TEACHING ACTIVISTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: COMING TO GRIPS WITH QUESTIONS OF SUBJECTIVITY AND DOMINATION

Sherene H. Razack
The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

Abstract

Education for social change seemed to be a more straightforward endeavour when we thought only in terms of unitary subjects: Blacks in South Africa, women in the world, Francophones in Québec. Once we started filling in the categories so that we had such subjects as Black women, White women and women with disabilities, for example, and confronted multiple layers of oppression and privilege, we were faced with understanding the interrelationship between systems of domination and the construction of subjectivity. For radical educators, the challenge is to devise a curriculum to facilitate critical reflection where personal privilege meets political practice in these multiple locations. We have to build into our critical education projects a commitment to exploring the depths of discourse as that discourse constitutes us in and out of the classroom. In this article I describe the pedagogical steps in one such experiment: a Canadian Summer College for human rights activists to reflect critically on how power is organized in Canadian society and hence to gain a deeper understanding of their group's strategies for social change.

Résumé

L'éducation à des fins de changement social semblait une entreprise relativement facile quand nous pensions seulement en termes simples: le Noirs en Afrique du Sud, les femmes dans le monde, les Francophones au Québec. Mais quand les catégories se sont complexifiées, nous donnant des femmes noirs, femmes handicapées et des femmes blanches, par exemple, et que nous avons dû confronter des communautés multiples, et donc des couches multiple d'oppression et de privilèges, il faut comprendre le rapport entre les systèmes de domination et la construction de la subjectivité. Pour les éducateurs critiques, le défi est de créer des programmes qui facilitent une réflexion critique où les privilèges personnels rencontrent la pratique politique, et qui tient compte de cette complexification des catégories. Nous devons bâtir nos projects éducatifs critiques en nous engageant à explorer les profondeurs d'un discours qui nous constitue à l'intérieur comme à l'extérieur de la salle de classe. Dans le présent article, je décris les étapes pédagogiques d'une telle expérience: un cours d'été canadien pour les militants des droits de la personne qui visait à les faire réfléchir de façon critique sur l'organisation du pouvoir dans la société canadienne, et ainsi les amener à acquérir une compréhension plus profonde de leurs stratégies de changement social.

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Introduction

To an adult educator immersed in the mechanics of a particular program, theoretical concerns relating to subjectivity and domination can seem remote to the process of deciding how to teach and what to teach, even when there is a strong commitment to examining critically the assumptions that underlie practice. Few of us recognise an ongoing and explicit connection between our theory and practice. Indeed, a common comment from community activists is that theory is not something activists or community educators have much time to consider. Whenever I am asked impatiently by participants in an educational program what the themes of critical theory or postmodernism have to do with their social change activities, the question is usually framed to imply that we would all be better off learning about such pressing global issues as the debt crisis rather than spending time on the construction of subjectivity and the deconstruction of power relations. Obviously, the two pursuits are not mutually exclusive, yet how we might build critical thinking in the activist classroom without recourse to alienating and abstract theoretical notions remains a major challenge and one which the educational project described in this article attempted to meet.

In an issue of *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*[1] devoted exclusively to critical social theory and adult education, Michael Welton offered this definition of critical theory:

> Critical theory is a theory of history and society driven by a passionate commitment to understand how societal structures hinder and impede the fullest development of humankind's collective potential to be self-reflective and self-determining historical actors.[2]

Critical theory has an intrinsic connection to social justice, hence an important role to play in radical adult education where the task is to provide learning opportunities directed to "restructuring social arrangements along more equitable, just, and humane lines"[3]. The contributors to the special issue of *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* explored the perspectives of Marx, Habermas, Marcuse and, to a lesser extent, postmodern thinkers (conspicuously omitting serious attention to feminist theorists) in order to identify how critical theorists take up issues of subjectivity and domination. For instance, Michael Welton explored in Marx the idea that people have to learn "emancipatory subjectivity," which they stand a chance of doing at the crisis moments (both systemic and social) in capitalism[4]. Habermas, Welton noted, searches for those mechanisms of cognition operating behind material processes, locating in them those conditions that favour critical reflection. Matthias Finger probed how modernist ideas of democracy, justice and emancipation can work to conceal mechanisms of domination. He wondered how we might question these ideas and remain tied to a faith in individual human agency.[5] Michael Chervin reviewed the ideas of Marcuse who recognizes, as do many postmodern thinkers, the many layers of discourse that we must take into account if radical education is to mean anything. Marcuse, for instance, makes the important point that ideology is not just an illusion to be unmasked but a series of regulations on a number of sites (such as the body). Critical education, then, has to explore contradictions at

specific sites and at particular historical moments so that we might find those "moments libérateurs" in which it would be possible to resist domination.[6] The value of Marcuse's work is his reminder to be context-specific in how we understand these regulations. For instance, it is simplistic to assume that the oppressed can have either a colonized self or a true self. As many feminists have also pointed out, there is no one true self, no unitary subjectivity waiting to be uncovered beneath the layers of colonization.[7]

