Volunteer Work, Informal Learning and Social Action

Fiona Duguid, Karsten Mündel and
Daniel Schugurensky (Eds.)

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THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY AND EDUCATION

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The series is particularly aimed at researchers, policymakers, practitioners and students who wish to read texts and engage with researchers who call into question the current conventional wisdom that the knowledge economy is a new global reality to which all individuals and societies must adjust, and that lifelong learning is the strategy to secure such an adjustment. The series hopes to stimulate debate amongst this diverse audience by publishing books that: (i) articulate alternative visions of the relation between education and the knowledge economy; (ii) offer new insights into the extent, modes, and effectiveness of people's acquisition of knowledge and skill in the new circumstances that they face in the developed and developing world, (iii) and suggest how changes in both work conditions and curriculum and pedagogy can led to new relations between work and education.

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PREFACE

In advanced capitalist economies, our lives often appear to be consumed by market relations. An increasing amount of most adults' time is devoted to labour market activities, either engaging in or seeking employment compensated by a wage or salary. Once we get the money, shopping for and using goods and services commodities have become pervasive pursuits. Work done beyond the realm of market exchange has tended to be taken for granted and devalued. But the spread of this consumer society has also made more evident the necessity of unpaid work beyond the market for the reproduction of our social lives. As we have less time for household work, the issues of when, how and by whom it can be done become more problematic, especially for the women who have been increasingly expected to juggle it with paid employment. A re-appreciation of the importance and value of household work is at least slowly occurring.

Volunteer work includes activities that we choose to engage in beyond the realms of paid employment and household work, whether joining community-based organizations or just helping neighbours. The facts that these activities have tended to be more freely chosen than paid employment and household work as well as being very diverse have probably contributed to their continuing devaluation. But empirical researchers have now clearly documented that, in several advanced economies, participation in voluntary organizations has witnessed substantial decline over the past few generations (e.g. Putnam 2000). The causes and significance of this decline have been hotly disputed (e.g. Durlauf 2002). However, the general trend is now widely acknowledged, along with heightened concern about getting more people engaged in community contexts. As the incidence of volunteer work declined, appreciation of its importance for revitalizing social life began to grow.

At the same time as the general import of volunteer work is increasingly recognized, it becomes more difficult to distinguish it from paid employment. As this book graphically illustrates, numerous people are now volunteering to do work that others are paid for, in order to gain work experience to qualify for paid jobs. For example, some private employers now troll the internet, find highly qualified recent immigrants, and then expect these people to pay to be allowed to perform the work that others are paid to do. More generally, growing numbers of people are compelled to involvement in coercive volunteering to qualify for a chance at paid jobs. The only thing that distinguishes such volunteer work from paid work is the fact that it is unpaid.

In the current socio-economic context, with many voluntary organizations facing funding cutbacks from government and philanthropic sources, the premium on use of volunteer workers increases and the importance of ensuring that these workers are as well-trained as possible to perform effectively grows accordingly. There have been some previous studies of formal training programs in the few voluntary organizations that have offered them. But most voluntary organizations appear to rely primarily on informal training, done in ad hoc terms by more experienced mentoring members. There have been no prior research studies of the array of formal and informal training activities in diverse voluntary organizations. In this respect, the current book is unique.

The editors provide a thicket-clearing review and clarification of concepts of volunteer work and provide the first tentative general framing of the sorts of learning related to this work. The book's authors present case studies of three basic types of voluntary organizations: those providing social services, representing local communities and mobilizing for social change. These case studies include profiles of the actual work their members do and detailed accounts of the sorts of formal and informal learning practices they are engaged in during their work. The concluding chapter offers some comparative analysis, practical recommendations and steps for further research.

The nature of adult learning is akin to an iceberg. Most of it is beneath the surface of normal observation. My colleague Allen Tough (1971) began documenting this condition decades ago. The research network of which the current book is a part has taken up the challenge of exploring this iceberg of learning in relation to paid employment, household work and volunteer work (see Livingstone 2010; www.wallnetwork.ca). A related study on household work offers unique insights into learning in that sphere, almost all of which has been done informally (Eichler et al 2010). It is probable that most of the learning we do is deeply submerged in the iceberg, beyond conscious recuperation. But it is also probable that most of the intentional learning we do in all spheres of work is informal, as all the studies in this network and a growing array of empirical studies of learning in paid workplaces (e.g. Malloch et al 2010) confirm. The present book finds that the most valuable forms of learning in diverse voluntary organizations have occurred informally with other workers and the authors begin to develop profiles of the most pertinent dimensions of this learning.

The central relevance of this book for this series on "The Knowledge Economy and Education" is to shine a light on the diverse forms of voluntary work that are much needed but little appreciated in contemporary societies, and on the learning largely beyond the realm of formal education that is required for such organizations to continue to survive in an era in which credentialed formal education has been given overwhelming importance. Voluntary work and related learning should be much more recognized and rewarded in knowledge-based societies than they have been. This book can contribute to that end.

In some respects, learning in conventional volunteer work may have been the freest form of learning. People who have chosen to do this form of work have tended

to spend proportionately more time engaged in related learning than people do in learning related to paid employment or household work (Livingstone 2001). Some of the case studies in this book suggest that, especially if people actively engage in such voluntary organizations from marginalized standpoints (e.g. low formal education, recent immigrants) and in relation to social justice issues, the learning can be quite profound and transformative. In the heavily credentialed, media-laden context of our knowledge society, such deep learning only appears to happen in voluntary organizations where there are opportunities for group reflection – which is to rediscover the basic principle of critical pedagogy (Freire 1971). Reflective learning in voluntary organizations has the potential to be a very empowering form of learning, especially when formal education is highly standardized and more removed from direct experience.

The authors modestly suggest that the many volunteers' stories in this book only offer "a window into the world of informal learning in the volunteer world". This is true and this first view may still be quite obscure in some ways. But it is truly the first concerted view. As appreciation of the importance of voluntary work for revitalizing social life grows, the conceptual and empirical relevance of this book should also increase. It warrants careful scrutiny by all who are interested in wider dimensions of work and learning in contemporary societies.

DWL
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INTRODUCTION

WHY THIS BOOK?

This book aims at contributing to the incipient body of literature on the connections between informal learning and volunteer work. Its origins can be traced to the project "The Changing Nature of Work and Lifelong Learning" (WALL), coordinated by our colleague D.W. Livingstone, professor of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/ UT). He has observed that, with the growing atomization of communities in capitalist societies, the centrality of volunteer work in local social networks for ensuring sustainability of community life has become more evident. We agree with him, and would add that the increasing dismantlement of the safety net of the welfare state and the privatization of many services have downloaded a great deal of activities to the community and to the volunteer sector. The book deals with an area that has not been sufficiently covered in the research on work and education: the connections between volunteer work and informal learning. Indeed, to a great extent, a book on volunteer work and informal learning explores uncharted territory.

Three reasons account for this. First, most of the existing research literature on work tends to privilege paid employment, paying little attention to voluntary work. Second, most of the research literature on learning tends to concentrate on the formal educational system or on the psychological dimensions of knowledge acquisition. The literature on informal learning, and particularly on informal learning among adults, is still marginal to the educational research enterprise. Third, the research on the relations between work and learning tends to focus on the relations between paid employment and organized education, and there is a dearth of literature that brings together volunteer work and informal learning. Moreover, most research on volunteerism focuses on motivations to volunteer (often driven by a desire to recruit and retain volunteers) and on the impacts of volunteering, particularly on personal health (especially mental health) and on employment prospects. The experience of volunteering itself has received far less scrutiny (Wilson 2012). Even less attention has been paid to the learning dimension of such experience. In this context, this volume brings together a collection of studies that document the impressive depth and breadth to volunteers' learning. In terms of the relations between an emergent knowledge economy and learning activities, the chapters of this book shed new light on the substantial but much ignored informal learning that occurs in diverse community settings.

In the context of the 'new economy', with the hegemony of neoliberalism and the ensuing drastic cutbacks to the public sector, many governments are forced to rely more and more in the voluntary sector and in community organizations for service delivery. At the same time, there are increasing pressures on those population groups that face more difficulties to enter the labour market (particularly youth and recent immigrants) to do volunteer work to build their credentials and become more employable. For these groups, learning through volunteer work has become in many cases a requirement to increase employability prospects in paid positions.

