# *Learning Changes*

# COMMUNITY CONNECTION
## OCCUPY, ORGANIZE, LEARN AND CHANGE

by Sharon Simpson

Since the first publication of this newsletter this page has been dedicated to providing information on anti-poverty work outside of the APCOL case studies. In this issue I would like to vary from that approach. In this season of widespread mobilization, I will use this as an opportunity to offer my personal comments on the Occupy Movement.

Inspired by the occupation of Egypt's Tahrir Square, Vancouver-based Adbusters called for the occupation of Wall Street in New York City. The call was answered by many and prompted occupations in cities across the globe. Initially the occupation of Wall Street did not garner much attention from traditional media. When they did provide coverage, often their coverage referred to the Occupy Movement as one that lacked clear messaging, leadership and coordination.

While new media has the ability to disseminate information at light speed, it is from traditional media that we continue to seek affirmation and legitimization. As such, when the Occupy Movement was depicted by traditional media as lacking in messaging, leadership and coordination it was easy to lose sight of the issues that galvanized people across the globe to take action.

It may be reasonable to say that the Occupy Movement does not have a single message, however it would be irresponsible to say that the movement does not have a clear message. Simply stated, the movement calls for equity in all areas where inequity is present. Others may replace the words equity and inequity with justice and injustice, but whatever the words, the concept remains the same. Inequitable access to resources has resulted in deepening the roots of poverty. The roots of poverty can be easily identified in areas where inequity is present.

The entrenchment of poverty across the globe is a result of inequitable access to basics such as food, housing, employment and education. This raises the question: how can organizing on a global scale address poverty issues and what lessons can be learned from the Occupy Movement? Questions of organizing and learning are central to the APCOL project. The Occupy Movement potentially offers new insight as to how people organize and learn based on a single overarching theme such as equity, while advancing their related but individual issues.

It may be argued that the infectious nature of the Occupy Movement has, to a small degree, shifted public discourse on the topic of equity. Traditional media have reported some of the affluent in society as saying the Occupy protesters have the right to protest. However, the conversation on how to honour the protesters' call for equity where there are inequities has not yet started. While it is not known what the end results of the movement will be, the movement may have given birth to a large scale method of challenging the status quo by learning new methods of organizing.

*Sharon Simpson is Special Projects Coordinator for Labour Community Services, and community co-leader of the APCOL project.* ⌘

# Striving to walk the talk:
## The first APCOL conference

by Peter H. Sawchuk

Among the principles of the Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning (APCOL) project are commitments to Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Popular Education. But what exactly is the part played by these principles in the project? What are their purposes? And, what do these principles look like in action? In this article I discuss these questions in terms of a key focus of our activity in 2011: the APCOL Learning from Each Other Conference.

## The Purposes behind PAR and Popular Education

Back in 2008 when the APCOL project was conceived by a group of community organizers and academics, we pledged to contribute to neighborhood action while creating a new, robust body of research about how people in Toronto go about learning to carry out the work of social change. An anti-oppression framework was and remains central to this pledge.

Clearly, we are all shaped by the multiple and overlapping forces of oppression and those carrying out anti-poverty work are no different. Race, social class, gender, sexuality, language and citizenship status are fundamental to understanding how people remain separated rather than effectively working and learning together. These are topics that the APCOL research was designed to explore, but what of anti-oppression in terms of research process as opposed to simply a research topic?

The PAR research tradition is arguably the research process most suitable to challenging multiple oppressions. It offers a way of attending to active involvement of research team members as well as those who in mainstream research are usually simply the people who "are studied." PAR challenges the multiple layers of oppression in this way. In APCOL however, Popular Education is essential to realizing the goals of PAR in practical terms. Popular Education attends to how people (who in mainstream educational practice are usually just "taught") can and must lead their own learning collectively in order to serve their own interests.



Participants gather in the cafeteria at FoodShare for the opening session of the APCOL conference.
Photo courtesy of Joe Curnow

## The APCOL Conference

These methodological and educational principles – this approach to anti-oppression in anti-poverty organizing and learning – guided APCOL's Learning From Each Other Conference in June 2011. It did so in many different ways.

The organizing committee of the conference was made up of a diverse range of community leaders, representatives and residents as well as academic researchers. This committee came together to discover a way that the broader interests of communities across Toronto could be supported through conference design. The committee created a list of the best things that could support the community in engaging in anti-poverty action and change.