It is feminist theorists who have rescued us from the paralysis that comes with confronting the discursive nature of all we know and can know. If all knowledge is partial and embedded in social relations, then we need to be justifiably suspicious of universal concepts that work in service of the status quo. This need not mean a descent into pluralism and the absence of any political projects. Instead, we can build into our political projects "ground-clearing activity," a sustained vigilance about how knowledge always circulates from a position of mastery.[8] We can commit ourselves to taking inventory, as Gloria Anzaldua counsels, asking exactly what we inherited from our ancestors.[9]

Radical educators have to find ways to take these insights from critical theorists and feminists out of the realm of theory and into pedagogy. How do we foster critical thinking on relations of domination, for example, so that our students understand power to be something more than a force that one person or one group exerts over another? To focus their attention on the more covert ways in which power is exerted, to examine instead how we are each ***constituted*** by an existing set of social arrangements, means finding ways to discuss how what we know, think and feel are socially produced. Paradoxically, to explore power relations in this way, educators who value an experiential learning approach must at the same time foster an interrogation into the category of experience itself. That is to say, while the student's experiences must be central to learning, those experiences have to be unpacked in order to explore how it comes to be that we often think and feel exactly what we are supposed to think and feel.

The program I describe below wrestled with a number of theoretical issues named above. We explored, for example, how Western concepts of human rights could in fact work to conceal the North's domination of the South. We worked hard to question the responses we each had to social groups to which we did not belong, watching to see how our respective positions of power and privilege regulated what we knew about the experiences of others. While we did not use words or concepts like regulation and hegemony, the problems that arose when activists tried to fit the daily experience of oppression into the language of human rights and the difficulties of working across differences of race, class, gender, sexuality and physical and mental ability soon led to collective reflection on what a rights-based description leaves out and to a compelling need to explore the limits of identity politics. Inevitably, the design of the program regulated to a large extent how questions of subjectivity and domination in the human rights context were addressed. In retracing both the analysis and the specific pedagogical challenges we encountered in the Summer College, I hope to share

my sense of how theory is embedded in practice and to demonstrate some of the ways in which seemingly abstract theoretical issues present themselves in education for social change.

The Idea of A Summer College for Human Rights Activists

The Summer College for Human Rights Activists sponsored by the Human Rights Research and Education Centre of the University of Ottawa completed its eighth year in 1992. The program evolved considerably over this period, reflecting both the politics of the times and the pedagogical roadblocks encountered along the way. After an initial feasibility survey, the Human Rights Centre of the University of Ottawa determined that human rights activists needed information on emerging human rights issues, a chance to network with other activists and an opportunity to reflect critically on their social change activities. In January of 1985, when the project began, we had few other guidelines except a sense that an activist was someone who was willing to take a public stand in fighting oppression, a person who was, in the words of a contemporary feminist newspaper, "actually trying to change institutions"[10]. We were also clear that the curriculum would be written primarily for individuals acting collectively, and we defined the ideal student as a person involved at a community level in the struggles for social justice of women, native people, persons with disabilities, disadvantaged minorities and the poor.

In defining the educational needs of activists, we took as our base that individuals actively involved in social change possessed a wealth of experience but were often frustrated by a lack of time to reflect. To explore such seemingly mundane questions of political strategy as "why are we doing this?" and "where will this get us?" requires looking at how a site of contestation has been described, analyzed and confronted. We imagined a group of sixty activists, in three groups, simultaneously reflecting on their work and pursuing ideas over shared meals in a relaxed environment. Out of this thinking and planning, The First Summer College for Human Rights Activists developed as a residential two week program attracting Canadian groups working in Canada and abroad on issues of sexism, racism, sexuality, peace and the environment. Ultimately, human rights organizations from South Africa, Bermuda, Latin America and Zimbabwe sent a few participants in order to network with Canadian human rights activists. There was also a sprinkling (deliberately limited) of human rights professionals who did not work from a community base but from within a state institution such as a Human Rights Commission. Such participants were required to demonstrate an activist background if not a current connection to a community group. In terms of diversity the students, the resource persons and the team of three instructors typically included roughly equal proportions of men and women: two thirds White, one third Black; five percent disabled persons; five percent lesbians or gay men; five percent persons of aboriginal origin. Few people fell unproblematically into any one category, of course; all the men were not Black and neither were all the women White, for instance.

