

ACTIVISM COURSE

BUILDING A BETTER WORLD

JUNE 2012

Key notes,
insights and ideas

Facilitated by
Greg Macdougall

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This is based on the folded-format version of this booklet.*

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The Course:

This course is to help participants develop a strategic approach and understanding to dealing with various issues/situations in their communities and the larger world. We will explore the problems and opportunities that come up in groups working to bring about change.

It's about creating a space where people can explore what's important to them – contributing their knowledge and experience – and they can be assisted in doing so through some structure/direction/things to think about.

Some of the questions that inspired this course:

- What issues are important to you, and why? How can you develop a deeper understanding around them?
- How can you best take action? How can you ensure that action is both rewarding and contributes to your personal growth, while still making a positive difference?
- What makes some groups more effective than others? Is a group's approach and perspective in alignment with your own? How can you best fit in a group's work?
- How do we keep a clear 'larger-picture' vision in focus while working on the concrete 'on-the-ground' steps towards that vision?

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what is fair, suitable, just; what works well for each individual, different for different people

Education

to educate, to bring out, to draw forth from within

About Greg Macdougall

Currently a member of both IPSMO (Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Movement Ottawa) and Organizing For Justice, he has written and done multi-media work for outlets such as The Dominion, Linchpin, and rabble.ca. He has facilitated workshops on topics such as media activism, Indigenous solidarity, systemic racism, environmental justice, outreach & recruitment, education, sexual health, conflict resolution, and more.

About this booklet:

This booklet is based on a course on activism offered between September and November, 2011 in Ottawa, Canada.

This isn't meant to be a completely comprehensive account of the course, but is a collection of some of the relevant content that will hopefully leave the reader with some ideas and inspiration, perhaps even to put on something similar on your own.

Also note that all underlined resources have links included in the Resources section at the end of this booklet.

Session #0

The course started out as a general interest course through the local school board. It was later converted to a community centre course, with some of the same participants and some new ones. 'Session #0' was the first week at the school board, before changing to the community centre.



CBC News took interest in the school board offering a course on activism. See the video online at: http://youtu.be/lid3c_ur1Nw

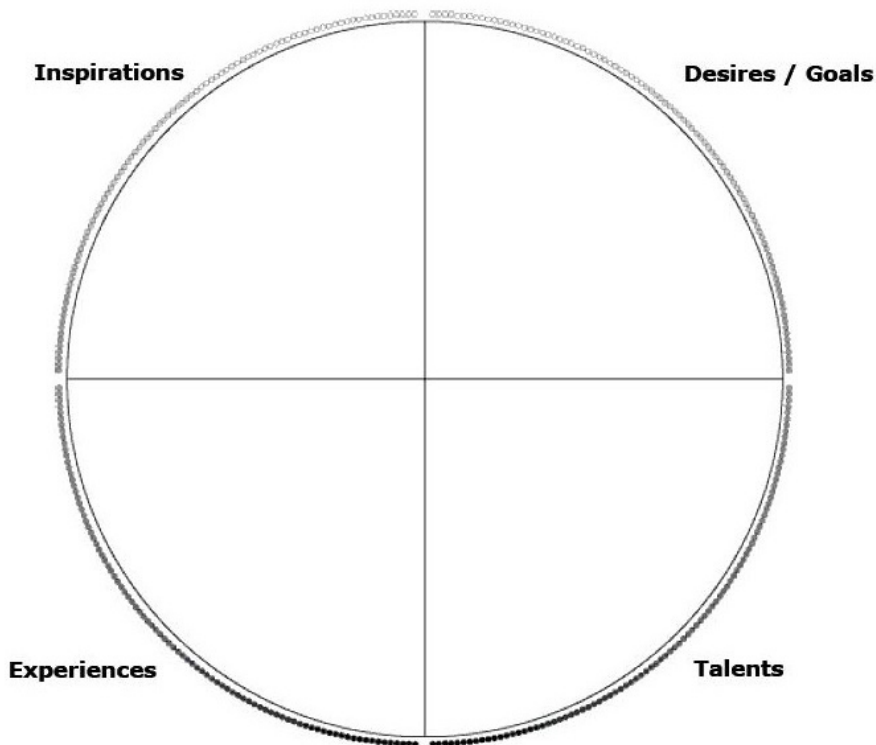
We started off with the paired introductions, and circle exercise, discussed in the Session #1 section on the next page. We also did a 'hot seat' / 'going deeper' exercise, where each person had 10 or so minutes being asked questions to help them 'go deeper' in their interest / desired outcomes for an issue/area they were passionate about (based on the idea in Facilitation notes).

And to come up with priorities for the rest of the course, we did a 'step forward / step back' exercise where participants would move forwards to express interest in a particular priority, and move backwards to express non-interest.

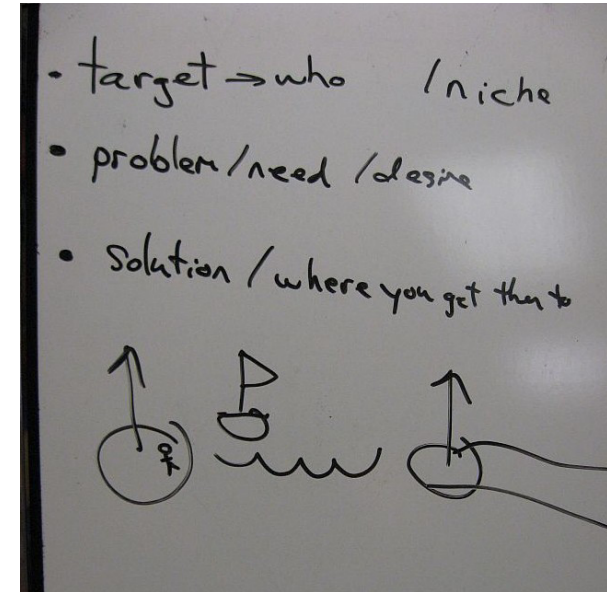
Session #1

We started with rotating 1-on-1 conversations, discussing which seasons we liked best and one thing we liked and didn't like about each of them. The purpose was to connect individually with each other before 'getting down to business'.

