Labour Education and Training Research Network

York University

Centre for Research on Work and Society

**Suite 276, York Lanes Bldg
York University
4700 Keele Street
North York, Ontario
M3J 1P3
Canada**

**Tel: (416) 736-5612
Fax: (416) 736-5916**

Research & Learning at the Local Level: Issues of process and product

by

*Peter Sawchuk,
Brock University*

Workers' Research / Workers' Education at the Union Local: Building Traditions and Transforming Labour-Academic Collaboration

Peter H. Sawchuk
Labour Studies
Brock University

Abstract: A major gap in education and training scholarship exists regarding the ways that union locals can and do participate in their own educational/training research. Drawing on research in the Steel, Chemical and Telecommunications sectors, I discuss specific instances of educational research at the local level and the ways these efforts result in processes and products that contribute to scholarship on working-class perspectives on education and training, but more importantly contribute to a membership's 'self-education', mobilization, response to management initiatives such as workplace reorganization, and collective bargaining at the local level.

Introduction

A major gap in education and training scholarship exists regarding the links between academic institutions and organized labour at the level of the union local. More specifically, there is a lack of scholarship that looks at the ways in which union locals can (and do) develop their own traditions of educational research, and the possible role - if any - for academic 'fellow travellers' in this development. In this brief space, I want to focus on the role of the union local in the development of educational research with an emphasis on the following: the organizational positioning of educational research within organized labour structures past and present; the connection between unions and academics; case study examples of educational research with three union locals; and finally, some general lessons to be taken from these reflections. Through this we'll see how the position of educational research within the organizational structure of the labour movement tends to prevent the full development and use of research by workers and for workers. This organizational positioning serves an important defensive function that protects workers and their unions from exploitation and helps maintain control over information and the development of our own knowledge. However in the case studies we'll see how shifts in research practice involving a type of "Union Sponsorship" can contribute to a different research dynamic that benefits the workers at the local level by bringing research closer to the union rank-and-file themselves. While academic scholarship certainly benefits, this is obviously not among the most important outcomes. Case studies of educational research at Steel, Chemical and Telecommunications sector union locals in Ontario show how specific contexts, processes and products in research can make contributions to general rank-and-file union education, local mobilization in response to management initiatives, and the development of a type of local activism that includes a tradition of social research.

Research is important to the survival of the labour movement. By this I mean that it is has been well understood for some time that adaption to change is essential to the maintenance of union density and the health of the labour movement generally (Kane and Marden, 1988; Chaison and Rose, 1991; Kumar, 1992). But while research is important to the labour movement good sense tells us that the way research is done, the questions it asks and the interests it serves makes

some research better than others. While we can dicker over methods, the virtues of "professional" analyses, etc. - what we really cannot argue over is the fact that research is *always* undertaken and issues from a particular standpoint, perspective, point-of-view, etc. The worst research remains (to this day) absolutely clueless to this issue and imagines a type of objectivity that is in fact impossible. There are forms of objectivity that are valid, but this 'clueless' variation is the stuff of what philosopher of science and feminist Donna Haraway (1991) calls the "God Trick". It's a view of virtually anything and everything from nowhere and everywhere. Defenders of this traditional 'disinterested observer' form of objectivity call this "partisan research" (e.g. Kumar, 1993:83), but now we can ask ourselves what are we really talking about when we're talking about bias anyway? World renown sociologist Howard Becker talks about it this way,

> When do we accuse ourselves and our fellow sociologists of bias? I think an inspection of representative instances would show that the accusation arises, in one important class of cases, when the research gives credence, in any serious way, to the perspective of the subordinate group in some hierarchical relationship... We provoke the suspicion that we are biased in favour of... subordinate parties when[ever] we tell the story from their point of view... when[ever] we assume, for the purposes of our research, that subordinates have as much right to be heard as superordinate, that they are as likely to be telling the truth as they see it as superordinate, that what they say about the institution has a right to be investigated and have its truth or falsity established, even though responsible officials assure us that it is unnecessary because the charges are false. [In other words] we provoke the charge of bias, in ourselves and others, by refusing to give credence and deference to an established status order, in which knowledge of truth and the right to be heard are not equally distributed. (Becker, 1970:125-27)

To clarify briefly, all this has absolutely nothing to do with "telling people what they want to hear", "getting the real story", etc.[1], but rather deals with something more simple - a recognition of one's own position in a social system. It has everything to do with genuine attempts at enunciating the perspectives of researchers/researched, the contexts of research, the funding, projected uses, etc. that form the foundation of research but are thought to be separable from it.