The pedagogical approach of the Summer College was loosely defined as participant-centred. The participants' own experiences formed the core of the collective reflection, and the preferred pedagogical tools were small group work and group-directed learning.

While there was a commitment to student-directed and participatory learning, there was also an increasingly substantial manual and an agenda of resource persons that limited flexibility and contradicted the notion of experiential learning. In reality, the Summer College embodied a specific social vision and analysis described on the recruitment posters; participants agreed beforehand to work within the framework. Experienced activist instructors led participants to a deepened awareness of how power is organized in Canadian society and hence to a deeper understanding of their groups' strategies for change. Underpinning the curriculum was a critical analysis of society that focused on ideologies and mechanisms of domination, an analysis that strongly regulated the discussion in spite of the commitment to participatory and learner-centred learning.

The analysis upon which the curriculum was formulated began from the position that native people, people of colour, women, people with disabilities and gay men and lesbians collectively experienced social inequality on a number of fronts. How this inequality developed and was sustained and the strategies needed for social justice became the organizing principle of the program's content. In pursuing the themes of inequality and oppression, three pedagogical challenges presented themselves:

1. How to take participants from an individualistic understanding of rights to one in which it was understood that there were subordinate and dominant ***groups*** in Canadian society.
2. How to link the personal to the political and to understand one's own subject position on both a cognitive and affective level.
3. How to develop an understanding of interlocking systems of oppression.

While we did not identify, let alone confront, all of these challenges simultaneously or with the same degree of success, we learned in the course of the eight years that the potential of education for social change is maximized when we remain self-conscious about our multiple and sometimes contradictory locations and vigilant about the deep entrenchment of systems of domination in our daily lives.

From the Individual to the Collective

The participants of the Summer College shared, for the most part, a geographical location in a liberal, capitalist, Western state which was the point of departure for the initial design. In essence, the program sought to enable activists to uncover relations of power particular to Western capitalist states. We asked at the outset: what does it mean to be a human rights activist in a liberal and capitalist Western state, as opposed to one in South Africa, for example? One important difference is the relative invisibility of some of the practices of domination one is engaged in confronting. Another is the strength of what Gayatri Spivak describes as "the great cultural explanations...that allow the entire capitalist caper to carry on to the other side of the international division of labour"[11], the thick overlay of ideological formations specific to the West. The curriculum had, therefore, to define and confront deeply held Western beliefs which, in the context of human rights, help to mask oppressive practices. One such belief stood out above all others: individualism.

Canadian activists, no less than other segments of their society, absorb in their education, in their dealings with the state and in the media, the very strong

individualist ethic that is the linchpin of capitalist ideology. For many people, social inequality develops because of individual failing; at best there is a recognition that inequality arises because women and minorities possess a mysterious handicap, often described as disadvantage. Alison Jaggar's contention that social inequality is caused, not by disadvantage but by oppression, "one group actively subordinating another to its own interest",[12] is an analysis of the status of women and minorities which many Canadians would consider inapplicable to their society. Thus, human rights are widely thought to be only about the preservation of the dignity and worth of the individual and equality of opportunity (hence the popularity of the civil libertarian perspective) and not about connecting these to the high infant mortality rate among native populations, the poverty level of certain groups, systemic violence against women or even the issues of pay and promotion for women and minorities. In declaring, therefore, that the curriculum would be about the oppression of women and minorities, the Summer College program had to move participants away from thinking about individuals and towards thinking about groups.

Since the contemporary vocabulary of human rights itself did not easily accommodate this, the first challenge was to subvert and simultaneously work with the language of rights. With hindsight one wonders whether working within the rights paradigm was inevitably corrupting since it tended to direct attention to legal strategies and take away from other perhaps more transformative approaches to social justice such as organizing at the grass roots level to pressure politicians for changes.