Facilitated by Sue Carter, the design process was truly remarkable. PAR and Popular Education principles not only supported this design, they were embedded within it. It was a design that would both raise and support participants in answering the questions:

Why do some people get involved in neighborhood groups working for change, and others don't?

What do people learn through their involvement – why do some stay involved, and others leave?

Who is excluded, included and how can challenging the layers of oppression that shape participation lead to new energies, new skill and learning, and above all new forms of anti-poverty work from the bottom-up?

Taking place at what has emerged as one of the homes of anti-poverty activism in Toronto – the FoodShare building on Croatia Street – the conference design involved a series of plenary sessions where all gathered together to discover broader perspectives and debates regarding anti-poverty tools, actions, strategies and experiences. Questions from the group drove discussion in ways that consistently allowed creative problem-solving, information sharing and new connections between people.

The conference began with 'big picture' discussions about activism in Toronto, led by Deena Ladd (Worker's Action Centre) and Debbie Field (FoodShare). A second presentation included speakers representing a diversity of strategies on how change happens. John Clarke from the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, Judy Duncan from ACORN Canada, and Winston Tinglin from Social Planning Toronto offered three ideologically and strategically different approaches to confronting poverty and organizing for social change.



Workshop participants at the APCOL conference discuss sustaining community action through relationship building, learning from each other and getting things done. Photo courtesy of Joe Curnow

# *People were actively interpreting the data, challenging the data, wondering why this question and not another ...*

And, in our final closing session Winnie Ng, Social Justice Chair at Ryerson University, stressed the need for on-going partnership between university and community activists and again highlighted the importance of fully integrating an anti-oppression lens into the on-going analysis of APCOL research. These plenaries were co-facilitated by D'Arcy Martin and Israt Ahmed, both already deeply involved in the overall APCOL project.

But the plenary sessions were only the tip of the iceberg. The bulk of the conference was made of smaller group sessions including research workshops. In these, we did not simply hear about the findings from the APCOL city-wide survey on anti-poverty activism. Instead, people were actively interpreting the data, challenging the data, wondering why this question and not another, giving valuable direction to future information gathering for the purposes of informing activist development and action.

During the workshop we offered a three-part model for sustaining community action: relationship-building, learning from each other, and getting things done. Our approach to the data throughout was: 'What is the research telling us?'; 'So what is significant about this?'; and 'Now what?'.

Participants and facilitators of the workshops alike noted some surprises in the information as well as some additional support for understanding what they are already doing well and how it can be extended. Participants said that the findings can help community groups make strategic decisions on such things as capacity building, recruitment and engagement of those in their neighborhood.

In the end, what was provided was a new model of research process; one that informed an additional, new commitment of the APCOL project to push the envelope even further through a new, more sustained Community Data Analysis initiative to be completed in early 2012 headed by Dr. Grace-Edward Galabuzi.

Beyond the research were the sessions that provided other tools for anti-poverty community organizing and learning on such topics as:

- Behind the Scenes: The Role of Popular Education in the Worker's Action Centre Wage Theft Campaign;

- Introduction to Popular Education;

- Using Storytelling as an Organizing Tool;

- Forum Theatre as Social Change;

- Food Mapping;

- Talking About Nutrition;

- Mobilizing the Friends that Tag Along;

- So You Want to Engage Youth in Community-based Research?

- Lessons from the ACT for Youth Project;

- Making Research Useful: Understanding our communities better through organizing and research;

- Alternative Social Planning: How research is done in the community;

- APCOL Community-Based Researcher Forum.

## PAR, Popular Education and Anti-Poverty Work

The APCOL Learning from Each Other Conference brought together over 130 community participants. Many of these people had little prior engagement with the APCOL project, much to our surprise. Based on PAR and Popular Education principles a fundamentally new form of "research output" emerged. Instead of reports gathering dust on a shelf, the research was finding its way into action.

The APCOL approach said that we have to do more than just gather information about the problems: we have to do something about them. And, in our view in trying to achieve these goals there is no substitute for challenging the barriers of participation, broadening and deepening participation, and perhaps above all learning to do this in ways that serve the interests of those trying to bring about change.

In making the change we desperately need, there can be no room for any of us to be only the researcher or the researched, the teacher or the student.

During the conference, we made some progress in walking the talk of these principles. After years of participating in traditional conference formats, it was a challenge for us to re-think "who" should be involved in planning and presentations, "how" we could design a creative and multi-sided flow of ideas and "why" the people involved could see the effort as worth their while.