As trade unionists, these are in fact critical skills that we use everyday but sometimes allow to be discredited by "experts". When we're paying attention (but lots of times we're not), these are the contextualizing skills that tell us who's ideas, work, proposal, etc. are best aligned with ours in any situation sometimes even before anything said. These skills tell us that who, why, where and for what are important issues for understanding what people are trying to do, and these same ideas can be applied to research as well. This may oversimplify things a bit, but from this perspective, sound social science is about learning the skills and techniques, familiarity with previous work, etc. while keeping our 'bullshit meters' running. Intensive local member

---

[1] These were comments from different academics during the conference presentation of an earlier version of this paper (University of Laval, Quebec: 1999).

participation as a method of producing research from a union/working-class standpoint can therefore be an important component for the production of relevant and quality research for labour. What we need, then, is not merely more research on labour and labour issues, but rather more research with, for and by labour on the issues they see as relevant and via the processes that offer the most internal development of their own activities and goals.

It is research from this working-class standpoint which, in effect, builds the most powerful 'curriculum' for learning and adaption; and, it is this type of research, as Haddad (1993) suggests in her comparative research on labour unions across countries, that co-varies so closely with the stability of these labour movements. However, actually producing research calls for more than sound philosophy: it requires resources and expertise as well. Indeed, these are the central axes around which issues of trade union research collaboration tend to revolve. To this end, former Research Director for the Canadian Union of Public Employees and long-time activist Gilbert Levine suggests that,

> ...the labour movement ought to be escalating demands on the universities for researching, teaching and many other forms of assistance. (Levine, 1988)

It is perhaps important to consistently emphasize that organized labour has significant claims on the use of public monies in the course of academic research. And, it (should) go without saying that these claims are every bit as legitimate as the corporation though this legitimacy is only narrowly recognized, if at all, within funding protocols and academic institutions generally. In St. Catharines, Ontario, where I work at Brock University, for example, organized labour was one of the major local contributors to the foundation of the school from the beginning while its participation as a partner and collaborator on an institutional level has remained virtually non-existent.

It is, however, important to recognize Canada's particularly rich history of extra-Union research linkages vis-à-vis specific programs, centres and institutions of education and research. Some initiatives long defunct, others still carrying on, others still emerging in new forms - many of these links were rooted outside of academic institutions altogether. They were organizations such as, to name but a few, the Labour Research Associates (Quebec), the Trade Union Research Bureau (British Columbia), and of particular interest to education and training researchers such as myself (in Ontario) the Workers Education Association. Another type of extra-Union research link was based around specific public-funded research programs. Indeed, we can learn a great deal from our experience in programs such as, for example, the Technology Impact Program (federal) and Ontario's Technology Adjustment Research Programme. Finally, the experience in academic-based Centres for the study of work, education and society in many of Canada's university's which provide both a forum for collaboration as well as an opportunity to assess the linkage between Labour and Universities as a phenomenon in its own right.

In regards to the linkages between unions and universities however, the most basic lesson to learned is that creating and sustaining real participatory collaboration is not easy. Forrester and Thorne (1993) comment on research links in relation to a conference designed to establish and celebrate such collaborations (from which a book was eventually produced):

> On the whole, however, the significance of the contribution by trade unionists to the

Conference is not reflected in the contents of the book: most of the contributions are from professional researchers. This is, in itself, an indication of some of the difficulties inherent in the relationship between trade unions and researchers. (ix)

Quoting a rank-and-filer at the conference,

Here was a conference aimed at developing links between the worlds of professional research... and the world of trade unions. Yet it is set up in a way that will alienate not only trade unions but also the entire population of non-professional researchers. (Forrester and Thorne, 1993:x)

The point here is that while the traditional academic mode of knowledge production (e.g. scholarly papers in scholarly journals; scholarly presentations; and scholarly conference) may be an important, it is probably not sufficient for supporting the development of union/academic research linkages, particularly at the level of the union local and rank-and-file membership.

Organizational Positioning of Educational Research in Unions

For researchers outside of unions who've entertained the possibility of productive, ongoing research links between organized labour and allies in the academic community - it is well known that the highway is full of both pot-holes, spot-checks, and the occasional road-block. From an academic perspective, Kumar (1993) has observed difficulties for Canadian unions to engage sustained research programs generally.