This situation has created a new trend in the world of volunteer work that we call, for the lack of a better term, 'coerced volunteerism'. This is different from the oxymoronic 'mandatory volunteerism' that we can find in some educational institutions and workfare programs. In this case, we are not talking about physical coercion (the use of threatened force), psychological coercion (e.g. emotional blackmail), legal coercion (e.g. threat of harsh penalties and plea bargains) or social coercion (e.g. community pressures with threats of shame and ostracism to non-conformists) but about economic coercion. Some demographic groups that have difficulties to entering the labour market are increasingly pressured to undertake volunteer work as a strategy to put a foot in the door. As noted above, prominent among these groups are youth with no prior work experience in their chosen field and recent immigrants without job experience in the host society.

Youths, particularly those completing college degrees, are increasingly pressured to undertake unpaid internships. In a book suggestively entitled "Intern Nation: How to Earn Nothing and Learn Little in the Brave New Economy", Perlin (2011) reports that the percentage of college graduates doing internships has tripled in less than two decades (from 17 percent in 1992 to 50 percent in 2008), and that this is a mass labour exploitation that, in the USA, saves firms more than $600 million annually. In Canada, Andrew Langille, an employment lawyer who does research on the topic, contends that unpaid internships are replacing entry-level jobs, that they rarely lead to permanent work, and that most of them (95% in the case of Ontario) are exploitative and illegal because interns are doing work typically performed by paid employees. In the context of the current economic recession and high unemployment rates, young graduates are forced to compete with each other and improve their resume in order to gain an advantage in the job market (The Huffington Post 2011).

All this has opened the door to another relatively new phenomenon: volunteer work in the for-profit sector. Whereas in the past practically all volunteer work was done in the non-profit sector, in the public sector and in community associations, in recent times it has been possible to observe the emergence of volunteer work in for-profit companies. In some of these situations, it is not easy to determine how much of this work is genuine volunteer work and how much is labour exploitation. This is not an issue that pertains exclusively to the for-profit sector. Indeed, in a general context of budget cuts and a reduced workforce, and the resultant pressures to do more with less, in some non-profit organizations and public sector agencies volunteers are not always perceived as a healthy and welcomed complement to paid

labour but as a replacement of paid labour. In other words, changes in the political economy are leading to dynamic changes in the nature of work, in employment conditions, and in the relations between work, formal and informal learning.

As noted above, volunteer work goes well beyond service delivery or the performance of certain tasks in formal institutional settings. People also do volunteer work in a variety of social movements, neighbourhood groups, grassroots organizations, sports clubs, faith communities and participatory democracy processes, to name a few. Although there is a wide range of reasons to volunteer, from instrumental purposes to more altruistic motivations, many volunteers devote time and energy to these activities because they want to make their own communities –and also other communities- better places to live. In doing so, they engage in personal and collective learning experiences. This is the topic of this book.

VOLUNTEER WORK

Volunteer work, understood in its traditional meaning, as unpaid activity oriented to help others and to improve society, has existed throughout the history of humanity. It has ranged from casual or regular assistance to community residents and family members in need, to more collective and organized efforts to better the quality of life of the community (akin to community service), However, it was not until the 19th century when volunteering began to take a more institutional form, with the creation of charitable organizations aiming at helping people in need, like the Young Men's Christian Association or YMCA (1844), the Young Women's Christian Association or YWCA (1855), the Red Cross (1863) and the Salvation Army (1865). In the 20th century, these organizations expanded their operations and their volunteer programs, and many other organizations were established. Of course, most individuals continued to do informal volunteer work like helping friends and neighbours, and surveys still show that people are more likely to be involved in such activities than in voluntary organizations. However, for those interested in undertaking volunteer work in organizations, the process has become more formalized and institutionalized over time. Today, prospective volunteers often have to go through a rigorous application process that often is relatively similar to the one that they would face for paid positions. Consider, for instance, a recent announcement for a volunteer position at a neighbourhood organization located in Toronto.

Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office	
Services in Spanish	
(Volunteer job position)	
Job Title:	Interpreter
Days:	Weekdays
Time:	Morning, afternoon or evening
Department:	Settlement
Programs:	SWIS/ISAP

Description:

The Volunteer Interpreter will provide Language Interpretation Services to clients who are unable to communicate in English. Simple interpretation at the community programs and services – registration for a program, appointments with welfare office, income tax, doctor, and other services as required.

Duties/Responsibilities

- Report to settlement worker to communicate completion of assignments, and to express availability for pending or unscheduled assignments
- Attend all assigned encounters with punctuality, respect, and professional manner
- Demonstrate flexibility when last minute changes or emergencies affect the scheduling Calendar
- Adhere to the standards, ethics, and professional rules of TNO.
- Report any problems, conflicts, or needs (personal or client driven) to the settlement worker for rapid and effective resolution
- Promptly notify settlement worker if unable to attend a scheduled assignment
- Assist the ISAP/SWIS team and other Volunteers in assignments as needed
- As an integral member of TNO volunteer Interpreter team you will provide linguistic support in favour of the successful daily operations of the program. This will include the following points:

Skills/Experience:

- Oral and written knowledge of English and Spanish
- Respectful towards people from all cultures
- Good communication skills
- Patient; supportive; reliable and trustworthy
- Commitment to Anti-Oppression framework

All applicants selected should be willing and available to attend an orientation and training session.
    We thank all applicants for their interest but only those selected for further consideration will be contacted.

To Apply:

To apply for this position candidates are requested to forward a copy of their resume to TNO Services in Spanish by 5:00 pm on Wednesday November 24th, 2010.
    "Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office is committed to employment equity initiatives. We strongly encourage residents of Thorncliffe Park and surrounding communities and members of ethno-racial, aboriginal, immigrant, francophone, refugee, LGBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans) and disabled community groups to apply and self-identify."

This announcement, typical of institutional calls for volunteer job positions in the last decade, suggests that in certain fields the application process is more competitive and demanding than in the past. This situation, coupled with a changing economic and political context characterized by a larger pool of qualified unemployed and underemployed people seeking an open door to the labour market, on the one hand, and increasing accountability pressures on non-profit organizations, on the other, is slowly but steadily leading to a sort of 'professionalization' of volunteer work.

Moreover, in order to start doing volunteer work, many organizations require that prospective volunteers complete a background check, which usually includes reference checks and a criminal history check. All this makes it more onerous for people to volunteer in organizations, even if they care about their mission. This can be partly explained by greater public demands for safety, especially for volunteer work in programs that involve minors, such as schools, boys and girls clubs, sport coaching, recreation centres and the like. Another recent trend related to the institutionalization of volunteer work is the proliferation of service learning programs in the formal education system, particularly in high schools and universities. These programs are frequently highly organized, and students are expected to fulfil certain obligations, work a specified amount of hours, and have their activities monitored and evaluated. Some of these programs emphasize the learning part of the equation, others emphasize the service part, and a few attempt to find a balance between the two.

Interestingly enough, at the same time that some volunteer programs are in high demand and prospective volunteers have to endure a competitive application process, in other contexts it is not easy to find enough volunteers to fill all available positions. Consider, for instance, the case of the Hillbrook/Tall Oaks Civic Association in Virginia. The President, Mark Crawford, had served three consecutive terms and, as per association bylaws, could not run for that office again. He encouraged and begged residents to run for the volunteer position, but to no avail. In this community of 250 families, younger residents said that they their work, kids and long commutes took all their time, and veteran residents claimed that they have already volunteered enough. Frustrated, Crawford nominated Ms. Beatha Lee for the President's position. She was described as a relatively new resident who had interest in neighbourhood activities and the outdoors, and who had experience in Maine overseeing an estate of 26 acres. At the general assembly, the approximately 50 people present raised their hands in approval, assuming that the candidate was a community-oriented newcomer. Then they socialized, ate food, and went home. A few weeks later, while reading the association's newsletter, they were taken aback by an article entitled "Dog Rules, Humans Apathetic (Pathetic)". At that moment, they realized that at the general assembly they had unanimously elected a dog as president of the residents' association. They checked the bylaws, and acknowledged that the dog fulfilled all requirements for officer qualifications, which, by the way, do not specify that only humans could serve.