This was followed by an exercise designed to explore some key things that might have brought us together here and that would help us start thinking about what 'activism' was about for each of us: filling out the four parts of a circle, each different aspects of ourselves. It was not meant to only be things relevant to 'activism', but things that were important to us as whole people, as human beings. Due to time restraints, we only shared some of what we'd written.



Following that, we talked about a concept of 'messaging' — that is, about connecting with relevance to the people you're addressing: speaking to their primary interests, rather than talking about what is important in your (group's) perspective.



The three key aspects of this approach are to determine:

- who it is you're talking with ('niche'/'target'/defining characteristics)
- what is their key concern/problem/need that you are addressing
- where do you get them to in relation to that (more of an 'end result' as compared with a 'how'/'what you do')

[the islands and boat on the whiteboard represent the person you are talking to, stuck on an island, and your boat can get them where they want to go, but you don't focus them on your boat, you focus them on where they can get to]

This was directed into a 'going deeper' exercise similar to what was mentioned in Week #0, where we explored individual interests in participating in the course – what they were looking to get out of it by the time it was over, where they wanted to be (or, more broadly, the type of change they were envisioning in their group or in society).

In small groups, we brainstormed about important values in the 'process' of activism or creating social change (see photos of notes on next page).

The brainstorming was prefaced by a discussion of the term/principle, “prefigurative” – meaning to model in the present, in the way we work and interrelate, the types of behaviour we would like to have in a future society. This could be expressed as ‘the means create the ends’ (instead of the ends justifying the means), or ‘being the change’ (instead of achieving the change). And there was discussion about how this can be accomplished both in temporary large scale settings (like short-term gatherings where people live and organize by different values than normal society) or in more ongoing yet smaller groups or initiatives (with even this course as an example, as we were modelling a participative, unauthoritarian learning environment, instead of the mainstream approach used most of the time in schools and elsewhere).

And it was followed by reading/discussing a list of conditions for creating a positive learning environment [Appendix B], from pages 46-47 of Joan Kuyek’s book ‘Community Organizing: A Holistic Approach’ (the unofficial textbook for this course). This was meant to foster thinking about how ‘abstract values’ might be applied in concrete situations/processes or to specific goals.

The session ended with a brief discussion on what people would most be interested in learning as we moved forward in the course, and a bit on setting up the online/email component of the course.

The key things identified to further explore:

- strategic approaches to activism/social change
- understanding group dynamics, generating energy/enthusiasm, outreach
- examining motivations (including the role of guilt)
- case studies, for lessons on what works (and what doesn’t)

- inclusiveness
 - equal opp'ty to talk participate / system
 - acceptance of all input
 - respect
 - collective decision-making
 - balancing interests
 - evidence-based
 - creating action from personal passions
 - identifying people's commonalities + which unifies people by finding subset of issues under the larger problem
 - capitalizing on people's skills - u media, group dynamics, facilitation, mobilizing groups

** Notes from brainstorming on activism values **

equality
 respect
 autonomy
 open to different experience
 consciousness of privilege
 accessible
 good facilitation
 clear procedures
 inclusive
 ● golden rule (treat others as you would like to be treated)
 ● non-hierarchical organizing
 ● building community
 Find an effective way to deal with people who dominate
 Expressive vs. instrumental
 Humour
 Sharing food
 Clarify what is at stake
 Talk about the issues / views on where power comes from / how it works

SESSION #2

This second session was divided into a look at some ‘overall’ strategy/vision for what kind of work needs to be done, and then a discussion on the case study of ‘Independent Media Centre (Indymedia) organizing.’ [Appendix C]

The strategy discussion was based primarily upon two excerpts from the book “Community Organizing: A Holistic Approach” by Joan Kuyek. The first excerpt was a list of five ‘change activities that work’, which we discussed in detail, and the second was on the importance of building a ‘culture of hope.’

Here’s the first excerpt (*from page 13*), with some notes from our discussion in bullets after each point.

Change activities that work do the following:

They create vision and enthusiasm so that many diverse people want to be committed to the work; they build a growing base of support for an equitable society.

- speaking to the specific interests of different stakeholders
- finding common ground
- doesn’t have to be ‘all inclusive’ ie some people have opposing interests to an equitable society
- some people (intentionally or not) may push others out, so that is a problem that needs to be addressed

They make understanding about and effective work on key issues accessible to previously uninformed and inactive people.

- openings for conversation / based on interest
- understanding of how collective action can be more effective/is necessary for dealing with systemic issues
- resources that can help people learn how to get involved

They create and model sustainable alternatives for the provision of food, shelter, energy, transportation and the care of children, the disabled and the elderly; they re-create and protect the “Commons.”

- different from demands, which appeal to/legitimize authorities; this is collective empowerment aka doing for ourselves
- examples: community gardens / open source model (software, etc) / ...
- OCAP principle: “They’ve found the key to organizing in poor communities is to be able to consistently demonstrate the ability to provide some-

thing of value to that community. When people need food for their kids or help to keep from being evicted, being told about a march happening next week is not going to meet their needs.” (‘direct action casework’ concept) — *from Healthy Roots conference notes*

- Question: what is the ‘commons’? → collectively ‘owned’/shared resources, made famous by ‘The tragedy of the commons’ concept (see Garret Hardin’s essay)

They establish multiplying numbers of relationships of respect for all beings and each other, kindness and dignity; they do not seek to increase public fear.

- versus the capitalist model of isolation
- concept of ‘listen’ (building respect and understanding)
- problem of how activists sometimes treat each other poorly (essay on ‘Being Whole’)

By focusing on key contradictions in the system, they transform the power of predatory elites, redistribute wealth and establish equity.