[t]here is very little internal research within unions; most of this research is confined to a selected few large unions and central federations of labour.... Unions have limited internal resources and inadequate research and analytical capabilities for strategic thinking on their medium to long-term goals and objectives for the valuation of management and state agendas. (Kumar, 1993:76-84)

While to my mind Kumar's notion of "analytic capabilities" simply expresses the issues of resources, the feature that I wish to draw attention to here that the vast majority of existing research activity at in central bodies (e.g. the CLC) and the regional, national offices of the affiliates.

From the perspective of the trade union researcher, Levine reflects on his experiences,

Given the very limited research resources of the labour movement, I could easily recognize labour's need to tap into the vast pool of knowledge and expertise available in the academic environment. I could also see that there was a sprinkling of academics whose sympathies were with the labour movement. But labour did not know how to ask for help or how to use help. As for sympathetic academics, they did not know how to offer help or they had other priorities.... Most labour researchers feel that [their unions] seldom provide initiatives for new programs. Instead, much of their work is defensive - a reaction to the negative initiatives of employers and governments. (1998:62-64)

In the case of both these perspectives, we see a focus on solutions through a centralized mode of

social/educational research. It is, in a sense, a perfectly rational response to limited resources. However in other ways this style of centralization runs against the grain of an aggressive, creative bottom-up unionism. Indeed, unions have typically been committed to keeping the issues members see as most important as democratic and locally controlled as possible. The extension of this centralization strategy suggests the development a body of labour researchers that work in a cooperative and coordinated fashion[2] - as the sole strategy for the development of effective research from a labour perspective this approach has serious flaws. The roots of these flaws lies in the fact that however important is the cooperation of workers across provinces, countries and continents (and it is vitally important), the heart of the trade union movement lies in local, participatory democratic action rather than - as the age of P.C.1003 here in Canada helped to initiate (see Panitch and Swartz, 1993; Gonick, Phillips and Vorst, 1995) - centralized bureaucratic force. As long-time Canadian labour educator D'Arcy Martin has commented to me on more than a few occasions: "The Labour Movement was not built on a feasibility study."

We are presented, then, with something of a paradox. On the one hand, unions are democratic institutions which, perhaps more than any other large-scale organization, is typically driven by its grassroots. Not only do unions organizational charts typically place the "union local" at the top of their organizational charts, but local executives as well as rank-and-file members, though things are never perfect, still display a degree of democratic control virtually unheard of in similarly sized social structures. On the other hand, in the structure of organized labour (affiliates and centrals), "research" is located at a distance from this same local control. While research has an important role to play in the growth of unionism in Canada as we've seen above, if it remains strictly at a distance from the heart of trade unionism. If the heart of the trade union movement is in fact local, democratic action it becomes clear that research initiatives that remain at a distance from this core will encounter difficulty in taking root, will not be fully developed and will continue to remain low on the list of labour's priorities.

Reflecting on Educational Research at the Union Local

This paper arose from a conference presentation by myself and Tam Gallagher, a Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP) National Representative on leave at the time from his executive position with CEP Local 200-O. The situation that Tam and I experienced can perhaps serve as a starting point in a grounded discussion of expertise, resources and the linkages between labour and academics at the local level. Briefly stated, whether it was my teaching load or research commitments, or whether it was Tam's responsibilities for servicing the membership or constantly putting out fires - our intellectual collaboration was made virtually impossible. Meetings we could arrange were quite literally never completed. One meeting was carried forward as we rushed to do strike support at a local chemical plant. Between dealing with security guards, members of the local themselves, and helping stop (scab) trucks from entering the plant we exchanged ideas on the presentation and planned our next meeting. Here we see the

---

[2]For an early example of which could be seen from the work of CLC Research Director John Fryer back in the late 1960's (see Fryer, 1991; also Levine, 1998).

most basic barriers to labour/academic research links. The constraints on time, space and human energy, as other engaged social researchers can attest, are enormous.

Reflecting on the difficulties and strategies of doing educational research with unions, a year ago I co-authored a working paper (Sawchuk and Martin, 1998) on experiences in the "Working-Class Learning Strategies" (WCLS)[3] research project. In this paper, we outlined how (formal proposals, methods, data gathering, analysis, etc. aside) it was in the process of sustaining connection, working with local committees and getting back to the locals with a set of 'preliminary' findings that accounted for the true value of the project. As one local union officer quoted this working paper commented:

> When I was first approached, I have to say honestly, I thought the idea to have more information was good in principle, but when you try to actually do something it's very hard to get going. When I talked to [the researcher] and we sorted out who we might be interested in interviewing I was still sceptical, but when I talked to people they seemed willing to give it all a try. At least some of them. After the thing took off though, and people got to see that what they were saying was going somewhere then things got even better and I think the final presentation and the booklet and everything was really something.... People became much more interested, and here we are. (Local Officer quoted in Sawchuk and Martin, 1998:1)