Ms. Beatha Lee is the pet of Crawford, the former president who was unable to find volunteers to apply for the positions and now serves as vice-president. Interviewed by the Washington Post, he said that he wanted to send a message to the neighbourhood that they needed to get involved, because "they can't count on the same people to do this year in and year out" (Schulte 2011). Indeed, as several volunteers pointed out in our interviews, it is not uncommon that in many organizations 20% of volunteers do 80% of the work. Sometimes people referred to this 20% as 'super volunteers', because they seem to be active in different groups, they are present in most activities, and they return to their duties year after year. When asked about this situation, most 'super volunteers' tended to be polite and understanding, noting that people are busy with their lives, but a few expressed disappointment and resentment about the limited participation of other volunteers and the lack of participation of many residents. The so-called 20/80 rule observed by our interviewees is not far from the Canadian reality of volunteerism. Statistics Canada (2007, p.43) reports that the top 25% of volunteers account for 78% of all volunteer hours.

VOLUNTEER WORK AND INFORMAL LEARNING

We learn from cradle to crave. However, we tend to assume that the only educational game in town is the formal education system, that is, the institutional ladder that goes from kindergarten to the university. For a variety of reasons, the bulk of financial and human resources, policies, programs, curriculum development and research focus on the formal education system. Important resources and research efforts are also allocated to the non-formal education system, which encompasses all the organized educational programs outside of the formal education system. Indeed, in addition to schools, people also learn a great deal– from religion to gastronomy, sports, literacy, health, politics and history– through workshops, courses, lessons, seminars, and other educational activities. However, there is a third dimension in the world of learning, and such dimension is usually unacknowledged by researchers and by the larger society. This third dimension, known as informal learning, is a residual category that includes all that learning that is not acquired through the formal and non-formal educational systems. At first glance, it seems that there is little left. A deeper look will reveal that we learn many important and relevant things outside of organized educational programs. Informal learning could be self-directed (intentional and conscious), incidental (unintentional but conscious), or tacit (unintentional and unconscious). This book shows the impressive amount of learning that takes place in volunteer work. It does so by exploring different volunteer settings and different areas of learning. Indeed, in this book we do not reduce adult learning to the acquisition of marketable knowledge and skills. As Livingstone and Guile (2012) note in *The Knowledge Economy and Lifelong Learning*, in most advanced economies/societies there is an emphasis on the private commodification of knowledge and a lack of interest on promoting a wide socialization of knowledge. Such prioritization tends to privilege the "knowledge economy" at the expense of the "knowledge society".

The connections between informal learning and volunteer work are rarely discussed, or even acknowledged. Most definitions of volunteer work, even the most comprehensive ones, tend to omit any references to learning. The Association of Voluntary Service Organizations (AVSO), for instance, has a holistic and multidimensional understanding of volunteer work that includes many facets, but does not make any explicit connection to learning:

> Volunteerism refers to all forms of voluntary activity, whether formal or informal, full-time or part-time, at home or abroad. It is undertaken of a person's own free will, choice and motivation, and is without concern for financial gain. It benefits the individual volunteer, communities and society as a whole. It is also a vehicle for individuals and associations to address human, social or environmental needs and concerns. Formal voluntary activities add value, but do not replace professional, paid employees.

It could be argued that learning is implicit in the sentence that mentions benefits to the individual volunteer and to the communities, but this would be a stretch. In other definitions and discussions on volunteer work, the dimension of learning is tacitly or explicitly acknowledged as some socially useful particular expertise that was acquired prior to the act of volunteering. The volunteer, then, applies the knowledge and skills previously acquired to the new situation. For instance, the Statistics Bureau (2000) defines volunteer activity as "the act of providing one's own efforts, time, knowledge or skill for society or community without receiving remuneration for the work". Along the same lines, the Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating asks a question on reasons for volunteering, and provides several choices for responding. One of them, chosen by 77% of respondents, is that they do volunteer work "to put their skills and experience to good use" (Statistics Canada, 2007, p.50). Other possible choices (not mutually exclusive) had to do with making a contribution to the community, being personally affected by the cause, meeting people, improve job opportunities, exploring strengths, fulfilling a religious obligation, or because a friend volunteers. Interestingly, learning does not appear at all as a potential reason to volunteer. We wonder how many volunteers would add this reason if given the choice.

In the section on benefits of volunteering, the Statistics Canada survey does include a question on learning skills. Two-thirds of respondents (66%) mentioned interpersonal skills, such as understanding and motivating people or being better able to handle difficult situations. This was followed by communication skills (45%), organizational or managerial skills (39%), knowledge about specific subjects like health, gender, political issues, criminal justice, or the environment (34%), fundraising skills (32%) and technical skills such as first aid, coaching, computer skills, and bookkeeping (25%). As we will see in the subsequent chapters, this is consistent with our findings, and can be connected to an interesting finding of a study coordinated by Livingstone. He found that the relation between work and informal learning appears to be strongest in the sphere of volunteer work. The majority of

participants who devoted less than three hours a week to community volunteer work spent one hour or less on related informal learning, whereas the majority of those who put more than three hours spent more than three hours on related informal learning.

Livingstone (1999, 2001 and 2003) noted that those who engage more fully in community work tend to be not only more involved community learners but also, to some extent, more active learners in housework, paid work and general interest activities as well. In other words, a high level of informal learning in one sphere tends to be positively associated with a high presence of informal learning in other spheres. Moreover, there is a much stronger association between community volunteer work time and community-related informal learning, on the one hand, than there is between paid employment time and job-related informal learning, on the other. This is an insightful finding, and suggests that greater control of one's activities can lead to fuller use of work-related skills and knowledge, and that those who are more active in more discretionary spheres of working life may also generally be more active informal learners. Moreover, participants in Livingstone's study reported that the learning activities they most enjoyed and found fulfilment in were much more likely to be community and general interest activities, over which they typically exercised much more control.

Another important aspect of the informal learning acquired through volunteering is its transferability to other dimensions of people's life, like paid employment or the civic sphere. The literature on the topic tells us that, through their work, volunteers acquire a variety of knowledge, skills and dispositions that could be useful in workplaces. Moreover, volunteer work teaches civic skills, such as the ability to write letters and memoranda, plan and organize meetings, and give presentations or speeches. Furthermore, through volunteering, participants build trust in other people and in public institutions, and this, together with the development of higher levels of political efficacy, a deeper understanding of the experiences of other social groups, and a heightened awareness of the structural nature of social problems and the need for political solutions, can increase civic and political participation. Volunteering also helps people to examine their biases about certain minority groups, to take steps to move beyond those biases, and to listen to participants with an open mind and heart. Indeed, for many people, volunteering is the first opportunity in their lives to recognize the issues faced by minority groups and to empathize with their humanity, and in this process they become more empathetic and caring people, and open their horizons. Moreover, through volunteering people learn that actions are interdependent, that group discipline serves a common purpose, that differences among participants can be negotiated, and that multiple perspectives bring new insights to solve problems. People also meet a wider range of people than they would have met otherwise, learn about local issues and local politics, and become more engaged (Youniss et al. 1997, Flanagan et al, 1998, Bloom and Kilgore 2003:434, Musick and Wilson 2008).

The particularities of the learning itself are connected to the profile and prior experiences of the volunteers themselves, the characteristics of the organization in

which they volunteer, the specific tasks that they perform, and the interactions that they have with other people inside and outside the organization. For instance, a study on a housing cooperative for university students in Canada (Mook, Quarter and Richmond 2007) found that volunteers learned a variety of personal, organizational and leadership skills, including managerial skills (how to run an organization with a $4 million budget) and democratic skills (how to deliberate and make decisions according to cooperative principles and practices). Likewise, Vanzaghi (2007) conducted a study on the volunteers of *Meals on Wheels*, a program that deliver meals to individuals at home who are unable to purchase or prepare their own meals. The volunteers interviewed reported changes in their personality as a result of their volunteer experience, using expressions as becoming more "outgoing", "assertive", "social", "talkative" and "less shy". Some said that at the beginning of their volunteer work they were timid and avoided talking with other volunteers, but over time became more social, confident, and happier. They also noted changes in values, dispositions and practices: they became less selfish and self-centred, more aware of other people's needs and of their own privileges and prejudices, more empathetic towards those who are different, and more likely to engage in practices of solidarity. In this book, which helps to reconsider and expand the relation between learning and work, we further explore some of these issues by reporting and discussing the informal learning of volunteers in diverse institutional and organizational settings.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

The book is organized in 11 chapters. The first one provides a conceptual discussion of volunteer work, informal learning, and the connections between these two human activities in contemporary societies. The second chapter, by Susan Stowe, discusses data on volunteer work and informal learning in Canada and internationally, in the context of the new political economy.

Chapters Three to Ten cover the case studies on informal learning and volunteer work. Recognizing that volunteer work comes in different types, modalities and settings, in this book we made an effort to include a diversity of volunteering situations.

