source of education for social justice.

CRITIQUE, RESIST, CREATE

Edmund O'Sullivan, a Canadian radical education theorist whose work on transformative learning shares much in common with the authors in this volume speaks of three educational moments; moments of critique, resistance and creation (1999). In naming these as three identifiable moments, he is not suggesting that they are independent of each other or even separate in time, although that is possible. He is saying that we have a responsibility when theorising or practising educational work within a social movement context to be aware of the responsibility for attending to, rendering visible, or acknowledging these distinct yet inter-weaving functions. These are not to be understood as linear concepts, but rather as existing in the world of social movement life in a combined and mixed discourse that may begin with create, return to resistance, then on to critique and back again in a kind of dance or poetic state.

Each of our pieces begins within a deep sense of urgency and concern for the fates of the majority of people on this planet and in some cases, as with Scandrett, Clover and Etmanski, with the fate of the earth itself. Poverty and exclusion amongst South African shack dwellers and urban poor are highlighted in the Harley and von Kotze chapters. Malone's chapter calls into question the years of undemocratic rule in Egypt whilst Crowther and Lucio-Villegas call forth the contemporarity of Marxist and Gramscian critiques of capital. Hall's chapter gives visibility to the meme of the #OWS movement, the treachery of the 1 per cent in the face of the 99 per cent and particularly, the role of finance capital.

Steinklammer's chapter begins with the impact of neo-liberal private market approaches to shutting down democratic spaces within public education in Austria, a concern that is found in other jurisdictions of course.

Harley's activist intellectuals, and Choudary's subaltern Indian activists are resisting the appropriation of grassroots knowledge creation by intermediate level civil society organisations, let alone academics. Given the savage destruction of the land, which accompanies capitalist resource extraction, resistance to ecological biocide has to be at the heart of environmental movements as Etmanski and Scandrett illustrate through examples from Canada, Scotland and India. Hall and Malone, among other things, show how the social media are being used by contemporary revolutionary and democracy movements to resist manipulation by mainstream media and corporatist domination of the narratives of struggles.

The *create* function maybe the most powerful of the moments that comes from a reflection on our combined work. Our work taken as a whole represents a fresh and unique weaving together of a very rich and diverse variety including fresh interpretations of Gramsci and Williams (Crowther and Lucio-Villegas), voices of political ecology (Scandrett), feminists aesthetics and activist arts (Clover), subaltern and grassroots intellectuals (Choudry, Hall and Harley), Latin American scholars (Kane), the film maker Ken Loach (Brookfield), anarchists (Malone), and organic farmers (Etmanski). The ability to draw from such a broad and diverse base of theoretical perspectives underpins what many believe to be the strongest contribution of social movement learning to the world of political struggle and social movement dynamics: an understanding of radical, democratic and transformative methods and processes which aim to create new spaces for personal, local and global change. Education within and without social movements is a space of pedagogical exuberance and creativity coupled with critique. Each chapter illustrates different aspects of this from the use of theatre and quilting in Clover, the social media in Malone and Hall, to organic farming in Etmanski, to the activists courses by Von Kotze and Harley, to the film for Brookfield, to the act of political action for Scandrett and Choudry and to the creation of new cultural spaces for Crowther and Lucio-Villegas.

Finally the narratives in this volume combine to tell us about the most important role of social movement learning, making hope possible, composting the imagination, building counter-power from the ground up, doing the *hokey cokey* (Kane) with the State when possible, creating new knowledge about the world we want and new pathways to obtain another possible future. Our work calls for the right to a new utopia, a new imaginative vision of a better world, and provides links to many of the rich ways women and men all over the world are doing it right now.

Tweeting History tells the story of how in January and February 2011, Mark Malone used his position as a postgraduate student, radical journalist and activist in Ireland to support those in the front line of the initial stages of the Egyptian revolution. Using social media such as Twitter, Facebook and blogs, with embedded photographs and video, which were being sent from Tahrir Square, Malone demonstrates the important role, which these technologies can play in

social movement mobilisation and praxis. However, he rejects the technological determinism of some commentators and draws on Gramsci to analyse social media as a site of struggles over narratives, meanings and political economy with opportunities for emancipatory struggle as much as for authoritarian and corporate repression.

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SECTION 1

HISTORICISING AND THEORISING, MOVEMENT EDUCATION AND LEARNING

ANNE HARLEY

1. "WE ARE POOR, NOT STUPID"[1]: LEARNING FROM AUTONOMOUS GRASSROOTS SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

Social movements are seen as important for social change. Some argue that the "new social movements" have replaced the working class as the historical agents of revolutionary change (Scott, 1990), and they critique Marxism for failing to account for the rise of social movements, currently "the most visible form of struggle", according to Holst (2002, p. 75). Slater (1985), writing before the advent of leftist governments in Latin America, argued that social movements might play the role that Gramsci had proposed for the working class in the (counter-hegemonic) 'war of position', including the belief that change was possible:

> In countries like Brazil and Argentina with relatively densely-structured civil societies a war of position is indispensable and the radical democratic struggles of the new social movements provide a crucial contribution to just such a 'war'...in the palpable absence of more immediate prospects of radical transformation of state power, new social movements generate new sources of political hope. And optimism of the will can invariably attenuate pessimism of the intellect (Slater, 1985, pp. 18–19).

Others, including Marxists, argue that social movements offer an important alternative to the politics of the state. Allman and Mayo (1997), for example, question the contemporary efficacy of Gramsci's focus on the nation state, in the light of current leverage of international capital over the modern state. Rather, they believe that the 'historic bloc' needs to be larger than the state – some kind of alliance of international movements: "Can progressive social movements...serve as an important vehicle in this regard?" (p. 8).

Adult education (even radical adult education), however, took some time to recognise the significance of social movements for the field. Although by the early 1990s a modest debate had emerged about the implications for adult education of the new social movements (Finger, 1989; Welton, 1993), serious academic engagement with its implications really only emerged after the mid-1990s. Holford (1995), argued that social movement theory provided the basis for "a radically new understanding of the relationship between adult education and the generation of knowledge", but had had very little impact on adult education theory (p. 95).

Since then there has been increasing interest in social movements by those within the radical tradition of adult education (Kilgore, 1999; Hake, 2000; Kane, 2001; Holst, 2002; Choudry 2009, Choudry and Kapoor, 2010). Much of this work has centred on knowledge and knowledge production – for example, Holford has drawn on Eyerman and Jamison's (1991) arguments about social movements as sites of knowledge production to argue that this is important for adult education "by enabling us to 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" (Holford, 1995, p. 101). Despite this, Choudry (2009) argues that our understanding of the politics and processes of knowledge and theory production within and by social movements is still limited, and that this knowledge and theory itself tends to be undervalued:

> ...even in many supposedly alternative milieus, voices, ideas – and, indeed, theories – produced by those actually engaged in social struggles are often ignored, rendered invisible, or overwritten with accounts by professionalized or academic experts (p. 5).

It is in this context that I wish to explore the thinking and theorising of movement militants in South Africa, and the implications of this for those of us attempting to practice radical adult education within universities.

'LIVING LEARNING'

During the course of 2008, six militants[2] from two South African social movements met every month to reflect on what they were learning through the struggle they were engaged in as social movement actors, and what they were learning as participants in a Certificate-level course at the local university. They called these sessions 'Living learning'. Their reflections were written up after each session, and published in late 2009 as *Living Learning* (Figlan et al., 2009).

'Living learning' was intended partly as a space to reflect on what and how to take back the things that the militants, mandated by their movements to attend the course, had learned in the classrooms of the academy:

> For a living learning, the critical question was always how best to take back to our communities whatever we might gain?; how best can our communities benefit from the few of us who are lucky to have access to the course?; how will we utilise the academic skills we can gain?; how do we take this information back? It has always been the task of a synthesis and a breaking down of the University theory so that we can work out properly what we can learn from it – and so we can understand for ourselves in what way it is different from the daily learning of struggle and life emijondolo [in the shacks] or eplasini [on the farms] (Figlan et al., 2009, p. 7).

But, significantly, 'Living learning' was also about how to combine the university of struggle and the academic university, and indeed 'disrupt' the academic university:

> Living Learning is about what's happening in and outside of the University classroom. So we are trying to combine the two universities – the one of experience and the one of academics (p. 7)...Our task is to plough what we can learn back into the struggles and structures of the movements – and vice versa: to plough the learnings from the struggle back into the University course process (p. 12)...We have work to do at the University too because it is clear that, without us who are from the movements being there, another agenda would be imposed (p. 49).

Publishing their reflections was thus a political act, intended not simply to allow others engaged in struggle to learn from their reflections, but to consciously critique the assumption that knowledge is generated only in the academy:

> Publishing a booklet out of our Living Learning could also be there for those 'smarter' people to learn from the 'fools' (p. 7).

THE MOVEMENTS

Whilst much of the dominant discourse about South Africa involves some kind of 'miracle' in its transition from apartheid to 'Rainbow Nation', South Africa's recent experience has been roughly similar to any other peripheral 'developing' country. Patrick Bond, in his *Elite transition* (2000), showed how the transition from apartheid to democracy included a "...transition from a popular-nationalist anti-apartheid project to official neoliberalism – by which is meant adherence to free market economic principles, bolstered by the narrowest practical definition of democracy (not the radical participatory project many ANC cadres had expected) – over an extremely short period of time" (p. 1). Now, "Freedom is the freedom to pay for food and for housing" (Gibson, 2006, p. 6). Michael Neocosmos (2007, p. 3) similarly argues that "South Africa is...probably the most consistently political neo-liberal of the African countries, at least it is so in the eyes of the Empire, as the latter regularly sets it up as a model for the continent".

