Educating for a change

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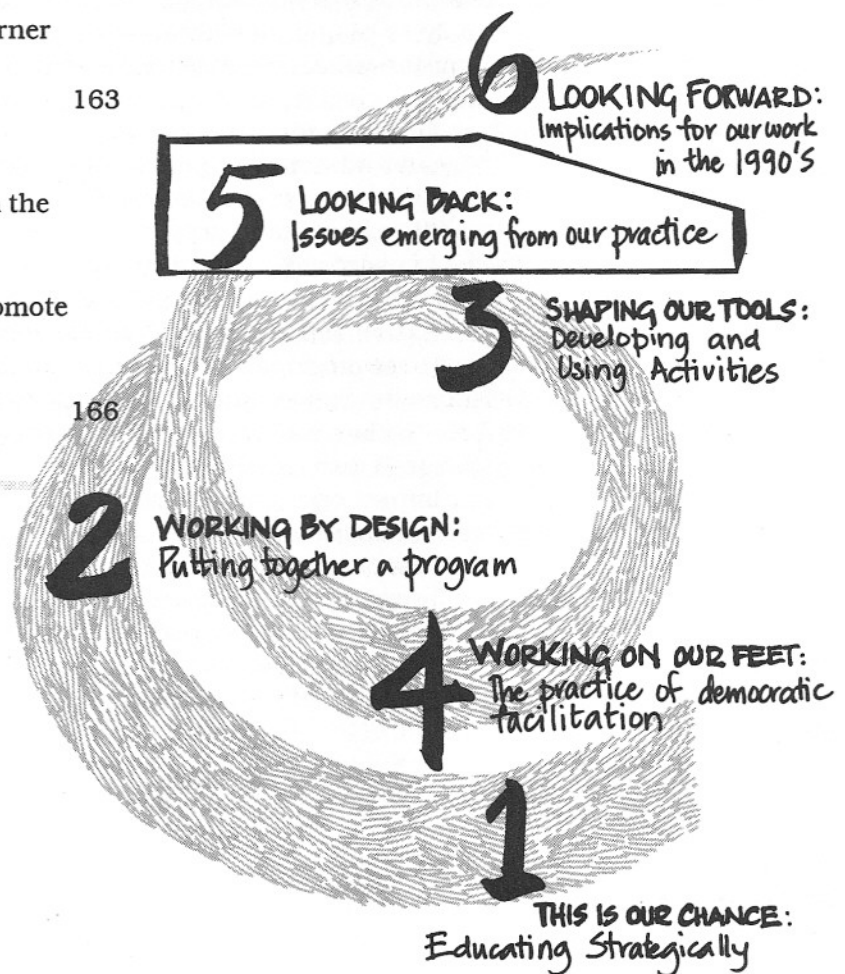**Barb Thomas**

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1 THIS IS OUR CHANCE: Educating Strategically

Speaking at a race-relations conference in March 1989 about the place of aboriginal knowledge in building a future, Professor Marlene Brant Castellano of Trent University stated:

> *Indigenous knowledge is seen to be personal knowledge, in that elders, who carry particular responsibility for teaching the younger generation, do not claim to define an objective reality. They share, rather, what they have seen or validated in their own experience. Knowledge is expressed as perception, derived from a particular perspective, rather than as concept, to which general validity is attributed.... When knowledge is utilized as a basis for community action, it is subject to collective analysis and revision, a process referred to in an oral tradition as "putting our minds together."*

Brant Castellano's explanation of aboriginal knowledge contains many elements in common with our orientation to education for social change. Specifically, we believe that what each of us learn is grounded in our experience and, as such, is laden with the values that ultimately influence how we perceive and give meaning to situations. And the extent to which education can produce community action is the extent to which we all use our collective experiences, analysis, and perceptions.

Education, then, is not objective. It is not value neutral and unitary. Moreover, the action that arises from education cannot be based on the insights and analysis of one individual. Instead, action to transform society must emerge from the collective insights and experiences of everyone in the group or community.

Also, according to an African theologian Emmanuel Tehindrazanarivelo, the African tradition sees education as a process of bringing a sense of awareness to people; that is, an awareness of worth, belonging, and responsibility; a sense of tradition, roots, and projection – a sense of being human within a community. The knowledge produced through education provides people with a vision that makes them able to interpret and to be creative so they can produce action as an expression of their own life and the life of the community.

