

Climbing the leadership ladder: legitimate peripheral participation in student movements

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Abstract

This article examines the learning and leadership development processes of a social movement organization in order to understand the ways that student movements sustain themselves. Using United Students for Fair Trade as a case study, I trace the learning processes of students in the leadership of the national organization and students involved in the affiliated campus groups. I apply situated learning theory within social movement studies in order to understand how activists learn through legitimate peripheral participation. This analysis showcases the explanatory power of legitimate peripheral participation for social movement learning studies while shedding light on the limitations of learning and engagement for students at the periphery of student movements. I suggest an approach to the leadership ladder that allows more affiliates to have access to the full practices of student movement organizations in order to increase political learning opportunities and sustain the movement.

Keywords: Social movement learning, situated learning, communities of practice, legitimate peripheral participation, student organizing

Learning, action, and student movements

In student movements, learning, participation, and leadership are intimately connected. This article asks how activists in social movements learn, and how that learning enables and constrains their actions. How does learning in social movements shape the ways people participate in the movement? And how does participation produce leaders that shape the practices and vision of a movement? Using United Students for Fair Trade (USFT) as a case study, I trace the learning processes of students in the leadership of the national organization and students involved in the affiliated campus groups. I apply situated learning theory in order to understand how activists learn through legitimate peripheral participation. This analysis showcases the explanatory power of legitimate peripheral participation for social movement learning studies while shedding light on the limitations of learning and engagement for students at the periphery of student movements. I suggest an approach to the leadership ladder that allows more affiliates to have access to the full practices of student movement organizations in order to increase political learning opportunities and sustain the movement.

For decades, student-led social movements have captured the imagination of youth and been at the vanguard of social change initiatives in the US, from the

US Civil Rights movement (Perlstein 1990; Morgan and Davies 2012) to the campaign to divest from apartheid South Africa (Soule 1997) to anti-war struggles (Heineman 1994) and beyond. Internationally, student movements can be traced through Paris (Seidman 2004), Iran (Mahdi 1999), China (Yang 2000), and many other places. These movements have been described in an abundance of academic work, investigating their histories, repertoires, resources, networks, frames, philosophies, and outcomes. More recently, literature around student and youth social movements has focused on mobilizations throughout the Arab Spring (Murphy 2012), Occupy (Reimer 2012), and anti-austerity campaigns addressing the neoliberalization of education, as in Chile (Guzman-Concha 2012), the UK (Rheingans and Holland 2013; Cammaerts 2013), Canada (Al-Saji 2012; Sorochan 2012), and Greece (Karamichas 2009). This research tends to focus on the motivation and tactical repertoires of the day, documenting what these movements do and why they do it. Motivation is generally understood as the conditions and resources that provoke collective action, and learning is an implicit component of this, but is not engaged directly.

The act of learning itself has rarely been the focus of sustained inquiry into student movements. I understand learning as contextually bound. Thus, while I make no claims here about the learning dynamics of student movements being unique and substantially different from that of other social movements, I do think that specifying the context of youth organizing is meaningful. The practices and participants in student movements can be distinct, and I am interested in capturing and understanding the learning process within these movements in particular. This is an important area because it has the potential to help student organizers and educators understand the dynamics at play when people decide to get involved in social action, why they decide to get involved, and how they get involved. It is also a crucial way of understanding everyday learning and the ways people's consciousness changes through their actions in communities.

In order to extend studies of social movement learning and pay particular attention to the learning dynamics within student movement activism, I suggest situated learning theory and community of practice theory as lenses through which to view the ways young adult activists learn in social movements. Bringing these conceptual frameworks to USFT, I will address how student activists learn and how that learning is shaped by and shapes their participation in the broader social movement.

In the sections that follow, I first bridge social movement studies with a discussion of situated learning theory, including communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation. I then introduce the case of United Students for Fair Trade, describing my methodology and USFT's work as a student movement. I then address the ways power dynamics influence access to the practices of a community, and this impacts members' experiences of leadership development. I then trace the ways student leaders learned in the USFT's Coordinating Committee as they moved toward full participation within the

community of practice, and the ways students in USFT's affiliates learned from the periphery of the organization. I then use two different affiliate groups to demonstrate the lack of consistency in USFT's practices, repertoires, and joint work before offering an analysis of how USFT's differential access to learning and full participation undermined the organization's ability to build a politically coherent, sustainable movement.

Legitimate peripheral participation in student movements

Situated learning theory conceptualizes learning as a social process rooted in participation in a community, rather than as an individual's uptake of content, as mainstream cognitivist approaches to learning tend to. This view holds that learning is co-constructed within groups of people, continually negotiated, and contextually bound (Lave and Wenger 1991). People learn through immersion in the activities of a given community; through the activity they learn the skills and the cultural performances, and as part of that process, they learn the meanings embedded in those skills and performances. Practices are negotiated by the community and are not static; they change in response to the people involved, the lessons participants learn, and the work to be done. Essentially, the community itself is the curriculum that members are learning, reproducing, and innovating through their collaboration (Wenger 1998).

Communities of practice theory, a related body of work, argues that people learn within the groups they are a part of. A community of practice is understood as the set of relations that create the context for learning – the people, the practices, and the broader social world (Lave and Wenger 1991). A group of people could be considered a community of practice if they were mutually engaged in joint work based on shared repertoires (Wenger 1998). Within this view, learning is a process of becoming part of the community and being able to fully function within it (Lave 1996).

This view has been widely critiqued for focusing on the reproduction of norms and practices in organizations rather than accounting for changes and innovations (Hager, 2005). Extending those critiques, I have argued elsewhere for a more robust view of learning in a community of practice that allows space for contestation of the dominant practices and consciousnessraising within communities of practice that leads to shifts in practice and centres of power (Curnow 2013). These critiques are valid and must be taken seriously. For this student movement context, though, I believe that communities of practice theory is very descriptive of the relations of power and reproduction within the established group. This case demonstrates how new members are brought into a community of practice and learn the dominant practices of the existing established members, and are also able to innovate new practices from both the periphery and the centre. It also illustrates how sub-communities of practice emerge and relate to other communities of practice.