In the ideological space of individualism in which Western human rights activists find themselves, human rights abuses are understood primarily as discrimination. The anti-discrimination approach to rights abuses is evident in educational materials and human rights courses that emphasize avenues of legal redress, primarily through human rights commissions. Discrimination itself is widely understood to be mainly about ***individual*** prejudice even when there is also some awareness of its systemic nature. For instance, a 1982 brochure on human rights published by the Public Legal Education Association of Saskatchewan noted that there were seven reasons why an individual might discriminate against a particular group:

1. hatred - this may be a historical hatred between two groups of people
2. false ideas of racial, sexual, physical superiority
3. prejudice - making prejudgments without knowing all the facts
4. ignorance - not knowing and not finding out about other groups or individuals
5. fear
6. intolerance - perhaps based on ideas passed on by parents and friends
7. discrimination as a policy - usually found in organizations such as businesses, clubs, and governments.[13]

Discrimination is seen here primarily as arising from the aberrant behaviour of a few individuals except for the first and seventh reasons which, however, remain unelaborated. If discrimination is explained as the actions of individuals acting out of fear, misinformation, intolerance and historical hatred, rights abuses can be easily psychologized. The power possessed by individuals of the dominant groups to act out their fears and prejudices is minimized in this picture, as is the systemic exclusion of specific groups from meaningful participation in Canadian society. In deliberate

contrast, therefore, a theme pursued throughout the Summer College curriculum was that discrimination is less a problem of prejudice and stereotyping and more a problem of power—power that enables the dominant group to oppress through a myriad of social, economic and political institutions as well as in countless daily episodes of interpersonal behaviour.

The view that certain groups are oppressed is, of course, strongly resisted in a society that is officially egalitarian. Denial is central to how privilege is maintained in liberal democracies. Philomena Essed, in two important works on everyday racism, explores how the ideal of tolerance has gained such a stronghold in liberal democracies that dominant groups have a great deal invested in seeing themselves as tolerant and resist strenuously the idea that racism exists in their society. In everyday relationships between Whites and Blacks, this resistance is manifested in a failure to acknowledge covert racism, a persistent denial that a rigid norm is enforced upon subordinate groups.[14]

A classroom discussion about the rights of collectivities suffers from the deeply held belief that we are essentially autonomous individuals who are responsible for making our own way; the failure to do so is attributed to personal and not societal causation. The individual rights model does not give us any conceptual tools for understanding oppression and the systems that constrain individual choice. How individual women's opportunities, for instance, are blocked is not so immediately apparent as it might be in a more overtly oppressive state. Uncovering the limits of an individual rights model, then, and revealing what it masks, i.e., relations of power between groups, was the first pedagogical challenge of the Summer College.

Anxious to begin where the participants themselves were, we thought of the first task of the curriculum as requiring a working through of existing human rights concepts, the main one being individual rights. In the traditional Western, liberal understanding of rights, an individual possesses the right to pursue his or her own interests without interference from others ***providing that this freedom does not inflict harm, either mental or physical.***[15] Since one individual's freedom frequently collides with another's (employers, for example, are not free to run their businesses as they choose if workers are also free to work an eight hour day), harm cannot usually be avoided. A democratic society resolves the collision of freedoms according to the principle that each individual is entitled to equal consideration. Individuals in this model do not belong to communities that define who they are or how they are treated, and the whole process is a relentlessly rational one that leaves unanswered the question of what is "equal consideration." Noticeably absent is any consideration of social justice; the concept of equality effectively replaces the notion of justice.

To critique this understanding of rights, and thus of rights denied, participants were given several case studies of conflicting rights and asked both to resolve them and to identify what values, principles and assumptions contributed to their decision. Perhaps because they were a diverse group of human rights activists, most participants succeeded in contextualizing rights claims. They argued, for instance, that the police do not have the right to bug the homes of the members of a militant Black group whom they suspect to be prone to violence unless it could be shown that the police were acting

in this instance on the basis of reasonable information and not on the basis of racism. By the time the session moved to a consideration of the social, political and economic considerations that have an impact on one's rights claims, most participants readily saw that individuals may have their rights denied as a result of their group identity and that, conversely, respecting human rights requires that we take into account what happens to an individual because of membership in a group from which one cannot dissociate (e.g., individual: woman; group: women).