Thus, like many other postcolonial countries which adopted the Washington Consensus, South Africa has seen the rich get richer, and the poor poorer, and the gap between the two grow, with increasing unemployment, disconnections from hard-fought-for water and electricity, and evictions (Gibson, 2006, pp. 2–3). The class structure within the country has been de-racialised and thus 'normalised', and the vast economic inequalities have been made to appear natural (Ibid). By the mid-2000s, South Africa was experiencing an "unprecedented process of self-enrichment by the new [black] elite" (Hlatshwayo, 2008, p. 214).

Gramsci (1971) argued there would always be resistance to hegemony; and so there has been in South Africa. Social movements have played an important role in this project. The first wave of post-apartheid social movements[3] was primarily a response to the neo-liberal policies introduced by the ANC government in 1996

(Gibson, 2006). Gibson argues this was particularly because organised labour failed to successfully challenge the new neoliberal policies and their inevitable social results. However, already by 2005 there was a "drastic reduction in social movement visibility [of these movements]", ascribed by leading movement intellectuals to the fact that they had not managed to make concrete links with the popular uprisings beginning to occur at community level all over the country (Hlatshwayo, 2008, p. 219). This failure to connect is largely a reflection on the fact that these 'first wave' movements, to borrow from feminism, were created by middle-class, vanguardist activists of the largely Trotskyite-left.

This 'second wave' of social movements emerged in the mid-2000s, at a time of local rebellions which displayed a 'self-consciousness of the poor' (Gibson, 2006, pp. 8, 10). These revolts, according to Gibson and others, are revolts of 'the obedient' – those who have waited patiently for more than a decade after the end of apartheid for their lives to improve (p. 11). The two social movements who mandated members to attend the course, the Rural Network and *Abahlali baseMjondolo* ('the people of the shacks'), are part of this second wave, but are notably different, in that, although consistently 'local' in the sense of taking up concrete historical struggles of real people in real places, they consciously and consistently avoid any parochial localism.

The Rural Network was founded in 2008 to connect various local struggles against violations of the rights of people living in rural areas. Colonialism and apartheid resulted in less than 20% of land in South Africa belonging to black African people. After 1994, the new constitution guaranteed private property; and the redistribution of land has been minimal (Lahiff, 2008). Thus most black African rural dwellers live either on tribal authority land held by the state (the ex-'homelands' of apartheid), or as insecure workers and tenants on largely white-owned commercial farmland. Struggles include resisting evictions, dealing with assaults and murders (by land owners, private security units as well as the State), and fighting a systematic bias against the poor in the workings of the criminal justice system and other state organs.

Abhlali baseMjondolo is a social movement of shackdwellers who live in what are often called 'informal settlements', places where people have built for themselves houses made of whatever comes to hand – mud, sticks, pieces of plastic, cardboard, corrugated iron. *Abahlali* grew organically out of struggle; it first emerged out of a road blockade by residents of the Kennedy Road shack settlement in the middle-class suburb of Clare Estate in Durban. The Kennedy Road settlement has existed for over 30 years. On Saturday morning, 21st March 2005, 700 people from Kennedy Road blockaded a major thoroughfare for four hours when they discovered that land nearby, which had been promised to them by the local ANC councillor, had been leased to a brick manufacturing company. Police with dogs and teargas ended the protest; 14 people were arrested (Bryant, 2006).

Twelve hundred people from the settlement subsequently marched to the local police station, where the 14 were being held. The crowd insisted that "if they are criminal, we are all criminal", and should thus also be arrested (Bryant, 2006,

p. 54). Two weeks later, 3000 people from Kennedy Road, as well as people from five other shack settlements in the area, marched on the local councillor, and in September, over 5 000 people, now constituted as *Abahlali baseMjondolo* (AbM), again marched on the councillor, telling him that he no longer represented them (Bryant, 2006).

By the end of 2005, 16 settlements had affiliated to the movement (AbM 2005), and by the end of the following year, another 20 had joined (AbM, 2006). The organisation currently has 10,000 members in 64 different shack settlements – 49 in KwaZulu-Natal and 15 in the Western Cape (AbM, 2011). Then in 2008, *Abahlali* and the Rural Network joined with two other South African social movements, the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign and the Landless People's Movement (Gauteng Province), to form the Poor People's Alliance.

At the beginning of 2007, AbM and the Rural Network each sent two elected representatives to attend the Certificate in Education (Participatory Development) (CEPD), offered by the Centre for Adult Education of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (and which I have co-ordinated since 2007). The militants were mandated to attend and bring back what they had learned to the movements.

THE COURSE

The CEPD is a two-year, part-time programme, targeting adults already involved in some kind of community education or development, and in particular those from the poorest and most marginalised of communities in and around the city of Pietermaritzburg and beyond. The students thus bring with them considerable experience and insight to their university learning. The dialogic engagement with these students is thus a learning encounter both for the students and for the university (Harley and Rule, forthcoming).

Certificate students are usually considerably older than most students, and in many cases their secondary formal education was of a poor standard so that they do not have the necessary qualifications to enter a university. For this reason, the CEPD is an access programme, which allows students to enter with less than the usual qualifications required for entry into the University. The programme has the following key objectives:

1. To develop skilled practitioners working in the field of adult education and community development, particularly in marginalised communities;
2. To enable access to students who would not normally be allowed into the University as a result of their prior education level;
3. To enable access to students who would normally find it difficult to access a University education because of: financial difficulty, by providing financial support; distance from the university campus, by running the programme on a part-time basis so students only have to attend once a week.

The programme is strongly influenced by a constructivist understanding of education, as well as by adult education theory and practice, in particular that of David Kolb and Paulo Freire. The programme thus uses a learner-centred,

participatory pedagogy in keeping with the principles of experiential learning and critical education. The intensive and interactive nature of this pedagogy means, inter alia, that only a limited number of students can be taken in each year, despite a considerable demand. It is this pedagogy, however, that allows for the kind of dialogic engagement which we think significantly contributes to the success of the programme.

By 2007, when the first movement comrades entered the programme, the CEPD had been running in its current format for six years, although the curriculum continues to develop to ensure its relevance to the learners and the broader social context.

As the current academic co-ordinator of the programme, I would like to believe that it falls within the radical tradition of adult education, in that it consciously aims to tackle issues of injustice and inequality; it makes the political nature of all education overt; it focuses on change at the roots of the system, rather than on the symptoms (Mayo, 1994); it tries to provide useful skills and knowledge; to develop a critical understanding of power and of agency (Foley, 2004); and to connect the local and the global (Crowther, Galloway and Martin, 2005). However, in considering the militants' reflections, it is clear to me that the programme falls short in certain critical respects.

LEARNING FROM THE MILITANTS

Learning About Knowledge and Education

The programme includes in its aims, in its pedagogy, and in its curriculum, a clear bias towards a Freirean understanding of education. Students are specifically taught the basic tenets of Freire, and it is clear from **Living Learning** that the social movement militants found many of Freire's ideas useful because they connect productively with their own thinking and experiences.

Thus the militants start from assumption that education is never innocent. "It is clear now that education is always biased; it has an ideology and a bias. So when we engage with it, our task is to fight to take it back and make it work for us" (Figlan et al., 2009, p. 24). The need to "fight to take it back" arises from the fact that much education is, to use Paulo Freire's (1996) phrase, for domestication. However, the militants use this term themselves, but they also use Figlan et al's (2009) terms 'mind dispossession' and 'mental abuse':

> We see that education is mostly used to control people and keep power for the powerful – but we can disrupt this. This requires us to analyse what kind of education is going on – is it there to make us 'good boys and girls' or is it helping to make us question things and make that part of our struggle to change the world? (Figlan, et al., p. 20).

However, for them a critical aspect of education for control is not simply that it is trying to create "good boys and girls", but that it equates 'education' with 'knowledge'; and then divides people, assuming that those with 'education' are

those with 'knowledge', and thus those without education have nothing to say and nothing to teach. "Education can sometimes destroy our struggle – when education makes leaders think of the people that they come from as the 'uneducated' ones, those who 'do not understand'" (p. 9). Universities are greatly complicit in this:

> From what we have seen, there are many at University who think that they are there to learn what to come and 'teach the poor' when they are finished studying. It is clear that they imagine they are our educators. They assume we are empty enough and stupid enough for others to learn what *they* decide, and that they will come and think for those of us who are poor and cannot think (p. 19).

But, even more problematic, the "systems [that] try to keep us silent" (p. 39), in their analysis, include those that are apparently on the side of the struggle – those who claim to speak and act on behalf of the poor and oppressed. Thus the militants expand Freire's conception of education for domestication versus education for liberation:

> We discussed for a bit whether this analysis of people's experiences shows that there are not simply two but maybe three kinds of education? Certainly there is 'education' that is imposed to keep the people suppressed and silent so that the status quo is not threatened. On the other side there is a liberating education that starts with the people's struggles to be fully human. But is there a special kind of 'education' in the middle – usually called 'capacity building' or 'political education' – that civil society organisations specialise in giving when people who are meant to be suppressed start to struggle against their oppression? This kind of education is done in the name of the poor and oppressed and is aiming to teach the language and rules of how to change your struggle so that it can be 'in order', following the protocols, thinking and expectations of the civil society people who want to claim to represent the people's struggles and interests (p. 47).