- Occupy Wall St movement (pointing out control of society by financial elite)
- school system: degree = (relevant) job?
- economic system: structural (baseline) unemployment
- ‘meritocracy’ vs racial inequality in income, wealth, etc
- discussion on definition of ‘equality’ vs ‘equity’ — question: does ‘From each according to their ability, to each according to their need’ refer to equality or equity? — generally understood: equal = same for everyone; equitable = suitable/fair for everyone.

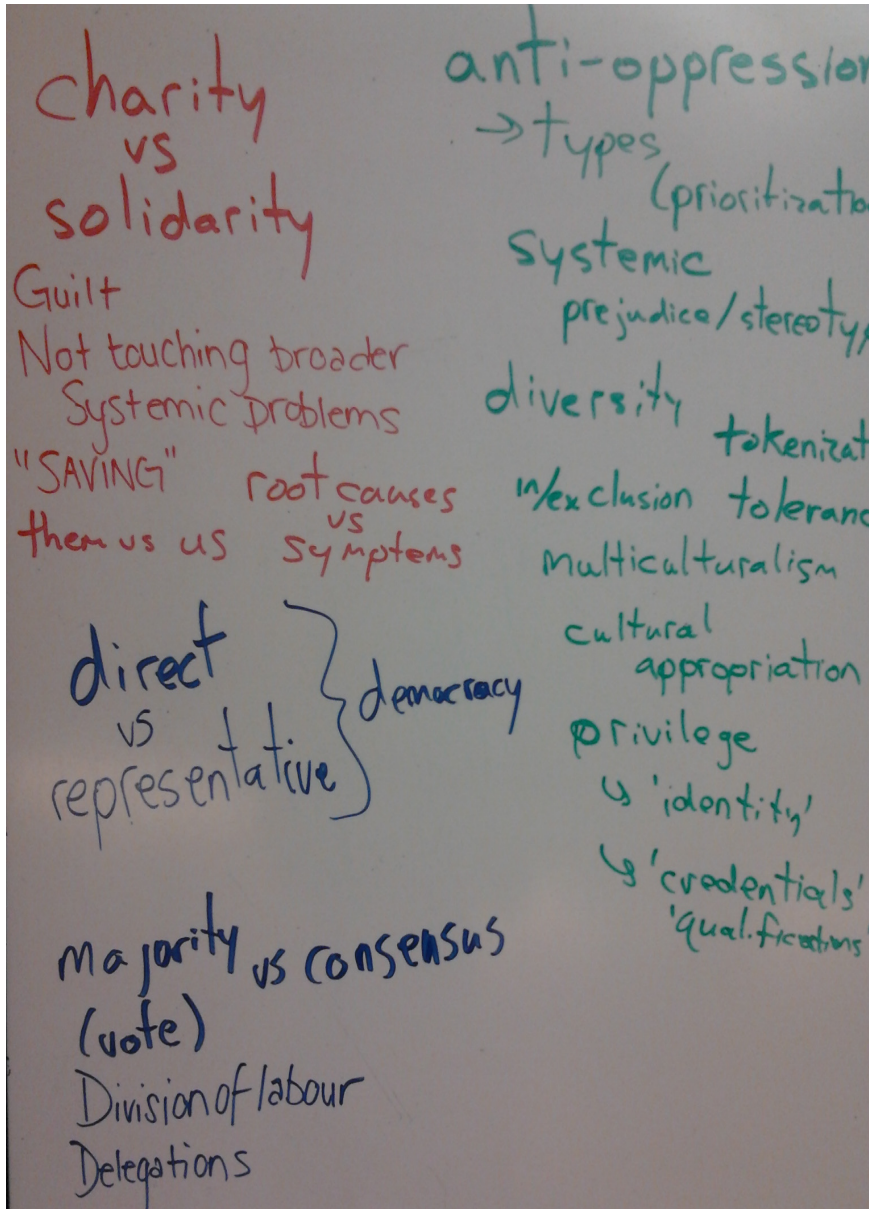
and then, we looked at this final quote from the book:

In my early years as an activist, I would have argued that we must start making change by organizing around environmental, economic or political questions. I no longer believe that is how to do it. Unless we consciously resist it, our practice will be shaped by the destructive corporate paradigm of “power-over.” To free ourselves from the systems that hold power, we have to build a culture of hope. And that begins in our own lives and the lives of our neighbours and friends. It’s like gardening: if we want strong, beautiful and healthy plants, we have to build up the soil. (page 41)

... and participants had some time to draw an image representing some aspect or understanding from the discussion or the quote, after which we regrouped for each of us to explain what we had drawn and what it represented.

Session #3

This session, I came in with a long list of terms and concepts for discussion. We selected three sets of these, and proceeded to talk in depth about them (notes follow). After the break, we had discussions on specific topics chosen at general by each participant (no notes taken for this part).



The three different sets of concepts/terms we discussed were:

- Charity VS Solidarity
- Direct Democracy VS Representative Democracy
- Anti-Oppression and related concepts

Charity versus Solidarity

- feeling 'sorry for' / pity
- 'saving'
- 'they' / other vs making connection
- what are you giving? leftovers vs what you value
- charity works in reducing guilt
- transformation from charity -> into solidarity
- fine line sometimes
- ex: how is 'food not bombs' different from the food bank? putting in effort? all equals?
- taking responsibility
- symptoms vs causes, but can't only address causes (ex: sexual assault support centres are still necessary)
- what is charity appeal to? 'middle class guilt'?
- paternalism
- 'noblesse obligé' (french term)
- cooptation with funding? who is in control?
- consider feelings/roles on both ends
- who's in control?
- charity: keeping people down, breadcrumbs, pacify, bureaucracy, submit to rules, do you qualify?, 'clients'
- solidarity: strengthen capacity of the people to fight for their rights
- liberation theology
- combining self-interest with altruism: John Casper aka Max Sterner "union of egoists" concept
- quotes:
 - "Give someone a fish and you feed them for a day. Teach someone to fish and you feed them for a lifetime."
 - "If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." - often credited to Lilla Watson, she says to credit the group she was part of, "Aboriginal activists group, Queensland [Australia], 1970s."