Significantly, however, when confronted with examples where honouring group rights meant limiting the privileges of some groups represented in the classroom, very often the personal histories of participants held sway and influenced how far they were willing to go in respecting the group-based claims of others. For instance, not all White males readily agreed that affirmative action programs that reserved a certain number of jobs for qualified women were just. And not all anglophones accepted the view that Quebec's language laws prohibiting new immigrants from attending English language schools (in the interests of maintaining French as the language of Quebec) was an example of a collective right of an oppressed collectivity. What was often at issue was whether a group could be accurately described as oppressed to the extent that ***unequal*** (i.e., unfair) measures were required.

Their experience as people working for social change notwithstanding, many participants of the Summer College were only superficially familiar with the status of groups not their own. Indeed, we have often presumed too much about the affinity that exists between diverse oppressed groups and have expected White lesbians not to be racist, South African Black men not to be homophobic and virtually everyone working for social justice to be aware of the bodily norms with which they operate. The fiction that we are all just individuals pursuing our own interests permeates the activist classroom and helps to create another fiction that we are all just activists seeking social change. It became imperative, therefore, that the curriculum include sections on the personal and political implications of identity.

In its early years, the curriculum did not explicitly address the issue of differences among participants. It did, however, devote considerable energy to the status of various groups in Canadian society in an effort to emphasize that there was inequality in Canada. Our initial failure to link the personal to the political in the classroom undermined in some ways this project of describing oppression. Participants were able to explore, the statistics relating to various groups, to be appropriately shocked by the evidence that young native men have the highest suicide rate in the world and almost a seventy percent chance of incarceration at least once in their lives and to recognize that disabled people have a 90% unemployment rate and that women of colour earn much less than White women with the same qualifications and experience. While they were able to uncover and understand how those statistics came to be, they sometimes could not locate oppressive practices within their own communities or grasp the personal implications of these statistics. Most students considered themselves exempt from their group's privilege and were initially unable to name what was in their own knapsack of privilege.[16] In recognition of this, we added films and texts of the personal experience of discrimination so that the connection could be made between personal

lives and abstract statistics. Tensions remained, however, which underscored why the second challenge of the curriculum involved making a more sustained connection between the personal and the political.

Linking the Personal to the Political

There are a number of land mines strewn along the path when one attempts to interrogate subject position in the classroom. First, an ever-present danger of building on the personal to forge a collective politics is that the political becomes limited to the personal. For example, as Jenny Bourne has noted, when some White women explored their own personal complicity around racism, one result was a lessening of personal guilt at the expense of accountability and sound anti-racist practice.[17] That is to say, how racism works as a system of oppression and its very real impact on Black people's lives take a back seat to the suffering that Whites feel about this state of affairs.

A second difficulty is the unequal risks taken in the classroom when linking the personal to the political. For example, if race awareness sessions take place in mixed groups, minorities sometimes have to watch in anguish as relations of domination and oppression are played out once again. In Canada, an emphasis on intercultural communication and multicultural awareness sessions often pre-empt thinking about how power is organized. Teachers are taught about the customs of their multicultural pupils but not about the economic practices that confine minorities to the lowest paying jobs. They learn to see non-dominant groups as exotic, not oppressed.

To avoid these situations, the Summer College curriculum initially laid such a heavy emphasis on systems that oppress that we almost forgot the faces behind the systems and the strength of ideologies of domination. This made it possible for a man to sit in a classroom and declare that violence against women simply didn't exist to the extent claimed by some participants, for a White woman to demand that a black woman participate in a discussion about racism because it was primarily about her and to enable a Black man to declare that homosexuals were deviants. Ironically, learner-centred pedagogy and a nurturing atmosphere reinforced the illusion of sameness among participants and acted to block a more careful examination of differences ***in*** the classroom itself. As I have explored elsewhere[18], a pedagogy built around the sharing of experiences often fails to take into account how such stories are both heard and spoken across different subject positions. It is not uncommon, for example, for people of colour who talk about their experiences of racism to White people to be met with disbelief and denial, so strongly do these stories come up against the dominant world view that Western society is basically fair and Westerners tolerant. Ultimately, pained by these instances, many participants felt that more space should be set aside in the curriculum to discuss personal histories that would assist them to cross the chasms of difference. In doing so, however, we had to take into account that, notwithstanding their educative value, the risks of sharing personal stories are very differently shared, as the reaction of dominant groups to the stories of oppression indicate. When Stephanie, a hearing impaired student tremblingly signed a poem she had written on her personal history of incest and the many years she endured without help, she did what no carefully prepared exercise could accomplish. She put herself on the line in order to respond to some male questioning about the nature and extent of violence against

women. Popular educators sometimes think, selfishly, that an episode of this kind in the classroom is an opportunity from heaven and devise techniques to encourage the telling. For instance, participants are asked to discuss moments of pain. It came as a considerable shock to the facilitator of a popular theatre workshop that the students of the Summer College resisted and intensely disliked being asked to imagine and act out a moment of great pain. My own response was anger because I did not like the implication that we were all safe with each other and because I disliked what felt to me like therapy instead of political organizing.