Brown and Duguid extend the theorization of communities of practice, arguing that they must be seen as nested or overlapping communities. They claim organizations should be viewed as “communities of communities of practice” (1991: 856) where sub-communities of practice hold a more specific identity than the larger community because of the different standpoints they represent. Sub-communities of practice are suggested as a strategy for understanding the ways that communities do not stand alone, but are embedded in other communities and broader social relations that influence their practices.

Legitimate peripheral participation is one of the key concepts emerging from situated learning approaches. It theorizes that newcomers to a community of practice learn through their immersion in the community, gradually becoming more able to participate in the community as they take on increasingly significant or complex tasks within the community (Lave and Wenger 1991). As they become more immersed in the community they move from the periphery through a centripetal process toward full participation. Through their increased exposure to tasks and ability to complete them independently, novices learn the reasoning behind the approaches and come to understand the philosophy of the community. Peripherality refers to the legitimate ways that members participate in certain practices or partial performances of the community. For example, a new member would not be expected to have mastered every task that was important within a community, nor would all members be expected to perform leadership roles. In contrast, full participation in a community of practice means that a member has come to identify, and been identified by others in the community, as a full member able to perform and model the dominant practices of the community. The concept of dominant practices is used here to describe the common practices of the community that one must become competent at performing in order to become a full member, and “mastery” is used to describe the accomplishment.

However, not everyone is expected to achieve full participation; being peripherally engaged in a community of practice is also considered a legitimate mode of engagement within this view (Lave and Wenger 1991), though Lave and Wenger note that peripherality can inhibit forms of learning. Access to full participation is a political issue, as Lave and Wenger note and Contu and Willmott (2003) have expanded. Contu and Willmott argue that participants cannot be expected to learn practices they do not have access to, and that power dynamics within a community are of central importance to analyses of who is able to learn which practices, and why they have access and others may not. Salminen-Karlsson (2006), Paechter (2003, 2006), Hodges (1998), and Callahan and Tomaszewski (2007) address the ways that women and queer people can be marginalized in a community of practice, arguing that the dominant practices of a community may be gendered in ways that prevent certain people from performing the practices or put them at a disadvantage when performing them. While communities of practice theorists have not, to my knowledge, engaged questions of the racialized and classed nature of full participation in a community of practice, the same logic holds, locking certain

people into positions of peripherality based on their ability to reproduce the classed and racialized performances that constitute full participation.

Legitimate peripheral participation is a useful conceptual framework for social movements because it describes the ways that participants learn through the community in daily interactions with peers and more experienced members. Much of what is learned in social movement activism is tacit learning rather than explicit training, and legitimate peripheral participation provides a framework for understanding this process of becoming an activist within a particular context. A small number of authors have applied sociocultural learning lenses to social movements, including Kirshner (2008), Ebby-Rosin (2005), Curnow (2013), and Evans (2009). These studies have attempted to theorize the learning that occurs within social movements. They draw from different theoretical traditions, including apprenticeship and guided participation, embodied learning, and conscientization in order to demonstrate the varied ways that participants in social movements learn in communities of practice and how their learning impacts their social action. My research extends their theorizations by demonstrating legitimate peripheral participation as it is mobilized in a student movement. Additionally, this study illustrates the ways that sub-communities of practice vary in their form and relationship to the community of practice. It also problematizes how sub-communities of practice do or do not have access to the full practices as a potential barrier to leadership development and political learning.

In order to extend these studies and more fully describe the process of learning through legitimate peripheral participation in a youth-driven social movement, I provide a case study of USFT. I trace the ways participants learned, and pay particular attention to the ways they report learning from their peers and their community. I then compare the central members' learning to that of peripheral members in order to see different expressions of legitimate peripheral participation. This study demonstrates the ways that leadership development and legitimate peripheral participation are linked, examines the ways that student movements support and constrain the learning of members, and explores how that learning impacts broader social movements.

USFT's Fair Trade campaign and the leadership ladder

USFT is a student movement organization built to promote fair trade products, principles, and policies (USFT 2011). Emerging out of Oxfam America coffee trainings in the early 2000s, USFT began as an effort to expand awareness of fair trade certified products and increase their sales on university campuses across North America. From this beginning, USFT expanded to hundreds of affiliated groups conducting over 350 campaigns, converting hundreds of dining halls to fair trade and educating thousands of consumers as they did so (Wilson 2010).

I was involved with USFT as a student organizer and later as the National Coordinator from 2003-2008. Through this experience I gained extensive insight into the day-to-day functions of the organization, as well as the learning processes that shaped the organizing strategy and campaign work. These experiences inform this article, as does the longitudinal study on which I am collaborating with Dr. Bradley Wilson. As part of this project, we attended and took ethnographic notes on 18 conferences. We also conducted interviews and surveys with 25 former coordinating committee members in 2011. These interviews lasted from 1 to 3 hours and covered a range of topics, including people's learning experiences, shifts in consciousness over time and experiences of identity development within the community.

All former coordinators were invited to participate in the survey, and interviews were requested based on the survey responses, thus the interviews do not represent the whole of all of the Coordinating Committees' members. Additionally, because we only sought contact with former coordinators, the racial and class dynamics of the organization with overrepresentation of white and upper-middle class participants are present in the data. Interviews and survey responses were selectively transcribed and coded thematically, and all identifying information has been anonymized. Codes included organizing, individual learning, mentorship, and collective learning. My initial analysis was drafted and circulated among interested interviewees, and their feedback has been integrated throughout. A portion of the responses are analyzed here in order to illustrate the ways that activists learned through legitimate peripheral participation, particularly when it came to learning how to be a USFT student organizer on campus and internationally.

USFT's base was made up of university, college, and high school students organizing voluntarily to do the work of promoting fair trade through their affective labour (Wilson and Curnow 2013). Organized as an affiliate network, USFT's members were student groups on university and college campuses. These student groups affiliated with USFT and educated their friends and colleagues, negotiated with their dining hall managers and school administrators, and promoted fair trade certified products throughout their communities. On campus, campaigns often focused on coffee conversion, where a student group would work to educate their peers and negotiate with the administration and food service providers to provide either an initial fair trade certified coffee offering or an entire line of certified coffees. Other campaigns that later emerged included advocacy to make fair trade bananas available in dining halls, to source fair trade chocolate on campus, to use fair trade rice in cafeterias, or the 'Full Monty', a campaign that encouraged campuses to take up the whole range of available fair trade products. Advocacy campaigns complemented this work, ranging from campaigns opposing the Central American Free Trade Agreement to campaigns targeting Taco Bell for their exploitation of farmworkers to union solidarity campaigns (Wilson and Curnow 2013).