These principles of education underscore our practice as social change educators. In this chapter, beginning with the assumptions and challenges that form the basis of our practice, we will examine the power relations inherent in learning situations. We will also consider the question of how we might increase our impact on the processes of social change. And we will assess what we have learned about ourselves as educators in the course of our work.

This chapter, unlike the others, draws primarily on examples of our work in the formal education system. We hope this will also help to underline the important role that we think teachers in the classroom can play in social change education.

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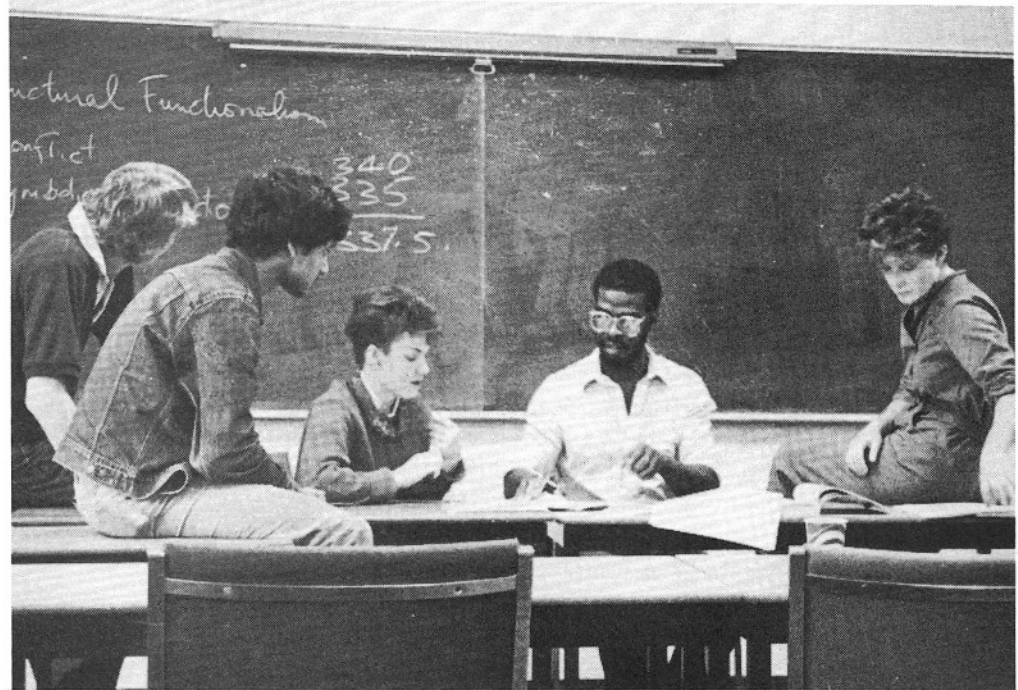
THE BASIS OF OUR PRACTICE

As social change educators we have to acknowledge the assumptions and objectives of our practice so we can confront the issues and challenges that surface as we carry out our work. To do this we must be clear about why we're engaged in social change education, in whose interest we work, how we engage learners in the process, and our role as consultants.

What is education for anyway?

Traditional education is about transferring information that will reproduce values, knowledge, skills, discipline, and occupational capacities that will in turn maintain the present order of society and satisfy people's interest to "fit in".

Social change educators, on the other hand, see education as a way to help people critically evaluate and understand themselves and the world around them, to see themselves as active participants in that world. Our hopes for social transformation are ignited as people come to see themselves as creators of culture, history, and an alternative social vision.

In our practice we assume that we have something to share with learners and participants about how to critically analyse the social system. At the same time we acknowledge our own positions in society and the ways that existing social arrangements limit our achievements and aspirations.

We also assume that people readily engage in discussion and actively work to change their situation. In fact, we often find that it's a struggle to get such discussion going. Many people find it difficult to let go of the long-held belief that the world of the status quo rewards them for sheer hard work and compliance.

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For example, when we are facilitating workshops, running meetings, or lead-ing discussions, the issue of social inequalities of class, race, or gender often surfaces. We find that the people who are themselves most likely to be the targets of discriminatory attitudes and practices are often the very ones who question the existence of racism, sexism, or other prejudice.

In such situations the question is: how do we help people to be critical of the arrangements for inequality in society or in their organizations so they can work for change – yet do so without extinguishing their optimism?

We know about "starting where individuals are at". But starting from where people are at means unravelling what they hold as "given". It means rearranging a seemingly stable sense of how things fit together or, sometimes, contradicting their own interpretation of their own accomplishment. This process will usually meet with resistance. (See chapter four for discussion of how resistance can be used and challenged.)