The movement militants are clear that their task is to question and disrupt this – not simply by analysing education, but by generating new knowledge, and new truth, themselves. This is something argued by Alain Badiou (2005), who says that when there is 'sustained investigation' (reflection) of an 'event' (something that points to the possibility of something different) and its implications, in other words an attempt to sustain the consequences of the event in thought, then there is the construction (not discovery) of truth, which leads to new knowledge:

> A truth punches a 'hole' in knowledges, it is heterogeneous to them, but it is also the sole known source of new knowledges. We shall say that the truth 'forces' knowledges (Badiou, 2005).

Thus Badiou makes a sharp distinction between truth and knowledge (Hallward, 2004, p. 1). He says that "...a truth is nothing other than the process that exposes and represents the void of a situation", the void being that which is not counted in

the situation, for example, the proletariat in a capitalist system and the shack dweller in a neoliberal system.

The militants make a similar distinction between knowledge and truth, with the 'truth' of a situation being precisely that which ruptures (extant) knowledge. Badiou argues that truth is both singular) (because it emerges from a particular situation), but also universal (because it is 'the same for all') (Badiou, 2005). The militants argue similarly, that truth is the universal in the thinking of the particular. The act of thinking experience, thinking struggle, is a collective *and universal* one. Indeed, "the thinking together of the oppressed who struggle can unmask [the systems that try to keep us silent] and create learning and alternatives for a better world and for the whole world, everyone" (Figlan et al., 2009, p. 39).

The act of generating new truth and new knowledge is thus itself disruptive, is a powerful political act. In ***Living Learning***, they discuss one important space for this within *Abahlali* – the 'night camps'. These monthly meetings start in the evening and will typically run throughout the night. Anyone can participate in these, anyone can speak, anyone can question. "We do it to generate knowledge together – and when we do that, we are also generating power together" (p. 20). But 'Living learning' itself was also such a space for generating new knowledge, of disruption, of 'being out of order':

> The kind of education and knowledge, the searching for truth that we are doing is too dangerous for the powerful. It has no formal 'syllabus' except the life and priorities of the people themselves...This kind of education and knowledge recognises that...'It is better to be out of order', to be outside the prescribed curriculum! We see clearly that the prescribed curriculum has the intention of control built deeply into it and that there are strings attached (p. 27).

In their understanding, then, 'being educated' is very different from the conception of universities and civil society, because education and knowledge are linked not separate or the same, and knowledge is about thinking experience, thinking struggle. "We are all educated. If I need to be educated about development, then the best educator is a real experience of development... [Elites] think we know nothing and must be taught. They think the people don't understand and therefore need education. We start from the opposite assumption" (pp. 46–47).

Learning About Pedagogy

Freire, like Gramsci, argued for a particular kind of pedagogy, a dialectical one where the teacher is also a learner, and the learner is also a teacher, because expertise and experience is shared and reflected on collectively (Freire, 1996; Mayo, 1999). In this pedagogy, what hooks (1994) calls 'engaged pedagogy', both teachers and learners are active participants, and there is an assumption that the teacher does not know it all, and that the students are not blank slates.

The programme uses this kind of pedagogy, a pedagogy that "is a matter of principle and purpose rather than mere technique" (Crowther, Galloway and

Martin, 2005, p. 6); and because it is targeting adult educators, specifically teaches this kind of pedagogy. This clearly resonated with the militants attending the course:

> What is important for real learning is to question and debate it – especially what is presented to you. This is a very different concept from what we were taught in school where 'teacher is always right'! Now we question giving the authority away to a 'teacher' – we can argue and debate. Only in this way can learning provide the possibility of finding different ways of doing things...We discussed how this idea can be connected to the thinking of the living politics of *Abahlali baseMjondolo*. It can stop us becoming arrogant as leaders of a movement because our experience in life and in the movement means that we must always remain open to debate, question, and new learning from and with the people" (Figlan et al., 2009, p. 18).

The militants specifically commented on the ways in which the programme practised what it taught (p. 21), in particular the need to respect the experiences and lives of others. "The right way of working with others respects their local struggles and their sufferings, and in no way undermines the people. This has been exactly how the facilitator of the course has approached us and our movements, struggles, experiences and opinions" (p. 41).

However, simply allowing space to share, respecting other people's experiences and knowledge, is not enough, and the militants directly challenge the notion that the teacher must always know more (Horton and Freire, 1990, p. 98). "So OK, the people need education of a certain kind but really: who must educate whom? The people living in the shacks and in the rural areas know their life, and those on the top must come down to learn from the people...Now to ask and to listen, that would be a liberating education!" (Figlan et al., 2009, p. 46). So 'those who suffer it must lead it'.

For the militants, then, knowledge, and universal truth, is created through the collective process of thinking struggle, led by those who suffer; and at this point of thinking, it is learned if this thinking is immediately acted on, through militant praxis:

> The kind of education we want involves people listening to each other. The learning we talk about is always a learning that is put into practice. At the same moment of learning, we apply it. To share it and apply it is what makes it a living learning. This is not an education to make individuals better in their individual jobs and careers – it is with the people (p. 48).

In this kind of ('out of order') education, there is thus a radical shift in the role of the teacher and the learner – no-one can teach if they are not engaged in the collective thinking of struggle and the praxis of this; no-one can learn if they are not engaged on the collective thinking of struggle and the praxis of this.

Learning About Curriculum

The programme was created in much the same way that all university programmes are created – through debate and discussion amongst academics, who then write down a curriculum 'template' to be reviewed by a variety of university committees before being approved. Depending on the individual academics and the particular configurations of power within the academy, such a procedure can allow space for radical content, but inherently risks varying degrees of dislocation from the spaces and 'curricula' of concrete struggle/s.

By contrast, the kind of education and knowledge that militants created and agitate for in 'Living learning' "has no formal 'syllabus' except the life and priorities of the people themselves...and recognises that...'It is better to be out of order', to be outside the prescribed curriculum" (Figlan et al., 2009, p. 27). Figlan et al go on to argue, as have many before, that a meaningful curriculum must provide 'really useful knowledge', in the sense that it "matches the theory with the reality of the life of the people" (p. 29). Such a curriculum must start with "critical thinking about the life of the people, starting to uncover and name the contradictions this shows against what the powerful want us to believe about our situation" (p. 25). "For the oppressed it becomes necessary that we get an education that allows people to see what is happening in their area, their world. So it must be relevant to our own context of life, and it must expose the reality of their oppression – we must really see the oppressor" (p. 34). Because it must start with the life of the people, with their experience, their struggle, and because this changes, there can never be a set curriculum.

Learning About Praxis

Clearly, a pivotal thrust in the militants' understanding of knowledge, learning and teaching is that of *praxis*, something which is a strong theme within radical education, drawing on Paulo Freire's work (Freire, 1996). For the militants, as for Freire, praxis is necessary for learning; for the militants precisely because truth erupts into a situation through emancipatory praxis. But it is also fundamental to the politics of their movements – you have to *do* what you are fighting *for*. "It is important to look after and put into practice in a disciplined and continuous way within our movements and our struggles exactly the kind of 'politics' and values that we want to achieve in the future we fight for" (Figlan et al., 2009, p. 21). In **Living learning** they talk about what this praxis entails within their movements:

> The first thing is always to ask the views of the members. Only then can we begin to strategise. And when we ask the people's views, this is done with deep respect and to encourage sharing (p. 15)...Debate in our struggles is very important as we are learning how to be democratic (p. 22).

Doing what it is you are fighting for begins to create that thing. AbM runs a campaign each year targeting what is called in South Africa "Freedom Day" – the anniversary of the first democratic elections in the country. They call this day

'Unfreedom Day', and use it to highlight the many ways in which the poor, in particular, are not free. They devoted one of the 'Living learning' sessions to a discussion about Unfreedom Day, and the praxis involved in organising it. As part of the process, *Abahlali* members went to the people in each shack settlement "to listen to their thinking" about freedom and the realities of their lived experience. "We need an open debate about notions of freedom, especially when so much of the people's lives is a contradiction to freedom" (p. 26). This praxis, they insist, not only disrupts the claims of freedom, which is not, but actually begins to create freedom, which is. "It might be a taste of freedom in itself to do this. So this space of discussion and listening is a small but important part of freedom – the freedom that comes from searching for the truth" (p. 26).

LEARNING AND TEACHING OUT OF ORDER

As stated above, I would like to believe that the CEPD is 'radical' in its intent, content and pedagogy. Of course, simply including radical adult education theorists such as Freire in the curriculum is no guarantee of radicalism, as Zacharakis-Jutz (1988) points out. On the whole, the militants appear to find at least some of the theorists that are discussed in the course useful to their struggle; and are fairly complimentary about some aspects of the course, including its pedagogy. Thus in their experience of this programme the academic university is not necessarily entirely useless. In their reflections, the militants discussed two universities – the university of struggle, and the academic university. They argued that although these were often mutually exclusive, this did not have to be the case:

> Perhaps we can talk of achieving the 'Universal University' – invading the academic one in order for it to benefit the people (Figlan et al., 2009, p. 59).

