Becoming an Activist: Learning the Politics and Performances of Youth Activism Through Legitimate Peripheral Participation

Joe Curnow, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto
252 Bloor St West, 7th Floor, Toronto, ON M5S 1V6 joe.curnow@mail.utoronto.ca

Abstract: Bringing situated learning theory to social movement theory, this paper examines the ways young adults engaged in social justice activities become activists. As novices within United Students for Fair Trade, students reported not identifying with activism, yet through their immersion in USFT's community of practice and their increasing participation in the dominant practices of the community, particularly the facilitation techniques, norms, and rituals, they came to identify and be identified as activists. This study highlights the value of situated learning and community of practice theory for social movements while demonstrating legitimate peripheral participation.

Learning and Becoming in Social Movements

How do students become activists? This study analyzes the engagement of university students involved in social justice activities as they adopt the identity of activists through their work in social movements. Using United Students for Fair Trade (USFT) as a case study, I trace the identity development of youth activists and analyze how they learn through legitimate peripheral participation in an activist community of practice. Examining learning and identity in social movements enables us to see how people become involved, gain experience, and become active change-makers in their communities and around the world.

Learning Sciences approaches have brought much value to concerted studies of cognition in context, particularly within schooling contexts. They allow researchers to see and examine in detail the learning processes that are enacted and maintained within communities. This type of analysis is valuable and should be extended to other contexts. My interest is in bringing the same intensity of analysis and attention to context to social movements so that we can understand how learning enables people to participate in social change work and develop activist identities. Studies of learning in social movements have increased within the past decade (Hall and Turay, 2006), and yet few rely on sociocultural theories of learning. These conceptual frameworks would bring value to adult education and social movement theory, as they are better able to describe and theorize the ways that individuals and collectives co-produce meaning, generate strategies for action, and mobilize their learning into social movements.

My research questions ask how USFT students became activists and how their identities and learning opportunities were produced through involvement in an activist community of practice. Given the theme of this year's ICLS, "Learning and Becoming in Practice," this analysis is particularly apt, as it centres on the ways that young adults engaged in social justice work learned, and how that learning shifted their identities through their activism. Participants' social movement practices actively constructed the community and enabled them to move from dis-identifying with the label of activist to actively embracing and enacting the dominant practices of activism.

Theoretical Approach: Situated Learning and Legitimate Peripheral Participation in an Activist Community of Practice

As a highly influential theory of learning, situated learning, with key concepts legitimate peripheral participation and communities of practice, (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) represents an important stronghold of theorization that offers an alternative to acquisition models of learning. Lave and Wenger argue that learning occurs through experiences in communities of practice and is a process of becoming, wherein people become better able to participate in the activities of their community.

Situated learning theory understands learning as a social act where meaning is co-constructed within a community of practice and is contextually dependent. Through social interaction knowledge and practice are maintained and transformed in an ongoing way. In this view, learning is inextricable from practice, and knowledge and action are dialectically related and co-constituting. Lave and Wenger trace how people move into a community of practice through immersion as a newcomer and move through a process of increasing centrality and mastery (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Through active social engagement, newcomers learn the practices and implicitly begin to understand the logic and theory behind the practices and the ways they are organized.

Legitimate peripheral participation describes the process by which new members become masters at activities within a community of practice. Rather than learning through mimicry or through instruction, Lave and Wenger suggest that learning occurs through "centripetal participation in the learning curriculum of the ambient community" (1991, p. 100). Members achieve full participation not only by learning skills or

reproducing types of talk, but also by developing the ability to participate in the full practices of the community. As participants become more acculturated and more competent, they move toward more roles of mastery in the community. Brown and Duguid describe situated learning as "essentially becoming an 'insider'" (1991, p. 48), where new members learn to function in the community of practice.

Communities of practice are understood as "a set of relations among persons, activity, and the world over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 98). These groups of people are mutually engaged in joint work using a shared repertoire of practice (Wenger, 1998). Formally or informally structured, these communities centre on the practice of their particular types of work. Communities of practice co-develop and maintain specific performances of culture and practice. Legitimate peripheral participation is a process of learning the skills and the underpinning logic as novices move into full participation in the community. Wenger claims that "the curriculum is the community itself" (1998, p. 100), thus part of the work is in sustaining the community of practice and building participants' identification within it.