The results were far from perfect, but we certainly made progress. In the coming year, we are committed to sustaining this ongoing attempt to bring our practices into line with our theories. The bar is now set high for our second conference, to be held in 2013!

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The Forum Theatre workshop engaged participants in methods of strategic planning and problem-solving for social change. Photo courtesy of Joe Curnow

**APCOL is online at www.apcol.ca**

# Spotlight: Discussing Activist Learning and Development with Judy Duncan

by Peter H. Sawchuk

Hot on the heels of the publication of *Global Grassroots: Perspectives on International Organizing* (Social Policy Press) as well as their recognition this year as one Toronto's leading activist organizations (Now Magazine, 2011), Peter Sawchuk sat down with Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) Toronto organizer Judy Duncan to discuss two issues: how social activists emerge generally, and how organizers develop in ACORN specifically. The following offers condensed excerpts from the conversation.

PS: So how did you become an activist and how does it relate to ACORN today?

JD: For me personally, some of it stems from my experience in university, and even younger than that when I was in elementary school. [...] But the main thing is that after graduate school, I went to Seattle and saw this position with ACORN that I applied for. Today I would not describe myself as an activist. I would describe myself as an organizer. You know the difference is it's not about me being engaged, it's about other people being engaged and me helping to organize, and this shift happened when I started with ACORN. Most importantly, I realized wherever you go people really want to be engaged, but it's just that they're not exposed to the possible channels to get there.

PS: So, what are these types of channels?

JD: Well, people often see their situation compared to other people, and when they do they generally can get a bit mad. They see



Photo courtesy of Peter Sawchuk

that they're not being valued as much as say someone making more money or something, and the channel that comes out of ACORN's work is, you know, you're standing at somebody's door or sitting on their couch in our door-to-door work, and you ask them, 'Are you interested in getting involved?' And they say, 'Yes'.

So, then it becomes getting them to come to meetings. But it has to be certain types of meetings because a lot of people might go to a meeting somewhere and they find it's actually dis-empowering. It's because they feel it's not going to go anywhere. So it's really important to show them examples of change and people actually making a difference.

PS: Why is it that people might not show up to a meeting though?

JD: Low and moderate income people are just busier with necessities compared to more affluent people. They're working two jobs. Their kids are getting into trouble because they can't be around as much as they'd like to be. Lots of things make life really busy. And then again, it's easier to watch television than to walk into a meeting full of people you don't know. So, you could maybe call it shyness or maybe just basic social nervousness.

PS: Well, that's not an issue we really talk about a lot in terms of organizing.

JD: I don't know if those terms capture it just right, but nobody really likes going to a meeting where they don't know anybody. So that's another important thing for these effective channels for action and participation.

PS: In terms of present day ACORN, do you think it pays enough attention to organizer/activist learning and development? Some anti-poverty organizations seem to pay a lot of attention to this while other great organizations seem to pay very little attention to it. What's ACORN like in these terms?

JD: It's the core of what we do. We call it leadership development. Everything we do is geared toward developing leaders. We work with them to develop a specific campaign and that's how learning happens. Everything we do is getting people to go door-to-door and develop leaders in a community.

PS: How about for staff organizers?

JD: We try to develop staff so they can develop community leaders. We have staff development materials. Our whole model is hinged on having good organizers who can develop leaders, so yes we spend a lot of time on training the organizers.

PS: So ACORN really revolves a lot around activist learning: learning in terms of building community leaders, and learning in terms of staff organizers. Specifically, how do you help the staff organizers do what they do?

JD: Our office looks pretty casual and campaign oriented, but our organization has a very structured set of things we take people through. They have to learn to door-knock effectively, they have to learn the rap. The rap takes two weeks or so to learn, to understand it and be able to execute it. There's five phases of the rap and we'll train people day after day, you know 2 or 3 hours a day. They learn by doing and shadowing. They'll go out and do it with another staff member who knows how to do it. It's all about how to engage people. It's all about asking questions. They do role play as well. It's very structured.

But we have to make sure in the course of this training that there's a good fit, that the person knows what they are in for, that they'll be going out to meetings and working with people in the community. We spend a lot of time working with new organizers. ⌘

More information at http://www.acorncanada.org/

# CHALLENGE AND CHANGE IN HAMBURG-WILHELMSBURG

by Julie Chamberlain

Social, economic and political issues faced in one part of the world may not be exactly the same as those faced in another, but they can certainly be very similar.

This spring I had the opportunity to spend a few months in Hamburg, Germany on a graduate study tour and internship supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). I spent the first two weeks with twelve Canadian graduate students, meeting with academics, politicians and activists.