Their criticisms of the academy, and those who learn there, tend not to be directed at the course (although there are moments when they are overtly critical of certain lecturers). However, in what the militants have to say, discussed above, it is clear to me that there are a number of (interrelated) fundamental arguments that they make that require reflection:

1. The issue of praxis

As noted above, the relationship between praxis and knowledge and learning is something that is emphasised in radical adult education. Freire (in Horton and Freire, 1990, p. 98), says "Without practice there's no knowledge"; Foley (2001, p. 86) writes "We learn as we act". These hold true as much within the academy as out of it:

> ...a commitment to praxis must remain at the core of the relationship between popular education and the academy. And praxis in popular education – whatever its difficulties in the context of the academy – must be not only about learning in order to act but also learning from action, even when it fails (Crowther, Galloway and Martin, 2005, p. 7).

As we have seen, the social movement militants argue that truth is created out of thinking about the struggle together in militant praxis, although "those who suffer it, must lead it" – it's not enough for someone, no-matter how much they care, or how 'radical' they are, to simply come and talk to the people:

> Paulo Freire emphasised that it is up to the oppressed people to do their own thing to liberate themselves. So even if you are an 'animator' and you want to come and help, you must recognise that the people are the ones who know about their situation. Some people who know more things from academic learning oppress us by saying, more or less, 'you know nothing – so do as I tell you'. This is how education maintains the existing order (Figlan et al., 2009, p. 34).

In the classroom of the CEPD, although there is some space to talk about struggle (but not much to think it – see below), there's really no space to act this thinking. Some of us, as lecturers, are involved in various struggles inside and outside the university; but these remain largely unrelated to what's going on in the class; and we're not involved in the struggles of the students attending the class. At best, we use certain accounts of certain struggles for students to reflect on. And as Hurtado (2007) warns "As soon as I divorce existing knowledge from the act of creating knowledge, I tend to accept existing knowledge as an accomplished fact and to transfer it to those who do not know" (p. 66). However, some of us at least have tried to retain a fidelity to the axiomatic prescriptive character of the praxis demanded by the truth the militants reveal. If the militants and their movements should not speak, but speak, and speak the truth that everyone matters, then that axiom is there to be taken up by everyone everywhere – no less by academics in universities. As an axiomatic truth, it is utterly indifferent to anyone's 'objective' situation and interests – it is simply to be enacted – again, no less in the classrooms of the university than in the face of the police on the streets. Being universal truth it creates the possibility of entirely militant academic praxis.

Part of this praxis is that you have to do what you're fighting for; as I understand it, this means you have to do what you are teaching. So if you are teaching radical education, you have to do it. If you are teaching social change, you have to do it. In their book, *Popular Education: Engaging the Academy* (2005), Crowther, Galloway and Martin argue (and show) how it is possible to radicalise our intellectual work inside universities; but, they concede, this isn't always easy; and praxis is particularly difficult, not least because of the current trends within universities. At one point towards the end of the year (and the end of the programme for some of them), one of the militants pointed to the deep contradiction between the militant praxis of the movements and that of the university: "How can we receive the certificate? Is it in the name of those who sent us? Or is it for me? If it is for me, then that is stealing from the people" (Figlan et al., 2009, p. 60).

2. Knowledge is created through thinking together in struggle: we "listen to their thinking".

It is true that the CEPD curriculum tries to be relevant, and tries to include issues of power and agency and struggle; but the basic framework and architecture of the course is set, and is set by academics. It is true that we acknowledge, even emphasise, that our students come to us with experience and knowledge about that experience, and the pedagogy we use is there to help people share that. It is also true that some us accept the truth that everyone matters, and we try to act that. But "listening to their thinking"?

Gramsci tells us:

A philosophy of praxis cannot but present itself at the outset in a polemical and critical guise, as superseding the existing mode of thinking and existing concrete thought...First of all, therefore, it must be a criticism of 'common sense' basing itself entirely, however, on common sense in order to demonstrate that 'everyone' is a philosopher (Gramsci, 1971, p. 330).

One of the most fundamental tenets of *Abahlalism* (the name used by the *Abahlali baseMjondolo* movement to refer to its ideology and praxis) is, as Gramsci (1971), Fanon (2001) and Freire (1996) asserted, that everyone thinks and everyone is an intellectual. Freire argues that "if the people cannot be trusted, there is no reason for liberation" (cited in Kane, 2001, p. 39), an idea which Liam Kane (2001) says is "something which is completely ignored or forgotten by much of the organised left throughout the world" (p. 39), but which has been an absolutely consistent theme of the movement since its inception. In a documentary made about the Kennedy Road blockade shortly after it happened, an *Abahlali* member, Nonhlanhla Mzobe says, "We think. People must understand that we think". As we have seen, it is thinking that creates universal truth, and new knowledge. Very early on, one of the banners carried by Kennedy Road residents read "University of Kennedy Road"; and by the march of 14 November 2005, "University of *Abahlali baseMjondolo*".

People who can think (i.e. everyone) have something to say, to teach; and are perfectly able to do this for themselves. Thus one of the movement's consistent demands has been that they be allowed to speak for themselves (from fairly early on, *Abahlali* began using the phrase "Talk to us, not for us" (Zikode, 2006c, p. 7)); and one of their consistent criticisms of government and of civil society (and of academics!) has been that they attempt to speak for them.

In his speech to a forum in March 2006, then President of the movement, S'bu Zikode, criticised the role of civil society, and intellectuals in particular:

Our masses are not just bodies without land and housing and bodies marching on the street. We can be poor materially, but we are not poor in mind...Some of the intellectuals understand that we think our own struggle. Others still don't understand this (Zikode, 2006a).

Abahlali have long recognised that it is precisely this assertion that they think, and that they have a right to speak and be listened to, that is most threatening to hegemony; as Zikode wryly remarked in mid-2006, "The state comes for us when

we try to say what we think" (Zikode, 2006b),[4] not when the state was needed because of, for example, the emergency of shack fires. This is because "We are the people that are not meant to think" (Zikode, 2008a).[5]

If everyone thinks, then, profoundly, everyone is already equal. "We start from the recognition that we are all equal. We do not struggle to achieve equality. We struggle for the recognition of the equality that already exists" (Zikode, 2008b). "A left politics that starts from the view that everyone matters and that everyone thinks, moves from the assumption of the immediate equality of all people...A left politics that starts from the view that everyone matters but that not everyone is ready to think takes the view that equality is something that will be achieved after a long struggle" (Gibson, Harley and Pithouse, 2009, pp. 77–78). I think our programme has been guilty of the latter – that we have been too ready to teach other thinkers, other theorists, to our students, rather than assume they can do it themselves.

3. The issue of pedagogy

One of the theorists that the militants mention in passing in **Living learning** is Jaques Ranciere, a theorist not discussed in the official Certificate curriculum at all. Ranciere, like Freire, Fanon, Gramsci and *Abahlali*, moves from the assumption that "there is no social actor, no matter how insignificant, who is not at the same time a thinking being" (1991, p. 34). But Ranciere (and *Abahlali*) take this further. He is preoccupied with the consideration of the relationship between knowledge and the masses (Ross, 1991). Much of his work was to document experiences and voices of early-nineteenth century workers who claimed the right to think; and who critiqued the claims of bourgeois observers and intellectuals to know and speak for the worker. Ranciere argues that the basis for the educational theories of such nominally leftist and 'radical' writers such as Bourdieu and Althusser is inequality:

> But what if equality, instead, were to provide the point of departure? What would it mean to make equality a *presupposition* rather than a goal, a *practice* rather than a reward situated firmly in some distant future so as to all the better explain its present infeasibility? (cited in Ross, 1991, p. xix).

His seminal work (so far largely ignored by the field of adult education), *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, is "an extraordinary philosophical meditation on equality" (Ross, 1991, p. ix), in which Ranciere asserts that "All [people] have equal intelligence" (Ranciere, 1991, p. 18). Ranciere is critical of sociology and much of 'politics' (he has his own understanding of what politics really is) for resting on an assumption of inequality, and argues that "pedagogy has followed politics like a dark shadow" (Barbour, 2010, p. 259). Knowledge, he claims, is not necessary for teaching, nor explication necessary to learning; thus pedagogy is a myth, used to separate those who 'know' from those who are 'ignorant':

> The normal pedagogic logic says that people are ignorant, they don't know how to get out of ignorance to learn, so we have to make some kind of itinerary to move from ignorance to knowledge, starting from the difference between the one who knows and the one who does not know…[the process of

learning must be seen] not as a process from ignorance to knowledge but as a process of going from what is already known or what is already possessed, to further knowledge or new possessions…the idea is that the ignorant always know something, always asks something, and always has the capacity, and the problem is how to make the best of this capacity and start from equality (Ranciere, 2009, interview).

He thus rejects explication in favour of recounting (repeating, retelling that which has been seen, an operation of the intelligence which then allows comparison and identification of causes, i.e. meaning), which is a concrete practice of equality because it presupposes equality of intelligence, rather than inequality of knowledge.

Ranciere (1991) also argues that learning requires two faculties – intelligence and will. Will is what accounts for differences in what is learned:

There is inequality in the *manifestations* of intelligence, according to the greater or lesser energy communicated to the intelligence by the will for discovering and combining new relations; but there is no hierarchy of *intellectual capacity*. Emancipation is becoming conscious of this equality of *nature*. (p. 27).

So emancipation is "that every common person might conceive his human dignity, take the measure of his intellectual capacity, and decide how to use it...Whoever emancipates doesn't have to worry about what the emancipated person learns. He will learn what he wants, nothing maybe" (p. 18). This means that the process of learning can start with anything that 'the ignorant one' knows – it actually doesn't matter what (p. 28). And the method is always: What do you see? What do you think about it? What do you make of it? (p. 23). The method is the same for everyone – there is no specific pedagogy of the oppressed, of the poor.