Can we discuss rationally and with a minimum amount of pain what is not rational and is deeply painful? Why should women take the risk of telling men what rape and incest and harassment feel like? Why should minorities attempt to explain to Whites the pain of exclusion by whites? Why should native people describe the genocide they are enduring? In the telling, it will be the teller of the tale who stands exposed and the listener who has the option to say I don't believe you. Others have tackled these problems and suggested that confronting privilege in the classroom is a game with many ground rules[19]. For all its inherent dangers, for the purposes of coalition, some telling will have to be done like that at the Summer College and we will have to find a way to question respectfully each other's narratives. When a pedagogy is built around the sharing of narratives, the only possible strategy seems to be to reinforce continually the point that there are narratives, as Gayatri Spivak notes[20], and to focus on what we need to do to change the patterns of oppression they reflect and sustain. The risks of subjecting one's deepest pain to public scrutiny are better borne with support—either from those similarly situated or from an institutional context that prepares the listeners and the tellers of tales for respectful dialogue. That institutional context can be the analytical framework of the curriculum which stresses the interconnections between systems of oppression and the tremendous power of elites. Communicating these themes presented the third challenge of the Summer College curriculum.

Interlocking Systems of Oppression

An analytical framework that stresses the connections between the global and the local can facilitate a better understanding of where we each stand, providing that an exploration of our commonalities does not enable us to ignore very real differences in privileges and power. It was partly in response to Stephanie's eloquence on violence against women that the idea grew to use the connections between violence against women in the family and in society and organized state violence to show how racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism and economic exploitation link up globally to produce various forms of oppression. The type of connections we hoped students would make are captured in June Jordan's poem which Angela Davis uses to illustrate the links between sexual violence, militarism, racism and economic exploitation:

> they fucked me over because I was wrong I was
> wrong again to be me being me where I was/wrong
> to be who I am
> which is exactly like South Africa
> penetrating into Namibia ...[21]

The intention was to uncover the interconnections between various systems of oppression and to enable each student to find himself or herself in the picture. The connections between the global and the local work particularly well if the classroom is made up of activists from around the world. By the time we tried these themes, the Summer College had begun to attract participants from Zimbabwe and South Africa who came initially to network with Canadian human rights activists. Their presence and that of participants who were born elsewhere and who had worked in their home countries (about thirty percent of the student body) made it possible to discuss apartheid, militarism and human rights and state violence while the presence of Canadian women working on violence issues or who had personally experienced violence highlighted the realities of oppression here.

What was less well fostered was how to uncover some of the same practices of domination that drive these various systems in different parts of the world. Black South African participants, for instance, continued to think that incest only happened in North America and that gay and lesbian issues were irrelevant to their political world while Canadians did not really believe that their human rights struggles were integrally linked to those elsewhere. At least a part of the failure to make these connections has to do with the ratio of Canadian to non-Canadian participants (about 10 to 1) which privileged the perspective and issues of the developed world even while ostensibly discussing political issues of the south.

To respond to the difficulty we noted in participants drawing connections between various forms of oppression, we devoted more time to the structure of the world economy and to the ways, both historically and currently, in which various elites utilize racist and sexist ideas in their bid to control the world's resources. To draw on Cynthia Enloe, bananas, beaches and bases are integrally connected in the current world economic order. As she puts it:

> Women active in nationalist movements in the Philippines, Ireland, South Africa, Canada, Sri Lanka, Mexico and Nicaragua have begun to analyze how the 'home' and the 'international system' are integrally tied to one another. In doing so they are far ahead of those women in industrialized countries who have scarcely glimpsed those political connections. The process that ties them together is not just globalized consumer advertising, it is domestic relations between women and men. If women, they argue, are kept in marginalized roles by men as lovers, fathers or husbands, the chances of halting foreign financed invasion, ending an unfair military bases treaty or holding accountable a multinational employer will be slim. In this sense foreign base commanders and entrepreneurs may depend on domestic violence as much as they do on alliances with men in the local élite.[22]

To foster this interconnected kind of analysis, sections were added on the International Monetary Fund and the current debt crisis and on the international creation of marginalized labour forces made up of minority women. If these sections could help participants see the connections between Canadian economic and foreign policy and third world politics and between sexism and racism and economic exploitation and to find the common principles and practices they were fighting for,

perhaps then they would be more equipped for working across differences than if we relied only on the sharing of personal narratives in the classroom.