The challenge becomes how to keep people talking about issues, how to help them see the personal benefits of understanding the situation and working to change it.

BARB THOMAS

EDUCATING FOR A CHANGE

What if you're educating for a change?

As educators our purpose is not only to help people critically assess their personal and social situations but also to help them develop their conviction that change is possible. We have to help them see that they have "what it takes" to initiate and bring about change, not just as individuals but as a collective of people sharing similar goals and wishes.

Participants who believe that education is value neutral tend to see any discussion that criticizes current social arrangements as "left-wing", "negative", "not objective", or "too political". Sometimes they see the educators as "more interested in putting forward their own views than in teaching". They see educators who do not question the status quo as being objective, neutral, and having no ideological position. Sometimes participants will point to the race, gender, or social class background of an educator as factors that skew objectivity.

For example, an educator talking to a class of about thirty-five young men and women with participants from various races, ethnicities, and social classes, said, for the sake of discussion, that class, gender, and race are more likely to influence educational and occupational achievement than ability. Not surprisingly in a society priding itself on an equitable educational system, most participants disagreed. Although the educator gave them numerous examples to the contrary, participants held that ability was the sole determinant of achievement, except in cases where women and racial minorities were given preferential treatment in hiring. They specifically cited Blacks as an example of this preferential treatment.

On the question of income as a barrier to educational opportunities, students argued that "OSAP is there", referring to the Ontario Student Assistance Program. They were almost unanimous in saying that the educator was "selective in the references" that he was citing.

Perhaps our task of uncovering the unequal consequences of race, ethnicity, gender, and class would be easier if people came into more contact with educators promoting a critical approach. But this is not the case for most students. A basic challenge for educators for social change is to work against the power of the traditional laissez-faire approach.

Whose agenda? *A Caribbean-born educator is invited to give a presentation on Caribbean youth to a group of social service workers. The educator focuses the presentation on the historical, economic, political, and social development of the Caribbean.*

He argues that the social workers should see the diversity of Caribbean people: they come from different islands with different colonial histories, economic resources, and numerous races and ethnicities in the population mix. He says there are many varying influences on the youth the social workers would be seeing: age, time and pattern of family immigration to Canada, class background, economic and social situation in Canada, and attitudes such as racism and the resulting discriminatory practices.

The educator emphasizes that it is impossible to talk of any cultural group as if it were monolithic. He concentrates therefore on providing a framework that workers can use to analyse their cases and to develop the necessary strategies appropriate for the individuals they work with.

At the end of the discussion a participant comments that the presentation hasn't been helpful because it didn't give "specifics" about West Indians. The participant mentions another workshop where the resource person, also a Caribbean person, gave a "good description of West Indians, what they are like, and what to expect".

Clearly, in this situation, the presenter and participants hold different assumptions and expectations. Two things are happening here.

✧ There are different assumptions about learning and teaching on the part of participant and facilitator.

✧ There is a kind of dominant cultural voyeurism. An earlier resource person had demanded nothing of participants but had provided information that participants could organize into existing slots: "Caribbean people are...". This other workshop had made no attempt to help participants locate themselves in relation to the issue. The Caribbean person remained an object of scrutiny.

How did the social change educator approach things differently?

✧ He tried to make the participants and the Caribbean peoples equal subjects in the discussion.

✧ He challenged the stereotypes operating in the interaction between the social workers – service providers from the dominant group – and Caribbean people.

As a result, he encountered resistance.

To try and overcome this resistance the presenter could ask participants to imagine they are giving a presentation on Canadians to West Indians. They have one hour. What would they want West Indians to know, what information would not distort who Canadians are? This is an activity that usually helps participants develop a framework they can use to mull over new information about another group.

Another approach – which could be combined with the previous one – is to ask participants to think about what they already "know" about West Indians. This is an important question because it requires participants to become conscious of how they already organize information about certain people.

The assumptions and expectations of participants are based partly on their reasons for participating in the workshop in the first place. For some, these reasons may include a desire to become more sensitive, more informed, more familiar with an issue so they can obtain "how to" information or inform the direction of their actions. Other participants, particularly in more formal educational settings, only want concrete information – "the recipe". They would rather not be bogged down by theory or a new framework for understanding.

As educators, we have to attend to everyone's agenda – not only our own but the agenda of the participants, the sponsoring organization, and the person within the organization who extended the invitation.

All these agendas contribute to what happens or doesn't happen in the situation. To address all these agendas we need to look for common ground.