Thus on several points, Ranciere marks a significant departure from Freire (but is remarkably close to the arguments of *Abahlali*). As Pithouse (2011) has argued, there is a 'slippage' in Freire's work, a tension between his insistence that we must "trust in the oppressed and their ability to reason" (Freire, 1996, p. 48), and his argument that oppression dehumanises, meaning that the oppressed themselves are not able to understand their own condition, and require some kind of humanizing pedagogy to conscientise them, although this is obviously not unique to Freire as the entire concept of false consciousness rests on a similar argument. Pithouse (2011) argues that Freire makes a mistake in casting the oppressed as *actually* dehumanised, rather than as being *misrepresented* as dehumanised;

While oppressed people have to make their lives amidst social relations that are objectifying people are not, even in the most repressive or wretched circumstances, inevitably reduced to those circumstances. On the contrary there are multiple ways in which people defend and tend their humanity (pp. 15–16).

If people are always capable of thinking, and thinking their own oppression (as Ranciere insists), then the need for some kind of particular 'radical teacher',

necessary to help them become people (rather than things) so that they can liberate themselves, clearly comes into question:

> Only a politics founded on…equality [of intelligence] deserves the name democratic. And only an education without preordained educators deserves to be called political (Barbour, 2010, p. 262).

CONCLUSIONS

I don't think we're alone in denying the ability of all people to think, everywhere – and in particular for all people to think critically. There is now a vast literature on the ways in which universities act to create and support hegemony; and I think there's a pretty strong thrust even within the tradition of radical education that assumes that some kind of radical teacher *who knows more* (and some kind of radical pedagogy) is absolutely necessary to 'conscientise' or 'transform' those who are not thinking, or not thinking well enough, or not thinking critically enough. The movement intellectuals (and, of course, Ranciere) disrupt this.

It's not particularly surprising that the academy (and even 'radical' intellectuals within the academy) begin from the axiom of inequality, as Ranciere would put it. In a recent paper, Richard Pithouse (2011) shows how the approach of the current (post-colonial) university is, to some extent, a reflection of the emphasis on pedagogy in contemporary neo-colonialism, where "interventions undertaken in the name of development or human rights are often pedagogic, presenting people as ignorant or insufficiently ethical rather than oppressed" (p. 13). Abahlali have made this point very powerfully, in a statement issued during the terrible xenophobic attacks in South Africa in May 2008:

> We hear that the political analysts are saying that the poor must be educated about xenophobia. Always the solution is to 'educate the poor'. When we get cholera we must be educated about washing our hands when in fact we need clean water. When we get burnt we must be educated about fire when in fact we need electricity. This is just one way of blaming the poor for our suffering…we don't want to be educated to be good at surviving poverty on our own (Abahali, 2008).

So the pedagogic bent (i.e. the assumption that some are ignorant, whilst others know) is all around us, precisely because it is the political requirement of hegemony to *prevent* (counter-hegemonic) thinking (i.e. that people are in the state they are in because they are oppressed, not because they are ignorant or insufficiently ethical):

> What had to be prevented above all was letting the poor know that they could educate themselves by their own abilities, that they had abilities…And the best way to do this was to educate them, that is to say, to give them the measure of their inability. Schools were opened everywhere, and nowhere did anyone want to announce the possibility of learning without a master explicator…Social institutions, intellectual corporations, and political parties

now came knocking on families' doors, addressing themselves to all individuals for the purpose of educating them (Ranciere, 1991, pp. 129–130).

And, again (as numerous recent publications have argued), the academy often plays an important role in this, in the way that programmes are chosen, that selection is undertaken, that curricula are set. The course that we offer has always been marginal; it is simply too small, at too low a level. But it has been allowed to continue through the years, probably largely for the same reasons. Recently, however, the course has come under increasing pressure, and increasing threat, often contradictory but with the same ultimate aim. The pressure has been to take in more students, to 'grow' the course (at the risk of the kind of pedagogy we use); and to no longer take in students who do not meet the 'rules' for entry in terms of their education level (at the risk of excluding precisely those we are targeting). The threat has been to shut the programme down, because it is not financially viable, or because it is at a level not appropriate to our institution.[6]

So what does all this mean for those of us in the academy who have "made a permanent commitment" (Badiou, cited in Hazan, 2008, p. 133) to a different world, and see our scholarly activity as part of that? Pithouse (2011) responds:

In order to take seriously, from within the academy, the fact that people outside of it, including the oppressed, are as capable as thought and ethical action as anyone else it is necessary to be attentive to both what Ranajit Guha calls the "politics of the people" (1997, p. xiv), a subaltern sphere of political thought and action, as well as to Rancière's sustained demonstration that people move between their allocated spaces – that workers are also present in the space that the philosopher kings have allocated to themselves and that moments of mass political insubordination are often characterised by a disregard for allocated places (p. 16).

I'm not yet sure how we put this into action, how we change our praxis and pedagogy, particularly within the constraints of the neoliberal university. But it seems to me that at the most basic level, the task for 'radical' academic intellectuals is to retain some kind of fidelity to the truth that everyone counts, everyone matters; but also, that everyone thinks. This would be, as the militants say, a truly 'out of order' education.

NOTES

[1] This quote is taken from a letter emailed to a South African NGO by Ashraf Casiem, then chair of the Anti-Eviction Campaign, a Cape Town-based social movement. Casiem was protesting against attempts made by some NGOs to control poor people's movements.

[2] I use the term 'militant' for two reasons. Firstly, and most importantly, because this is how the movement members refer to themselves; but secondly, because I wish to indicate what Paulo Freire meant by the term – "something *more* than 'activist'. A militant is a *critical* activist" (Shor and Freire, 1987, p. 50).

[3] Most commentators agree that this includes the Landless People's Movement (LPM), the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) etc.

[4] In September 2009, a week after *Living learning* was launched, the Kennedy Road settlement was brutally attacked over a period of several hours by an armed mob, leaving many shacks destroyed, hundreds of people displaced, and two of the attackers dead. Two weeks before the attack, the African National Congress (ANC) chair for Durban publicly stated that *Abahlali* was a threat to the ANC, and the day after the attack the ANC Member of the Executive Committee (i.e. of the provincial cabinet) for Safety and Security said that a decision had been taken to disband the movement, and described the attack as a 'liberation' of the settlement. The movement has been adamant that the attacks were politically motivated, and have consistently called for an independent enquiry (AbM, 26/9/2010).

There is little doubt that the Kennedy Road attack profoundly affected the movement; many of the leadership were traumatised, and forced into hiding, so "for some months we had to organise underground" (AbM, 2010); and for quite some time, the movement was unable to have large and open meetings as had been the norm prior to the attacks. However, as the movement says, "It damaged our movement in some ways but it has not destroyed our movement" (Ibid.). The attack has served to re-emphasise the claims by the Poor People's Alliance that no-one in South Africa is yet free.

[5] Abahlali are not alone in this insight: A housing activist in Scotland says "It became obvious to us that they [the Labour Party] were terrified of people like us – not because we had any political power, but because uneducated people like us had become experts in understanding what we were talking about" (Martin & McCormack, 1999, p. 261).

[6] In late 2011, the University's Senate agreed to reject any future applications for new Certificate or Diploma programmes, and to review all existing Certificate and Diploma programmes with a view to shutting them down.

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2. LEARNING TO RESIST[1]

Hegemonic Practice, Informal Learning and Social Movements

RESISTANCE!

In the fall of 2009, widespread resistance "from below" emerged at Austrian universities and kindergartens. Resistance was against, to name but a few areas addressed by the protesters, the underfunding of education, the re-structuring of educational institutions according to market mechanisms and their orientation towards the preparation of students for business life (Steinklammer, 2007). Beginning with the kindergarten sector ('Collective Kindergarten Rebellion', http://www.kindergartenaufstand.at), the first protests were staged in the spring of 2009 (Steinklammer, Botka, Fleischmann and Tinhofer, 2010). In the autumn students and teachers from universities (#unibrennt, http://www.unibrennt.at), addressed not only the unacceptable general conditions and chronic underfunding of Austrian educational institutions, but also raised the issue of how learning took place and what was being learned in those institutions. The resistance movement in the field of education shaped the year 2009 in Austria. It made more Austrians pay attention to and reflect upon the topic of education. But what effect did this resistance have on the people involved? What kind of learning processes took place in the course of this resistance?

Figure 1. Banner of the collective kindergarten rebellion
© collective kindergarten rebellion.

In this chapter I examine the question of what can be/was learned by participating in the protests through the lens of critical education and what conclusions can be drawn for this critical learning through social conflicts. I begin this chapter with a brief overview on two central analytical categories of critical education theory: power relations and hegemony. I argue that to sustain a certain hegemonic order not only is the adaptation of a certain ideology necessary but also those of hegemonic practices. I continue with a discussion of subjective hegemonic instances of stability and informal learning-in-practice in order to open a discussion of learning processes that illustrates the internalisation and adoption of practices that sustain hegemony. I then apply these theoretical constructs to some examples of the education protests in order to discuss and outline several tasks and areas of work relating to critical education theory.

CRITICAL EDUCATION, POWER AND SOCIETY

Central to critical approaches to education is the analyses of the human being and his/her learning in social contexts. In the 1970's and 80's, in particular the critical theory of the Frankfurt School but also the works of Paulo Freire and Antonio Gramsci constituted an important point of reference for critical education theorists in Western Europe. In recent years a number of critiques and refinements have made reference to feminist theories, theories of international political economy, postcolonial and anti-racist approaches, cultural studies, psychological theories and many more (Lösch and Thimmel, 2010).