Identity is key within a community of practice, and is understood not as something acquired, but as a process of becoming. Lave (1996) claims that the most significant thing people learn in a community of practice is how to become a full-functioning member. She states that in the process of learning, "people are becoming kinds of persons" (Lave, 1996, p. 157). The focus on learning reflected in identities emphasizes the dynamic ways that identities are produced within certain contexts and communities. Lave and Wenger argue that while participation is critical to engagement and learning in the community of practice, ultimately a "deeper sense of the value of participation to the community and the learner lies in *becoming* part of the community" (1991, p. 111, emphasis original). They claim that newcomers' increasing sense of identity as masters is some of the most significant learning in a community of practice, and indeed, a key indicator that they have achieved centrality.

Situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation are valuable tools for understanding the dynamics within social movement organizations. Few have applied these learning frameworks to social movement contexts, but those who have, including Kirshner (2008), Ebby-Rosin (2005), Evans (2009), and Curnow (2013, 2014) have shed valuable light on the learning dynamics that enable participants to create change in their communities. Learning is a critical, yet under-developed, concept for social movement theorists to take seriously (Foley, 1999; Hall and Turay, 2006), as it has the potential to unlock key questions about how conceptions of justice are co-constructed, how movements are formed, how participants learn social movement tactics, and how communities change as a result of this learning.

Since these social movement spaces often exist outside of institutional schooling and formal training, situated learning is effective in describing and theorizing the ways that people learn and become particular types of activists. Moving toward full participation in an activist community of practice is often a process of learning the particular practices and frames of a social movement organization and moving from peripheral involvement to full participation through active engagement in campaigns. Co-negotiating processes like facilitating meetings, planning, protesting, and coordinating public messaging is a process of participation, and ultimately of becoming – as social movement theorist Charles Tilly argued, a social movement is "what it does as much as why it does it" (in Munro, 2005, p. 75). Situated learning theory allows us to understand how the practices and tactics – that is, what activists do – produce the community, and thus the movement. Therefore, sociocultural learning theories' articulations of learning-as-becoming are particularly apt for social movements.

However, few have looked thoroughly at the ways that activist identities and practices are co-produced and are an ongoing accomplishment within the community of practice. Through this analysis, I show how individuals are brought into a process of legitimate peripheral participation, how their participation produces learning, and how that learning enables new members to become activists and shape the meaning of activism within their community.

Context and Methodological Approach: United Students for Fair Trade

This paper is an analysis of the work of United Students for Fair Trade (USFT). USFT documents define the organization as "national network of student organizations advocating around Fair Trade principles, products, and policies" (USFT 2011). USFT emerged from work to mobilize students around Fair Trade in order to change the purchasing policies of their high schools, community colleges, and universities. Between 2003 and 2006, activists affiliated with USFT ran an estimated 350 campaigns on their campuses. One participant, Katrina, described it saying "USFT was a catalyst for Fair Trade. Our Convergence brought together so many students from so many schools and was the launching point for Fair Trade campaigns. It raised awareness for Fair Trade and brought Fair Trade into the limelight." The student organization played an important role in building demand for Fair Trade Certified products, mobilizing volunteer actions that formed the base of the social movement, and applying pressure to certifying agencies and businesses (Wilson & Curnow, 2013).

USFT developed as a community of practice through their joint work, shared repertoire, and mutual engagement to promote Fair Trade Certified products on campuses across the US. Each of the activists on the Coordinating Committee was engaged both locally in campaigning at their school and nationally as organizers

of students across the country, coordinators of the grassroots campaigns, and negotiators with the other Fair Trade organizations, certifiers, and businesses. USFT was embedded within larger communities of practice as well, including the Fair Trade movement internationally.

An elected Coordinating Committee of students led USFT. The Coordinating Committee was made up of 15-22 students representing different regions of the US and coordinating different core campaigns within the organization. Decisions were made through a consensus-process and the Coordinating Committee was officially non-hierarchical (USFT, 2011). Every summer a new group of students was brought into USFT's Coordinating Committee and transitioned from campus organizing to coordinating internationally. Their learning process through engagement in USFT forms the foundational context for this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

From 2003 until 2008 I was involved in the USFT community of practice. For years I worked as a student activist and later as a professional student organizer with a variety of organizations geared toward ethical consumerism and corporate accountability in the United States and internationally. This research is from an ongoing research project with Dr. Bradley Wilson that examines student activist tactics within ethical labelling movements, the ways that student labour is leveraged and commodified, and the ways student activists learn and act in solidarity with peasant workers and cooperative organizations.