These affiliates were organized regionally and interacted with other affiliates at the International Convergence, USFT's annual conference, which brought affiliates together with cooperative coffee farmers, fair trade NGOs, and the fair trade certifier, TransFairUSA. Some individual members of affiliates might also participate in 'trips to origin' which enabled groups of students to travel to coffee, cocoa, or craft producing communities for exchanges with partnering cooperatives. For most individual affiliate members, though, their immediate community of practice was their campus group, which was nested within USFT's larger community of practice.

A small proportion of these students became involved in USFT at a national and international level, joining or being elected by the membership to the leadership of the organization. USFT was governed by a Coordinating Committee of 15-22 students representing the different regions, campaigns, and initiatives within the organization. The Coordinating Committee made decisions through a consensus-based process and was officially non-hierarchical in structure. Their work was significantly different from the affiliate conversion campaign work. Rather than work at campaign work on campus, they focused on recruiting and supporting the grassroots affiliates, building leadership, developing and delivering anti-oppression and fair trade trainings, and coordinating nationwide campaigns. They planned and facilitated the International Convergences, the trips to origin, and any other exchanges and meetings that occurred with affiliates or international partners. These students invested significant amounts of time in USFT's governance and campaigns, with students reporting spending more than 20 hours a week on USFT activities, in addition to their school and paid employment commitments. For Coordinating Committee members, their communities of practice included their campus affiliate and the Coordinating Committee, and for some coordinators, also the larger fair trade movement, including certifiers, NGOs, and farmers.

For the Coordinating Committee, the scope of the international coordination spanned the Americas, Africa, Asia, Australia, and Europe. This included supporting emergent student fair trade work in Canada, the UK, and Australia and working with farmer and producer organizations. Additionally, these students set the direction for the organization and worked with TransFairUSA, the Fairtrade Labelling Organization, and other fair trade stakeholder organizations which coordinated the fair trade movement internationally. This work was the most contentious, as students sat at the table negotiating the future of the fair trade movement and the various certification policies that formed the core of the "scaling up or selling out" debate of the time (see Wilson and Curnow 2013). At these tables, coordinators learned the ins and outs of certification and were deeply embroiled in the internal debates of the international movement, from questions of producer voice to transnational corporations' involvement and beyond.

Newcomers to USFT's Coordinating Committee faced a steep learning curve when they joined and attempted to master the dominant practices of the community. They were expected to move through a "leadership ladder"—the

explicit leadership development process for coordinators. The leadership ladder was the approach to bringing new members in by asking them to do smaller tasks and gradually (or not, in some cases) ramp up to more complicated and high-stakes projects. The leadership ladder was conceptualized by USFT's Coordinating Committee as a process wherein new members assumed increasing responsibility as they became more proficient. In structured and unstructured ways, they incrementally took on higher-stakes tasks, like negotiating with large corporations or the certifying agency. Novice coordinators operated at the periphery for many organizing tasks, though they were quickly required to do more complex and important tasks. People's immersion in the Coordinating Committee meant that they were rapidly expected to participate as members who had mastered their roles, even as they were still very much in a process of learning the full practices of USFT's Coordinating Committee themselves.

When I refer to the full or dominant practices of USFT's community of practice, I am centring my analysis on the activities of the Coordinating Committee. While the practices of the Coordinating Committee changed over time, the activities reflected a deeper engagement with the social movement, more intentional approaches to regional organizing, and more nuanced critiques of anti-oppression, colonialism, and capitalism than many of the peripheral members at the affiliate level. Though affiliate conversion campaigns were a legitimate mode of participation, the engagement was peripheral in that most affiliates played no role in deciding what the standardized practices would be and had very little contact with other movement participants.

New members of the Coordinating Committee were also expected to move the affiliates within their regions through a leadership ladder. For example, once an affiliate group had coordinated a campaign to get fair trade coffee on their campus, they might be encouraged to engage in the Full Monty campaign, where they would use the same skills and relationships they had developed before to get more fair trade products, like tea and bananas, in their campus dining hall. Or an affiliate who attended a Convergence might be asked the next year to bring a group of students or to conduct a workshop. The idea behind this practice was to develop leadership by constantly asking people to take on more responsibility, supporting them in accomplishing the goal, and then challenging them to do something more complex and which required greater commitment and accountability to the organization.

Because the leadership ladder was dependent on relationships with established members of the Coordinating Committee, it was unevenly deployed. Thus, the learning and leadership opportunities of affiliates and coordinators varied widely, and this serves as the basic problematic for my analysis. Because the primary active form of recruiting was through people's social networks, the network of people already involved tended to reproduce itself, including its demographic makeup. It is important for me to acknowledge here that all of the practices were shaped in relation to participants' race, class, and gender. The likelihood of being recruited, one's experience within the leadership, and one's

ability to perform certain tasks in the ‘right’ way were undoubtedly tied to people’s bodies and lived experiences within a colonial, patriarchal capitalist society. What coordinators understood as indicators of potential ‘leadership’ was shaped through their own cultural lenses, and the tendency for white, upper and middle-class students at private institutions to be elected to the Coordinating Committee happened in relation to those recruitment strategies.

Full participation and power

Participation in communities of practice is shaped by and shapes participants’ experiences of power. Who can participate and how depends not only on an individual’s ability to perform competently, but also on their access to learning spaces, mentorship, what the practices are, and who evaluates their performance. Because who we are as racialized, gendered, and classed people shapes who we become as activists, this section interrogates how USFT’s core practices were developed and the ways that social relations enabled and constrained different members’ forms of participation. Problematizing the nature of participation enables us to acknowledge the racialized, classed, and gendered ways that learning is shaped and communities of practice are reproduced so that as we look at the ways participants move through processes of legitimate peripheral participation, it is understood that people necessarily navigate the process differently based on their social location.