We noted at the time, how important it was to understand the myriad of knowledge forms brought into contact with each other but that,

> [t]he trick was (and is) to combine these knowledges within a clear, broad-based, politicized, knowledge production project. The consensus among those interviewing and those interviewed was to put more information in the hands of the rank-and-file workers at the local level in order for them to gain greater control over their learning and their lives in the workplace and beyond. (Sawchuk and Martin, 1998:3)

---

[3]The WCLS project (1994-1997; Dr. D.W. Livingstone, principle investigator). The project investigated the existing learning practices of members of union locals in five key sectors of the Ontario economy (Auto/CAW, Steel/USWA, Chemical/CEP, Garment/UNITE, Service/OPSEU) with focus on informal learning in the three overlapping of spheres of work, community and home.

In Sawchuk and Martin (1998) we went on to identify three key sets of activities for positive academic/union research linkage at the local level: union sponsorship, reflexive academic mode of production, and personal contact. Briefly, "union sponsorship" referred to a conscious process of building on progressive connections between more central labour representatives[4] and academics with the goal of transference of collaboration from these central representatives to local ones. It was, in practice, a process of informal negotiations, personal vouching for, and nurturance of new contacts and alliances. This process of union sponsorship can be described as a "spiral" relation in which the union sponsor engaged and disengaged a series of times slowly moving to the periphery of the local activity. This does not, however, mean that we simply produced isolated research activity. Importantly, union sponsorship was also a process of affirming the value of other levels of the union structure. Indeed, one of the Union Sponsors in a description of his experience within the project later recalled coming to understand the importance of this type of affirmation for the development of a sustained research linkage and its full development for his union.

> When I got the fourth call from [the researcher] about his approaches to the local executive in that site, I felt irritated, like he was wasting my time. And then I realized he was taking care not to end run me when building his workplace links. So I called him back and said, 'Go means go'. Then we could both relax. (Union Sponsor quoted in Sawchuk and Martin, 1998:4)

The student researchers and the process of academic production were slowly phased into the local. Indeed, student researchers (of which I was one of the original) generally re-called the massive amounts of learning that was necessary to carry out collaborative research successfully. The student researchers were learning from the union sponsors on the one hand and the rank-and-filers on the other. This was, we came to learn, a vital feature of our social/educational research methodology that could not be compromised.

Finally, the notion of personal contact was also a significant set of activities. This simply referred to the importance of engaged researchers, drawing on their own lives to build solid relationships in the course of each contact, each interview, each presentation, meeting, etc. This is often what is referred to in social research as "action research"[5]: a process in which, in its most basic form, study is undertaken *within* and *contributing to* activity undertaken in solidarity between the researchers/researched. In addition, the data collection itself (in-depth, life-history interviewing) had an enormous effect on the building commitment of all concerned within the

---

[4]The "Union Sponsors" in the case of our research were National Representatives and union staffers from provincial offices and related bodies.

[5]This notion of "action research" is subject of a range of theoretical justifications and descriptions. See for example: Maguire (1987), Whyte (1991), McTaggart (1997). Also see discussion under the heading of the older concept of "participant observation" (e.g. Bogdan, 1972). Writing that contribute to the epistemological underpinnings of action research include: McRobbie (1982), Hooks (1984) and Harding (1987). See Gottfried (1993) for a discussion of methodologies for linkages between unions and professional researchers along these lines as well.

research process as a whole. As several local officers commented these methods put a "human face" on the research, attached "practical" outcomes to the research, and, in general, formed a positive basis for the ongoing work at hand, as well as future research as well.

Case Studies in Educational Research with Three Union Locals

The three cases I wish to briefly review have each been the focus of prior research (WCLS project; see Livingstone and Sawchuk, forthcoming) in the case of the Steel and Chemical locals. In the case of the Telecommunications local, research is currently underway in the "Education as Research/Research as Education: Labour and Workplace Reorganization 1993-1997" (ER/RE)[6] project (Sawchuk, Orgales and Martin, 1997). Each of these cases demonstrate a different perspective on the educational research at the union local theme and is discussed in terms of the mutual effects of research contexts, processes and products. We see both differences and similarities, but consistently can detect the importance of the establishment of a research tradition among members in the locals themselves.