When the other students left, I settled into an internship at Haus der Jugend (Youth Centre) Wilhelmsburg, a child- and youth-serving organization in the south of the city, and set to learning about the issues and challenges facing neighbourhood residents.

Wilhelmsburg is the largest of a cluster of islands in the Elbe river, part of the city-state of Hamburg, and yet removed from it in material and symbolic ways. Connected by bridges, tunnels, public transit and public administration, Wilhelmsburg is distanced from other parts of Hamburg through its characterization as a "problem area," a racialized space of low incomes and discontent.

Almost 50,000 people live on the island, which is home to part of the port

of Hamburg, heavy industry, farmland, a major highway and rail line, as well as residential neighbourhoods. The strength of Wilhelmsburg is its associations, says Uli Gomolzig, executive director of Haus der Jugend Wilhelmsburg. There are many community associations based on interests and backgrounds, some of which are very active and tight-knit. What is missing, to his mind, are cross-cultural ties and understanding: there is too much social distance, for example, between the majority Turkish population and people from other backgrounds.



Sheep graze along the edge of the free port zone, highlighting the diversity of Wilhelmsburg.
Photo courtesy of Julie Chamberlain

This is not the only concern facing Wilhelmsburg: the island has high rates of school dropout, unemployment, and poverty. Much of the housing in the area is

subsidized through the Hamburg system of affordable housing, and landlords' level of care and attention is varied. According to the Haus der Jugend, seventy percent of youth in the neighbourhood come from "migrant backgrounds," a census term meaning that they have non-German heritage. The racialization of poverty that we see in Canada, and the interlocking of racialization,



Haus der Jugend Wilhelmsburg, in the shadow of the neighbouring WWII bunker. An IBA Hamburg project is presently turning the bunker into a renewable energy station. Photo courtesy of Julie Chamberlain

impoverishment, and space that we see in Toronto neighbourhoods, are mirrored in this urban environment 6000 km away.

On the one hand there is some visible official neglect in Wilhelmsburg: while I was visiting, a burnt out car sat out front of the Haus der Jugend for weeks before an insurance company – not the city – took it away. Several people commented that it would never have taken so long to clear away if it had been in a different part of town.

On the other hand there are massive amounts of resources pouring into spatial planning and design projects focused on Wilhelmsburg. The Hamburg International Building Exhibition ("IBA Hamburg"), and the International Garden Show will both culminate in 2013 after years of work, comprising over 50 building and garden design projects. A lot of eyes are on, and in Wilhelmsburg, in tour groups wandering the neighbourhood, and around future building sites, and in extensive marketing mobilizations for the projects. But what will be the benefits for neighbourhood residents? There are criticisms that the projects are disconnected from the pressing needs and aspirations of residents, and fears that instead of contributing to well-being, the investments may push people out of a last oasis of lower rents in a very high rent city.

Haus der Jugend has been working in Wilhelmsburg for decades, offering after-school programs, sports and movement opportunities, games, lunches, and homework help, as well as supports for parents and adults. The centre has seen the neighbourhood change over the years, and like many Toronto organizations, faces a funding crunch in stark contrast to the extent of community needs. Yet perhaps the hardworking team will be an anchor for the community as they weather the changes coming Wilhelmsburg's way.

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For more information, see
DAAD study tour website: https://sites.google.com/site/ccgesstudytour/
Haus der Jugend (in German):
http://www.hdj-wilhelmsburg.de
IBA Hamburg: http://www.iba-hamburg.org/en/

# A Community Perspective on Community-Based Research

by Karen Sun

More and more, we see research partnerships developing between academics and community organizations. These can be enlightening and mutually beneficial collaborations which help us to create a better society together. However, in my experience, there are many problems that need to be addressed before we can develop research projects that have positive, long-term impacts in the community. The process and philosophy that the APCOL project has used should be a model for how to nurture respectful and equitable collaborations between university, college and community partners.

## Benefits of Partnership

Academic research can be very helpful to community groups in developing improved policy. Research also provides empirical evidence for community groups who do not always have the organizational capacity to collect data. Community activists and organizations can use research to show the prevalence of a problem that requires policy changes. Academic research can help to provide an air of legitimacy to community issues in the eyes of policy makers.

Academic research can also be helpful in program documentation and evaluation. There are many excellent programs offered by community organizations across the city, but there tends to be little documentation of what works or sharing of lessons learned. Research support for documentation, evaluation and analysis of community programs can be of great benefit to organizations, funders or to the sector to improve program delivery.