At the same time critical education doesn't remain simply a theory but claims that education should have an empowering, emancipatory effect and should help to overcome oppression within society. Moreover,

> Critical learning extends the learner, moves her beyond her current understanding. […] Emancipatory learning involves learning generating emancipatory action (Foley, 2004, p. 105).

These emancipatory claims are based on analyses of power and leadership relations, in both society and education. Yet power is not something that humans or social groups simply possess. Power rather represents a relation between ruling classes or factions and those subjected to domination (Demirovic in Bescherer and Schierhorn, 2009). That is to say, power originates from the relations between individuals or between groups and the different ways these groups are integrated into one and the same society (Becksteiner, Steinklammer and Reiter, 2010). Therefore, different factors of integration have to be taken into account such as the questions of division of labour, of gender relations, everyday culture, family structures, migration and much more. Every model of society presupposes a specific way of shaping and producing ways of life, ways of thinking, and cultural coexistence, which correspond to the requirements of the material productive forces (Merkens, 2007a). Therefore in critical debates on education one recurring theme is that socially organised education processes can be understood as attempts of the ruling group(s) not to leave learning processes to chance, but that capitalist

societies are characterised by providing significant resources to educate young people so that "the social division of labour can be reproduced, renewed and dynamically changed" (Demirovic, 2010, p. 70*[2]). In our example one can argue that by linking the controversies about general conditions in educational institutions with the questioning of dominant concepts of education in society and their correspondence with supposed requirements of the material productive forces, the education protests countered existing power relations. By putting the reduction of education to economic utility up for debate the current neo-liberal forms of social integration were attacked by the movement, by opposing the idea of the human as homo economicus which reduces and psycho-physically adjusts human beings to their economic utility and applicability and by holding wide-ranging discussions about concepts of education and definitions, the current neo-liberal forms of social integration were attacked by the movement. Thereby it is essential to recognise that power and relations of domination do not have to be established and maintained by force. Power can also be established and stabilised if social groups succeed in defining and enforcing their own interests and the social formations that go along with them as common social interests (Brand and Scherer, 2003). This type of domination is generally referred to as hegemony. The debates and actions within the education movement in Austria can therefore be (partly) understood as forms of counter hegemony, as I will elaborate later on.

Hegemony and its Subjective Instances of Stability

Hegemony as an analytical concept of critical education theories refers to a type of domination that is not based on direct force but on the leadership and consensus of a large part of the population. The latter adopts and supports the ideology of the dominant social group as their own meaningful and action-guiding interpretation of the world, as guiding principle, without the exertion of direct force being necessary.

> Hegemony describes how a dominant group can project its particular way of seeing social reality so successfully that it's view is accepted as common sense, as part of the natural order, even by those who are in fact disempowered by it (Borg and Mayo, 2008, p. 30).

In order to implement a hegemonic project, the interests of the (future) leading group have to be generalised so that they acquire a progressive function for the entire society. This includes that the needs and interests of the subaltern have to be rearticulated and redefined so that they are represented in the hegemonic order (Candeias, 2007). Consequently Gramsci's concept of hegemony essentially includes two aspects: political hegemony (political leadership and organisation of different political groups) and cultural hegemony (establishing consensus; reaching a leading position in the creation and maintaining of consensual cultural, moral and intellectual mentalities of a society) (Bernhard, 2005). By squatting and protesting the education protest movement questioned certain aspects of the current cultural hegemony in Austria for the first time in years. This was a new experience to many

as in most cases people are not aware of the effectiveness of political and cultural leadership. The dominant worldview seems like the natural order, and is taken for granted. Its historical and social context is obscured. The emancipatory approaches of critical education concepts (for example the work of Paulo Freire in 1970) therefore imply that the educational goal of consciousness raising to counter our unconsciousness of these power relations as the basis of overcoming oppression.

A characteristic of this type of domination is that people adopt and reproduce the conception of a specific hegemonic social order, even if they occupy a subaltern position within it and even if this order is opposed to their own interests. The education protests for example challenged the current conception of gender relations especially in the kindergarten sector. One goal of the 'Collective Kindergarten Rebellion' was and is, to change, as women, the image of this profession in society and to challenge the image of the female kindergarten teacher (99% of all employees are women), who is always friendly and puts up with everything; even tough working conditions that are harmful to their health and in obvious violation of current labour legislation. Articles and pictures of fighting pedagogues were published. For the first time many women experienced what it means to stand up, fight for better working conditions and social appreciation. Conversations with activists revealed that the self-images of many pedagogues were changed through the struggles they were involved in (Steinklammer et al., 2010).

But theoretically speaking one has to consider that adopting or opposing a certain ideology alone is not enough to hegemonically secure and reproduce or challenge a specific social order. In addition, practices that support or oppose hegemony need to be created and adopted. Practices represent meaningful socially acceptable and standardised modes of acting by means of which subjects are able to integrate themselves into the hegemonic constellation in their respective personal surroundings. Lipietz (1988) writes that social relations are

> Embodied in individuals…in the form of acquired habits and routines, like the accepted rules of a game, even if everyone seeks to improve his game. The capacity of a dominant group to impose a game that benefits it will be called hegemony (p. 13).

This quotation draws attention to several aspects central in the production and maintenance of hegemony and therefore, important to critical or emancipatory education. The "rules of the game" can be understood as socially accepted and approved behaviour corresponding to the respective situation, behaviour to which acting subjects adapt themselves and which ensures that the 'game' remains stable over a relatively long period of time, even though the process of establishing and maintaining hegemony includes counteractions by individuals as well as contradictions that arise from within. Hegemonic 'rules of the game', however, are characterised by the fact that they determine how these contradictions are to be dealt with, and they ensure that the resistance of individuals does not threaten the social order. This makes it hard to predict if and when contradictions erupt and suddenly 'challenge the expectations of routine social behaviour' (Kurzman 2005,

p. 5). In Austria, for example, most of the existing critical political groups and organisations were altogether overtaken by the beginning of the protests and played a minor role within.

Habits, on the other hand, are long-term continuous practices we repeat on a regular basis, almost like a ritual that becomes ingrained. Most of the time we no longer perform these actions consciously, but rather in a taken-for-granted, almost automatic way because they belong to us, they have become part of us, have been embodied in us.

Therefore, when looking at social practices and their hegemonic meaning it becomes apparent that order and existing relations of domination are not maintained from the outside alone, but deeply inscribed into us – even into the body – and as a result are reproduced and stabilised in our practices. Thus, processes must take place that result in cultural hegemony being deeply embedded in the acting subjects. According to Gramsci (1971) 'every relationship of hegemony is necessarily an educational relationship' (p. 350) existing between individuals and social groups, in so far as the production, challenge, reproduction and transformation of consciousness and practice or consent primarily take place through teaching and learning processes. Some of these are formally organised but a large part are informal learning processes. This has to be taken in account by emancipatory education approaches and developed further.

A SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT VIEW OF INFORMAL LEARNING PROCESSES

For this reason I will continue to examine the question of what role informal learning-in-practice, that takes place apart from the organised processes in educational institutions, could play for the question of empowerment from the perspective of critical education.

Learning by Participating in the Social World

As a first step to approaching this issue, it is necessary to take an even closer look at specific learning processes and to further elaborate on thoughts of how hegemonic practices are acquired.

Human beings are social beings, who are made to live together and who only adopt social behaviour with and through participation in the social world. Actions/practices (as distinguished from instincts and reflexes) are not something predestined, innate, or fixed, but are socially developed and learned in interaction with others. It is learning that takes place in practice, while we participate in the social world that surrounds us. Markard (2008, p. 154*) argues that

social conditions/meanings […] are integrated into the experiences of individuals made in concrete situations.

The individual appropriates the world by learning, takes his/her place in society, and participates in its formation. Thus the individual is shaped by his/her experiences with the surrounding world and his/her acquired knowledge about the

world. At what point experience becomes learning and how this process works, has, to this day, not been resolved (Foley 2004). It is a case of informal learning, however, that occurs while participating in the social world that surrounds us.

The social world constitutes a reference point for our actions, a socially and culturally pre-structured framework that we adopt by participating in it and by interacting with others and to which we attribute meaning. This attribution of meaning itself happens in the process of our practice, as

> it is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do. In this sense, practice is always social practice (Wenger 2008, p. 47).

Thus participation in the social world is the basis for the production of meaning and for the structuring of our actions. It not only shapes how we appropriate the world, how we understand, attribute meaning to and act within it, but also how we see ourselves, our taste, our relationships to our own bodies and how we interpret our own actions as well as the actions of others and so forth.

> Experience of meaning […] is what practice is about. […] Meaning arises out of a process of negotiation that combines both participation and reification (Wenger 2008, p. 135).

One has to consider that the meanings of facts of the world represent possibilities for action or restrictions of action to which we can but do not have to relate (Holzkamp, 1995; Allespach, 2008). This does not determine our actions, but the meaning we attribute to things and how important they are to us has a bearing on if and how we relate to them. In this respect, practices and the enforcement of practices sustaining hegemony cannot be seen in isolation from the internalisation of an ideology and the adoption of a specific worldview whose establishment and reproduction is again always based on practices. As Lave and Wenger (2008) summarize it:

> Learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people in activity in, with and arising from the socially and culturally structured world. This world is socially constituted (p. 51).