USFT’s full practices were initially established by early generations of USFT leaders in coordination with non-governmental organizations and the certifier, and reflected the theory of social change and political ideologies of the founding group. Yet even within the initial group of leaders, the practices and politics of USFT were contested. The full practices of USFT – from the ways conversion campaigns occurred to the facilitation of Convergences – were continually negotiated by members of the community of practice. The ways that the dominant practices of USFT were established and maintained was an ongoing process – as people collaborated and worked together, regularities emerged in the strategies that they used, the resources they relied on, the roles that were available, and how those roles should be performed. Every time the group interacted was an opportunity to change the practices, some of which did change over time, but which largely remained consistent. In part, this was because of the power dynamics within the group; the way new members established themselves as legitimate and competent was by proving themselves able to act according to the dominant practices of the Coordinating Committee, and so these practices reproduced themselves and reinforced power among people who acted in that way. This meant that while the community could and did shift their practices over time, there was inertia that pulled the community of practice toward maintaining the established practices.

Layered on top of this was the influence of social identities that empowered certain people from privileged groups to exert inequitable influence on the community of practice. Within USFT, most of the established members of the

community were white and many were enrolled in elite universities, thus the dominant practices were racialized and classed in particular ways that made them differently accessible to people from different race and class identities. These practices formed the core of what new members needed to master in order to become full participants in the community of practice, but they could also innovate new practices and introduce variations on dominant practices. In this way the full practices of fair trade student organizing were not fixed, but emergent and constantly being performed and reformed.

Fair trade as a movement and ethical consumption as a strategy have many limitations. Fair trade in North America and Europe has been a markedly white, upper middle class movement (Hussey and Curnow 2013). The political act of buying premium coffee or artisan crafts is a decidedly classed approach to social action, one that participants identified as inaccessible to poor and working-class communities, particularly those of colour. Some argued that it was unethical to promote a social change strategy that excluded poor communities of colour from participating, especially when many of the migrants who might have been willing to engage but were excluded had migrated because of the effects of free trade policies and the coffee crisis in their home communities. Despite these critiques, the privileged students in the founding Coordinating Committee and in later cohorts focused their approach on selling more fair trade certified coffee and other products.

The sales and marketing approach that USFT promoted was also a racialized, gendered, and classed domain of activism. Campaigns to get fair trade coffees on campus relied on students working with their administration and food service providers to win their goals. Working with the administration of the university and dining services often required students to present themselves as professional colleagues. Unlike other campus activism, many affiliate members embraced wearing suits to meetings, having access to power brokers on campus, and using business strategies to accomplish their social justice goals. These performances reflected the white privilege, masculinity and upper-middle class status of many members who not only assumed they would be welcome at the boardroom table but that their recommendations would be heard and accepted by the campus administrators. The tactic that USFT promoted assumed that affiliate members would be capable of and comfortable with interacting in spaces with administrators and would be welcomed in. Navigating bureaucracy and speaking the language of the administration served students well in this campaign, and though there was an understanding within certain Coordinating Committees that this tactical approach reinscribed racialized, gendered, and classed power relations, the tactic remained the centrepiece for complex reasons (see Curnow 2013 for a more thorough treatment of these pressures).

Within the Coordinating Committee the racialized, classed, and gendered dynamics were different than affiliates, but shaped the experiences of participants in similar ways. For example, coordinators often travelled across the country for meetings with other fair trade stakeholders. While USFT worked to make these accessible by paying the travel costs of representatives, people on

the Coordinating Committee who had access to personal wealth and flexible time were able to attend more of the meetings and benefitted from greater access to information and recognition from other movement leaders. Another example is the Specialty Coffee Association Expo, a trade event where USFT students attempted to lobby coffee importers and transnational corporations to source fair trade certified coffees. This event is predominantly attended by white businessmen, and so even though USFT's delegations were often much more diverse, the students who were identified as cis gendered¹ men were engaged in conversations much more frequently. In this space whiteness and masculinity were unintentional prerequisites in order to engage fully in the practices.

Because of the ongoing anti-oppression work they engaged in, USFT's Coordinating Committee understood some of the ways that their practices reflected race, class, and gender biases. They worked together to mitigate many of what they identified as the problematic processes, by intentionally developing relationships with affiliate groups that were more racially diverse and including community colleges in outreach, recruiting people of colour for leadership roles, etc. However, as is the case in many places they struggled to understand many of the ways that they reproduced oppressive relations and to consistently intervene in effective ways. This wasn't because they were bad people acting malevolently or even uncritically, but because of the materially racialized, gendered, and classed society that they were working within. Even while actively resisting the social relations of racism, sexism, and classism, they reproduced certain dynamics.

While a critique of the racialized, gendered, and classed nature of participation in communities of practice is not the primary analysis I am bringing to bear here, it is necessary that we understand legitimate peripheral participation as a process that tends to reproduce not only the dominant practices of the community of practice, but also the larger systems the community is part of. Thus, while my focus now shifts to the ways that student activists learned and did not learn the practices of USFT's community, it is understood that these practices are power-laden, and people's abilities to enact them fully depends significantly on their access to full participation, as well as larger social relations.

In the sections that follow, I examine the ways members of the Coordinating Committee and affiliates learned through legitimate peripheral participation, and how their experiences of the leadership ladder, and by extension their access to the full practices of the community of practice, enabled or limited their participation and access to learning, recognition, and power within the movement.

¹ Cis gender individuals "have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies, and their personal identity"(Schilt and Westbrook 2009)

Learning by organizing in a community of practice

Legitimate peripheral participation is a strong framework for describing and theorizing learning within student movements. It is particularly descriptive of the dynamics at play within loosely structured and non-hierarchical organizations when new members enter the community and learn their way into full participation through their activities.

Within USFT we can see this happening in several ways as novice coordinators moved from peripheral positions into more central positions. They learned through immersion in the community of practice, experimenting and attempting to practice the requisite performances of the community. They also learned from their colleagues, and through exposure adopted more sophisticated practices and philosophies of change. Additionally, they learned from more established peers within the coordinating committee. They also learned through their relationships with elders from outside their immediate community of practice in the broader fair trade movement.