VALERIE ALIA

Connecting with learners

If we aren't willing to speak in the language of those we wish to involve in our programs, and to use the symbols and images of that language, our reluctance may send out the message that certain groups and people are either not welcome or are being patronized. We will be setting up a barrier.

This barrier may prove a difficult one to break down. It is based on the cultural and class allegiances that inform the traditional approach to education; on the notion that by adopting the language, symbols, and images of "other" groups, our social positions and identities become endangered. But this is a tricky question: sometimes it is also false to adopt the language of other groups, because doing so can be perceived as a form of appropriation, of "going Native".

But just in showing that we have taken the time to learn about and relate to the symbols and images of various cultural and class groupings, we have the potential of lessening social distance. We can establish that these are things we share; these are things that define group membership and identity.

When we try to speak in the other's language, however imperfectly, we communicate powerfully that we accept the other. Symbols and images are more complex, but equally powerful. Everyday behaviour, ordinary forms of interchange, ways of acknowledging ourselves and others: these are all symbolic. Our willingness to recognize these symbols and accept what is intended by them is a way of lessening social distance.

Participants, especially if they are culturally or racially different, are sensitive to how educators display a knowledge and appreciation of their values, life experiences, issues, and concerns. At the same time, while we have to be careful about appearing to be "going Native" or becoming a pseudo-minority, minority status is not a state of mind but lived oppression. We must always remember that privilege remains intact even if we take on the lingo and forms of non-dominant groups.

Educators as consultants: who are they?

Social change educators can play a significant consultative role in helping members of oppressed groups understand their situation in society and act to bring about change if necessary.

For some of us, consulting is a way of life – it's how we earn our rent. So it is appropriate to ask ourselves some questions: Who are the consultants? What are the politics of consulting? What are some of the issues faced by educators who freelance as consultants? What are some of the contradictions?

We often encounter consultants from the dominant social, racial, ethnic, gender, and cultural groups of society. Less frequently we see consultants who are minority group members. While these background characteristics play a role in any consultant's approach to the work, more significant to social change movements is the degree to which consulting educators approach their work from a critical perspective and an orientation towards transformation.

Certainly, the fact of having experienced poverty, sexism, racism, and/or discrimination does not necessarily mean that educators identify the social structure as the oppressive force. All of us, whether we're from minority or majority groups, are products of educational systems that trained us in the values of the dominant culture and its orientation to education. We are likely to

have internalized these values and approaches so we'll "fit in" better. We too struggle against our own resistance to alternative arrangements of social power.

In our work as consultants, then, we are conscious of our commitment to education not for the sake of disseminating information but for social change. But can an educator who has not and will never share the experience of the participants be able to work effectively to address their needs? For instance, under what conditions should male educators work to address issues such as male dominance and sexism? Or White educators work on the issue of racism? Can non-union educators understand unionists' issues?

In thinking through these questions, it is important to bear a few points in mind:

✦ Social change educators, no matter what their backgrounds, have to be clear on their stake in the issue under discussion. So a male can participate in a session on gender oppression as long as he recognizes that men are often the oppressors.

✦ Neither the money nor the fame are motivating factors for social change educators. Rather, their motivations come from the goal of empowering others to think critically and challenge unjust structures. We recognize, though, that these motivations are not always so clear cut and altruistic; there are diverse and even contradictory motivations in any one person.

✦ It is important to recognize the participants' social identities. For instance, if people of colour are not involved as educators in design and facilitation on anti-racist work, that work only reproduces dominant structures.

There are also benefits to having educators who share the same identity and experiences as the learners. This can make one less barrier to negotiate and one less aspect to explain: learners will usually assume that such educators share similar values, attitudes, and aspirations.

In essence, educators have to recognize the political side of their involvement in social change education. Either we understand our privilege and continue to exploit it; or we understand our privilege and create working conditions that both remove the blinkers of privilege and refuse to collapse into privilege.

For example, White educators should avoid anti-racist work where they are paid and people of colour are brought in as free "community labour". Men who believe in gender equity should continually protest participating in panels where only White men speak as experts. Social change educators with privileged social identities can either reinforce the "rightness" and "naturalness" of their privilege, or they can name it, challenge it, and refuse to collude in it whenever possible.

POWER
RELATIONS

Those of us committed to educating for social change attempt to be conscious always of the role and significance of power: who has it and who is powerless. Being aware of power is critical to an understanding of how it can be used to serve our needs and interests.