Although we were unable to include every type of volunteer activity, our case studies cover three arenas that have an important presence in the world of volunteerism: community service, community representation, and community development. Community service refers to volunteer work that delivers 'something' to community members, be it on individual or collective basis, often through a voluntary organization. Community service is probably the most typical understanding of voluntary work. Examples of 'community service' include delivering meals to seniors, coaching sports teams, driving children to music camps, helping in a food bank, teaching local language and culture to new immigrants or to migrant workers, coordinating a toy drive or organizing a film festival. Chapters Three, Four and Five deal with community service.

Community representation refers to volunteer work that is undertaken on behalf of (and/or in benefit of) a particular community, acting as an unpaid representative in decision-making bodies like boards, committees, or councils. Chapters Six, Seven and Eight deal with community representation. In this book, examples of 'community representation' include the cases of housing co-operatives (Chapter Six), the tenant participatory system in public housing (Chapter Seven), and participatory budgeting (Chapter Eight). Community development, in the context of this book, refers to volunteer work that builds capacity and empowers groups to affect changes in their own communities, guided by principles of justice, equality and respect.

Finally, Chapters Nine and Ten are about cases related to community development. In the field of community development, it is possible to identify three distinct–though sometimes overlapping– ideal types: social planning, locality development, and social action (Rothman 2001). In the social planning approach to community development, the process is typically initiated by a public sector agency such an urban planning unit, a health promotion program, or welfare institutions. This approach typically relies heavily on technical expertise, assessments, indicators, rational problem solving, surveys, partnerships with community organizations, and the articulation of social services, and decisions on programs or services are usually based on data collected by professionals. Professionals are also expected to play a key role in setting goals, coordinating activities, and evaluating outcomes. The locality development approach focuses on enabling local residents to identify issues of common concern and develop strategies to address them. Community members take ownership of the process and participate actively in the planning, implementation and evaluation of actions. People's expertise, participatory processes and study groups are highly valued. Social action involves activities that increase the power and resources of relatively powerless groups, sometimes to advocate a particular policy, sometimes to cancel a policy or to interrupt a government or business action that is considered detrimental to the wellbeing of the community (the case discussed in Chapter 10). The social action approach favors community mobilization around an issue, and this process usually involves awareness raising (e.g. popular education and communications strategies), civic-political organization, and coalition building. In social action, community volunteers might arrange disruptive events, including demonstrations, lawsuits, boycotts, sit-ins and strikes, to call the attention of those in power to their concerns. Social action tactics are typically used in situations involving conflicting interests and power asymmetries, especially when conventional negotiations fail (Brager and Spetch 1973, Rothman 2001). The case discussed in Chapter Nine is a combination of social planning and locality development, whereas the case discussed in Chapter Ten provides a good example of a social action approach to community development.

After considerable thought and consideration, we decided not to include a chapter about service learning. Three factors led us to make this choice. First, there is already a significant body of literature (both praising and critical) dealing with service learning. Second, most of these programs are ephemeral one-time volunteering

events (Pompa 2002, Scales and Roehlkepartain 2004, Musick and Wilson 2008). Third, and most importantly, most service learning programs in educational institutions are mandatory, and therefore could not be considered as volunteer work unless we accept a contradiction in terms. At the same time, we decided to add a case of 'coerced volunteerism' (see Chapter Five) because it constitutes a relatively new phenomenon that has not been sufficiently addressed in the literature on volunteerism. By 'coerced volunteerism' we mean situations in which certain vulnerable populations are forced by social and economic dynamics to volunteer in order to gain access or re-entry to the labour market. Three examples of these vulnerable populations are youth who need to build their resume before they apply to their first paid job, unemployed persons who were laid off from their jobs and need retraining in a second (or third) occupation to re-enter the labour market, and new immigrants who are compelled to do volunteer work to gain access to the labour market in the host country by getting local work experience (the case discussed in this book). What follows is a more detailed description of each case study.

The first case study (Chapter Three) builds on the rich tradition of volunteering in community service in non-profit organizations. To explore volunteer learning in this type of situations, we chose the Red Cross, a prototypical humanitarian organization that, like the Cancer Society or the Salvation Army, relies heavily on volunteer work. Indeed, the Red Cross has approximately 97 million volunteers worldwide, an impressive number for any organization. Founded in 1861 in Switzerland by Henry Dunnant, the mission of the Red Cross is to protect human life and health, to ensure respect for all human beings, and to prevent and alleviate human suffering, without any discrimination based on nationality, race, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity, religious beliefs, class, allegiance, or political opinions. More specifically, the Red Cross provides relief assistance in emergency situations of large magnitude, such as natural disasters and wars, organizes disaster preparedness activities, and supports local healthcare projects and youth-related activities. This chapter, written by Kunle Akingbola, Fiona Duguid and Martha Viveros, explores three main questions: a) what types of knowledge and skills do Red Cross volunteers acquire through volunteering activities?; b) how do they learn them?; and c) who is likely to benefit the most from the learning acquired through volunteer work—the volunteer or the organization? The chapter examines the learning dimensions of volunteer work from the angles of personal and professional development and organizational effectiveness.

In Chapter Four, Adam Perry examines a different type of service-oriented volunteerism, expressed in the case of Frontier College, an adult education organization based in Toronto, Canada. Adult education programs all around the world, and particularly literacy programs, often rely on the active participation of volunteer educators. Mass literacy campaigns, from China to Brazil, Cuba and Nicaragua, have been prominent in mobilizing urban youth as volunteers in rural areas. In Canada, Frontier College established a pioneering program of 'labourer-teachers' in 1899 and has been running successfully for over a century. The 'labourer-teachers', all volunteers, are often students on summer vacation who

live and work alongside frontier labourers while teaching literacy and basic skills to their worker colleagues, often temporary agricultural workers from Mexico and Jamaica. Unlike many other youth volunteer programs (including different versions of 'voluntourism'), the emphasis is more on solidarity and less on the young participants' consumption of cultural experiences. Hence, it is not surprising that the 'labourer-teachers' program prioritizes the learning of local workers and does not pay any attention to the learning of volunteers. Despite this fact, all labourer-teachers who participated in this study reported a significant amount of informal learning through living in solidarity and through partaking in the struggle for decent working conditions.

Chapter Five, written by Bonnie Slade, Yang Cathy Luo and Daniel Schugurensky, explores the learning of recent immigrants – most of them professional trained-who are coerced by the labour market to undertake volunteer work because their international work experience is unrecognized by employers. Their accumulated skills and knowledge and their previous job experience (sometimes in more than one country) are considered irrelevant for the new context. Although they are aware that in some cases their volunteer work is not too far removed from labour exploitation, they often accept this situation because there are few other avenues available to enter the local labour market. The volunteer experience is particularly useful for finding a paid job in their field to those immigrants who undertake volunteer work in their fields. However, for those who do volunteer work in areas unrelated to their specializations, it generates a deskilling process that over time removes them further and further from meaningful opportunities for economic progress or professional development. One interesting finding of this study is that some of these immigrants did volunteer work in for-profit organizations, which may indicate the beginning of a new trend.

In Chapter Six, Fiona Duguid, Karsten Mündel and Daniel Schugurensky examine the informal learning experienced through participation in governance by members of a housing co-operative in Canada. Volunteer engagement in self-governance can be observed in a wide variety of membership organizations, from student councils to social clubs, from neighbourhood associations to trade unions, community gardens, tenants' organizations, academic associations and worker cooperatives. As suggested by the Virginia case discussed a few paragraphs above, effective self-governance demands a high degree of volunteer involvement by local residents or by members of a co-operative organization like the ones discussed in this chapter. In this case study, members of the housing co-operative who took part in deliberation and decision-making processes in various committees and boards, collectively acquired a great deal of knowledge, skills and attitudes in a wide variety of areas, from self-governance to the realities of housing co-operatives, and from leadership to political efficacy. Some co-op members reported that volunteering in these spaces allowed them to meet people who they otherwise would not have met, and these interactions helped them to examine their own prejudices and values (including sexist, racist, homophobic attitudes) and to change both their personal views and their day-to-day

practices. This study confirmed some of the findings of the study carried by Theriault et al. (2010) on a housing co-operative, particularly the enabling dimension of co-operative housing life for future development of projects and goals among residents.