Researchers will often seek partnerships with community groups and organizations in order to access research participants, get letters of support for grants, translation and support for dissemination.

## Problems with Partnership: Inequity

In my experience, researchers rarely offer any compensation to community organizations for assisting with the research project. This becomes a problem when community organizations' time and resources are taken for granted. Academics also generally have the research topic, research question and methodology finalized before they contact community organizations for support. This means that community groups and organizations are unable to provide important insights to researchers unfamiliar with a community, which would improve the efficacy of the research. A better process would be for researchers to connect with community organizations in advance, so that a methodology, particularly for recruitment and targeting the right segment of the community, is considered with the expert knowledge of the community.

Translation is a very skilled task that cannot easily be accomplished simply by someone who is conversant in both languages. Good translation is critical to capture nuance in research questions, particularly in surveys where there is little opportunity

for discussion to help clarify the meaning of words. It is important for researchers to employ qualified translation services when working with different segments of immigrant communities.

We understand that there are often very limited resources for undertaking research work; however recognizing the capacities of staff or volunteer capacity within a community organization is the first step in building trust and equity within academic and community partnerships.

### Getting to Know Each Other

One of the difficulties of conducting community based research is reaching a common understanding of the pace and scale of change that can happen through advocacy and the role of research in the cycle of advocacy and policy change. Smaller program changes at a community organization can



Community participants in discussion to create a research agenda and partnership document for CCNCTO. Photo courtesy of Karen Sun

happen quickly, while more complex policy changes may involve ongoing funding and multiple levels of government. Building community understandings of the process of policy changes in a Canadian context is

an important part of managing community expectations.

Some communities in Toronto feel that researchers have come again and again to study their communities, yet the results of the research are never shared. As a result, they become more reluctant to participate in future research projects because they do not have a sense of how these research projects have benefitted them or their community. Often it feels like researchers simply tell the community what they already know. Many community members do not have a good understanding of how academic research is conducted and how the documentation of their knowledge can be used to benefit their community. It is important for the community to understand this benefit in order for them to be committed to participating in a project.

Researchers who enter a community as outsiders with requests for community support will need to manage community expectations. It is important to involve community members in determining what actions will most benefit them. It is important for researchers to report preliminary findings to community organizations and engage in meaningful discussions with community partners to demonstrate how the community can use this knowledge to their benefit. There may be opportunities for academic partners to offer other types of support to community groups including student volunteers, access to expertise, offering their services as spokespeople to the media or as advocates for policy changes to policy makers.

### Building Equity

At the Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter (CCNCTO), we decided it was time to take a more active approach to developing research partnerships rather than waiting for researchers to contact us. We

wanted to have more of a say in what was being researched, how it would be researched and most importantly, how the research would be used to benefit our communities in the short and long term.

We decided to better position ourselves for future research partnerships with academics, given that we did not have the capacity to lead such projects. To do this, we needed to decide the circumstances under which we would partner on a research project. This involved determining research questions that would be relevant to our mission and beneficial to the community, the support we could offer a researcher, and our expectations for results.

To create a list of potential research questions, we organized a meeting of community members to discuss issues our community was facing. Participants were involved in 20 minute discussions in 3 different topic areas. They were tasked with thinking about issues that affected the community and information gaps within the community that could be used to develop effective research questions.

A review of our internal capacity, notes from community discussions, as well as discussions with students and professors in academia about their needs culminated in a Research Agenda and Partnerships document that was circulated by e-mail and is also available on our web site: **http://ccnctoronto.ca/?q=node/394.** We continue to build our relationship with academics so that we may better understand each other's needs and capacity. We hope that this will attract students, academics and community researchers who are interested in building equitable partnerships and working towards making social change together.

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# FILLING THE GAPS THROUGH STORYTELLING: HUMAN GEOGRAPHY AND SOCIAL BELONGING
## by Doreen Fumia

People have stories to tell, stories about their lives, where they live and whether or not they feel like they belong. Belonging can reflect a variety of feelings such as a sense that you have a place in your home, your school, your community, your neighbourhood or your nation. Why does this matter and what does it have to do with anti-poverty community organizing and learning?

Quantitative methods seek to gather statistical information while qualitative methods seek to include background information to those statistical numbers. Our APCOL case study uses qualitative research. This includes historical and political backgrounds that shape social interactions and social inequality (for example, histories of racism or homophobia).

We also use ethnomethodology and human geography to fill in gaps in the existing resources on anti-poverty activism and knowledge about local neighbourhood communities.