I focused on the USFT Coordinating Committee as a community of practice. Data was collected in 2011 and participants were all former Coordinating Committee members or active affiliates who had been involved from one to five years but were no longer involved in USFT and had not been for four to six years. Twelve participants responded to an extensive, qualitative survey that provided insight into their experiences and development over time. An additional thirteen participants were interviewed in semi-structured and unstructured interviews that lasted one to three hours. Interviews asked detailed questions about participants' involvement, their learning incidents, and their identities as activists. I also conducted a textual analysis of primary documents from the period, including emails and organizational materials, examining the ways the organizational structure, campaigns, and values were described. I used ethnographic notes from the time as well as my participant experiences from the five years I was involved to complement the interview and survey data. I looked for themes in the ways learning, participation, and organizing were formally discussed and codified, as well as the ways they were performed and critiqued.

Responses were coded and analyzed, specifically around issues of activist identity, how people learned practices, perspective transformations, and how the community fostered learning in order to answer questions of how and what young adult activists learned and how their subject-position impacted their learning of skills, identities, and political analysis. Learning was defined as shifts in participation, so when respondents reported changes in their participation or their peers' participation, it was coded as learning. Similarly, identity was coded when respondents mentioned affiliating or disaffiliating with certain labels, communities or practices. Based on repeated review of the audio and transcripts and iterative cycles of coding based on the questions above, I refined my focus, shifting my attention to the ways participants learned specific activist practices and the ways that the core values of the community were revealed through the process. Ethnographic and interview data was anonymized and organized around activist identity development to illustrate the shifts in identity and practice over time as participants moved toward full participation as learners, organizers, and leaders within the social movement organization. The findings were triangulated across multiple interviewees and are consistent with either the texts, notes, or my participation, or a combination. Once an initial analysis was completed, the draft was circulated among participants, five of whom responded with written or verbal feedback, and their critiques of the data and my analysis have been integrated into the results that follow.

Doing Learning, Doing Activism: Techniques, Norms, Rituals

Each year, a new cohort of student leaders were brought into USFT's Coordinating Committee. They reported facing a steep learning curve as they moved from organizing on their own campuses to nationwide organizing and coordinating at an international level. Respondents reported learning many things, including about Fair Trade, international development, and the coffee industry. They also reported learning how to manage non-profit organizations, fundraise, plan major international events, and negotiate with large corporate actors at high levels. In the sections that follow, I will show how burgeoning young adult activists took gradual steps as they learned increasingly more about the activities that were expected of them, and through their increased activity, how their consciousness developed. New coordinators and returning coordinators learned through their activity, co-constructing the organization and co-creating their identity as Fair Trade activists.

Group Agreements

At the most basic level, newcomers were introduced to techniques, norms, and rituals that facilitated group process and built a sense of shared values in action. Isadora described how in almost any space a newcomer entered, the group process would begin with a discussion of "ground rules". Though they were collectively

generated by asking participants for suggestions of rules which were agreed upon with each new group, these ground rules generally consisted of the same core agreements. With remarkable frequency, these same basic rules were offered and agreed to in almost any group meeting, workshop, or conference. Typically, someone would offer a version of "listen to understand". Someone else might add a statement of confidentiality or not using people's names when sharing conversations outside of the group. Another typical offering was "step up, step back", a request that people who may be more assertive or more talkative in a group step back. These ground rules were emergent in nearly every workshop space and meeting, yet reflected the core practices and principles of the community of practice, as well as the relationship between practices and principles.

The ground rule listen to understand, for example, was not just a rule about paying attention, but rather underscored an organizational emphasis on consensus-building based in relationships. In interviews, members articulated that this rule was established in opposition to what was perceived as a common practice of waiting for one's turn to speak and argue rather than really attending to what a speaker was trying to communicate. However, this logic was rarely made explicit in ground rules. Members were expected to comply, and presumably learn the value of the approach through their participation.

Similarly, step up, step back worked to shift the practices of the group so that they reflected the equity commitments of the organization. Isadora claimed that the goal was to create space for less dominant or less vocal people to step up, and to encourage less vocal people to take a risk, as it were, and contribute orally to the group process. Isadora identified that this practice was underpinned by an anti-oppression logic — that White privilege and male privilege were enacted through dominance in participation, and that intervening through an explicit guideline was meant to make people think about "how much space they took up" and to subvert what might otherwise seem like a natural process. Miles also commented that the expression of privilege was being addressed through these types of rules without being labelled as such, where the goal was to make it more likely that women and people of color would be more active in conversations. Though this was not made explicit, people were expected to conform to the ground rule and understand it through their practice.