Power and social change educators

Our power as individual educators comes from any one or several of the following:

✦ **Information power** – where the educator possesses or has access to information that is perceived as valuable to others

✦ **Connection power** – based on the educator's "connections" with "influential or important" persons inside or outside of an organization

✦ **Expert power** – when the educator gains respect or has influence because she or he is perceived to possess expertise, skill, and knowledge

✦ **Position power** – when the educator's position as leader gives her or him the capacity to influence and obtain respect from others

✦ **Personality power** – where the educator is liked and admired by others because of his or her personality, and which means that participants sometimes identify with the educator

✦ **Network power** – where the educator is a member of, knows members of, or has established a network, which means that the educator is able to influence people.

This list indicates that educators usually enter a situation with a given form of power, and that the source of this power depends on the educators themselves, as well as on forces external to them.

The question is, given our goals as social change educators, how should we exercise this power, when, for what purpose, and under what conditions?

As social change educators we know that education should assist people in their personal development so they can achieve change in their lives and in society as a whole. Therefore we cannot afford to be ambivalent about our exercise of power. We must name the power, identify the source, and use it in a way that serves the interests and needs of the group we are working with.

Whatever the situation or setting – workshops, classroom, community – educators must establish a model for participants, particularly those engaged in social change and advocacy, of how to share ownership and responsibility. Power need not be seen as only a negative force. If we do look at it that way it will perpetuate ambivalence, which can become a stumbling block towards achieving social change.

Power and social identities

Social identity is another source of power. When we examine the social and cultural identities that characterize the dominant group, we get a sense of where power lies within the Canadian social structure.

We cannot ignore the extent to which power is socially constructed. By this we mean that regardless of our personal or political choices, our membership in particular social groups either endows us with or denies us privilege.

For example, even when an able-bodied woman is actively involved in the struggles of differently abled people for access to jobs, she still has a far better chance of getting a job than the people whose struggle she identifies with. Her opportunity is not a matter of her personal choice – it comes to her through the values of the dominant society. A person's power and influence vary with the number and types of dominant social and cultural characteristics possessed.

These social and cultural identities play a significant role in what people believe about who can wield influence. For example, a group of Black youth wanted to make a request of the executive director of their community centre. Their staff team was composed of a Black and a White worker. When the youth discussed who ought to talk with the director (who was White), they suggested that the White worker should do so. When asked why, they responded, "Because she is White."

In a "Train the Trainer" program for union educators, one of the facilitators, a woman, suggested that a man in the training team give individual feedback to two male union participants. Her suggestion was premised on the observation that the two participants in question heard critical comments more openly from the male facilitator than from the female.

The extent to which educators possess the social identities of the dominant group in Canada determines how their information is received. One Black facilitator recalls that in a multicultural training session, participants perceived him more as "a plant, a spy, an instigator, a shit-disturber, and a person who was bringing up racism unnecessarily" than as a facilitator equal to his White colleagues.

In another case, a Black educator was showing the film *Eye of the Storm* to a psychology class made up mostly of White students, on a day when the subject

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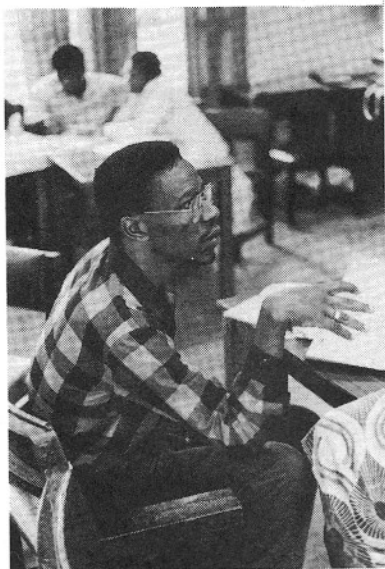
was "Attitude" – with one of those attitudes being prejudice. The film is about a teacher teaching about prejudice to White primary grade students who live in an exclusively White community. A class member asked the educator if "he was trying to tell them something". Another asked, "Are you saying we're racist?" Although he was showing the film in the context of the course outline, his students interpreted the film as carrying a personal message from the educator. As in many situations, the participants linked the race of the facilitator to how they interpreted what they heard and to how much they accepted it.

Women and people of non-dominant racial and ethnic groups are faced with challenges that they must address if they are to work effectively with people from the dominant culture. Educators from the dominant group are less likely to meet resistance and can use their privilege consciously, responsibly, and strategically to assist educators who are limited by their social position. There's an example of this in chapter four, "MAKING THE MOST OF WHO WE ARE." In that case, as a White person, the facilitator knew that her racial identity did not distract the White participants from their own task of examining racism.