Ethnomethodology refers to how researchers immerse themselves in communities as both observers and/or participants in a community. They might attend community meetings, interview local residents, or examine photographs together. Human geography is another approach that involves the researcher in communities. It not only maps the physical places where people live, it also asks questions about how people shape the social spaces in which they live.

In this way, we are able to portray neighbourhoods and the people who live in them according to the dynamic stories that residents have to tell and blend these stories with existing statistical information. One of the key elements of this project is to examine local residents' involvement in anti-poverty activism in one neighbourhood west of Toronto's city centre.

## Anti-Poverty Meetings: sites of discovery

Joining groups and meeting with people who share similar perspectives makes us feel connected to those around us. This is precisely what anti-poverty groups do: meet, listen to each other's stories, learn and organize. Organizing meetings is the first step to figuring out whether we have allies who share the same sense of injustice and whether we will find support to demand better conditions. Some call this social movement action or social action networking. When we find that there are others who share our desires to improve working and living conditions, we gain a sense of community belonging. This sense of belonging can extend beyond our immediate community to broader social networks that enliven the area, the city and even the country.

When involvement in community activism is tracked and reported, it serves a purpose: to help us understand how we work together, make social change and gain a sense of belonging in the process. Yet, this is not always the end result of anti-poverty activism. It takes a concerted effort, among residents and researchers, to highlight the experiences of those who live in neighbourhoods and to communicate those experiences in a way that influences social change. This is a key goal of this project.

Often politicians, urban planners and researchers have their own ideas about who belongs, and where, based on reports, media, statistics, city maps and neighbourhood profiles (see for instance information found at this web site: http://www.toronto.ca/demographics/neighbourhoods.htm). Interpreting the information found in the places listed above may be influenced by assumptions people have about those who are from different cultures, races, sexual identities or income levels than they are. So, while it is important to gather information that provides us with shared knowledge about people and places, it is crucial to understand who those people are and how those places have taken shape. One way to do this is to simply ask.

## Just ask

Approaches to research in neighbourhoods have begun to include more and more first-hand accounts of the people who live in those neighbourhoods. Two approaches

*Joining groups and meeting with people who share similar perspectives makes us feel connected to those around us.*

have introduced innovative ways to conduct research: storytelling and photography. Storytelling is a specific method that allows people living in the neighbourhoods to speak for themselves, rather than others speaking for them. Photography, sometimes referred to as "photovoice," is a method that puts cameras in the hands of local residents to create images that tell stories often used to fight for social change. In this way, local residents create their own narratives about where they live and whether or not they feel a sense of belonging.

I already mentioned a couple of terms that researchers use for working collaboratively with local residents: ethnomethodology and human geography. Human geographers ask us to think about the city as having both a physical and human component and both relate to each other.

For instance, one researcher observes, "When you declare that land can only be used to build two-storey houses, or when you say that certain kinds of businesses cannot operate there ... you shape the landscape and actively shape the social relations that will take place there" If you walk the streets in your neighbourhood and take note of the stores, parks, public transportation, housing and so on and then compare this to walking the streets in a neighborhood that is known to be in a radically different income bracket, is there an obvious difference? Does the landscape tell us something about who lives there?

## Shaping Neighbourhoods

There are many influences that go into shaping a neighbourhood and some include economic, political, and social events. For example, what were the conditions for a neighbourhood to take shape? Was it a factory that employed immigrants who fled Ireland during the Great Potato Famine in the 1800s? Was it originally a vacation spot or an area that was developed near waterway transportation?

What brought people to a place, what keeps them there and what drives them out? Were they born there? Did they migrate from another part of the city or another country? Is the place safer - or less safe - because of their race or sexual orientation? Or, are they there because it is the only place they could find affordable housing? How does this information reflect the experience that individuals have and how do these experiences shape neighbourhoods and stories about who belongs where?

Social inequality is a complex and often disturbing issue. If we look at Toronto and its over 140 neighbourhoods, we begin to understand how the city and local communities work hard to develop a sense of belonging in each neighbourhood. There is a gap in our information readily available about Toronto's neighbourhoods that more recent research has identified as heritage gentrification or environmental racism. Our APCOL case study is working with residents in one neighbourhood to fill that gap.

To summarize, this research will portray one neighbourhood as the residents experience it. We integrate these stories with information about the history, economic underpinnings and social networks that have helped make this space a neighbourhood. We follow one anti-poverty campaign run by the residents. In order to allow the residents to tell their own stories we will meet and tape our conversations. We will also walk the neighbourhood with residents, attend meetings and include photographs as a way to amplify their stories.