One former Coordinating Committee member who was interviewed, Chelsea, described how she learned how to be an organizer, saying, “We learned by doing it!” She described her process of experimentation as a regional coordinator. She tried to do targeted outreach to campuses in her region by making a list of schools and attempting to find organizations that seemed relevant, but did so without guidance. Through doing recruitment work, she learned which strategies worked, seeing what her peers were doing and learning what worked for them. Similarly, Bill explained his learning process as experience-based, describing the organizing framework he learned through his campus organizing experience, saying:

I learned, like, cut an issue², empowering, relationship building ... we were figuring it out and we had mentors to teach us. And we were just trying to figure it out and strategizing... transferring the skills to a broader base, like marketing, mobilizing a lot of people to come out.

He named a few of the skills and concepts that were part of the community of practice’s rhetoric and identifies his relationships with peers and mentors as the site for fostering this knowledge. He also suggested the sort of learning-by-doing that was common. Inexperienced organizers tried their best to use tools they had been trained in, but spent a lot of their energy experimenting and making it up as they went along. They tried different tactics and strategies, learning from their experiences and reflecting on their successes and failures.

² “Cutting an issue” refers to the practice of selecting and framing campaigns that strategically address systemic issues rather than individualized problems. It is a common process for moving from a political analysis into an actionable campaign.

Through an ongoing cycle of experimentation and reflection in the community, coordinators developed an organizing practice.

Immersion in the community was a key part of developing and teaching new members the practices and ideologies of USFT. Leadership summits in Nicaragua were a major component of the learning process for new coordinators. These trips to coffee farming communities were important for introducing new members into the full practices of the community, from using consensus decision-making to relationship building with farmers' cooperatives. Over the course of ten days, new members would form ties with the returning members and other novices and gain practical experience talking about fair trade, designing outreach strategies collectively, and participating in trainings on anti-oppression and other core values. While some of these components were explicitly instructional, most of the learning occurred through participating in the group practices, planning, making decisions, and hanging out during meals or on the bus. In interviews, all of the students who participated in the Nicaragua leadership summits identified them as learning opportunities that enabled coordinators to understand what fair trade was and how USFT worked to promote fair trade coffee as a pathway to alternative economies and international solidarity.

After they returned from Nicaragua and throughout the year, the primary way coordinators learned within the community of practice was through ongoing interactions with their peers on weekly conference calls. Through these interactions, they learned about each other's approaches to student organizing and campaigning. Roxy described this, saying:

There weren't necessarily people we were trying to learn from, but as we were each trying to do our own thing in the roles we were in, we were basing that off of conversations we were having with others in the group, and everything built together. There was definitely a lot I didn't know that I know I assimilated from other people- that I picked it up from working with them, but I can't always say that was *The* person that taught me that, but I know it was in this group setting, working with people that I gained so much more knowledge.

The coordinators were constantly learning from each other because the community of practice was constituted by peers with similar passions, politics, and contexts, whether the learning focused on ways to explain fair trade to a campus affiliate, a more radical meaning of fair trade, or a facilitation skill in practice. The immersion in a dynamic community of learners meant that people were constantly forming and reforming their theory and practice of activism and organizing in concert with their peers.

Another way participants reported learning within the Coordinating Committee was through relationships with elders. These relationships included formal and informal mentorship with movement elders in some cases. For other coordinators, their engagement with elders centred on joint work where they

were attending meetings and negotiating with the certifying agency and developing strategic plans for the movement at a national level. Particularly for older generations of coordinators, this dynamic was one of the most salient points for them in interviews and when they reviewed my analysis. As Bill noted above, relationships with mentors and elders helped shape his practice. He describes how coordinators learned from outside mentors, often elders in activist spaces, who could guide participation and scaffold learning experiences to meet younger activists at their stage of political development. Their mentorship moved students through legitimate peripheral participation, enabling students to take on new repertoires of action on their own, which may later be taken up and institutionalized within USFT's community of practice.

Respondents stressed the importance of relationships with movement elders, ranging from staff at the non-governmental organizations involved in Fair Trade to the founders of the earliest Fair Trade companies in North America. One set of elders anchored leaders like Miles to a broader critique of capitalism and colonialism and played a key role in USFT's development as they helped establish what would become the legitimate full practices. For many of these Coordinators, including Bill and Rita, the relationship with elders was focused on the social movement philosophies. Other coordinators, including Linda and Olive, got specific feedback on organizing and how to do it. Both described the importance of staff at certain organizations providing tactical support on whom USFT should reach out to and collaborated on strategies for building skills among coordinators and the affiliates strategically. This relationship was sometimes instructional, but more often based in reflection or negotiation. This is something of a challenge to some of the discussions of sub-communities of practice, in that the people establishing the legitimate practices were outside the sub-community itself. It demonstrates the importance of relationships between communities of practice in social movement analysis³ and extends the understandings of how learning can happen and who can establish full forms of participation in a community of practice.

Within the Coordinating Committee, people learned in different yet social ways, and through their learning and participation they became more central in USFT's community of practice. Through their relationships and their action in community, they adopted specific understandings of the role of social movements and particular repertoires of engagement. Lizzie said

I was really fortunate to get involved with USFT because it was more about building power as a movement. At first I was like, I don't really understand what organizing is, but it is about getting people to understand an issue, getting them

³ The relationships and influences between communities of practice and sub-communities of practice is related to social movement network analysis and the importance of ties across movements and social movement organizations. It is outside the scope of my argument to engage that connection here, but other research would do well to question the strengths of bridging communities of practice and social movement network analysis.

on board with things, rather than just throwing events, which is what I think some organizations were more focused on.

She described in detail the ways that she learned this through her work recruiting new members and developing leaders across her region. In the process of doing the work, experimenting, learning from colleagues and more experienced student activists, she moved into a position of full participation within the community of practice. Mastery and competence were measured by the skills that were learned, how and when they were employed, and the extent to which coordinators adopted the framework of organizing as the primary activist activity to create social change.