<u>Steel</u>. The United Steelworkers of America local in this research were workers in a medium-sized metal fabrication plant which produced trim and door parts for the Big Three auto manufacturers. Throughout this research, the workers experienced difficulties as management persisted with a mix of newer but largely outdated production technologies to maintain a share of the market in the rapidly changing and expanding (via outsourcing) autoparts sector. For workers in this relatively small privately owned company, this meant an unpredictable cycle of lay-offs, call-backs, creeping unemployment through attrition and the polarization of the workforce into a small but stable trades and technicians group (mostly men), and a larger group of operators (mostly women) who experienced insecurity, tightly disciplined and narrowly defined work as well as wage stagnation. More than half the hourly waged workforce were English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) workers.

The Union Sponsor and co-investigator who initiated contact for this site was Mike Hersh, former President of USWA Local 2900 and currently Senior Coordinator for the Canadian Steel Trade and Employment Congress. Hersh's sponsorship was, as I've described earlier, like a spiral: introducing student researchers to rhythms and traditions of the local that, in addition, within the course of research underwent an important amalgamation process. Hersh's involvement moved from centre to periphery, re-emerging at key moments as the research proceeded, particularly in the final stages in which the research gave rise to specific collective bargaining proposals when which Hersh facilitated teaming with representative of USWA's Education Department.

The data collection itself, drawing on the busy lives of working families, was a drawn-out affair. The methodology required a series of long, life-history interviews with an eye toward getting to know people well and meeting at times and places convenient for them. Interviews took place in coffee-shops near the plant and workers' own homes. The fact that 80% of the workforce were women who worked full shifts, including overtime, possibly a second job, and

---

still typically had prime responsibilities for home-care was both a significant feature of the research process as well as the learning practices we collectively analyzed (see Sawchuk, 1999; Livingstone and Sawchuk, forthcoming).

The presentation of initial findings back to the local produced further discussion which built momentum for a collective bargaining proposal on training in the next collective bargaining session at which time the union won a commitment to space, human and technical resources as well as a Joint Committee for worker training. As the Committee began to function in the summer of 1997 I was invited to participate as technical advisor for the local. Based on the new collective agreement and the research findings, the committee agreed that a Workers' Education Centre would be created in the plant and two pilot courses would be run: one in Computers to taught by a Human Resource representative; and the other in ESL which I was asked to deliver. Nevertheless, bolstered by a handy and accessibly written booklet-form of the final report (complete with pictures from a photo-shoot around the plant and the opening of the Education Centre) and the publication of an important article in the District Newsletter - the pilot courses took off.

What we learn from this level of engagement is that the products - as important, interwoven parts of the action research process - helped to build momentum for participation amongst the workers who donated scarce time and energy. Maintaining the trajectory of the project, collectively coming up with do-able outcomes from the research, building participation amongst the rank-and-file did, in short, was help establish a new research-based traditions amongst the rank-and-file. "Research", before a distant and largely adversarial notion, became *workers' research*. Overall, it can be said that in the face of difficult sectoral and organizational contexts, the spiral of the union sponsorship process, the level of engagement between researchers and the rank-and-filers, the realization of research outcomes that mattered to workers most, and the leadership of the local union executive (and support of the district representatives) were all essential elements of effective research with union locals themselves.

Chemical. The Steelworkers site offers a glimpse at workers struggling to hold their own while doing their best to inch forward by making some strategic gains. The Chemical site, however, was a union local on the offensive, though this had a great deal to do with the sectoral and organizational context. In the chemical sector, Industry Canada has describe stable employment and capital investment over the last decade and into the near future, while the company itself is a staple in the Financial Post's top 200 net sales, has recorded dividend increases for the last 26 years straight (indeed they've paid out dividends uninterrupted since 1899) and has demonstrated stable employment and strong growth primarily on the strength of its North American operations. In addition, the character of the workforce was virtually opposite to the steelworker site. In contrast to the predominantly female and ESL workers in conjunction with low to medium wages at the Steel plant - at the chemical plant, the hourly-waged better paid, predominantly spoke english as a first language and were male. In Livingstone and Sawchuk (forthcoming) we discuss the effects that these patterns of social division have on learning, training and education, but here we should note that these same features also played a role in the research process itself.

The Union Sponsorship for this local came in the form of long-time labour educator, and for Director of Education for the Ontario Region of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union, D'Arcy Martin. Like Hersh, Martin's sponsorship was a spiral-like process

bringing local union executive members to the table with researchers with personal assurances of the integrity and interests of the research. Also like Hersh, Martin re-emerged again in the research to play an important roll in the feedback process, and the subsequent development of the research tradition at the local.