Hence the considerations here go beyond the socialisation processes of our childhood since these learning processes continue to take place through our participation in the social world. On the one hand, we repeatedly enter new communities of practices (e.g. at work, at university, in political groups, etc.) in the course of our lifes and have to integrate ourselves into their collective practices and on the other hand, as Lave and Wenger (2008) indicate, social practice in itself is contradictory and these contradictions have to be worked out and negotiated anew each time, no matter if the aim is to change them or to maintain what already exists. Maintaining and reproducing the status quo needs as much experience, explanation and learning as changing it would need.

We learn in and by experiences, how we can, should and are allowed to behave according to the respective situation. In the course of these informal learning

processes we internalise the existing social conditions and develop a practical sense – what Bourdieu calls habitus – "for what is to be done in a given situation" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 25). In this learning process the social order is adopted as a way of seeing the social and is internalized as part of our practical sense (Bremer, 2010). We develop an intuitive knowledge of the world, its contexts and conventions. The practical sense can be understood as the unconscious dimension of actions and practice, as a direct, intuitive understanding of the world that is related to what is expected of the world and of the actions of other agents. The acquired explicit rules, the lived regularities and habits provide agents with orientation and stability. Their practical sense stabilises the inner balance by enabling them to adequately react to interpellations of the social environment. As a consequence, it does not only contribute to the maintenance of the social order, but also tends to contribute to the maintenance of existing power relations (McDonough, 2006), – by drawing on their practical sense, that they have built over a long period of time, human beings permanently rebuild structures of domination in their daily actions.

The example of the kindergarten protests shows this rather clearly. The working conditions have been bad for quite some time (at least 10 – 15 years) and kindergarten teachers were complaining about it a lot on an individual basis. At the same time many of them realized that their position within society gives kindergarten teachers rather effective power resources- there are not enough pedagogues and therefore it should be easy to get concessions from the employers. Furthermore, if they would go on strike many other production areas would be affected and the pressure would be high. Nonetheless, nothing happened and employers were able to shift the effects of staff shortage on to the employees. What we see here is that since our practical sense influences our conception of the social world and of our position in it, it also influences the perception of our possibilities for action – that is, how we can act in a certain situation – but also the perception of the position that can be and is taken in the struggle for change or maintenance (Schroer, 2006). As mentioned above, the facts of the world do not determine our actions. Mostly we have different options, if and how we relate to them. Nevertheless we are shaped by social structures, by our incorporation into the social context, and by the existing relations of power. We all know situations in which we have different possibilities for action. Sometimes those are clear to us and we consciously choose one or the other, but often this decision is made unconsciously, in the course of action, without giving it much thought. Sometimes we are not even aware that we have different options and just do what we see as our only option. Experiences made within specific social positions as well as informal learning processes that have taken place – the developed practical sense – promote the fact that, human beings are more susceptible to some options for action than to others. Their preferences have adapted themselves to their respective surroundings and the demands perceived within them. They have developed adaptive preferences for specific options for action and the practical sense blocks the perception or (in the case of the Austrian kindergarten teachers) activation of alternative options, as this acquired collection of schemes of perception and

appreciation directs the individual's focus of action entirely towards their integration into the hegemonic constellation. How dominant these schemes are became clear after the first protests and demonstrations were staged successfully with more than 4.000 kindergarten teachers in Vienna. Existing hegemonic negotiation structures between trade unions and employers were activated by the establishment and these managed to channel and hush dissident moments by offering small improvements of working conditions, a ridiculous low pay raise (in some cases only € 0.40.- cent) and the promise of reforms that employees are still waiting for. Yet, protests have calmed down and it has become more and more difficult to mobilise the employees.

PRACTICE, INFORMAL LEARNING PROCESSES AND CRITICAL EDUCATION

What conclusions can we draw from the above considerations for critical education and its claim that education should have an empowering effect? To begin, I would argue that when looking at the informal learning of (hegemonic) practices it becomes clear that cultural hegemony permeates all aspects of our subjectivity, not only our consciousness or worldview. The acquired practical sense as unconscious principle of production of practices is structured by practice and at the same time has a structuring effect. Hence, reflection and consciousness-raising are important aspects of empowering education processes. They alone, however, are not sufficient, as the practices of the subjects are of essential importance for the internalisation and reproduction of relations of power and domination. These practices again are deeply embedded in us and in our practical sense. In order to fight against the effectiveness of cultural hegemony, it is necessary to work on the elements of domination, on the practical sense within us as well.

> In his/her subjectivity, consciousness, corporality the human being is rooted in cultural hegemony, from which s/he can only be released by radically fighting its influence within him/herself. Therefore, each critical concept of education today is necessarily connected with the perspective of resistance. Education itself is to be understood as an attitude of resistance against one's own habitus that is functional with regard to existing relations of power and domination. By attacking this habitus, education creates the condition for the possibility of releasing resistant actions against destructive projects of dominant social groups (Bernhard, 2010, p. 94).

Thus it is necessary to connect the claims that education should have an empowering effect with the perspective of resistance.

RESISTANT LEARNING AND LEARNING HOW TO PUT UP RESISTANCE

By doing so several tasks and areas of work present themselves for critical education. In the following I will discuss them in the context of the education protests.

Resistant Learning

A central conclusion drawn from the considerations set out above is that resistance is necessary in order to work on and change one's own practical sense. Thus, resistant learning directed at challenging and changing one's own practical sense is needed. This includes two essential aspects.

Figure 2. Squatting teachers' flyer
© Squatting teachers Vienna.

On the one hand, there are calls for critical education processes which create space for learning subjects to distance themselves from their own practice, to contextualise it, and to connect it with an analysis of social conditions (Becksteiner et al., 2010). Their own practical sense has to become the object of consciousness-raising processes and reflection in order to remove it from the unconscious and to challenge it. This is a precondition for recognising adaptive preferences and directing one's attention to alternative ways of acting or developing new options for action. Bernhard 2010 comes to similar conclusions when he argues that

> Insofar as a human being recognizes that his/her habitus is not an imposed fate, but [that] it represents a social form of altering human nature, s/he will basically be put in a position to offset it (p. 98).

He further argues that this consciousness-raising and reflection are tasks for critical education, because education constitutes an anti-habitual attitude, in which the human being critically decides again and again on his/her consciousness and relation to the world rather than letting it become affirmative. Education is not a habitus, but a force that objects to every kind of habitualisation of habits that chains the human being to what already exists (p. 98).

On the other hand, this cannot be done in isolation from practice, since the practical sense is structured by practice and at the same time has a structuring effect. Therefore, practical experiences and action learning are necessary for a new practice to be developed and for the practical sense to be worked in interaction with the social world. Within the education protests, numerous efforts to develop such alternative practice can be identified: for example the emancipatory orientation of the protesters and their aiming for a decentralised, grass-roots democratic organisation within the movement. These attempts

encountered several limitations and challenges the protesters had to take on and deal with, which was an important learning experience itself. Thereby they adapted and developed their practice further and had to constantly reflect on it. Another example of action learning in the protest movements were the so-called 'Volxküchen' (derived from the German word "Volksküchen", which literally means "people's kitchens") that were established rather fast and maintained by volunteers cooking donated food and provided meals for free in return for a voluntary donation. For certain people involved in the protest this was a new experience of handling food and enabled them to experience other forms of supplying goods beyond capitalism. The establishment of the 'Collective Kindergarten Rebellion' can be interpreted as an attempt to develop a distinct practice of networking and of defending one's interests as a base, since they aimed at providing themselves with the opportunity of exchange, reflection, articulation of concerns, discussion and of political decision-making processes that went beyond those of the usual, hierarchical interest groups and trade union structures (Collective Kindergarten Rebellion 2011, p. 7).

Figure 3. Daily plenum, in the main auditorium of the University of Vienna
© #unibrennt.

My thesis is that in the examples mentioned above, as well as in many other examples, an unconscious reworking of the practical sense took place, or, since alternative forms of practice could be experienced, the practical sense was changed little by little. At the same time, we have to bear in mind that our practical sense is in itself relatively stable and cannot be changed abruptly overnight. After all, the dispositions, schemes of perception and appreciation, and structuring principles of a human being have developed over a long period of time and the purpose of this unconscious collection is to give stability to us and our actions so that we can find our way in the world. That is why the reworking and change of the practical sense can only be achieved in the long term and always requires new experiences that then can be reflected upon and adapted. Bremer (2010) states that for a long lasting transformation of one's habitus,

It is important that social subjects are also able to have new experiences. These experiences are to be understood as bodily performed actions […] and the reflection upon them (p. 189).

The examples mentioned above already show, however, that it is difficult to organise such learning experiences in planned educational processes. In social conflicts such informal learning processes are much more likely to take place. However, there is the danger that these learning experiences remain covert and unconscious and, without conscious educational processes in which those resistant and empowering experiences of practice can be taken up or used as point of departure, they cannot fulfil their full empowering potential (Foley, 2004). Thus a task of critical education is to provide the space to bring those informal learning processes to consciousness, to reflect on them and to develop further strategies for action in exchange with others. By doing this, their own resource of experiences should become clearer so that it can be resorted to in other situations. As Foley (2004) stated very clearly, it also needs "the special powers of theory" (p. 50) as basis for critical reflection. He argues that

This is the creative paradox of consciousness-raising work: personal experience is its necessary point of departure, but for critical consciousness to emerge people must gain theoretical distance from their subjective experience (pp. 50–51).