Throughout my data, it is clear that coordinators who became central figures within the community of practice did so through their close relationships with other coordinators and their joint work together. Through the process of campaigning and organizing across the US, they developed a shared philosophy of student movement action and the skills to mobilize a broad base of students.

Learning from the periphery: affiliates learning to campaign

The discussion of Coordinating Committee learning through legitimate peripheral participation in order to achieve full participation illustrates key social movement learning principles. It also serves as a counterpoint to the experiences of individual members of affiliates at the grassroots of the fair trade student movement. An analysis of the learning process of affiliates stands in contrast to the experiences of coordinators and exposes a significant gap in USFT's leadership ladder strategy.

Where coordinators were exposed to full participation in the USFT community, affiliates' participation was frozen at the periphery, with individual members lacking access to full participation in the organization. This happened because of the types of contact that affiliates had with the central organization. For the bulk of participants, contact with USFT was through a published organizing guide and introductory trainings. A smaller subset of people had more concerted contact with experienced members through participation in the annual Convergence or trips to origin. Even more rare was the campus affiliate group with one or more Coordinating Committee members involved in their group. This range of engagement shows different experiences of learning and participation in the USFT community of practice.

Affiliates most often learned how to do campaigns through highly structured guidebooks and Fair Trade 101 workshops that were focused on training people to do particular tasks in particular ways. The guidebooks were developed by previous generations of Coordinating Committee members and posted online and distributed at trainings, laying out clear instructions for running a coffee conversion campaign. The trainings were conducted at conferences and on

campuses and outlined the basics of the coffee crisis, explained fair trade certification, and also laid out specific instructions for campaigning. USFT's affiliate campaign process was designed to make conversion campaigns easy for anyone to start and win, regardless of their level of engagement. The coffee conversion campaign created a highly structured 'recipe' for a campaign with step-by-step instructions for how to organize a group, collect signatures for support, and negotiate with food service providers.

These steps were easy to follow with little contact from regional coordinators. Most people involved as affiliates ran their campaigns but never moved toward deeper engagement in the fair trade movement; for most, that level of full participation was never a goal. The learning that occurred within the affiliate chapters based on the workshops and guides did little to produce stronger identification with the community of practice. In many ways, the role of affiliates was a position as a peripheral participant, though affiliates experienced peripherality differently based on their access to the full practices of USFT's Coordinating Committee and the broader fair trade movement.

For students who sought out more contact or were sought out by regional coordinators, the annual International Convergence offered an intensive immersion into USFT over the course of a weekend once a year⁴. During the Convergence, affiliates would be exposed to the philosophies of USFT and see the values demonstrated through prefigurative politics, including an institutional focus on popular education, anti-oppression, and cooperative solidarity. Throughout the weekend, attendees could participate in workshops, panels, and other gathering spaces in order to experience in an embodied way how USFT's Coordinating Committee talked about fair trade and envisioned social change. However, there were real limits to the learning through legitimate peripheral participation. Although people participated in the Convergence, they did not have access to the full practices. Convergence participants were more passively involved, engaging in workshops and keynotes, but not involved in the coordination and behind-the-scenes debates that brought students, farmers, NGO-staff, and the certifier together. The new members were not actively constructing the conference, with the exception of one session, a co-developed process called Open Space Technology⁵. For three days, they might have close contact with the practices of the Coordinating Committee, but beyond that, their contact would likely be limited.

A small number of students from affiliates experienced even more intensive immersion into USFT through trips to visit farmer communities. In particular,

⁴ Attending the Convergence, like other practices, reflected particular class dynamics. Though USFT's Convergence Coordinators worked hard to make the Convergence economically accessible to everyone through scholarships, sliding fees, and other strategies, affiliated students often needed to raise money from their college or university to cover the costs, which required attending an institution that had those resources available as well as the acumen to navigate the bureaucracy to access conference funds.

⁵ <http://www.openspaceworld.org/>

USFT coordinators led trips to Chiapas and East Africa. These trips lasted from 1 week to 5 weeks and exposed participants to USFT as a national organization and the practices of the Coordinating Committee. Trips included meetings with farmer and artisan cooperatives and reflections on the experiences and the role of students working in solidarity from North America. Participants learned about coffee production and the certification process through their exposure to farms and export cooperatives, but they did not necessarily adopt new practices or become part of USFT. Participants never worked together and their commitment to each other only lasted a few weeks beyond their trips, though the goal was that trips would bring people into roles on the Coordinating Committee. The leadership summit (detailed above) accomplished drastically different ends, in large part because of the established community of practice. The 2006 East Africa delegation, during which 18 students applied to the project, co-planned it, and then travelled throughout Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda visiting Fair Trade coffee, tea, and craft cooperatives, is a prime example. With only one staff person and one novice coordinator, there was no claim to an established centre, and throughout the trip the dominant practices of USFT were contested in practice, notably that of popular education pedagogies and consensus decision making. Participants rejected participatory training and decision-making processes, arguing against the perceived inefficiency of the processes and requesting lectures and majority rule votes instead. On this trip, people were exposed to the dominant practices, but did not adopt them through participation or seek leadership positions within USFT.

Participants from affiliates where a coordinator was based were more likely to engage in the dominant practices of USFT, from decision-making processes to national campaigns. People who had better access to the full performances of the community of practice ended up being more likely to seek and master the full practices of USFT and be recognized by the Coordinating Committee and beyond. They were also likely to have contact with other coordinators beyond their own regional coordinator. Through this interaction and work, these affiliates adopted the dominant practices, and in many cases shaped the dominant practices: the coordinators from their chapters brought their personal iterations of the practices to the fore as they became central in the Coordinating Committee. These affiliates also had better access to information and were more likely to be engaged in the leadership development processes of USFT, which meant that certain schools were continually represented on the Coordinating Committee and at Convergences.

Across these different learning trajectories, affiliates could successfully learn to conduct campaigns on their own campuses, but members had limited opportunities to become more engaged in USFT's practices. Although they experienced legitimate peripheral participation, they were frozen in peripheral positions and kept from accessing the other practices that would enable them to learn and become more deeply engaged in the student fair trade movement, with very few exceptions.

In name only: joint work, shared repertoires?