Comparing the Steel and Chemical sites is instructive. Unlike the Steel site, the research process with the chemical workers went much smoother and more quickly. The largely male workers in the researchers (in fact women made up only 1% of the hourly waged workforce at the plant) though with busy lives of their own, experienced few of the barriers seen with the Steelworker women. I remember the very different experience of visits to the Steel and Chemical sites. In the steel site plant tours, periodic meetings and workplace ethnography were achieved as the union president and I wove our way around the factory through a maze of back allies between buildings, gaps between presses and stacks of warehoused crates avoiding management and 'stealing time' to talk with workers on the job. In contrast, in the chemical plant organized tours were given by the industrial hygienist and union health and safety representative while for meetings with workers I had the use of private corporate meeting room or the run of the local union hall. In short, the chemical workers enjoyed a much better condition and this contributed to a much more incremental approach to applying the types of research findings we were making to specific outcomes. In this site, our project played a more subtle role in supporting collective bargaining (in terms of training issues[7]); however, the project and worker-led research nonetheless developed and continues to have a high profile in the local.

In terms of the research outcomes and products within the process - presentation of the research updates and the initial research findings were made to well-attended Local monthly meetings, and were invaluable for building awareness of the research process at the grassroots. Rank-and-filers involved in the research would reiterate and explain their involvement over coffee at breaks. All this produced enough momentum to carry the creation of an ad hoc Education Committee within the local.

In discussion with local members the suggestion for the production of a decidedly plain-language, handy discussion booklet that workers could easily carry with them and on which there were space for notes was proposed. Members told us in interviews that they weren't interested in abstract descriptions, and suggested that the booklet contain information in people's own words and dealt with the current issues in the workplace (at that time ISO certification process; computer access; and training rates). The idea was to get the information out to workers and have the findings taken over for new outcomes among the wider membership. This, in turn, became a model of what Martin, Orgales and I (1997) eventually began to refer to as "research as education/education as research" dynamic that can be (and has been periodically) generated at the

---

[7]After some deliberation in the local, it was decided seek changes in regard to the training rate structures and practices in the plant. Previously, workers trained workers as the company's central training strategy but paid and supported workers to carry out this training minimally. Quite literally, workers were responsible for carrying out the company's training for nickles and dimes.

local level. The idea turned out to be popular: over eighty copies of the discussion booklets were taken away from the meetings by workers and momentum for further initiatives was produced.

Other important products of the research process not already mentioned included articles in the union newspaper (something which should not be underestimated for its affect on the momentum of research process) and the interesting notion of a "Workers' Knowledge Bank." Briefly, the Workers' Knowledge Bank was an idea that emerged in analysis of the interview data and was directed at supporting the expansion of existing informal learning networks amongst co-workers. Perhaps the most important outcome of the original research in the chemical site was the establishment of a research tradition at the local. In fact, when news of an opportunity for further educational research arose (on Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition or PLAR[8]), the local union dived in head first. Indeed, building on their experience of the value of educational research and the importance of practical outcomes the local suggested that the findings of the research be produced as an educational video which the members would make themselves with informal technical expertise of the membership and research support from the academic partner.

Telecommunications. In contrast to both the Steel and Chemical sites, the Telecommunications site was the focus of a different research project altogether which is still ongoing (Sawchuk, Orgales and Martin, 1997). Nevertheless, this site serves an important comparative function as it originated with no direct links to academic researchers at all. While the collection and analysis of the activities at this site have yet to be completed, this research has the potential to shed much light on the process of research and education at the Local level. By drawing on personal interviews, analysis of policy and meeting minutes, union memoranda, survey and focus group research carried out by Local themselves, and even personal papers of key local union members - this research has important potential for the exploration of the inner dimensions of a Local's struggle in the workplace and the role of research and education in this struggle.

This site was centred around a telephone service provider in northern Ontario where in the early 90's the union entered into an active and contentious partnership with management in order to stave off rising competition and save jobs in a community being assaulted by deregulation of the telephone industry. However, with no background in the workplace reorganization initiatives being proposed by management, the local turned to a matrix of resources including courses (both union and company-led), union and managerial conferences around North America; intensive joint and union-based strategic planning sessions; the development of their own surveys and focus groups; guest speakers; seminars for the rank-and-file; presentation of research results to membership and to the company; and the publication of reports, newsletters and memoranda to maintain the active involvement of the membership. The local was intensively supported by their regional and National union offices and made extensive use of their National Representative as well as the union's own educators and researchers. What we can see here is perhaps the most richly documented example of a union local's active and critical participation in a workplace reorganization partnership in Canada.