The benefits of recognizing the role of social identities

A White educator who conducts courses in cross-culturalism says she does not tell "students" (young people) about her ethnic background because "it is not relevant" and she doesn't want to influence the students' interaction with her. Nevertheless, she expects the students to talk about their own backgrounds.

In another situation, a White facilitator doing an anti-racist workshop began by asking the only two non-Whites of the fourteen participants to tell the rest of the group about their experiences with racism. One Black participant objected, suggesting it was unfair to use the two of them as data and not invite everyone, including the Whites, to share their experiences with racism, particularly because of their dominant social position.

As social change educators we always need to acknowledge our social identities and the role they play in learning situations. Educators and all other participants, whatever the context, should share knowledge, ideas, and experiences equally. Doing so takes the mystery out of the role and helps to see that power is shared. Moreover, the process enhances communication and comfort.

Educators who are women and people of colour are very aware that they cannot remain the "objective facilitator" in workshops. Participants certainly don't see them that way.

Consider, for example, a Black woman facilitating a workshop on race relations and cross-culturalism, when the majority of the participants are White. She never talks of her nationality, race, ethnicity, or culture. Nevertheless the participants, based on what they see as her background characteristics, treat her according to their expectations. But if the workshop has a White female facilitator, the participants assume she is a Canadian; no further information is necessary.

As social change educators, we must be conscious about the role that skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, and accent play in the learning situation. We need to consciously evaluate our feelings and share our ideas like all other participants.

RICK ARNOLD

Sharing power   For the social change educator, sharing power, real or perceived, is necessary if we are to make the process of learning democratic and engage all participants in analysis and setting goals and directions.

When we recognize the role of social identities, we make it possible to hear what participants are saying and understand what they mean. We are able to avoid being defensive when "accused" of being "White", "Male", or "English". We place ourselves in the same vulnerable position as the participants, which makes it possible to build trust and effective communication.

Whatever the setting – workshop, classroom, community – early on educators must acknowledge their own power base as well as that of all the participants, particularly the power of social identity and the power accorded by the position of "educator" (even one who constructs participatory activities). To achieve full participation everyone must feel equal, important, and committed to the process.

We have to remember, too, that even when we take up the many concrete methods of acknowledging and sharing power (as outlined in chapter four) or engage in the many possible activities (chapter three), educators still have power because of their role in shaping the process; or because of most people's presumption that educators know more.

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The educator as facilitator and learner

Traditionally, the educational process has placed learners in a passive position. In Paulo Freire's words, they have been looked on as "empty vessels". For social change educators, however, learners are people who have something to teach. Such a stance goes a long way towards overcoming differences in the background and life experiences of educators and learners.

The educator is a facilitator and a resource person, someone who engages people in a dialogue that is a two-way conversation. The learners in the educational process are active participants, individuals who respond and help shape that process.

For a new educator/learner relationship to take hold, the educational setting has to be supportive – which means that people do not get jumped on for expressing their ideas. After all, we are trying to build people who are aware and wish to advocate and work for change collectively.

When learners are able to participate actively in the process, what happens is as much of their own making as it is of the facilitator's making. They share responsibility for the results. Learners should be challenged to help shape their situation, which also means becoming critically aware of it. Facilitators should be open to challenges from participants.

The ability to listen and learn from participants builds mutual respect. It affirms the dignity of all; it is the basis of empowerment. To listen is to be on an equal footing; listening means putting yourself in the place of the other. How can educators construct a setting in which there isn't a growing "we versus them", no matter how genuine our intent to do otherwise? Especially for educators in formal school settings, the art of listening is an important pillar in building structures that counteract some deeply ingrained, top-down teaching habits.

At the base of all this is the educator's genuine belief in people's potential and willingness to let go of some power and control. An authentic relationship of dialogue cannot be built by following guidelines or principles; people will "feel" the underlying belief and trust of the educator. Becoming honest, open, and vulnerable is not easy; it is a struggle.
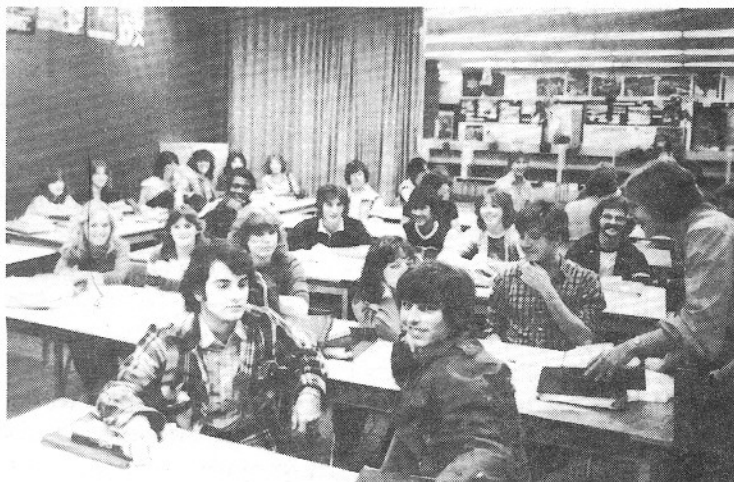
RICK ARNOLD