In USFT's Coordinating Committee and within affiliates there were clearly differences in how and what people learned, predicated primarily on their access to performances of mastery of the practices in the community. Their work was also profoundly different, and these differences combined to create an organization, and indeed a movement, that had widely variant practices and theories of change. Rather than being understood as a singular community of practice, each affiliate should be understood as an independent community of practice with some overlapping practices with USFT as a national organization, but where the practices may or may not track with each other. This also produced a stratified system of affiliates, where some had closer relationships and more shared identity with USFT as the central student movement organization. Looking at two specific affiliates demonstrates the wide range of practices and illustrates how legitimate peripheral participation and access to the full practices varied, and how in many cases the connections between and across affiliates' practices were weak. In these schools, which were both sub-communities of USFT's community of practice, the expressions of centrality were so different that they were at odds with each other.

University of California at Santa Cruz (UCSC) was a particularly strong chapter that was engaged in USFT from the beginning. Members played an important role in shaping the dominant practices of USFT and hosted the first Convergence, setting the bar for subsequent conferences. Members of UCSC's group helped organize trips to origin, coordinated campaigns, and were always engaged with planning the Convergence. Nearly every year, the West Coast regional coordinator was based at UCSC. To be a full participant of their affiliate community of practice, one had to be engaged in broader food system work, notably in the Community Agroecology Network (CAN), and other food justice work, including migrant labour organizing or the Real Food Network. Their approach to fair trade was much broader than a focus on certified products; in fact their coffee conversion campaign opted not for a certified coffee but a CAN coffee roasted and imported directly from cooperative communities where UCSC students studied and built partnerships in Central America. Solidarity and alter-capitalist food system development were essential to their conceptions of fair trade.

In contrast, University of South Florida (USF) was engaged with USFT very peripherally. Their fair trade campaign was initiated in partnership with the Christian student association and centred on helping poor people through charitable purchasing of fair trade certified coffee. Their contact with USFT was through a regional coordinator based in another state, and no one from the affiliated group ever attended a Convergence. They launched a campaign and worked closely with TransFairUSA, and as a result focused on the certified label.

There is little overlap in terms of the politics or practices of these two groups. Mapped against USFT's Coordinating Committee's dominant practices, it is even clearer that these affiliations were tenuous, and one could argue that

without a shared repertoire of joint work, they should not be considered to share a community of practice. They shared a commitment to fair trade and conversion campaigns, but what those meant in practice and how they planned to accomplish them were actually quite different.

Looking at these affiliates' interactions of legitimate peripheral participation reveals the disparate practices and outcomes of these ostensibly related sub-communities of practice. USF, like most USFT affiliates, had little contact with how the USFT coordinators performed their activities or discourses, so while USFT in some ways established the norms, the practices were taken up quite unevenly. The guidebooks and trainings made campaigning so simple that anyone could participate and could do so independently of USFT. There were many positive aspects of this decentralized structure; it made it simple for many campuses to become involved with few resources and allowed for authentic local control. The possible lack of relationship with the rest of the student movement, though, proved a challenge for many affiliates. Most affiliates' contact with USFT was only through their regional coordinators, many of whom were new to their positions and were working toward mastering USFT's full practices in their own processes of legitimate peripheral participation. Additionally, most affiliates had no contact with the broader fair trade movement; they would never interact with farmers' organizations, the certifiers, or the NGOs that coordinated the fair trade movement. This isolated them from setting policy, but more significantly it kept people from understanding much of the complexity of certification and the contested nature of solidarity across the movement.

Extending the leadership ladder

These disparate practices among affiliates reveal broader significance anchored to questions of learning and consciousness. Within USFT, political education happened largely among established members as part of the practices of full participation. Through engaging in the central practices, one would learn the community's theory of social change. Through immersion and action, new members moving toward centrality would have access to conscientization processes and be embedded in a politically active community of practice where at a minimum emergent anti-capitalist and anti-colonial politics were a fundamental performance. As one former coordinator said, "The students who come into USFT from the simple end of fair trade products were very quickly connected and linked up to other students who were absolutely committed to asking those hard questions about race and class and gender and capitalism." When affiliates did not access the broader movement community, they often did not have an opportunity to engage with other students debating the politics of the movement as part of the practices of being part of the fair trade movement.

Though USFT prided itself on the ease of entry into fair trade activism, optimizing the conversion campaign for ease of entry undermined the movement politically and tactically. As laid out in the Fair Trade 101s and the organizing guides, conversion campaigns required very little learning in order to

engage and offered few avenues toward broader collective action in the community. Being so easy as to not require contact with or support from other affiliates or Coordinators meant that participants did not have to engage with USFT in order to access more resources or pursue more sophisticated practices. Without these relationships, there was little to encourage affiliates to consider moving into full participation in the movement. The easy campaign produced a dynamic where affiliates did not necessarily experience any of the political learning that might emerge through the leadership ladder process and legitimate peripheral participation as people moved into full participation in USFT. In effect, the easy campaign tactic limited USFT's ability to build a movement, instead merely enabling it to mobilize short-term campus-specific campaigns.

The conversion campaign tactic may have seemed like joint work, in that affiliates were all launching the same types of campaigns asking for the same things at different campuses. However, the work was never really shared; campaigns between campuses had little impact on one another, and learning on one campus would likely not influence the full practices of USFT's other affiliates or Coordinating Committee. The campus-specific conversion campaign itself was inadequate for moving people into full participation. There was not a mechanism for most people to be involved in shared work more meaningfully – access to full participation was limited, and the central roles available to people were generally those of being a leader of an affiliated chapter or a coordinator, with few other options and a gulf between them in terms of learning and leadership development. There were no sustained national campaigns where people could work together, compare their repertoires with other campuses, build relationships, and develop a critique of the social relations in which fair trade was embedded.