Democracy (Direct versus Representative)

- *also* (Majority) Voting versus Consensus

- issue of practicality: can't decide everything that affects our lives
- not need everyone involved with everything?
 - ex: big picture vs small picture,
people get involved in what they're interested in
 - division of labour/expertise: not necessarily bad, actually necessary, just have too much of it now ('pin factory' example: actually found in study better quality of life when rotate tasks, have control over management decisions)
- delegation:
 - bonds of trust
 - temporary, contingent, accountable, recall option
- representative
 - system to govern us, not do what we'd like
 - democratic deficit/rhetoric: \$\$ influence hidden by talk of 'democracy'
- consensus concerns
 - can be dealt with by modified consensus
 - having an individual block everything?
 - can vary depending on type of group
 - (single-issue? short term? long term? community based? etc)
 - basis of unity / membership criteria
 - consensus resource: www.consensus.net
- ex: (metaphor for current democratic system) from TV show 'Yes Prime Minister' episode considering how leading questions can make up peoples minds
- how some of Six Nations confederacy system was adopted into US system of democracy:
 - how true?
 - what parts?
 - why is US system so messed up?
- also, book (from 60s, questionable?) mentions how US 'founding fathers' were very familiar with Old Testament Jewish society that had many democratic elements
- the great 'models of democracy', USA and ancient Greece:
 - both only democracy of certain people (not slaves, not women, ...)
 - James Madison quote: "They [government] ought to be so constituted as to protect the minority of the opulent against the majority"
 - even into present, poorer people vote less: shows why ACORN efforts to get voters out was so targeted/attacked

Anti-Oppression

— Forms of oppression; systemic; prejudice; stereotype

— Diversity; Inclusion-Exclusion; Accessibility; Tolerance; Tokenization; Multiculturalism

- how some people will dismiss talk of, say, 'diversity' in favour of 'anti-oppression' (or vice versa), but some willing to speak different languages without absolute judgement of one over the other
- what are we looking at? participation in groups (internal), what happens 'out there' (external)
- notes on '[Diversity and Making Membership Accessible](#)'
- thinking about 'experts': do they help? hinder? some of both?
 - effectively dealing with problems? paternalistic or empowering?
- privilege of identity, also privilege of 'credentials'/qualifications'
- need to go to school (or workshops/...) to learn about oppression? or can informal learning/experience/understanding be just as valuable (and valued?)?
- problem of people not 'checking themselves' b/c they feel they are 'experts'/knowledgeable enough, that they just feel they need to 'call out' others they see as having problematic behaviours
- separating the person from the behaviour (not, "you're racist", but, "that is racist")
- '[Unpacking the invisible knapsack \(white privilege\)](#)' exercise by Peggy McIntosh
- problems of 'calling out' people for oppressive actions/behaviours (a management-/class-based mindset?), excerpt from 'Facilitating Group Learning' by George Lakey (page 75)

Other possible sets of topics to discuss/brainstorm:

direct action; diversity of tactics; civil disobedience; (non-)violence def'n
generating social energy
prefigurative organizing/ models
hierarchy / (non-)hierarchical; vertical vs horizontal organization
education; teaching vs learning:

- popular; direct; project-based; experiential; learning types; training

security culture; infiltrator, agent provocateur
activism vs organizing:

- grassroots; NGO; 'non-profit industrial complex'

marketing; outreach; promotion; advertising

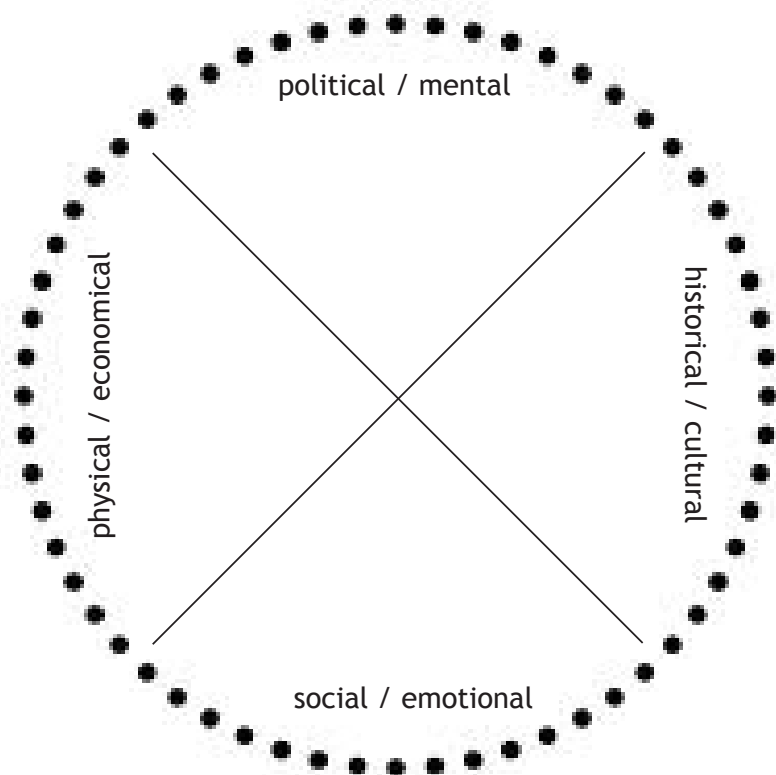
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Session #4

The fourth session featured a visit from Joan Kuyek, the author of the Community Organizing book we'd been referencing previously.

It started with an exercise similar to the ones used in sessions #0 and #1 — Joan's description of the circle exercise in her book was in fact the inspiration for those. We each filled in our circles on our own, with how we were currently doing in each area: what was going on in and/or significantly affecting our lives, divided into aspects. We then shared a highlight from what we'd filled in: one thing that was really draining us, and one thing that was providing us with energy.