What has been particularly striking about the data thus far is the degree to which

---

[8] This research was run by the Advocates for Community Training and Education for Women (Toronto) who were interested in an industrial workplace as a comparative site in their study of new methods of PLAR that better served working-class people.

education and research occur as dimensions of each other in what the executive referred to as "real-time". It is in fact a "mobilization" model of education and research. Local executive, activists and union educators were conducting research and producing curriculum and reports on the run where the stakes were high. A local executive member of the local recounted in an interview,

> It was just a circle, a process. You had the idea. You found out everything you could, so that's the research. You created courses - so that's to do it, to go with it. But then you analyzed what you did - you couldn't just stop there and you did it all over again. Was that effective? Did that work? What else do you have to do? 'Uh, we gotta go back and learn this and this'. So really it is just constant. So when you think about - that is exactly what you were living. (Local Officer, ER/RE project)

Compared to the two other cases, this local had no time for the spiral of union sponsorship and the incorporation of academic researchers. The resources of the entire union, and particularly the personal time and almost super-human energies of the executive, stood in place of those available through collaboration. At least one similarity across all three sites however is striking. In each site, for those rank-and-file members who were mobilized during the research, and the many others who have gained important, though more peripheral, experiences with the research/educational process - a general positive valuation of research was produced. Another Local Officer at the telecommunications local explains her new perspective on the importance of research for the unions.

> It's invaluable and actually it scares me now that I know, and we can't do it anymore. We're making ourselves sitting ducks. And now that we got a taste of what it can do - I'm really upset. I'm almost second guessing now. I used always just go with my gut, but now I'm thinking this is a really important piece to go with the gut. (Local Officer, ER/RE project)

She concludes explaining,

> Throughout that whole [research] process I had some very distinct feelings. I felt proud that we were doing it. I felt that we were finally getting a chance to strut our stuff to the company, that I was smart and as able as they were. I was proud to strut the union resources, and that was, through the whole process, that was my overwhelming feeling. Like a feather in our cap. It was exciting and refreshing to do, and to play their little game with charts and stuff and it's OUR stuff and we strut in front of them charts and things. [laughter] (Local Officer, ER/RE project)

Recommendations and Future Directions

Forrester and Thorne begin their collection of papers on research and trade unions by commenting that when local activists become involved in research,

> ...the agenda is less likely to drift away from their concerns and the results have both the legitimacy and relevance accorded by lay member involvement. Implicit in the research activity is a restructured relationship between researchers and workers to create teams capable of combining the research skills of academics with the knowledge of lay activist union members... Research can only become part of a programme of genuine empowerment when the research process itself is democratized. (Forrester and Thorne, 1993:4)

Indeed, this was the basic argument of this paper. I've also argued that not just any sort of research can produce the positive effects we've seen above. Projects need to operate from the standpoint of and in solidarity with the working-class and organized labour.

A key finding to be taken from these experiences concerns the importance of the establishment of an education/research tradition at the local level. Among the positive features of this are: important information is produced for use by the local; new skills and knowledge are captured in local networks; and, new orientations to the value of research and education programming are realized which cannot help but have a rippling effect within union structures as a whole. As I argued from the outset, unions are predominantly democratic structures where change must be rooted in the rank-and-file.

A second observation deals with the role of Union Sponsors in regard to the establishment of labour/academic research links. These sponsors are key to the establishment of dialogue and negotiation between outside researchers and the local that must eventually transfer leadership of research toward the local activists and general membership itself. Part of this is an open exchange between researchers and the local union. For example, a local could request that a membership survey be carried out by the academic partners producing a valuable educational experience for student researchers as well as rank-and-file members who wished to participate in the production and analysis of the survey.

The final observation involves thinking about the relationship between research, education and action in a dialectical way. When, for example, Kumar (1993) tells us that "research is lacking in strategies and approaches needed to organize the unorganized, to foster internal democracy and rank and file participation within unions..." (81), we have here pre-figured a separation between research, education, and local union action. Another way of looking at this relationship would be to say that the study of these issues can be done in the course of contributing to action on these matters themselves. In this case, the value of research is realized in both its practice and in its production/dissemination beyond the local. What we are really talking about however is beyond any purely instrumentalist relationships. It is perhaps best described by in terms that Raymond Williams has referred to as "alignment and commitment" (Williams, 1977:199-205). Effective action research with local unions must move beyond instrumental motives in their participation and even beyond mere "commitment" to "alignment". In other words, actually coming to understand how the interests of steel, chemical, telecommunications, etc. as well as academic workers are "aligned" with each other. Alignment in this context is a component of the production of research from a labour perspective that evolved in the case studies discussed above. It is vital to the emergence of social research traditions at the local level and can make an important contribution to creative adaption, initiatives and the general development of the labour movement as a whole.