The co-construction of group agreements served multiple purposes. The first was governing group behaviour. Through the process, newcomers could see in normal interactions what the expectations for behaviour were, could practice operating within those norms, and eventually begin to offer the standard rules if they had not yet been incorporated into the group agreement as a way of contributing and potentially innovating. Participating in the co-development of group agreements was a basic way people could demonstrate their proficiency in the cultural production of USFT in small ways, regardless of their level of engagement. The second purpose of ground rule setting was in modeling facilitation strategies. Through this mechanism, newcomers could observe the facilitation techniques of more central members and participate in meetings structured around the establishment of the shared agreements. I observed that newcomers were active participants in constructing a space that was facilitated and enabling the facilitation. Additionally, they could see explicitly what should be enforced in meetings and workshops, and how members could be corrected or disciplined. Randy reported that through this process, newcomers were also able to learn, through their participation, which norms were stated but rarely enforced by watching others breach or by breaching themselves. From my experience, this breaching and repair process was most likely regarding step up and step back, where if someone was perceived to be taking up too much space, the group might be reminded of the rule generally by a facilitator or participant, a facilitator might intentionally avoid calling on that person, or the individual might be told directly to step back. The participation and observation in the group agreement process enabled newcomers to eventually take on the facilitation of sections of meetings, and later entire meetings, workshops, or conferences.

Keeping Stack

In much the same way, newcomers learned from more experienced peers about other processes that were central to the organization's activist culture. One way activists managed contentious conversations was through a technique they referred to as "keeping stack." Dani described how she learned stack, saying,

> Darren, another student leader, had been involved in more radical activism in his hometown, so when we were having a hard time managing some difficult discussion, he introduced the idea of using stack. He explained how one person would keep stack, basically keeping track of who wanted to respond to a specific idea, who wanted to speak next. And as part of it, people would wiggle their fingers or snap if they agreed with what someone was saying, so that then they wouldn't have to interrupt the flow of the discussion. So Darren kept stack for us, and by watching how he did it, we learned how it worked and how to keep stack. And once we got the hang of it we used it a lot and took it back to the rest of the organization.

Dani described a process in which a new skill was introduced; novice coordinators learned through instruction and modeling how to use the skill. This included experimentation with the hand signals and the timing of the

complex system—to indicate they wanted to speak, a participant would raise their hand or index finger and wait to be acknowledged by the person keeping stack. Once acknowledged, the person would wait until their name was called in the order the facilitator collected the names, unless one had a "direct response", indicated by alternately pointing both index fingers at the speaker. Direct responses did not join the queue, but instead were able to speak immediately following the speaker they sought to respond to. Additionally, if someone agreed with what a speaker was saying, rather than joining the queue to voice their support or responding directly, they instead raised their hands and wiggled their fingers. There were also signs for interrupting for a process question, indicating confusion on a topic, raising volume, and other requests. These signals could be difficult for new members to deploy at the right time and difficult to keep track of the full inventory of options one could use for a given situation, but in order to participate, new and experienced members needed to use signals at the appropriate time, especially if they wanted to speak by joining the stack. Based on my observation, as newcomers became more proficient at participating using this process, they had opportunities to try to keep stack, thus learning more about how it was done in practice, but also shaping the way others in the collective understood how stack was kept. Becoming the stack facilitator required greater proficiency at knowing what certain signals indicated and when they should be used, but also gave the facilitator the freedom to make accommodations based on their own facilitation practices and the participants' usage of signals. Later generations would not learn through explicit instruction, but would simply be immersed in the practice. They would learn through observation and experimentation with occasional coaching or correction by the facilitator or their peers.

The process became an important performance, a skill that new coordinators needed to be able to use appropriately when it was being deployed. Members had to know how to indicate they wanted to speak in order to get into the stack, so in order to participate in discussions they had to be proficient in the performance of stacking. Members also had to respect the stack order; interrupting the order to express an opinion, which would be acceptable behaviour in many other argumentation contexts, would be considered rude and entitled, so one needed to adhere to the process. It was also a skill that a novice would be expected to employ as a facilitator as she or he moved toward full participation, which meant learning how to identify speakers jockeying for position in the stack and managing direct responses to previous speakers.