The study discussed in Chapter Seven, undertaken by Behrang Foroughi and Erica McCollum, presents another case of learning through volunteering in local resident associations. This chapter examines a participatory model (called 'tenant participatory system') that involves public housing tenants in decisions that affect their daily lives. Unlike co-operatives such as the one discussed in the previous chapter, where members are expected to actively participate in self-governance, in public housing this is highly unusual, because more often than not tenants are perceived by government officials as incapable of making important decisions are therefore are seldom given the opportunity to have a say. The case study is the Toronto Housing Corporation, which with 165,000 tenants is the second largest public housing agency in North America after New York. The tenants who are elected by their fellow tenants in their buildings devote many hours of volunteer work to represent them at the tenant participatory system. Since 2001, the tenant participatory system of the Toronto Housing Corporation includes a variation of a model of deliberation and decision-making known as participatory budgeting, which was born in Brazil in the late 1980s and is now being implemented in thousands of cities around the world.

Volunteer work in participatory budgeting is further explored in Chapter Eight, prepared by Daniel Schugurensky. This chapter elicits the informal learning acquired by delegates of participatory budgeting in three progressive Latin American cities: Porto Alegre (Brazil), Montevideo (Uruguay) and Rosario (Argentina). In these cities, residents can allocate a portion of the municipal budget to specific projects in their neighbourhoods, usually related to infrastructure. The learning acquired by participants was organized in four main categories: democratic and political knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, and practices. Unlike most traditional models of participatory democracy, which tend to attract primarily white, affluent males who are already familiar with city hall and local politics, participatory budgeting tends to attract more low-income groups, women and people of colour. For this reason, volunteer delegates refer to participatory budgeting as "our school of citizenship".

Taking together, Chapters Six, Seven and Eight provide a good understanding of volunteer work through community representation. Like professional politicians, these community representatives dedicate countless hours to attend meetings, to do research about the issues to be discussed at the meetings, to address the problems that affect their communities and advance new projects, and to monitor that decisions are followed up with actions. However, unlike professional politicians, who hold paid positions, these community representatives engage in this work on voluntary basis. The learning reported by participants in these three case studies support the argument posed by democratic theorists that participation in local governance encourages citizenship learning and promotes better democracy by allowing people to develop the very skills and attitudes they need to participate effectively.

Chapter Nine, prepared by Karsten Mündel and Daniel Schugurensky, is about the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, an organization that brings together a broad-based group of community and provincial associations dedicated to build strong, equitable and sustainable communities through education, engagement and collaboration. This organization started as an informal and loose network in 1986, and became formalized in 1992 to support local and regional groups, coalitions and networks working on comprehensive community development processes that nurture social, economic and environmental well-being in their localities. In this case study, which could be considered an example of volunteering in non-governmental organizations committed to social action and community empowerment, we found an interesting profile of volunteer workers. For the lack of a better term, we refer to them as 'intermittent' volunteers', because they alternate recurrently between paid and volunteer work within the same community-based organization, depending on funding availability, changes in life circumstances or the urgency of a particular issue. With the budget cuts of the last decades and the implementation of new funding formulas, many organizations had to lay off staff. However, some staff members who are committed to the mission of the organization sometimes continue working for the organization on voluntary basis. When the organization has access to new financial resources, the recurrent volunteers switch back to paid work, often performing similar tasks. The intermittent volunteer is a figure that cannot be isolated from the expansion of neoliberal polices, the economic crisis, and of course the commitment of many people who do not perceive themselves only as paid staff of non-profit organizations but also as active citizens who are engaged in their communities and are willing to devote significant amounts of unpaid time to improving the quality of life of those communities.

The last case study, presented in Chapter Ten by Kate Rogers & Megan Haggerty, provides a reflection on the case of the *Frente Cívico*, a social movement that emerged in Cuernavaca, México, to protect a regional cultural historic site from being destroyed to make room for a big-box store. Learning through volunteering in solidarity action with oppressed groups is closely related to the learning that occurs through participation in some social movements. Indeed, a field known as "social movement learning" has emerged in the last decade to account for the learning that takes place within and among social movements, and also in the larger society as a result of the actions carried out by social movements (Hall 2004). Using the lenses of the social movement learning framework, Rogers and Haggerty describe the learning dimension of *Frente Cívico*. Given the context of the conflict that ignited this movement, it is not surprising that most of the learning reported by participants related to social, political and environmental issues. They also noted learning about legal and economic knowledge, and developed skills for democratic leadership, horizontal organization, critical analysis, and strategies and tactics. Together, Chapters Nine and Ten allow us to better understand the learning dimension of volunteer work through social action, and particularly through different approaches to community development. In the work of the Ontario Healthy Communities

Coalition, we can observe a combination of locality development (creating an infrastructure for community activism and action) and social planning and policy change (using the political and other systems to create policies that work toward improving the quality of life for all citizens). In the case of *Frente Cívico*, we can observe an approach guided by social action and systems advocacy (engaging citizens in understanding and building power, and using it to advocate and negotiate for the interests of the community).[1]

In Chapter 11, Duguid, Mündel, Schugurensky and Haggerty, drawing on the insights arising from the previous chapters, provide a summary and some preliminary conclusions on the connections between informal learning and volunteer work. Based on the case studies, this chapter reflects on motivations to volunteer, on the breadth of the learning acquired by the volunteers, and on the connections between profiles of volunteers and type of learning. In this final chapter, the authors also revisit and expand the typology of volunteer work developed by Cnaan et al. (1996) that is presented in Chapter 1.

For a long time, informal learning has been a marginal topic in the literature on education (even in the literature on adult education), and volunteer work has been a marginal topic in the literature on work. The emphasis has been paid to the formal education system (K-12 and higher education) and to paid work. However, as the following chapters will show, the rich universe of diverse learning experiences in a variety of volunteer contexts deserves more scholarly attention.

It is our hope that this book makes a modest contribution to this endeavor and to our collective understanding of the connections between informal learning and volunteer work.

NOTE

[1] For a discussion on different approaches to community development, see Rothman 2001.

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1. VOLUNTEER WORK AND INFORMAL LEARNING: A CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

Informal learning and volunteer work are two dynamics that coexist everyday in communities throughout the world. However, we still know comparatively little about the nature of these dynamics. While an abundant literature exists on work, only a small portion of this literature deals with volunteer work. Likewise, only a minority of the vast literature on learning explores dynamics of informal learning. In the same way that volunteer work has a marginal place in the study of work; informal learning has a marginal place in the literature on learning. The chapters included in this book deal explicitly with the learning dimension of volunteer work, a topic that has not yet attracted the interest of many researchers. Nonetheless, we suggest that the topic is important because, as we will argue in the following pages, both volunteer work and informal learning are present in our daily lives and necessary for the reproduction of our daily lives. Before we proceed, it is pertinent to clarify the meaning of the two main terms guiding our exploration: "volunteer work" and "informal learning". This chapter serves that purpose through its three sections. In the first one, we examine different conceptions of volunteer work. In the second, we discuss the concept of informal learning in the context of other types of learning and examine different forms of informal learning. Finally, in the last section, we establish some connections between volunteer work and informal learning, describe the socio-political context for volunteer work and informal learning and provide a general framework to assist us in the exploration of the informal learning of volunteers that will be presented in the subsequent chapters.

VOLUNTEER WORK

The concept of volunteerism makes reference to a great variety of activities. Among them are the following:

- organizing and supervising events
- coaching children and youth
- delivering food and clothes to the needy
- serving on boards, councils and committees
- providing support and healthcare

- taking part in canvassing, campaigning and fundraising
- protecting the environment and wildlife
- teaching and tutoring
- raising awareness and advocating on important issues
- greeting visitors
- doing office work
- leading tours and other recreational activities
- ushering and helping in religious institutions
- researching and disseminating information
- fighting fires
- doing repairs, maintenance and construction work

Although this is not an exhaustive list, it gives a general idea of the vast array of activities done by volunteers (Abdennur, 1987; Elsdon, Reynolds, & Stewart, 1995; Hall, McKeown, & Roberts, 2001; Ilsley, 1990; Salamon & Sokolowski, 2002). It is estimated that close to half of all Canadians do some form of these volunteer activities (Hall, Lasby, Ayer, & Gibbons, 2009). Despite this impressive fact, it is interesting to note that a significant amount of publications dealing with volunteer work do not include an explicit definition of the term. In fact, in a study that sought to define "volunteering", Cnaan, Handy, and Wadsworth (1996) found that in the more than 300 articles and reports that they reviewed, the term volunteer was seldom defined. Cnaan et al set out to uncover what were the commonalities of volunteering.