And it was interesting to note the kinds of similarities that emerged even with only sharing two aspects each.



About Community Organizing: A Holistic Approach

Some things that Joan mentioned from her book were:

- The way that 'social energy' is needed in order to organize, and how to build it: an example was the 'Better Beginnings Better Futures' project in Sudbury, where by organizing with the well-being of the neighbourhood's children as a central focus, a lot of people became interested and active — and how a motivating focus such as doing something for your children can be much more activating for many people rather than doing something for themselves.
- Leadership and how important it is to discuss, nurture and build leadership: identifying potential leaders, and investing the time and training in order to (learn how to) help those people develop into their potential as community or group leaders. Even when we are aiming for 'horizontal' aka non-hierarchical organizing structures, this does not mean we don't have or need leaders(hip).
- Being able to heal our own pain, grief, and despair. Example of Joanna Macy's 'The work that reconnects', allowing people to communally, together, feel the grief/pain/fear of the troubles of the world and share in each other's knowing that we need not be paralyzed into inaction, but instead help each other confront the feelings of powerlessness/overwhelm and still go out and do something.

Video Interview and Podcast

For part of the session, we recorded Joan's responses to questions about her book and thoughts on activism and organizing. A nine-minute video is available online, as well as a 23-minute podcast, and a written review of the book.(Appendix A)



Video: <http://youtu.be/0nr5BfAJ9zA> — **Podcast:** <http://rabble.ca/podcasts/shows/needs-no-introduction/2011/11/conversation-joan-kuyek>

Book review: <http://dominionpaper.ca/articles/4262> (Appendix A)

Session #5

The last session featured a number of parts:

There was a brainstorm session on activism values and principles, something of a continuation of the exercise from session #1. The main areas under discussion ended up being:

- what the group is doing, and the process by which it is done
- how people are/get involved in what the group is doing
- how people are treated (both those involved, and those external)
- the methods of building understanding / education / communication
- the importance of tapping into people's passions

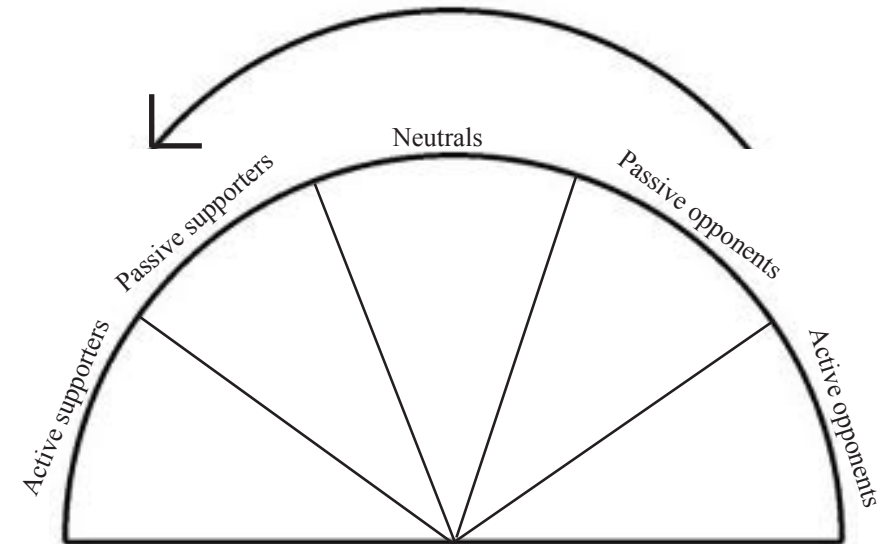
There was also discussion focused on participatory decision-making and drawing out the best ideas from a group. Some of the ideas around that were taking into account the different ways people feel comfortable contributing in a meeting (some people will hesitate to voice their opinion in front of a large group), so different ways to collect opinions could be to break up into smaller discussion groups that can then report back to the full group, or having various places to write input around the room, and have people wander around, silently writing down their ideas for others to see. Writing down ideas/possibilities is also a way to have people 'vote' on what ideas they do or don't like, possibly with a points system, and then taking the most popular ideas forward. Also discussed were ways of moving input, feedback and decision-making beyond/outside a meeting: sending out notes for response that allows for more time and reflection, and also can extend the reach to people who were not at the physical meeting. There can also be one-on-one or small group consultations with key 'experts' / stakeholders / focus groups. And of course, there are other possibilities as well...

The final exercise was a second 'going deeper' hotseat questioning one, with a participant's plans or inspiration for future action open for investigation/discovery. This was also a continuation or 'part two' of the exercise from the beginning of the course, but now more based on some of what had been covered / come up in the course. The focus of the questions aim to bring out connections, possibilities, opportunities, and deeper desires that the participant might not even be aware of / have articulated on their own. For instance,

... the use of "choice creation" or "dynamic facilitation", which is about going deeper and exploring one person's passion to bring out creative, radical and positive ideas that might otherwise not be voiced. Some questions offered as examples to help draw out people's passions are, "What's the

best-case outcome - what do things look like?"; "What would be the first step?"; "If you were in charge, what would you do?"; and "I guarantee you success, so what is it you want to do?" — from *Facilitation notes*

During the process of brainstorming activist values and principles, the following concept/diagram was brought up:



Influencing diagram / spectrum

This diagram illustrates the concept of the various positions where people, groups or organizations can be found on a certain issue of importance to you/ the group you are working with. It is used to first identify where the key targets are, and then to strategize about how to shift/influence them into a better position — for example, active opponents would be better to be passive, while neutrals would be better as supporters, whether active or passive. So the key is knowing where people line up, and where you'd like to move them to or what you'd like to have them do. Something not shown on the diagram is an identification of the 'potential influencers' — if the goal is to be able to influence a certain party or group to shift positions, a key thing to know is who or what may be in a position to exert some form of influence on them, so with each target that can be taken into account and strategized around.