Clearly, to understand the debt crisis, for example, at a level beyond the abstract, means confronting the First world privilege that sustains it. At the same time that participants explore the dimension of the debt crisis, they have to come to "feel" in their bones that there is a Third world because of the actions of the First world. They have to "know" about economic exploitation in cognitive and non-cognitive ways, an undertaking that can only begin from a recognition that there are multiple subject positions and that we are, as members of various groups, constituted by systems of domination in different ways.

Continuing Dilemmas

Common cause was the underlying rationale of the Summer College. That various human rights struggles are linked by the interdependency of all systems of oppression has been the foundation on which the curriculum rested. The task at hand has always been clear: uncover how racism, sexism, economic exploitation and the oppression of disabled people, old people, lesbians and gay men work in specific contexts and determine effective political strategies. The complexities of this kind of uncovering has meant that time must be spent deconstructing the deeply held belief in the autonomous and essentially free individual who is thought to inhabit Western democracies. If an individual is not an autonomous being, he or she inhabits a variety of communities. Neither a generic woman nor a generic man exists. Each individual inhabits cultural, linguistic, political, racial communities in which are entrenched various sexual, racial and bodily norms. More importantly, the norms of each community reflect the way in which power is organized in society. One can, as a popular educator, try to devise ways in which participants' everyday experiences of oppression can be understood in terms of these webs of domination. This has been the pedagogy of the Summer College.

What remains disturbingly out of reach is a way to make the transition from critical consciousness to action. To put it simply, when students left the Summer College, did they leave with the same "investments of power and privilege" with which they entered, critical consciousness notwithstanding?[23] There was ample proof that consciousness was raised; student evaluations and behaviour at the college itself indicated this to be so. But no educator could credibly claim that a two week residential program changes political practices in any remarkable way. Furthermore, at the Summer College students already possessed a high degree of consciousness about oppression, at least in their own sphere, and were experienced activists. One cannot ever be certain that participants have learned anything new. What then would make this two week experience, if it is positive, something beyond a brief interlude? The question about promoting critical reflection over the long term is one part of the challenge; the other is the more metaphysical issue about transforming consciousness when there is still very real privilege to be derived from retaining the old. As Charles Paine expressed it, how do you build critical consciousness when your students are quite "comfortable with the world" and are, in fact, affluent?[24] Most of the participants of the Summer College cannot be described as affluent by North American standards, and many are, in fact, poor. But privilege comes in many different packages, among them gender, skin,

heterosexuality, able bodied, developed world, etc. Ironically, when the interrelationship between systems of oppression consumes students' analytical and political energies, and the full extent of human rights abuses is revealed, it can feel self indulgent to turn the light on to one's self and ask about personal privilege.

Comfortable students and comfortable teachers continue to trouble me as I teach Canadian activists each summer and university students in the winter. I am not the first, nor I expect the last, educator to lose sleep over the question of the limits of education for social change. What will persuade men to give up their privilege, for instance, lies at the heart of many feminist critical reflections, and the answers have ranged from a liberal insistence on reasoned argument to a seemingly pragmatic response that only organized power on the part of women will effect any change. One could ask instead, as Teresa de Lauretis did, "What will persuade women to walk out of the male-centred frame of reference in which gender and sexuality are (re) produced by the discourse of male sexuality...?"[25] The answer may well be that women will walk out when they realize that they have something to gain by doing so. It remains difficult to make a similarly compelling case for White women walking out of their skin-based privilege. Education for social change seemed to hold more potential when we thought only in terms of unitary subjects: Blacks in South Africa, Native people in Canada, women in the world, Francophones in Quebec. Once we started filling in the categories so that we had White Quebecers, White women and disabled men confronted the multiple communities and hence the multiple layers of oppression and privilege, we were faced with the need to understand the interrelationship between systems and the construction of subjectivity.