The definition of what constitutes volunteerism has evolved over time. In the 18th century, the term "volunteer" referred to someone who willingly served in the military. These individuals were not paid to serve nor were they obligated to serve (Cnaan et al., 1996). Later on, the term was used, in daily language, to refer to those who rendered aid, performed a service, or assumed an obligation voluntarily. More recently, formal volunteer work has been understood as work that fulfils four characteristics: freely chosen, unpaid, part of an organisation (normally a non-profit), and benefits the larger community (i.e. Cnann et al., 1996). This definition can be presented in a simple yes/no table:

Table 1. Restricted definition of volunteer work

Criteria	Yes	No
Freely chosen		
Unpaid		
Part of an organization		
Benefits the community		

According to this definition, if a given activity fulfils all four characteristics, then it can be considered volunteer work. If it does not fulfil at least one of the four characteristics, then it cannot be considered a true and full expression of volunteer

work. This dichotomous approach is simple yet deceiving, because it ignores the many shades of grey that occur in the real world of volunteerism. To overcome this limitation, Cnaan et al. (1996), after an exhaustive analysis of the many existing definitions in use by organizations, policy makers and researchers, conceptualized volunteering as a series of four interrelated dimensions and 12 categories that are part of a continuum:

Table 2. Dimensions and categories of volunteer work

Dimension	Categories
Volition	1. Free choice
	2. Relatively uncoerced
	3. Obligation to volunteer
Remuneration	1. None at all
	2. None expected
	3. Expenses reimbursed
	4. Stipend/low pay
Structure	1. Formal
	2. Informal
Intended beneficiaries	1. Benefit/help others/strangers
	2. Benefit/help friends or relatives
	3. Benefit oneself (as well)

(Cnaan et al., 1996, p. 371)

The table overcomes the limits of the restricted definition of volunteering with a more subtle elaboration that acknowledges the degrees of volition, remuneration, structure and potential beneficiaries that can be present in a given volunteer activity. According to this table, the further down the activity falls in each category, the less likely that it will be considered "true" volunteerism in the strict sense; nonetheless, it can be considered volunteer work. These gradations are important because a yes/no test to the four dimensions is insufficient to capture the complex reality of the social world of volunteer activities. Indeed, a particular activity may have a score of two in two categories, a three in another category, and a one in another. Moreover, in real life it is not always easy to determine with precision whether a particular situation fits one category or another.

For instance, in terms of *volition* – the first dimension of the table – the classic definition suggests that volunteering should be freely chosen. However, even when the volunteer may perceive a particular situation as freely chosen, an external analysis of the context may suggest a combination of volition and constraint. For instance, many people volunteer because they internalize social norms and expectations of the community in which they live or the organizations in which they participate. Indeed, in some political, religious and neighbourhood groups, belonging means

volunteering (e.g., Musick, Wilson, & Bynum, 2000). This does not mean that volunteering is compulsory, but that volunteering is expected.

Hence, although the political, religious and community convictions may be freely chosen, the volunteer activity itself includes elements of free will and elements of social coercion that are not easily distinguishable. For instance, a person's decision to volunteer in the local library, in a food bank, a religious community centre, a neighbourhood association or a soccer league may be perceived by the individual as freely chosen, but in fact it may be a combination of free choice and a need to satisfy external expectations. A similar situation can be found among the so-called "overtime volunteers" who put in additional work during the evenings or weekends in non-profit organizations because either they believe in the cause of the organization or unpaid overtime is part of the organizational culture (see Baines, 2004; Basok & Ilcan, 2003).

Additionally, in some workplaces employees are expected to do volunteer work as part of corporate volunteer initiatives. Whereas in these cases there is not necessarily a formal structure of incentives and punishments in place to promote volunteer work, and there may be some degree of free choice, often there is a subtle set of expectations and peer pressures.

The third indicator within the category of volition ("mandatory volunteerism") is more clear-cut, because the element of free will is usually absent. Mandatory volunteerism can be found, for example, in compulsory community service stipulated as a requirement for probation, workfare, or high school graduation (Kahne & Westheimer 1996).

Some readers may even argue – and we would agree with them – that the term "mandatory volunteerism" is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms, because volunteering, by definition, should include an element of "voluntas", that is, the will to do something. If the free choice to act is replaced by legal requirements and the motivation is replaced by threats of punishment, then it can be argued that, strictu sensu, these are not voluntary activities. For this reason we prefer to avoid the term "mandatory volunteerism" and use instead "mandatory community service", which leaves the element of volunteering out of the equation. Hence, since this is a book on volunteer work, we decided to exclude case studies dealing with "mandatory community service", leaving it as a topic for another study.

Other examples regarding volition suggest that it is often difficult to establish whether a particular volunteer activity is genuinely and entirely "freely chosen" or not. We propose that in most volunteer activities there are elements of free choice and elements of coercion, and hence it is more pertinent to talk about degrees of internal freedom and degrees of external pressures. Moreover, the existence of a continuum of volunteers' volition does not necessarily reflect on the quality of the volunteer experience in terms of its potential for learning or its potential to "do good". In other words, the degree of choice or coercion in any given volunteer activity is not necessarily correlated to the social benefit of the activity or to its educational impact.

The second dimension of the definition is *remuneration*. In theory, 'true' volunteer work is supposed to be unpaid. In the real world, however, there is a range from less than zero – like in international volunteering, where there is an expectation that volunteers pay their own travel and subsistence costs (e.g., Lacey & Ilcan, 2006) and other instances that require out-of-pocket expenses paid by volunteers – to a modest honorarium. In between those extremes – paying and being paid to undertake a volunteer activity – there is the possibility of reimbursement of expenses. When an honorarium is in place, to qualify as volunteer work it is expected that such remuneration is substantially lower than the "market rate" for the same work.

In terms of *structure*, the strict definition noted in Table 1 only considers volunteer work if it is performed on a regular basis in an organization, usually a non-profit organization. However, as suggested in Table 2, volunteer work can also include informal and sporadic activities, like shovelling the sidewalk of an elderly neighbour after winter snowstorms, picking up litter in the community, or helping a teenager with her math homework. Helping someone with math homework would be considered formal volunteerism if it were part of participation in an organization that, for instance, created learning mentors in neighbourhoods.

The last dimension of volunteer work mentioned in Table 2 refers to the intended *beneficiaries* of the volunteering activity. The continuum presented in the table ranges from helping strangers – what could be considered "true altruism" – to activities that also benefit oneself. Between them are activities that benefit friends or relatives. While this framework is useful, we would like to extend the category of helping others/strangers – that is, identifiable persons – to more intangible contributions to the common good. It is in this discussion of beneficiaries that we can see a diffuse link between volunteering and active citizenship. Many volunteer activities such as participation in political riding associations or social movements, planting trees for reforestation or making submissions to environmental hearings can be considered a form of civic service or part of being an active, caring and informed citizen. At the same time, this also raises the question of the potential overlap between civic service and volunteering (e.g., Smith, 2004). For example, should the act of voting be considered volunteering? On the one hand, it is unpaid, freely chosen, formal and of benefit to society, and hence could be considered volunteering. On the other hand, it can be argued that it is simply a civic duty that is part of being a responsible member of a democracy. Another issue that arises in relation to the question of beneficiaries has to do with the private or public nature of the beneficiaries. In the past this was a non-issue, because most formal volunteering activities used to take place in the context of community organizations, non-profit organizations or governmental institutions. In recent years, however, we have witnessed the emergence of a new trend in formal volunteerism, which we address in chapter five: volunteering in for-profit organizations. In this context, it is pertinent to ask if it is conceptually acceptable to include this activity (which usually involves vulnerable people who need work experience like recent immigrants or youth) as volunteering, even if it is freely chosen, formal, unpaid, and of benefit to others. From a different

perspective, it could be conceptualized as labour exploitation. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore all these questions in depth, but we find it important to highlight again how the concept of intended beneficiaries, even if conceptualised on a continuum, fades into shades of grey.

So, does it matter whether we have a precise definition of volunteer work? Would this help us in our analysis of the different situations presented in this book? In part, in order to compare across different case studies, it is important to have a common definition of what we consider volunteer work to differentiate it from other unpaid work such as household and care work (e.g., Eichler, 2005, 2010). It is from this common base of experience that similarities and difference between volunteers' learning become illustrative and can make a contribution to understanding the links between volunteering and learning. However, acknowledging the different ways through which volunteerism can be viewed helps us expand our ability to recognize the multi-faceted nature of the volunteering. We now turn to a further exploration of the breadth and depth of the volunteering activity.