References

Becker, H.S. (1970) <u>Sociological Work</u>. Chicago: Aldine.

Bourdieu, P. (1998) <u>Practical Reason</u>. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP.

Clarke, P.F. and Gray, L.S. (1990) "Broadening the Mission: Research activity among university labor education/labor studies professionals" <u>Labor Studies Journal</u> 15(2).

Chaison, G. and Rose, J. (1991) "Continental Divide: The direction and fate of North American Unions" in Sockwell, D., Lewin, D. and Lipskey, D. (eds) <u>Industrial and Labor Relations</u>. (5th ed), Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Haddad, Carol J. (1993) "Unions and Technological Change: Labor research strategies and structures in the USA and Canada" in Forrester, Keith and Thorne, Colin (Eds) <u>Trade Unions and Social Research</u>. Aldershot, UK: Averbury.

Haraway, D. (1991) <u>Symians, Cyborgs and Women</u>. London: Free Association Books.

Forrester, Keith and Thorne, Colin (Eds) <u>Trade Unions and Social Research</u>. Aldershot, UK: Averbury.

Gonick, C., Phillips, P. and Vorst, J. (1995) <u>Labour Gains, Labour Pains: 50 years of P.C. 1003</u>. Winnipeg: Society for Socialist Studies.

Gottfried, Heidi (1993) "Notes towards the development of a liberatory research project" in Forrester, Keith and Thorne, Colin (Eds) <u>Trade Unions and Social Research</u>. Aldershot, UK: Averbury.

Harding, S. (ed) (1987) <u>Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues</u>. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.

Hooks, b. (1984) <u>From margin to center</u>. Boston: South end press.

Kane, E. and Marden, D. (1988) "The Future of Trade Unionism in Industrial Market Economies" <u>Labour and Society</u> 13(2).

Kumar, Pradeep (1993) "The Canadian experience: Establishing and strengthening links between trade unions and researchers" in Forrester, Keith and Thorne, Colin (Eds) <u>Trade Unions and Social Research</u>. Aldershot, UK: Averbury.

Fryer, John (1991) <u>The Canadian Labour Movement in the 1990's: Challenges and Opportunities</u>. Kingston: Queen's UP.

Levine, Gilbert (1988) "Relations between Unions and Universities in Research and Teaching: Union expectations" <u>Labour/Le Travail</u> 21 (Spring 1988).

Levine, Gilbert (1998) "Economic Research in Labour Unions" <u>Socialist Studies Bulletin</u> Number 52.

Livingstone, David W., Sawchuk, Peter H. and contributors (forthcoming) <u>The Hidden Dimensions of Working-Class Learning</u>. Washington:Rowman and Littlefield.

Lipzig-Mummé, Carla (1988) <u>A Trade Union Based Secondment Scheme for Academic Researchers: The Quebec Experience</u>. Sydney, Australia.

McRobbie, A. (1982) "The politics of feminist resrach: Between talk and action", <u>Feminist Review</u>, 12.

Panitch, L. and Swartz, D. (1993) <u>The Assault on Trade Union Freedoms: From wage control to social contract</u>. Toronto: Garamond.

Sawchuk, Peter H. (1999) "Practices of Structured Participation: A situated, emancipatory

perspective on workplace learning" in <u>Proceedings of Researching Work and Learning: A First International Conference</u>, (September) Leeds, UK: University of Leeds.

Sawchuk, Peter H. and Martin, D'Arcy (1998) <u>Reflections on the Social Research Process with Trade Union Locals</u> Working Paper, Centre for the Study of Education and Work, OISE/UT, Toronto, Canada.

Sawchuk, Peter H., Orgales, Jorge and Martin, D'Arcy (1997) <u>Education as Research / Research as Education: Labour and Workplace Reorganization 1993-1997</u>. SSHRC Grant Proposal.

Somerton, M. and Vulliamy, D. (1993) "Developing Workers' Research Skills: Collaborative research and trade union education" in Forrester, Keith and Thorne, Colin (Eds) <u>Trade Unions and Social Research</u>. Aldershot, UK: Averbury.

Williams, Raymond (1977) <u>Marxism and Literature</u>. Oxford: Oxford UP.