People tell complex and often contradictory stories which in turn demonstrate that paying attention to human geography creates dynamic and rich social histories about the places where we live. Working with residents to turn this rich social account about their neighbourhood into reports, local newsletters and policy recommendations serves to supplement community efforts to make living conditions better.

When residents work together on these projects with resources available to researchers, it builds a sense of community. And when we build a sense of community, we strengthen our sense of belonging in our homes, neighbourhoods and possibly beyond.

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# POLITICS MATTER: MAYOR FORD'S
## ATTACK ON MUNICIPAL CHILD CARE
### by Katheryne Schulz

Recently, Mayor Rob Ford announced his intention to shut down Toronto's municipal child care centres in addition to massive cuts to child care spaces. Why does Ford want to close municipal child care centres in particular, when they are actually a very small part of the child care sector? Toronto has only 55 municipal child care centres compared to 645 community based programs.

Municipal centres were set up in low-income neighbourhoods because community run programs couldn't afford to operate in areas where there were no parents who could afford to pay full fees for child care. Municipal child care programs are run by the city, and the city is responsible for making sure they have enough funding. Costs are also higher in municipal child care programs because the families who are served need more parental and child development supports, which means having both additional staff and having staff with more special training, and more years of experience.

These centres also act as the service of last resort for families with children who have special needs. While community-based centres can argue that they don't have the staffing and resources to be able to provide service to children with special needs, municipal centres do provide services to children that other centres will not or cannot serve.

Ford is trying to ignore these realities and focus only on the fact that municipal child care centres cost more to operate, and he tries to link this to the fact that staff are unionized and have better than average wages and benefits. He argues that the city could offer more spaces to more parents by shutting down these programs and spreading the money across lower cost programs.

This argument will be attractive to opponents of social spending, for-profit operators and even to people in the non-profit sector who are in desperate need of additional funding for their centres.

There are two problems with these arguments. The first is, what kind of services, if any, will low income families get when their municipal child care centre closes?

There is a relationship between what a program costs and the quality of care it provides. This is especially true when it comes to staffing. Study after study shows that the quality of care is directly related to staff wages and benefits. This is because programs with poorly paid staff have high turnover, staff are less experienced, and they are more likely to be holding down a second job.

If municipal centres close, non-profit community child care centres will not be able to absorb a whole lot of these low-income parents because they rely on a balance of full fee paying parents and subsidized parents in order to run their quality programs. Nor will they be in a position to take on additional children with special needs. This means that for-profit community operators will take some of these children, while others ( e.g. children with complex special needs) will end up with no child care program at all.

For-profit operators are able to provide cheap spaces because they are willing to operate lower quality child care by slashing staff wages and benefits. This means that low-income children and their families will be getting cheaper child care that is less likely to meet their needs, and that has questionable child development benefits.

The second problem, is that Ford's rationale of more but cheaper child care won't stop with municipal child care centres. After all, if expensive municipal centres can be shut down and their funding re-allocated,

## For-profit operators are able to provide cheap spaces because they are willing to operate lower quality child care by slashing staff wages and benefits.

why can't more expensive, high quality non-profit programs be treated the same way?

Pushing for cheaper and cheaper child care leads to none of the child development benefits linked to higher rates of success in learning and better socialization. At a certain point, promoting cheap child care becomes pushing deregulation of care. It's dangerous for children when caregivers have little or no training and they can take on more children than they can safely supervise.

Further, we have to decide if we want to invest our tax dollars in creating lousy minimum wage jobs, or if we want to create good jobs.

In a recent article in the Toronto Star, child care expert Kerry McCuaig reports that "economists tell us every dollar spent on child care has a multiplier effect on Toronto's economy of $1.38. Every dollar invested increases Canada's economic output – the GDP – by $2.30. This is one of the highest GDP multipliers of any sector."

A good mayor would be spending time mobilizing citizens to pressure the province and the federal government to spend more on child care in order to give the city an economic boost, not attacking the highest quality child care services we have.

The real agenda behind attacking municipal child care is to create the conditions that make it possible for for-profit operators to increase their market share. These operators cannot slash wages and benefits when municipal centres and non-profits are offering staff a better deal, because staff can see their work is worth more, and they won't put up with it.

For-profits can't successfully lobby for lower standards and lower regulations for child care when their municipal and non-profit competitors are pushing for even better standards, and offering care that is more appealing to parents.