VOLUNTEER WORK AND SOCIETY

In the previous section, we problematised the concept of "volunteering" by looking at the different components of the volunteer experience. A follow-up to the Cnaan et al. 1996 study was conducted in 2000 by Handy, Cnaan, Brudney, Ascoli, Meijs and Ranade. It included over 3000 questionnaires administered in Canada, the Netherlands, India, Italy, and the United States. They started from the premise developed in the Cnaan et al. study that the perception of who is considered a volunteer and who is not boils down to the net cost of the undertaking: the "concept of net cost best accounted for the perception of who is a volunteer" (1996, p. 381). Handy et al. (2000) found that the public holds the perception that the greater the self-sacrifice the more altruistic the action is perceived to be. Likewise, the more the work benefits strangers (rather than oneself or friends), the more it is totally unpaid, and the more uncoerced it is, the more it will be considered a "true" volunteer activity. That is, another way in which the volunteer experience can be categorised or classified is by looking at how it is perceived. If the net cost to the volunteer is considered to be high and the net benefit low, then the experience is considered to be "true" volunteering.

Another challenge in trying to understand the breadth and depth of the volunteer experience is the tendency to conflate it with the voluntary sector. While a great deal of volunteer work is indeed done through voluntary organizations, it is important to recognize that there is also widespread volunteer activity in the public sector, in the private sector and in the community at large (Brudney, 1990; Sheard, 1995). Additionally, volunteer work can take different forms, and volunteers are motivated (and sometimes coerced) by different circumstances. Let's consider, for instance, teaching literacy on a regular basis, helping a disabled neighbour with certain chores on occasional basis, undertaking an internship in a corporation in order to gain job experience, working outside of regular hours in a non-governmental organization

(NGO) in order to complete tasks, participating in a governing board, doing community work as mandated by a government agency, or participating in a social movement against child labour. All these activities can be considered volunteer work according to the general definition, but clearly they are of a very different nature. Some of them, like working beyond regular hours or doing long-term internships with negligible educational impact are even borderline cases, and some may consider them unpaid work rather than volunteer work.

One further important way of looking at volunteer work is a supposed shift from "old" to "new" volunteering. One of the main features of this shift is the decline of long-term, regular volunteer work and the increase of short-term commitments. This trend has resulted in the rise of episodic volunteers, that is, those who are only willing to engage in short and occasional tasks. In this regard, the classic volunteer used to make unconditional, regular and long-term commitments, while the new volunteers are more likely to set conditions, and to engage in a more irregular and erratic way. Another feature of this transition is that the classic volunteer was more idealistic, selfless and altruistic, and tended to put the needs of the organization first. The new volunteer, instead, tends to be more pragmatic, is more inclined to do a cost-benefit analysis before volunteering, and believes in a balance between individual needs and organizational needs (Hustinx, 2001; Macduff, 2004, 2005). This parallels the broader shifts to more contingent work and working lives that see many different careers throughout the life course. In part, peoples' volunteering vary with their shifting commitments to their paid employment.

A more nuanced analysis of this trend is provided by Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003) who contrast collective with reflexive styles of volunteering. They argue that rather than a transition from one type of volunteering to another, there are instead two distinct ideal types of volunteering that are concurrent. Collective volunteering "involves voluntary acts that are initiated, stipulated, and supervised by groups regardless of the intentions or preferences of the individual group members" (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003, p. 171). Reflexive volunteering "represents individuated forms of commitment in which the focus shifts to the volunteer as an individual actor" (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003, p. 172). This analytical framework highlights the extent to which a given volunteer activity is collectively or individually directed. This framework complements the continua-based definition provided by Cnaan et al. (1996). Using the later, we can come to some sense of the degree to which an activity can be considered volunteering. Using the former, we can see how the activity relates to the modern epoch and tension between individualism and collectivism. We now turn to a discussion of informal learning.

INFORMAL LEARNING

Adult education takes place in both formal and informal settings in a wide range of locations: in the community, the workplace, formal institutional environments, and the home. (Ontario Education, 2005, p. 48)

Having explored the breadth and depth of volunteer activity it is now time to turn our attention to the learning of volunteers. Before we can explore the connections between the two, we need to first investigate the relevant aspects of the learning literature. We are interested in exploring learning that results from the volunteer experience. While there is a significant body of knowledge exploring experiential learning and education (e.g., Chapman, McPhee, & Proadman, 1995; Dewey, Hickman, & Alexander, 1998; Kolb, 1984; Mooney & Edwards, 2001), we have found that in most cases, the learning activity that takes place through volunteerism does not fit the experiential model. Since most volunteering activities are not conceived of as learning activities, it is not surprising that there are limited opportunities for reflection and analysis – which are key parts of an experiential learning cycle – in the volunteer experience. This is not to say that experiential learning is of no relevance to our study but rather we needed to pursue another framework for understanding volunteers' learning.

As noted in the introduction, we have found that informal learning is a more appropriate lens through which to explore the learning activity of volunteers. An examination of the literature on informal learning prompts at least five general reflections. The first relates to the distinction between informal learning and other types of learning; the second to the perceived importance of informal learning; the third to the different forms of informal learning; the fourth to the tacit nature of most informal learning; and the last one to the implications of researching informal learning. We take up these reflections in turn.

The first reflection concerns the absence of an agreed upon definition of informal learning. There is an abundance of definitional discussions of the term, and although space does not permit an exhaustive review, some general trends can be seen (e.g., Colley, Hodkinson, & Malcom, 2004; Eraut, 2000; Livingstone, 2006). Many definitions conceive informal learning as a residual category that includes all learning that falls outside of formal and non-formal education systems. This tripartite typology is not perfect. Indeed, some authors have argued that it is impossible to clearly distinguish one category from another, and called for discarding it altogether (e.g., Eraut, 2000). For our purposes, we accept the typology of formal, non-formal and informal learning because, following the insights of activity theory and situated learning theory, we conceptualise learning as taking place in social context (e.g., Bandura, 1971; Engeström & Miettinen, 1999; Seppanen, 2002). That is, learning is not merely the individual act of cognition; it is also a process that takes place through social action in particular contexts, and we find that there are distinct social and pedagogical relations embedded in each of these three types (formal, non-formal and informal). At the same time, we accept this typology with reservations because of the amount of confusion and overlapping that it creates. To clarify some of this confusion, we find it important to distinguish between informal learning as a site and as a process. As a site (and this is the most frequent understanding of the term), informal learning refers to that learning that takes place outside formal and non-formal education settings. As a process, informal learning refers to the

way in which learning is acquired, regardless of the setting. Hence, some types of informal learning (e.g., "the hidden curriculum," social relations of inclusion and exclusion, gender roles, etc.) can be also acquired in formal and non-formal settings (see, Colley et al., 2004; Mündel, Duguid, & Schugurensky, 2004).

Secondly, the implicit meaning conveyed in the concepts of formal, nonformal and informal learning implies a hierarchy of learning experiences. In this regard, Billet (2001) points out that "although unintended, this labelling [of formal, non-formal, and informal] has fostered a view that learning experiences in the workplace are incoherent as being 'informal' and 'incidental', and as failing to furnish critical insights" (p. 14). While Billet is writing from the context of paid workplace learning, the critique is still relevant to other contexts, including volunteer work. As Illich (1970) and other educational critics have commented, informal learning from experience is seldom given the same prestige as learning that is acquired (and accredited) through either formal or non-formal systems. A contributing factor to this phenomenon is that informal learning has been under-theorized and under-researched, largely because it is more difficult to uncover and analyse than formal or non-formal educational activities that have a set curriculum and objectives whose attainment can be identified and evaluated. Indeed, most of informal learning is incorporated as tacit knowledge, which was characterized by Polanyi as "that which we know but cannot tell" (1966, p. 4). This explains why informal learning has been for a long time a sort of "black box" about which not much was known.