INCREASING
OUR IMPACT

In our experience, elements that allow our work to have a greater impact include working collectively, being able to size up or assess a situation we face, keeping an eye open for opportunities, and acknowledging the contradictions and being clear about our limitations in tackling the dominant agenda.

Assess the situation

Before starting a workshop session, for instance, we clarify the expectations (with a planning team ahead of time if possible). We find out about issues in the organization as well as in the wider social context so we can understand and address them.

In the workshop itself we find out about expectations from participants and check to see how those expectations relate to the objectives of the planning team or those who hired us. Whatever the situation, we make clear our role and help structure sessions that will allow for critical reflection by participants and include next steps or an action component.

Grab the free space

We constantly need to be looking for cracks in the dominant agenda, where the powerful and influential disagree among themselves. In the late 1980s-early 1990s, for instance, industry and government consensus has been faltering around issues such as the environment or free trade. This faltering allows popular organization to take the lead and suggest alternatives.

Timing is all important for an action to be successful. We should ensure that people are ready at any given moment to participate in initiatives addressing their concerns and issues. What kind of "free space" is available to introduce particular kinds of social change activities?

In our experience, each new situation kicks up opportunities for action and suggests when it is best to take action. The important thing is to recognize that the opportunity exists and get a foot in before the door slams shut again.

Acknowledge the contradictions in the work

Educators from outside an organization face different dynamics and contradictions than their counterparts inside. Getting the rank and file to look critically at society (if that is an objective, for instance) can also entail putting the organization under a magnifying glass to see if it is part of the solution or part of the problem. This approach can feel threatening to an executive if a reappraisal of the organization's stance and hiring practices was not what the executive bargained for in hiring an outsider to do a specific piece of work with the membership. At the same time, outsiders must recognize their different stakes and appreciate the risks for insiders.

If the workers speak out, they could be subject to retribution from an insecure executive. Educators also run the risk of never being invited back again when an executive and/or a chastened rank and file come to see them as "shit-disturbers". That is one of the reasons why, when we work with another organization as "outsiders", the objectives for the session/work need to be clear; and why we attempt when possible to involve both participants and the inviter/organizer/executive members to help form part of a planning and design

group to set guidelines for what is possible and identify what might constitute "stepping over the line".

Sometimes we end up feeling more allied with people in subordinate positions than with the leadership that has brought us in. It is a delicate tightrope act and many factors have to be considered, including, for example, the extent of the relationship, length of contract, and potential for change within the organization.

For the "insider" who works full-time for an organization, there will be some contradictions between what the organization says and what it does. Again, many feathers can easily get ruffled at all levels – and sometimes it may be necessary to ruffle them if there is to be a positive breakthrough. Inside educators need patience and skill to reaffirm the positive and improve upon the shortcomings.

Particularly in organizations that are membership-based, social change educators will want to see the voice from below strengthened. Part of this process will involve increasing the feeling of ownership that the rank and file members feel towards their organization.

Work collectively   There is a tremendous benefit in working collectively with educators from different backgrounds. We have found it invaluable to have at least two people facilitating and planning a session instead of the traditional one person. As social change educators, we must model anti-racism, employment equity, and awareness of international issues in our practice by having the team of educators reflect the diversity in our society.

Even if the learner population is a homogeneous White population, we still need to reflect that diversity. Whether such a homogeneous population is dealing explicitly with racial concerns or other issues (such as how to facilitate board meetings), we should make every effort to involve non-dominant group educators to reflect Canada's current population mix.

This practice also challenges stereotypes, exposes non-dominant group members to the organizations we work with, and models different working relationships. The other side of this coin is the heavy price paid by non-dominant group educators in cases where they are working to educate the dominant group without any allies from that group.