Conference Calls

Conference calls were sites of key practices to perform, and several interview respondents joked that this was the skill that was most important to learn. Most of USFT's decision-making was conducted via conference calls, since coordinators lived across the United States. Having 15-20 people participate on a conference call required a lot of shared understanding around process and facilitation, according to Isadora. Throughout my data, people suggested that almost none of this was taught in an explicit way. Rather, when a new generation of Coordinating Committee members were on their first call, an experienced facilitator would conduct the call. He or she would likely begin by explaining basic call etiquette, like introducing oneself before speaking, until everyone got to know everyone else's voices, or announcing oneself when you joined a call, or muting the phone while you are listening. Beyond that, though, people had to learn by listening and participating in calls. The next call might also be facilitated by a more experienced facilitator, but quickly new coordinators were expected to begin facilitating calls, as the responsibility rotated through the group. Novices learned that they should email out a request for agenda items by receiving requests via email. They also learned that facilitators were expected to develop agendas that included specific items with allotted times to each item by receiving proposed agendas. Rita noted how people had to learn how to participate, and described her own process of development. At first, she would only volunteer to take notes. She said, "I felt a sense of responsibility, this is my contribution to keeping the ball rolling, making the facilitator more successful… that's how I learned about facilitation." She very clearly identifies how her peripheral participation as a note-taker enabled her to learn the central skill of facilitation. Novices also learned specific ways of facilitating, managing time, and calling for and conducting a consensus process for decision-making. What was not taken up through imitation might be assisted or corrected by one of the old-timers of the community of practice. Occasionally, too, if someone was deemed to be doing too bad a job at conducting a call, other people would usurp the responsibility, intentionally demonstrating, either implicitly or explicitly, the "right way" to facilitate. These lessons of what was correct protocol were supplemented by the many online instant messages that some coordinators, including Katrina and Roxana, reported using while simultaneously on conference calls. Commiserating about bad facilitation or making fun of awkwardness reinforced the norms around what was good and bad facilitation. Throughout the data, participants stressed that becoming a strong facilitator was one of the ways that coordinators established themselves within the Coordinating Committee and became recognized as student activists.

Ideological Underpinnings

These practices governed group dynamics. Emergent activists learned these skills through their participation in the group. By watching and participating in the processes as participants and as facilitators, they became

activists. As they adopted these frames of understanding, these techniques, and these rituals, they became more fully able to function as full activists, not only in USFT, but also in the broader North American leftist activist culture. As young adult activists learned these skills, they moved from peripherality toward full participation within USFT. Through legitimate peripheral participation, new members were able to observe the practices of a community and participate in the activities. As they became more central, they would facilitate small pieces, and then be expected to facilitate with support, and then be able to facilitate independently. This "leadership ladder" as USFT referred to it, was a process of immersive skill building and acculturation that enabled people to do the work proficiently while coming to understand the political theory of the organization.

Through engagement in all of these processes, the underpinning logic and theory of social change for USFT could be revealed. The coordinating ideology was about producing facilitators attentive to interaction and the production of anti-oppressive spaces in order to enable radical democracy, consensus-based decision-making, and non-hierarchical participation. Lee said that USFT's facilitation processes:

> Focused on an obsession with empowerment. We were talking about empowering producers of coffee in the Third World. And if we were going to live that ethic with integrity, that meant remaking our own selves and the way we interacted in a way that was more empowering of everybody. We're talking, like, making sure voices that are traditionally marginalized are really heard, at every level. That meant a lot of time spent organizing minority caucuses in USFT, making sure that less extroverted people on conference calls were heard.

Through developing ground rules, the community of practice developed a political critique of privilege and worked to ensure that all participants could be involved in an inclusive community in order to foster truly democratic decision-making. Keeping stack served a similar purpose, and worked to enable a consensus model of decision-making. Coordinating conference calls the USFT way ensured that participants had the information they needed in order to make decisions well, while also attending to the ways that privilege was enacted during the meetings. Randy said, "USFT was more concerned with how they did things than other activist groups I had been part of, which were mostly results-oriented without a whole lot of concern about their method… It was striking how much people were concerned with attitudes and the way things were said or done." All of USFT's facilitation strategies were developed from a political ideology and worked to engrain that ideology in the community members. Newcomers' active participation enabled particular forms of learning, and it was the demonstration of both the performances and the political underpinnings that allowed people to claim roles of centrality within the community of practice.