Promoting tactics that bring people from different affiliates together in order to collaboratively build strategies and co-negotiate systems creates fertile ground for learning. Coordinated campaigns offer a number of affordances that the guide-based campaigns do not. The first is contact with other affiliates, extending one affiliate's practices through exposure to another's and building relationships. Through contact with other approaches, affiliates can learn new strategies, as well as the different philosophies that underpin them. In this way, affiliates like USF and UCSC could have influenced each other, as they learned about the successes and struggles of each others' approaches. The second is a need to be in communication with the Coordinating Committee rather than the ability to independently carry out a campaign in isolation. The impetus for consistent contact could provide opportunities for more peripheral groups to experience the full practices of USFT and allow them to experiment with those practices in their campaign work. Additionally, necessary and sustained contact with the Coordinating Committee could disrupt the tendency toward some affiliates having no meaningful relationship with USFT, though it may not be enough.

Joint work could include a coordinated campaign that targets one company or elected official and leverages the power of all of the affiliates in order to collaboratively achieve the same goal. This type of work would require collaboration and communication across the affiliate network and would bring affiliates into some of the messier dynamics of choosing strategies and reframing them when they do not pan out, something that participants in conversion campaigns were insulated from. In collaboratively designing and launching a campaign, affiliates could play a more active role in establishing the practices, learn from the performances of Coordinating Committee members, and contest or reshape the dominant practices through their engagement.

Collaborative work becomes a key link here. It is the practice that potentially binds affiliates together and to the established members of the community of practice. In later years, USFT attempted to launch a coordinated campaign that had the potential to unite different affiliates, but the target that was chosen was relevant to only a handful of them. If executed well, this type of engagement may have been effective at connecting affiliated groups together in joint work to create shared tactics. This type of collaboration could leverage the strength of the affiliate base while creating a shared sense of full participation in USFT, making those performances available to participants beyond the Coordinating Committee. Joint work could have had the potential to bridge the leadership ladder across peripheral affiliates if it had brought them into closer contact with each other and the Coordinating Committee. In that community of practice with full participation at the periphery and at the centre, there may have been more opportunities for members, new and established, to learn and co-develop the political ideology of USFT through their practice.

Additionally, shared work has the potential to become an intervention that can disrupt some of the racialized, classed, gendered nature of the dominant practices. The standardized campaign meant that affiliate members only moved into full participation if the tactics chosen by people in positions of mastery worked for them and their context. The potential of shared work is that when the tactics break down, there is an opportunity for a co-negotiation process. The communication and negotiation can, though does not necessarily, shift the practices to allow other people to be successful. Working together on the same campaign can provide space for people in positions of peripherality and mastery to co-develop and co-shape the tactics, thereby changing the performances of full participation.

The implications of shared work as a mechanism to foster legitimate peripheral participation for social movements are significant, particularly around building and sustaining critical social movements. For federated student movements, building a coherent leadership structure that can sustain the movement requires ongoing leadership development and widespread access to full participation in the social movement, not only for those in leadership. Affiliates and chapters need to have increased contact with performances of full participation through engagement in shared work in order for the movement to produce qualified and capable leaders. Relationships amongst affiliates are important to building a

shared community of practice, and established members must engage in joint work with affiliates in order to bring people into shared practices in meaningful and appropriate ways. Without these relationships rooted in practice, learning outcomes become disparate and the coherence of the work—and by extension, the movement—suffers.

For communities of practice that prioritize developing systemic critiques and particular social analyses, people involved at the grassroots level have to be engaged at a deeper level than the cookie cutter campaign if they are to successfully access and engage in critical conversation. Rather than suggest that centralization of social movements is necessary for learning, or in the interest of all social movement organizations, I am suggesting that for USFT it would have been useful to reproduce the environments that enabled critical consciousness to develop and thrive, rather than merely engage affiliates in an easy, step-by-step campaign that insulated them from other affiliates and the internal contradictions of fair trade certification. I am not arguing that the practices in peripheral groups were detrimental for the movement, but merely acknowledging that those affiliates with less access to the practices of USFT experienced dramatically different learning.

Divergent practices in the national organization and at the affiliate level are not a problem from my vantage point, and they will no doubt continue in decentralized organizations and movements. These divergent practices stem from the particular contexts of the sub-communities of practice and reflect the conditions and learning of the people engaged in the group. The diverse tactics are important for sustaining grassroots social movements and pushing the national social movement organizations they are a part of. I am not calling for tighter control of grassroots base organizations, but more coordination, engagement, communication, and accountability between affiliates and the leadership body, as well as among different affiliates. Shared repertoires for joint work and mutual engagement allow people to learn from each other and could have enabled a deeper political critique of fair trade certification to emerge, but affiliates were largely isolated from the work experiences and exchanges that enabled Coordinating Committee members to become critical of the certifier, neo-colonial development strategies, and capitalism more broadly.

It is important to note that the types of joint work, shared repertoires, and mutual engagement that I am calling for do not address the limitations that structured certain groups' abilities to participate in the full practices of USFT and other student movements. This closer contact will not ameliorate the racialized, gendered, and classed dynamics at play that enable certain people to participate fully while others, because of their social locations, remain uninterested in the tactics, unable to perform the established practices, or unlikely to be judged as adequately performing them by participants in privileged positions. Addressing these barriers requires more than a leadership ladder and legitimate peripheral participation. In fact, it requires a radical reconceptualization of the full practices and those that are privileged to establish and judge them. In other work, I have noted how experiences of

marginalization and the dissonance of peripherality can produce oppositional consciousness and opportunities for conscientization (Curnow 2013). This remains a key area for learning theorists to explore so that as social movement participants we are more intentional and strategic about the ways that our framing and tactical repertoires invite meaningful engagement from people across social difference, rather than reproducing and re-entrenching racialized, classed, and gendered social relations in our movements.

Applying situated learning frameworks to USFT enables us to better understand how people learn within social movements. Legitimate peripheral participation helps explain why people learned what they learned depending on their engagement in the movement. Situated learning and communities of practice theory describe the learning within USFT very well, as people moved toward full participation within the Coordinating Committee and as they acted peripherally as an affiliate. Legitimate peripheral participation also brings a theoretical foundation to the practice of the leadership ladder, as it explains the types of learning and access that people have access to as they move from the periphery of a community of practice toward the centre. These tools for theorizing the pedagogical practices in student movements help centre our analysis on the practical ways that action, participation, and learning happen in social movements and offer direction for the ways that movements can broaden their base and foster consciousness-raising through strategic participation in a leadership ladder.

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