Given these multiple locations, the challenge is to devise a curriculum which would facilitate critical reflection on where personal privilege meets political practice within a specific context. We have to build into our critical education projects a commitment to exploring the depths of discourse as that discourse constitutes us in and out of the classroom. I have tried in this article to describe the steps in one such experiment, a Canadian Summer College for human rights activists.

I have come so far as to see that we have to find ways to question each other's experiences, given what Spivak terms "the great cultural explanations" that affect us. But to what end? If, as I would argue, it is for the sake of coalition building and not for the sake of personal friendship, then the goals of education for social change and its limits come more clearly into focus. We need to understand and respect each other just long enough to work together for change. It is promising that we have recognized the importance of the non-rational in this process. Spivak suggests that we have to reflect on what it would be like to be on the margins, whatever that may be for us. Thinking about privilege and giving it up are not the same thing, however, even though one cannot happen without the other. It is my view that one cannot make a compelling case for change on moral grounds; ultimately, people change because it is in their self interest to do so. What then is our role as teachers in ***organizing*** for change? Do we leave the organizing to the organizers and the teaching of critical thinking to ourselves? Can we effectively do one without the other? This is the crossroads I find myself at today.

Notes

1. *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* V, Special Issue, (Winter/hiver 1991).
2. Michael Welton, "Shaking the Foundations: The Critical Turn in Adult Education Theory," *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* V, Special Issue (Winter/hiver 1991): 24.
3. David Little, "Critical Adult Education: A Response to Contemporary Social Crisis," *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* V, Special Issue (Winter/hiver 1991): 13.
4. Welton: 29.
5. Matthias Finger, "Can Critical Theory Save Adult Education from Post-Modernism? *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* V, Special Issue (Winter/hiver 1991): 133-144.
6. Michael I. Chervin, "La Théorie de Marcuse et l'Education Critique," *The Canadian Journal for The Study of Adult Education* V, Special Issue (Winter/hiver 1991): 63.
7. For a discussion of some feminist theorists in law on this point, see Razack, "Revolution from Within: Dilemmas of Feminist Jurisprudence," *Queen's Quarterly* 97, 3 (Autumn 1990): 398-413.
8. Trinh Minh-Ha, *Woman Native Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989): 41.
9. Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1989): 82.
10. *Off Our Backs*, XVI, 1 (February 1986): 1.
11. Gayatri Spivak, "The Post-modern Condition," in *The Post Colonial Critic*. Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues, ed. Sara Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990): 20-21.
12. Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983): 6.
13. Public Legal Education Association of Saskatchewan, *Human Rights* (Saskatoon: Public Legal Education Association, 1982: 2.
14. Philomena Essed, *Everyday Racism*. Cynthia Jaffe, (California: Hunter House, 1990); *Understanding Everyday Racism* (California: Sage Publications, 1991).
15. A classic expression of the liberal democratic approach to rights is contained in Allan Borovoy's popular booklet for human rights advocates, *The Fundamentals of Our Fundamental Freedoms* (Ottawa: The Canadian Labour Congress, n.d.)
16. Peggy McIntosh explores countless daily instances of White privilege such as always finding your own race in stories, media, etc. She has designed exercises to facilitate looking at daily instances of hidden privilege which we successfully used at the Summer College. See her "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies," Working paper #189, Wellesley College Centre for Research on Women, 1988.
17. Jenny Bourne, "Towards an Anti-racist Feminism," *Race and Class*, XXV, 1 (Summer 1983): 1-22.
18. Sherene Razack, "Storytelling for Social Change," *Gender and Education*, 5, 1 (1993): 55-70.
19. Many teachers working with majority white students counsel "ground rules" for behaviour, but this does not, to my mind, significantly reduce the risk for the most vulnerable students. See, for example, Lynn Weber Cannon, "Fostering Positive Race, Class, and Gender Dynamics in the Classroom," *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 1 and 2 (1990): 126-134. I have proposed instead that strict limits be placed on what is attempted when the power imbalances between students are too great.
20. Spivak, 44.
21. June Jordan, "Poem About My Rights," quoted by Angela Davis in *Women, Culture, & Politics* (New York: Random House, 1989), 36.
22. Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases. Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (London: Pandora Press, 1989), 56.
23. Elizabeth Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't this Feel Empowering: Working through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy," *Harvard Educational Review* 59, 3 (August 1989): 301.
24. Charles Paine, "Relativism, Radical Pedagogy and the Ideology of Paralysis," *College English*, 51, 6 (October 1989): 562.
25. Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender. Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 17.