One reason that these performances of facilitation and group dynamics were so important was because they simultaneously signalled and constructed the broader politics of the group. USFT had a stated commitment to building an anti-oppressive movement, internally and externally. Their external politics, like campaigns, gave them a public facing approach to anti-oppression, but both internal and externally oriented practices had to reflect their core values, through what is referred to as prefigurative action (Breines, 1989), which gave them an immediate outlet to enact their values. The group dynamics and processes underlined here demonstrate the ways that people were eased into these politics in an internal community of practice as a way of developing both the skills they would need to coordinate the public facing campaigns, and the political/ideological approach that USFT believed should underpin the external work. Within USFT's community of practice, demonstrating proficiency in the internal process of legitimate peripheral participation unlocked people's ability to become full participants as activists in the external campaigns.

On Becoming an Activist

In my interviews, I found high levels of discomfort with the idea of activism when participants described their entrée into USFT. Most respondents stated that when they became involved with the organization, they did not identify as activists. This is particularly significant because all of these individuals would eventually take on leadership positions in the organization. Rita said, "I didn't like the connotation of the word activism, I did not consider myself an activist. It's kind of funny I was spending eighty hours a week, like every amount of free time I had, living, breathing and thinking about social issues and how to change them." For Coordinating Committee members, their initial lack of identification with the label of activism had to do with preconceived notions of activism. Katrina said, "Working with USFT helped me get past my stigma of activism and feeling radical enough" indicating her dis-identification with the label. These new members shared a commitment to the cause and were deeply engaged in the work, but initially did not understand the work as activism. Lizzie said "It took me a while to recognize that I was an activist… enough people started telling me I was an activist. I was like, I'm just doing stuff I like." Lizzie and others identified with the work first, seeing its relevance to their lives and believing it created a real impact in the world. For Lizzie, when other people from inside the community identified her as an activist leader, she began to see herself that way as well. On a similar note, Rita later said

It was more about participating in the community. I didn't think the things that I was doing were activism, it was the task I was doing. I just didn't think I was an activist, I wasn't averse to it. It changed after the Convergence – I felt more embedded in the community, like this is an activist cause I would want to be involved in regardless of tasks… It grew on me.

She focuses on the ways that the work and the community provoked her to change her ideas about activism and see herself as a contributing member of the activist community. For these members, it was only through their engagement in the community doing the work they felt was necessary for a cause that they felt affinity for that they came to identify themselves as activists.

All respondents stated that after their involvement on the Coordinating Committee, they did self-identify as activists. For many, immersion in USFT changed their conceptions of activism, grounding them in real-life activity and de-mystifying the idea of activism as fringe or fanatical. Roxana said:

It made me realize that activism is a lot more than just protesting or deciding one day to sit in the front of the bus. It's about movement building and sustained effort in order to create any real change. Activism is also about educating and empowering others in order to build people power and, ideally, create systemic change in the long run.

She notes a significant change in her consciousness when it came to the idea of activism – from the activity to the strategy to the broader work of consciousness-raising. Beyond the facilitation work, USFT's organizing practice, campaign strategies, and education pedagogies were also highly specified, constructed, and maintained through the community of practice, but an analysis of these is outside the scope of this work. Future work will entail an analysis of the ways that USFT's campaigning and pedagogy works to produce activist identities.

USFT student activists carved out a particular identity as activists, one that was specific to Fair Trade. Their approach to facilitation was highly specified, as was the theory of change and anti-oppression that was the foundation or their work. Through their work, participants became able to identify themselves as activists because 'activism' now had a particular meaning for them that was rooted in their tasks and their engagement in the community. Rather than an abstract term connected to extreme political expressions, 'activism' became a concrete performance of facilitation and social change work that was rational and that they were capable of doing. Their identification with the community of practice drove them to re-evaluate their earlier opinions of activists. Within this space, the process of becoming an activist constituted taking up the techniques, norms and rituals of the community. Through their process of adopting the practices, participants learned the logic behind the practices and began to identify themselves as activists.