BARB THOMAS

Help to give voice to others and promote their presence

As social change educators, we have a responsibility to challenge the perception of the educator as "expert" or "all-knowing". We have to demystify how knowledge is produced and bring everyone to the understanding that they have a role in the production of knowledge; and that they can gain access to "expert" knowledge of various sorts when they decide such access would indeed be useful.

A good example of this problem is the practice of research, a knowledge-producing vehicle. Often research is seen as a process in which an "objective expert" (usually an outsider) gathers information in an "objective manner". It has results (by way of recommendations) that are produced without the input or consent of the people it affects. Usually research done by an outsider comes back in the form of power forged with what has been taken (or stolen) from the people who participated in the research. Often it comes back to exploit.

There are other approaches to research. Participatory research, for instance, can be a vehicle for educating, facilitating collective analysis, and developing change strategies. Participatory research material can be a tool for advocacy and giving voice to the participants who otherwise would not have a chance to be heard. This approach involves being inclusive and promotes action for change. It recognizes an ideological basis for documentation and aims to demystify how information is gathered and knowledge is produced. It emphasizes the collective nature of analysis, seeing all participants as investigators.

Finally, writing for social change is oriented towards action; it is not research for "the sake of research". The researcher who uses participatory approaches sets the research agenda in co-operation with participants, based on their perceived needs and issues. Together, they reflect on and analyse the information. The emphasis is always on giving the participants presence in the process and in the information.

This approach is evident in those works that give insight into the experiences and perceptions of non-dominant groups, while at the same time placing their interpretations and perspectives on the agenda for those of us committed to helping them address their issues. * Such works take seriously the contributions of everyone towards creating knowledge, with the belief that the creation of knowledge is not just the prerogative of "experts". People are able to read other people's ideas and see that others share their concerns.

Readers of such materials will get the message that it is legitimate to express their concerns and that their views will be respected when expressed. On this basis, the expression of their issues and concerns helps to bring about social change.

* For examples of participatory research see such works as: Carl James, *Seeing Ourselves* and *Making It*; Michael Czerny, S.J. and Jamie Swift, *Getting Started on Social Analysis in Canada*; and Patricia Maguire, *Doing Participatory Research*.

A VITAL BRIDGE

We gain a sense of satisfaction when the needs and issues of the people we work with are being addressed; when it is clear that prior assumptions have been challenged and the next steps to bring about change have been outlined. Here are some of the comments that have communicated this kind of growth to us.

I've had some real Ah-Hahs – like "That's what I've been doing all along, but I never saw it that way before…".

I gain confidence in being able to tackle work which lay ahead.

From a sense of being alone and isolated in this work to a new appreciation of working with others who themselves are facing similar problems.
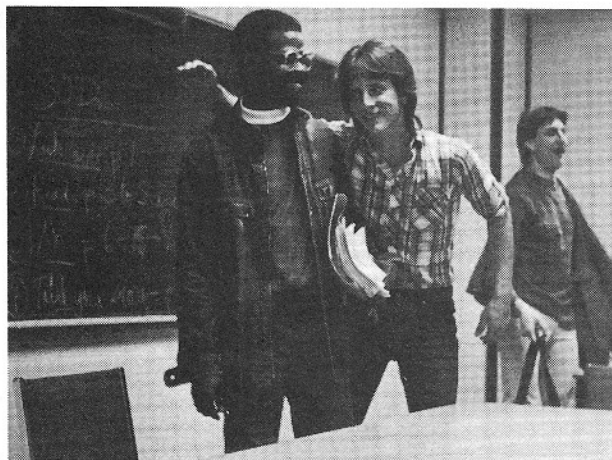
I've gained confidence, self-esteem, new energy, new knowledge, and new friends.

These responses illustrate shifts that nourish us in our work and give us energy for the work ahead. We are always conscious that the process of education for social change needs commitment and belief in the goal. That is why we build and seek feedback from participants.

Educators too, are encouraged, given energy, and get excited about new opportunities, new networks, and new friendships with people who share similar goals and ideals. Participant feedback is a vital bridge in the interdependence between educators and learners.

Because we are often swimming against the current as we challenge inequitable ideas and practices, we need to support each other – just as learners need support so they can gain confidence in their capacity to bring about change.

When everyone takes responsibility for the learning, everyone is a teacher. This brings with it a sense of freedom, of liberation from the traditional responsibility of a top-down educator. The greater social solidarity to which we aspire needs to be mirrored in a solidarity between ourselves and learners, as we continuously support each other's movement towards transformation.

MARK HENDERSON