Appendix A:

Book Review: Community Organizing

Fertile Soil for Social Change:

Kuyek's "Community Organizing" a wise guide for activists

by Greg Macdougall | <http://www.dominionpaper.ca/articles/4262>

Community Organizing: A Holistic Approach

Joan Kuyek | Fernwood Publishing: Halifax, 2011

The strength of this book comes from Joan Kuyek's perspective, informed by over 40 years of organizing. Initially intended as an update of the book Fighting For Hope: Organizing to Realize Our Dreams, which Kuyek wrote in 1990, it has instead become a book that reflects both the changes in the world and Kuyek's learning over the last two decades.

Kuyek's political experience is rich and deep. It began in the 1960s, when she did research for the federal government's Company of Young Canadians program. What she learned there quickly transformed her interest towards participatory democracy and community action. She did community organizing in Kingston, where she dedicated herself to the women's liberation movement and was elected as a city councillor ("alderman"). Later came various organizing in Sudbury, and then national work with the United Church's "The Church and the Economic Crisis" project and the Urban-Rural Mission with the World Council of Churches. She then went back to Sudbury to work as the founding program coordinator of the Better Beginnings Better Futures community development program, followed by a year with the national Urban Issues Program of the Bronfman Foundation. She then helped found Mining-Watch Canada, where she stayed for ten years.

Community Organizing: A Holistic Approach is indeed holistic and comprehensive. Kuyek examines the creation of positive social change based on a coherent and wide-ranging analysis of the context in which the work is done and the principles needed to make it effective. Her concept of a holistic approach draws on Aboriginal 'medicine wheel' philosophy, in an effort to bring balance to the various aspects of organizing. She notes, "whole chunks of experience and information are often missing from our work." She uses stories from her own history of involvement to illustrate the holistic approach, which add much to the principles and analysis contained in the book.

Perhaps the most important part of the book is her perspective on starting

points for effecting real change — by which she means changing the societal systems that perpetuate problems, and not just winning piecemeal victories. It is not, as she would have argued earlier in her life, on environmental, social or political questions that we must begin our organizing. Instead, she offers a gardening analogy, of creating fertile soil from which good things can grow.

We need to begin with our own lives and those closest around us. We must generate enthusiasm in those who are willing to get involved, so that they will stay involved and enjoy doing so. This must be so, because we are asking a lot of people: "Asking ourselves and others to take on the work of confronting these systems of domination is asking people to take on a dangerous and difficult task."

Kukey finds hope and inspiration in First Nations communities where the maintenance of traditional ways of life has gone hand in hand with improvements in social, political and economic life. Having outlined the many problems with our current culture, she finds it necessary for non-Indigenous people, too, to undertake a radical transformation of our cultures and communities.

And along with this type of coherent vision, she provides many principles and tools: a list of conditions for how to create safe learning environments, "the web of influences" exercise, questions for visioning exercises, activist theatre, media resources, and more. This book is really a toolbox, a strategy-box, and a vision-box, all in one.

Kuyek clearly illustrates how we can either meet or fail the challenge of class gender, or race, and its impact on our organizing. She's also able to communicate a valuable understanding of subtleties in discussions on different aspects of power and economics, both of which are often insufficiently or problematically discussed or investigated in activist efforts.

Kuyek has much wisdom to share: frankly acknowledging the problems of fragmentation and disunity in organizing; explaining why developing a sense of "we" based on vision and values is better than organizing based on defining "enemies"; and learning to welcome how synchronicity seems to play a supportive role whenever we're doing the right work.

For someone interested in getting involved in organizing, this book can serve as a comprehensive and inspiring introduction. For those already committed to this work, it is a valuable resource for reflection and guidance.

An accompanying Resource Guide for Community Organizing is available at www.fernwoodpublishing.ca/community

Appendix B:

Positive Learning Environment Characteristics

(excerpt from *Community Organizing* book by Joan Kuyek, pages 46-47)

Real learning involves some risks, because it challenges people to change their roles in society. We have found that some situations are more conducive to learning and participation than others. The following conditions may create an environment where people are ready to risk and learn with one another:

- getting past the roles we create for ourselves or that are created for us; being more than “the professional,” “the welfare recipient,” “the victim”;
- feeling that our ideas are equally valid with everyone else’s and that we won’t be dismissed or laughed at if we are shown to be wrong;
- getting past private property in ideas. Not feeling that because we said the idea, we have to defend it to the death or our personhood is at stake;
- having the totality of our lives present at the meeting; taking time to care for one another as people with full agendas and concerns outside the meeting;
- equality and willingness to give to one another in need. So, for example, if I tell you that I need material help, you will share with me; or if I tell you I need time, you will find it for me;
- opening up our spirit of creativity and play, getting away from verbal knowledge. Too much of our activity is ruled by articulate people. We need the wisdom and experience of people who express themselves differently. When we take time to work in clay together, or to cook together, or to draw, we develop new lines of trust and communication;
- being able to confront and deal with issues of racism, sexism and homophobia. These never go away because we ignore them, they only get worse;
- working together on a common project. There is nothing like “doing” together to learn to work together. The sooner the better;
- developing activities together that increase economic and political terms security for group members. A group that helps me gain a living or have political power will get more of my allegiance in terms of time and energy than one that is purely social;
- doing something of great significance. It will attract more energy. We all want to be part of making history if we only knew how; and
- celebrating our achievements and our heroes. When we do something good, we need people to acknowledge it publicly.