The city of Windsor has already shut down its municipal programs, and Toronto is now trying to follow suit. As municipalities cut spaces and funding, for-profit operators will be the only remaining operators left standing because their expenses (read wages) are the lowest. And in true for-profit form, as we have seen with other privatized services like hospitals and garbage collection, once for-profits dominate a market and eliminate their competition, they quickly move to maximize their profits. This is done by slashing wages, lowering standards, and increasing fees.

All of Toronto's children deserve to have high quality, public child care. You can take action by writing to your city councilor about your support for municipal child care. To find your councilor call 311 or go to **http://app.toronto.ca/im/council/councillors.jsp**.

*Katheryne Schulz is a long-time child care activist, a doctoral student at OISE and a graduate assistant in the APCOL project.* ⌘

# WHAT'S NEXT?

## by D'Arcy Martin

Photo courtesy of Line Bolduc

Our little project has grown up now, and needs to take on some wider responsibilities.

When a small group of community leaders and university researchers started this project, our first concern was to build a strong foundation. On the community side, this meant demonstrating an ability to deliver useful results and to provide direct support to the capacity of grassroots groups. On the university side, this meant attracting progressive and capable students, and giving them scope to initiate and engage. Neither of these big tasks is ever completed, but now, half way through our five year term, we need to share what we are learning.

The traditional university procedure would be to have a few graduate students comb through the data – from interviews and surveys, from our conference in June, from case studies and conversations with key informants. The result would be a report of what university people find interesting, in a format they find congenial. In our project, we have opted instead to involve community-based researchers in gathering the data, and now a number of them will sit down with students to see what everyone finds interesting. The resulting report will be carried by people back to the communities where they have worked, to consult on where and how the findings should be used.

This takes work. It is much slower than the traditional way, and much harder for the small group of "founders" to control. But we believe that the findings will be more authentic and useful as a result of really committing to Participatory Action Research (PAR).

Of course, this all sounds more linear and logical than the project actually is in practice. Much of the energy behind APCOL is a passion for justice, a choice of the heart. To honour this intuitive, creative side of our work, what researchers call the right side of the brain, we are moving into the arts. Already there is talk of making two films, of generating exhibits of photos from the community organizing process, of writing songs and staging theatre that capture people's feelings as they learn to organize. This process of releasing the eloquence in our network will be challenging, but it will be fun.

So what's next at APCOL? Some people will be exercising their left brain, analyzing data and reporting it out. Other people will be exercising their right brain, exploring ways to increase a flow of meaning around issues. We will all be talking about health and nutrition, good green jobs, advancement in education and ensuring safe and affordable housing. Both sides of our collective brain will be needed as we move forward. We invite people to shower us with ideas of both sorts, so that we produce something rigorous and playful, focused and surprising. That's what the 99% can do when we really try.

*D'Arcy Martin is an activist educator and coordinator of the APCOL project.* ⌘

# APCOL At Large: Journey of Learning

## by Joseph E. Sawan



Shabnam Meraj, Ashleigh Dalton, Fazilatun Nessa Babli, Melissa Strowger Abbey and Joseph Sawan in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Photo courtesy of Tashnim Khan

One week before the APCOL Conference, a group of OISE graduate students and APCOL community researchers travelled to Fredericton, New Brunswick to share preliminary research in two conferences at the Canadian Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences Congress.

For most of us, this was a new experience; all of us had yet to present the APCOL findings outside of OISE or the communities where we live. We presented a total of six academic papers; three at the Canadian Sociological Association (CSA) and three at the Association for Nonprofit and Social Economy Research (ANSER). Each paper was co-authored by a graduate student and community researcher.

There was great interest in the learning processes described by community researchers, as Fazilatun Nessa Babli explained during her presentation at the ANSER panel; "What we learned? How we learned? The answers to these questions is during the Journey of Learning ... I got the opportunity to learn a lot about popular education, informal learning – skill development and surveying techniques/methods."

Although the 'journey of learning' described refers to past experiences of conducting research, it's clear that after struggling to analyse and present our research in Fredericton, we continue on this journey to reflect, learn and facilitate positive social change in the communities where we live.

## KEEPING IN TOUCH

Members of the APCOL project are committed to communicating with groups and individuals interested in issues and campaigns involving Nutrition and Food Security, Housing, School Completion, and Jobs/Living Wages. If you would like to be part of this exchange of information please email us at info@apcol.ca and we will add you to our electronic listserv.