At the same time, though, the specific USFT activist identity was rooted in larger communities of practice; the forms of participation that newly labelled activists became skilful at performing were signifiers within student activist communities across North America. Many of the practices analyzed above were not exclusive to USFT, but spanned other youth social movements, including the alter-globalization and anti-sweatshop movements. Part of what drove people's identification as activists, then, was also their ability to situate themselves within a broader community of practice. When USFTers who previously had not thought of themselves as activists took on these practices, they could see how they were, in fact, acting like activists. By removing the stigma that respondents identified and focusing on manageable tasks, participants gradually worked toward proficiency and centrality that slowly made it possible for them to see themselves as others saw them.

This case has demonstrated a process of situated learning, wherein students involved with USFT moved from dis-identification with the label of activist to a strong identification with the term through their shared work in a community of practice. Through legitimate peripheral participation in the basic facilitation strategies of the organization and their ongoing work in the community of practice, these activists shifted their identities and their abilities to participate in social change work. Through immersion and experimentation with the practices of the community, including developing group agreements, keeping stack, and participating in and facilitating conference calls, new members of USFT Coordinators' community of practice became activists. Their performance of these practices as peripheral members allowed them to learn and shape the ideologies that were foundational to the practices. Through that learning and members increasing ability to perform the full practices of the Coordinating Committee, they became recognized as full members and understood themselves as student activists.

Situated learning frameworks have much to offer social movement theorists and activists who want to understand the ways that new members become embedded in social movement communities of practice. This case shows the value of situated learning theory for the study of learning in social movements, in which people often learn through loosely structured engagement in a committed group of volunteers and learn the practices of the community through their shared work as they attempt to change the world. Legitimate peripheral

participation describes the learning trajectories in this social movement organization, as new members gradually became more fully immersed in the practices and better able to perform them. Participants' identity development emerged from their experiences of participation and co-construction of the community and its practices. Situate learning opens new avenues for social movement researchers to understand why people join movements, how movements evolve, and how frames and ideologies are constructed and circulated by activists in their daily activity.

For the Learning Sciences, this case offers a new context to understand learning and identity development, and links social movements with situated learning. This bridge strengthens our ability to understand learning in formal and informal learning contexts, and offers new sites of inquiry for researchers interested in the relationships between communities of practice and social change. Additionally, this case draws attention to the political nature of communities of practice and how ideologies are developed, propagated, and maintained in communities of practice. USFT's case also helps us to theorize how new members of communities develop identities through their participation, and explores how practices are passed on over generations within a community of practice. Finally, using Learning Sciences approaches in the context of social movements allows us to see the impacts movements have on individual activists engaged in collective action and to understand how social change is produced through participation in communities of practice.

References

Breines, W. (1989). *Community and organization in the New Left, 1962-1968: the great refusal*. Rutgers

Brown, J.S. and Duguid, P. (1991). Organizational learning and communities-of-practice: Toward a unified view of working, learning and innovation. *Organization Science.* 2:1 40-57.

Curnow, J. (2013). Fight the power: situated learning and conscientisation in a gendered community of practice. *Gender and Education*, *25*(7), 834-850.

Curnow, J. (2014). Climbing the Leadership Ladder: Legitimate Peripheral Participation in Student Movements. *Interface, 6*:2

Ebby-Rosin, R. (2005). *New voices at the table: Organizing low-income Latino parents for school reform* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation.). Stanford University, California.

Evans, M. P. (2009). *Inside education organizing: Learning to work for educational change* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation.). Boston College, Massachusetts.

Foley, G. (1999). *Learning in Social Action: A Contribution to Understanding Informal Education. Global Perspectives on Adult Education and Training*. St. Martin's Press, Inc. New York, NY

Hall, B., & Turay, T. (2006). State of the field report: Social movement learning. *Victoria, BC: University of Victoria*.

Kirshner, B. (2008). Guided Participation in Three Youth Activism Organizations: Facilitation, Apprenticeship, and Joint Work. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, *17*:1, 60-101.

Lave, J. (1996). Teaching, as Learning, in Practice. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 3:*3, 149-164.

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. NY, NY: Cambridge.

Munro, L. (2005). Strategies, action repertoires and DIY activism in the animal rights movement. *Social Movement Studies, 4*(1), 75-94.

United Students for Fair Trade. (2011) www.usft.org/about. Accessed on April 1, 2011.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity.* Cambridge: Cambridge Press.

Wilson, B. R., & Curnow, J. (2013). Solidarity™: student activism, affective labor, and the fair trade campaign in the United States. *Antipode*, *45*(3), 565-583.

Acknowledgments