Appendix C:

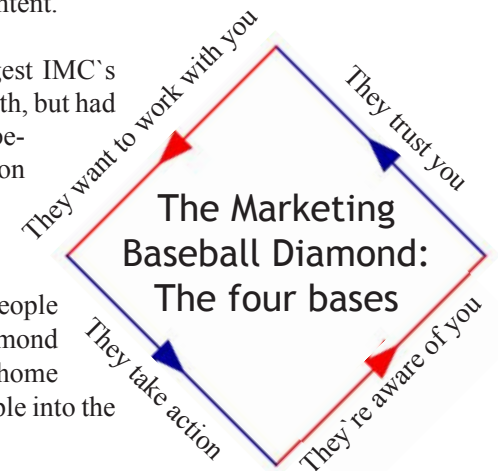
CASE STUDY: Independent Media Organizing

In session #2, we looked at the IMC (Independent Media Center) network, specifically IMC Ontario and IMC Ottawa, specifically during the time period when I was involved (2000-2004). The Indymedia network came out of the 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle, and featured ‘open-publishing’ news websites across the globe. The newswire was a lot like today’s Facebook newsfeed (except you didn’t need to be logged in and it wasn’t limited to your friends’ posts, and with perhaps less functionality), and the ability for anyone to upload video files was an early precursor to YouTube.

With the concept and technology that was Indymedia, it is somewhat a shame that it didn’t have as much success as it could have, at least in some locales (it is still operating successfully in some places).

We discussed some of why the Ontario and Ottawa projects didn’t fare so well. One of the big problems was the way the network was oriented to organize more around big events — like its birthing event (WTO protests) — at the expense of more ongoing and indepth reporting/coverage, and of building the organizational aspect of it, which was left to a few key people who were also responsible for producing content.

IMC Ontario was one of the largest IMC’s by reach/number of visits per month, but had a very small group of volunteers behind it. This brought up discussion of the ‘baseball diamond’ method of bringing people into an organization (or, in other contexts, marketing ‘conversions’ into people taking action). One key to the diamond strategy is having a well-defined ‘home base’ or way of incorporating people into the organizational structure.



We also discussed how the concept of ‘the medium is the message’ fit the IMC model, in that it was in fact a new model of media (you were the journalist as well as the audience) and as such needed this fact to be well communicated for people to use the platform well / appropriately.

More Indymedia notes at: www.EquitableEducation.ca/writings/media

Appendix D:

‘Edge-U-cation’ session

The ‘Edge-U-cation’ event was held on Wed Mar 16 2011 in Ottawa, with 20-plus people in attendance. The theme of the event was to discuss what liberating education looks (and feels) like.

This report from the event includes an outline of the event, three sets of flip chart notes taken during the the full-group parts of the evening (and video from one of those parts), and facilitator comments at the end.

Session Outline:

(small-groups were either 3 or 4 people in each)

- ice-breakers: pair-up and discuss two questions (‘What’s one good thing that’s happened for you in the past week’ and ‘What’s one thing you’re looking forward to in the spring’) and then rotate to other partners
- small group discussion: why did you come tonight, and what is your goal for the evening
- full group discussion: pros/cons analysis of ‘lecture style education’
- short talk from facilitator on education, ending with brief description of ‘direct education’, the method of learning adopted to facilitate the event
- small groups: silently read ‘direct education’ handout from [Training For Change](#) (1pg double-sided), then discuss. end with each person sharing one question that the reading/discussion inspired in them
- (same) small groups: go round, each participant shares 1-2 really positive learning experiences they have had, and what made them so positive
- full group discussion: what contributes to good learning?
- movement activity: everyone stands and spreads out, one person at a time announces something they would like to apply/move forward on based on the discussion so far, people who share that feeling/desire physically relocate to be in proximity to that person (people do not need to ‘stick’ with one option, can keep moving towards other things that appeal to them)
- closing activity: everyone standing in large circle, five volunteers (one at a time) do short clapping/stomping/etc routine, everyone then responds together by repeating the routine

FLIP CHART NOTES:

Pros/Cons of ‘Lecture-Style Education’

(notes taken from group discussion)

- Pros:
 - one-to-many sharing (‘expert’)
 - standardized
 - cost effective
 - appropriate for some topics
 - could be reliable source
 - transmission of information (‘drilling’)
 - good for less self-directed learners
- Cons:
 - doesn’t work if not receptive audience
 - not involving
 - lack of participation
 - no responsibility on learner
 - feedback?
 - passive: not good for active learning/solving new problems
 - authority
 - limited to lecturer’s beliefs/perspective
 - poor for learning skills/building capacities
 - prevents collective intelligence
 - bad for more self-directed learners
 - not necessarily where learner is at
 - not room for dissent/alternatives
 - mono, not diversity
- ‘Middle’ (could be pro & con?):
 - socialization of process
 - depends on quality of teacher

Notes from short talk *(with bit of audience participation)*

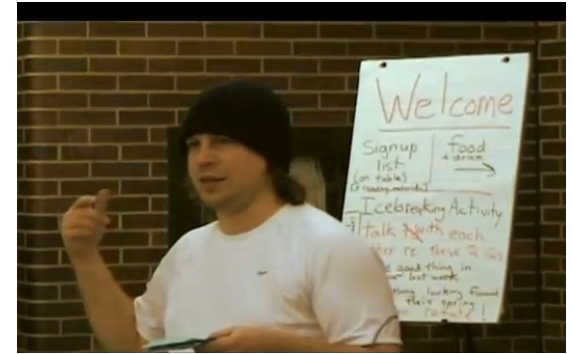
- Japan situation (nuclear) more important than talking right now?
- education should be for doing, not just talking
- you learn what you do, the ‘hidden curriculum’
- the schools are like the prisons are like the factories, regimented
- there are other ways to learn:
 - project-based: learn as you do
 - cooperative learning: students group and teach each other (students aren’t used to this)
 - evaluation can be more than tests:
 - portfolios, continuous learning with reassessment, ...
 - experiential learning
 - popular education (PE)
- PE: meant to be accessible and build on personal knowledge
- PE: takes into account power dynamics, oppressions (ski lift vs ice picks)
- George Lakey / Training For Change, direct education: building a container to hold the learning environment
- caring first makes education easier
- emotive learning is easier
- (collective) self-responsibility for solving problems

What contributes to good learning? *(group discussion)*

involvement in process is critical!
serious yet fun
valued contribution: pertinent, impactful
transformative risk
paradigm shifting
beyond comfort zone, yet within
people need to feel safe to share, get involved
numerous/individual learning paths
trust that learners and teachers can steer class
leap of faith: willingness, proactive
learning as a whole
committed teachers create transformative experiences
apprenticeship
friend, mentorship, (focusing)
kinship is key
authorship: passionate about subject
multi-faceted approach (dimensional)
creativity and spirit can not be quantified
focusing on negatives/positives in a balance
acknowledge skills/interest

Edge-U-cation video from short talk

This seven-minute video from the Edge-U-cation event features me (Greg Macdougall, the event facilitator), speaking a bit on my perspective and explanation of what education is/n’t and how it works (or doesn’t).