In this respect he quotes Hart (1990a) who states that theory

Does not follow the contours of immediate experience. It 'sets a distance' which enables people 'to fathom aspects of the world hidden from the eyes of its own authors and actors' and to make transparent the relations that obtain among isolated and fragmented incidents of personal experience (pp. 66–67).

When looking at informal, resistance learning, the necessity of linking theory and practice, or processes of consciousness-raising and experiences of practice, becomes apparent. Practically speaking, this means that critical education has to relate consciousness-raising to social struggles. It is a question of learning in practice and of combining theory and practice.

"How to Put Up Resistance" has to be Learned as Well

Another essential conclusion regarding learning to resist can be drawn on another level. After all, opposing one's own habitus means to question and challenge social conditions, that is, to offer resistance. In the education protests, this challenge of a dominant worldview and social order has clearly taken place, even if it was not always explicit and not intended by everyone. Putting up resistance and questioning hegemonic social conditions cannot be taken for granted, however, and does not necessarily represent an adaptive preference for most of us. Otherwise it would not be considered a hegemonic relation of domination if it were not consensually accepted. From this, two conclusions can be drawn for critical education.

Developing a Practice of Resistance

If resistance does not represent an adaptive preference for most of us, this means that there are few experiences that we can draw or build on in this context. Thus also a practice of resistance first has to be developed and learned. In the example of the education protest movement, such learning occurred in the experimentation with alternative forms of resistance like flash mobs and other forms of political activism. It also became clear, however, that protesters have to constantly make traditional forms of protest like demonstrations their own again. The experience of claiming the public space in the course of demonstrations, of taking to the streets, taking this space and articulating their political intent, was something new and unfamiliar to many in the kindergarten sector, something they had to learn to deal with. After experiencing the first demonstration how hard it was for many of the participants to voice their discontent and demands and to make noise, the next demonstration was an experiment to start with something closer to their previous practical experiences and to adapt elements that have an empowering effect; for example, by setting new, political lyrics to tunes of popular children's songs and singing them together during the demonstration, which turned out to work much better than shouting demands. Another example of developing a practice of resistance is the establishment and use of autonomous communication and organization structures in the Web 2.0 or the use of new information technologies for the self-organisation of the students' protest movements. This organization in Web 2.0 represents a significant resource of knowledge, since by using these structures as communication platforms, information is stored for a long time, and that way campaigns and discussions are documented within the movement (Note the enormous amount of photos: http://www.flickr.com/groups/unibrennt), to which people can return at a later time or in another context and from which they can learn.

Figure 4. Flash mob of kindergarten teachers in Vienna 2009
© collective kindergarten rebellion.

From the conclusion that a practice of resistance first has to be developed and learned emerge several tasks for critical education- like fighting for, providing and maintaining autonomous space for reflection and learning in which the parties

involved can work out how they want to politically work together and in which new forms of cooperation can be developed. An example of such an attempt is the 'Critical and Solitary University of Vienna' (http://krisu.noblogs.org) that was founded on the initiative of students, teachers and staff from different institutes and universities.

Since resistance does not represent an adaptive preference, it can be concluded for critical education that a learning process conceived for the long run is needed, one that takes place in several learning loops. Practically speaking, this means that periods of learning in practice have to alternate with periods of reflection and development of alternative options for action and then with periods of implementation in order to try to strategically implement a different practice step by step. In another learning loop these attempts again have to be reflected upon and the process starts all over again. Thus the long-term conception would make it possible for the learning process to contain theory and practice, yet it also assumes that critical education takes place in social conflicts or is related to them (Becksteiner et al., 2010).

Taking Up and Communitarising Dissident Elements

At least one other conclusion can be drawn from the fact that resistance is not necessarily an adaptive preference for many of us. Just because this might be the case in principle, it does not have to mean that, in the creation and maintenance of hegemony contradictions do not arise. Dealing with them successfully does not always have to be possible within the existing order. Thus, time and again dissident elements express themselves within us. They often remain hidden, below the surface, however, and are therefore elusive and difficult to grasp. Since these elements of dissent, as well as the attitudes and acts of resistance that might go along with them, remain sporadic and hidden, their impact is limited. From the perspective of critical education it is necessary to take up these elements, to seize and communitarize them. It is not only a question of processes of consciousness, but also of the informal learning that takes place while participating in the protests, in the resistance. Similar to the demonstrations in the kindergarten sector, amongst the people who put up resistance in the university protests were not only those who wanted to make a stand against economic utility, but also those who felt deprived of the possibility to prepare themselves for neoliberal competition (Kratzwald 2009). Because the growing experiences of contradiction in the existing system could no longer be successfully dealt with within, groups joined the resistance not questioning the hegemonic ideology itself but its corresponding with experienced possibilities to integrate themselves into it. Paulo Freire already stated 1988 that

> Conscientization is not exactly the starting point of commitment. Conscientization is more of a product of commitment. I do not have to be already conscious in order to struggle. (Freire 1988 in McLaren, Fischman and Serra 2002, p. 172).

Figure 5. "No comment" protests of students in Vienna 2009
© #unibrennt.

This implies that experience/ informal learning is one important basis for conscientization and not the other way round. However, as Foley points out, this learning in action is often not recognised as such and therefore might remain only potential. (Foley 2004) What seems important is that through being part of the movement (for which reason so ever) all groups could gain alternative experiences of practice/resistance and that informal learning processes took place to which they can return to at a later point. Once people were involved in the protest movement, they challenged the existing hegemonic order together and had to experience firsthand, if leadership by consensus starts to crumble, the element of hegemonic force would become more apparent. In the course of the education protests, learning through participation in the social world (as basis for the production of meaning and for the structuring of our actions) meant, in concrete terms, the people involved, who all had different motives, could make many concrete learning experiences about their own involvement in social conditions, power structures and their own subalternity. These practical experiences are a necessary (also bodily and sensual) precondition for being able to locate oneself in the ensemble of social conditions and for developing something like class consciousness. In the educational processes it is essential to seize and reflect upon these experiences of subalternity, but also of community, solidarity, and the experienced differing interests. From this follows the task of constant awareness-raising in the context of practice that changes society.

LEARNING TO RESIST – A CHALLENGE FOR CRITICAL EDUCATION

When looking at practices that sustain hegemony, at informal learning, and at social conditions internalised as practical sense, it becomes apparent that critical education has to make the learners' practical sense the object of processes of consciousness-raising, and that a process of reflection is necessary that encompasses the acting human being in his/her historical and social entirety. This should serve as a basis for developing alternative options for action. As a point of

departure for working on one's own practical sense, however, informal learning processes and practical experiences of resistance are needed as well. In addition, action learning is called for in which a new practice can be developed in practice, just as education loops are necessary, in which those can be reflected upon and adapted. The basis for this is a combination of theory and practice as well as of consciousness-raising and struggles in society.

However, this orientation towards learning to resist in all facets presents us with several challenges. Not only is there the task of creating and maintaining autonomous space for learning and reflection, but the question also is how to organize such partly informal learning processes. Learning and education processes within institutions clearly are the centre of attention of all parties involved. Even if learning in institutions does not always happen voluntarily, and even if the question of which parts of the planned curriculum and which other aspects (also of the hidden curriculum) are in fact learned remains unanswered, the reason for being there as well as the orientation and aim of the process are clear to all parties involved. In social conflicts instead, the orientation and goals are others than that participants should learn within them. Learning rather takes place incidentally, often it is not intended, and it mostly occurs unconsciously (Foley 2004).

At that point a shift in the pedagogical approach to learning is called for. There has to be more emphasis on the importance of voluntary and spontaneous learning processes directly tied to the collective political practice and experiences of social movements. This has to be taken as a starting point for planned education processes (Merkens 2007a). Thus it is necessary to pursue pedagogy from the viewpoint of the learners and to act accordingly. This can mean that self-initiated learning processes are supported, taken up and further developed together. Therefore one can try to allocate space in existing institutions and to grant it to the learners or to create new learning space together with the learners. Pedagogy from the viewpoint of the learners can also mean, however, to start from the experiences of the conflicts and to plan and shape educational processes together with the learners.

The shift in the pedagogical approach to learning also involves the necessity of a changed (self-) image of teachers and those accompanying the educational process. They have to assume the role of organic intellectuals and see themselves as such. Gramsci describes organic intellectuals as being culturally involved in social movements and being part of the process themselves (Merkens, 2007b). To Gramsci the task of organic intellectuals is – as counter-concept to the traditional notion of intellectuals as thinkers in the ivory tower–the "active participation in practical life" (Gramsci 1971, p. 10).

> This means their practice has to aim at setting out a systematic critique of the common sense, in which the social struggles of today are reflected (Merkens 2006, pp. 18–19*).

In conclusion, it is important to stress that more research and reflection is needed on how human beings learn and what they learn in empowering struggles.

According to the view developed here, this research process would have to be devised as critical self-research, and as a combination of theory and practice it would have to relate the research to social conflicts and to allow for exchange between them.

NOTES

[1] A longer and slightly different version, in German, of this article has been published in: Sandoval, Marisol/ Sevignani, Sebastian/ Rehbogen, Alexander/ Allmer, Thomas/ Hager, Matthias/ Kreilinger, Verena (Ed.) (2011). University burns! Education, Power, Society, Verlag Westfälisches Dampfboot, Münster

[2] All quotations marked with a * are translated by the author.

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