Video online at <http://youtu.be/LvaZwTrQVo8>

Edge-U-cation — comments from facilitator:

Was happy to see that this format did indeed get people participating, sharing with each other... also, two volunteers felt confident enough to come to the front and take flip-chart notes for the full-group parts of the session, one even taking on co-facilitation duties spontaneously... The ‘movement activity’ was something I’d heard described but never seen, thoughts on making it more effective: perhaps, after one person has said their thing and others moved towards them, the next person to share first has to make sure they are at least ten steps away from that group, so that there is more movement. Also maybe after the first person has shared, try having the next 3 be people who had not moved to the first person? ... And the last activity worked well, people went beyond the instructed ‘clapping/stomping’ and added in other elements like mouth sounds and finger snapping. It was noted afterwards that that activity works well to get everyone in the group ‘in sync’, entrainment, and it could be done earlier in the workshop to be able to generate that energy/vibe while the session is still going, instead of just to end it. ... The one thing, to do with the ‘hidden curriculum’ I mentioned in the short talk, is that although this was very participatory, it was still totally structured by me, ie I directed people what to do (activity) all through the session and so it was still a matter of people following directions. One thing direct education is supposed to be about is creating the initial structure that then allows participants to take the session where they want, so building in/facilitating participant choice in how it unfolds would be the next step to incorporate ... the ‘open space’ event concept is something to look at here. Definitely some things to think about more...

Resources / References

In order by type of resource and order of appearance in booklet:

Facilitation notes: www.equitableeducation.ca/2002/facilitation
Healthy Roots conf. notes - www.equitableeducation.ca/2003/healthy-roots
Tragedy of the Commons concept: wikipedia.org, & Garret Hardin's essay: www.garretthardinsociety.org/articles/art_tragedy_of_the_commons.html
Being Whole essay: www.equitableeducation.ca/2011/being-whole
“From each according to his ability, to each according to his need”: wikipedia.org
“Yes, Prime Minister!” quote: www.imdb.com/title/tt0086831/quotes
Diversity and Making Membership Accessible: www.equitableeducation.ca/2003/ftgu-breakout-notes
Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack, by Peggy McIntosh: www.nymbp.org/reference/WhitePrivilege.pdf
Joanna Macy: www.joannamacy.net
Training For Change organization: www.trainingforchange.org
Pay-What-You-Want ideas: www.marketingforhippies.com/category/pwyc

BOOKS

Community Organizing: A Holistic Approach, by Joan Kuyek, 2011 Fernwood Publishing: www.fernwoodpublishing.ca/Community-Organizing
- online resource guide: www.fernwoodpublishing.ca/community
- review by Greg Macdougall: www.dominionpaper.ca/articles/4262
Facilitating Group Learning: Strategies for Success with Adult Learners, by George Lakey, 2010 John Wiley & Sons. *reference is on page 75*

PODCASTS:

Joan Kuyek interview: rabble.ca/podcasts/shows/needs-no-introduction/2011/11/conversation-joan-kuyek

VIDEOS:

CBC News reporting on course: www.youtube.com/watch?v=lid3c_ur1Nw
“Yes, Prime Minister!” clip: www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLhFXkvugLM
Joan Kuyek interview: www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nr5BfAJ9zA
The Work That Reconnects 2-DVD set by Joanna Macy, New Society Pub. www.newsociety.com/Books/J/Joanna-Macy-The-Work-That-Reconnects
Edge-U-cation short talk: www.youtube.com/watch?v=LvaZwTrQVo8

A bit about the pedagogy/androgogy*

The motivation behind this course was seeing many activists who end up walking away / giving up / burning out / bitter, cynical and lashing out / martyring themselves / not being effective or having any fun, all in the process of their involvement with organizing (with me being no exception).

The purpose was to create a space for participants to explore where they are coming from and their experiences/ motivations/ desires, as well as the different concepts and issues that are central in activism, to help them become better grounded/centred, informed, reflective and self-directed in how they move forward in their involvement.

Some of the values/characteristics of the course:

- **Participatory:** no-one and/or everyone is an expert; having different types and styles of activities; creating a better level of connection between participants. Also this ensured that the course better reflected participants' own interests. And it should be noted that it was a fairly small group for this initial offering.

- **Short:** five 2-hour sessions, over six weeks (one week off). So providing resources for independent exploration between sessions and after the course is over, is important (note: this booklet is an example of that, as were the various handouts provided during the course, some of which are referenced in the [resources section](#)) ((also, there had been interest from someone out-of-town in participating, who suggested having weekend sessions — or having a web-based course)).

- **Sliding-Scale / Pay-What-You-Want:** this was done for two main reasons: A) to make it more accessible / affordable to people at different incomes. B) but also, to make it less risk / encourage people to sign up who might be hesitant: given that it is something of a 'different' or 'unique' course, engaging people at a comfort level of 'try it and see what you think it's worth' might work better** (**note that a small deposit was suggested at the first session, and then a further payment was suggested at the completion of the course).

Note The roots of the words '**pedagogy**' and '**andragogy**' are both 'ago' at the end, aka 'leading', or 'led', whereas 'ped' refers to children and 'andr' refers to adults. One meaning of andragogy not only refers to age of the learners, but whether it is student-directed or teacher-directed learning (since adults are more likely to be (seen as) independently-able, self-directed learners).