A third consideration has to do with the different types of informal learning. In the pioneering work of Alan Tough (1971; 1979), for instance, informal learning was largely equated with self-directed learning. When considering the criteria of intentionality and awareness, Schugurensky (2000) identified three types of informal learning: self-directed learning (intentional and conscious), incidental learning (unintentional but conscious) and socialization (unintentional and unconscious). Likewise, Livingstone (2006) divides informal learning into two main types. The first type of informal training occurs "when teachers or mentors take responsibility for instructing others without sustained reference to an intentionally-organized body of knowledge in more incidental and spontaneous learning situations, such as guiding them in acquiring job skills or in community development activities" (p. 2). The second type is self-directed or collective informal learning, a residual category for "all other forms of intentional or tacit learning in which we engage either individually or collectively without direct reliance on a teacher or an externally-organized curriculum" (p. 2). All these attempts at defining the nuances recognize that within informal learning there is continuum of experiences that can be more or less structured and organized, and that can occur at the individual and/or at the collective level. Whereas this taxonomy of learning is not without problems, it can be useful in understanding how and what people learn – as long as we recognize the fluidity of the boundaries between and the potential simultaneity of the different learning types. A common concern in these and other understandings of informal learning is the need to recognize the degree of consciousness and intentionality of the learner.

In our case studies, we certainly found that there were different levels of intentionality to volunteers' learning. Nonetheless, rather than developing rigid categories into which to place our data, we have found it more useful to foreground the degree of intentionality – speaking of predominantly deliberate learning on the one hand and predominantly implicit learning on the other hand. For example, this continuum of intentionality follows closely the continuum of tacit learning developed by Eraut (2000). There is also a continuum of consciousness of the learning experience. Some of these learning experiences are evident and conscious (e.g., self-directed and planned learning) while others are more likely to be unconscious (e.g., socialization). Moreover, some learning may be unconscious at one time, but upon further reflection or elicitation may become conscious later on.

The fourth consideration arising from the literature is that most informal learning tends to be tacit. Tacit learning – and its conceptual cousin implicit cognition – can shed light on both the level of intentionality and awareness of a given learning activity. It can also shed light on the challenges of researching learning that, while informing research participants' actions, is difficult for them to explicitly articulate. That is, as research into implicit cognition and tacit learning has shown, it is possible to act on knowledge that we are unable to express or even know we know (Berry, 1996; Durrance, 1998; Polanyi, 1966; Underwood, 1996; Underwood & Bright, 1996). This is not only in the case for describing physical competencies such as riding a bicycle– in which case a complex understanding of physics would be necessary to give a complete explanation. It is also the case in adapting or learning the "culture" of a given organization and realizing what are the socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in that context.

The fifth consideration relates to the implications of informal learning research for public policy and for transformative social action. In terms of policy, an uncritical and individualized emphasis on informal learning (sometimes under the official discourse on lifelong learning) can lead to a withdrawal of the state and employers from education and training, and to a commodification of education, transferring most of the responsibilities and financial burdens to learners (Apple, 1982; De Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; Gorman, 2002; Newman, 2002; Parker, 2003). In terms of social action, exploring the tacit knowledge of volunteers involved in community-based organizations is not simply academic curiosity; it can also serve an emancipatory purpose.

INFORMAL LEARNING AND VOLUNTEER WORK: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIPS

Past studies seldom consider learning as a possible primary motivation for volunteering (Percy, Barnes, Graddon, & Machell, 1988). To a large extent, this is due to the fact that surveys have not tended to include learning as a possible response item among the motivations for volunteering. While chapter two provides a detailed analysis of the Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating (CSGVP), here we highlight the fact that this significant survey of Canadians'

volunteering does not include learning as a possible reason for doing volunteer work. Therefore, based on that data, it is not possible to draw any conclusions about the significance of learning as a motivator for volunteering.

It may also be the case that, with the exception of internships, learning is not perceived as an important motivation for volunteering. This hypothesis is supported by research on the accreditation and rewarding of volunteer activities (Cox, 2002; Percy et al., 1988). Cox found that "explicitly educational motives are rarely cited as the reason; people engaged in voluntary activity perceive their activities as 'doing' rather than learning" (Cox, 2002, p. 166). Likewise, Percy et al. (1988) found that "an adult may speak about 'learning' as a motive for attending a voluntary organization, but is most likely not to do so" (p. 58). The 2004 CSGVP suggests that volunteers are more likely to perceive the opposite connection: 77% of respondents felt that the volunteering experience let them apply previous learning to a concrete situation. For reasons probably related to the invisibility and tacit character of informal learning, the connection between learning and volunteering is mostly perceived as a one-way street. The dominant perception is that we learn in school and to some extent in our professional work, and then we can put our acquired knowledge and skills to social use through volunteering.

Although CSGVP shows that volunteers acquire knowledge and skills from volunteering, for the most part learning is a peripheral theme in the field of volunteerism. To a large extent, this is because volunteering is usually seen as the business of doing, and learning is often seen as a more passive/reflective activity (Cox, 2002) or as the result of a structured curriculum. The few studies that focus on volunteering and learning note a strong association between the mission of the volunteers' organization and the content of what is learned (Andersen, 1999; Elsdon, 1995; Elsdon et al., 1995; Henry & Hughes, 2003; Ilsley, 1990; Kerka, 1998; Mooney & Edwards, 2001; Percy et al., 1988). We see this confirmed in our case studies as well: volunteers learn significantly about topics related to the vision and operational realities of the organizations they are involved with. While an important finding in and of itself, it is not particularly surprising. Our work uses the existing studies as a starting point for exploring other informal learning from the broad range of volunteer activities that study participants engaged in.

One of the possible reasons to explain the peripheral place of learning in the volunteering field is that most of the learning is tacit. Similar to previous research on volunteers' learning, we found that, on first blush, many volunteers said that they were not engaged in an educational activity during their volunteer work, and most had difficulties identifying particular learning outcomes resulting from their volunteering activities. However, once we elicited different areas of learning through a series of questions asking about changes in knowledge, skills, abilities and values, many volunteers were able to recognize the amount of learning acquired in the different areas through their volunteering.

The acknowledgement of informal learning in some instances helps us to recognize that educational activities take place outside the walls of educational institutions and

training programs. From a social perspective, this is particularly relevant when the informal learning helps volunteers to challenge the official curriculum of schools and the messages conveyed by the mass media, and assists them to contribute to, for example, social justice. The formal recognition of informal learning is also a step forward in valuing knowledge and skills acquired outside of schools and universities. However, this can also be understood as either an abdication of responsibility of an educational enterprise or a commodification of learning creating a better workforce.[1] Ultimately, it is likely both at the same time. Nonetheless, it has been important for us to be aware of these dynamics as we conducted our research.

The learning dimension of volunteer work is not only often ignored by volunteers themselves, it is also off the radar of researchers and voluntary organisations. Eldson et al. (1995), after reviewing the literature on the connection between learning and volunteering (pp. 24–26), concluded that very few studies exist that directly explore the learning that results from volunteering. Ilsley (1990) found that voluntary organisations do not pay much attention to the learning of their volunteer members:

> Although most formal volunteer organizations offer training programs, we found that much of the actual learning in volunteer organizations is unplanned. Perhaps relatedly, learning – especially forms of learning other than instrumental/didactic – appears to be undervalued in most volunteer programs. This is highly unfortunate. (p. 71)

In our studies, we found that volunteers acquire learning related to their specific contexts, from learning how to produce a newsletter to making coffee for large groups, and from the provincial legislation about housing evictions to the chemical make-up of acid rain. They also acquire institutional and political knowledge about their organizations, specific social realities and the larger context. Sometimes they revisit their own assumptions and change their perspective on a particular issue or a population group. Over time, they also develop and refine a variety of social and practical skills, as well as attitudes and dispositions.

CLOSING REMARKS

As we have seen, there is a variety of ways in which volunteer activity can be conceived and classified. The two major approaches that we will be using are based on a series of continua rooted in the classical definition of formalised work that is unremunerated and freely chosen. This is complemented by a continuum between collective and reflexive volunteering. This last continuum in part reflects the changes that have occurred in the field of volunteering with the changes in the world of work and beyond. In a general sense, we adhere to the classical definition of volunteer work recognising the need to push its boundaries to include important insights from our case studies on immigrant volunteers and social movement members.

Generally, the learning of volunteers is informal. Recognising some of the shortcomings of this traditional classification of learning activity, we still chose to refer

to volunteers' learning as informal to reflect the fact that we are elucidating the learning that takes place outside of both the formal classroom and non-formal workshops or conferences. Non-formal education activities in particular complement volunteers' learning, but the predominant learning modality and site have been found to be informal.

In this book, we are trying to serve two principal aims. The first is to complement existing research that details the (informal) learning that takes place as people volunteer. The work cited above has begun the task of cataloguing the breadth and depth of volunteer learning particularly as it relates to organizational mission. The case studies presented in the following chapters will supplement these findings. The second is to explore the connections between this learning and the volunteer experience, considering a variety of volunteering experiences. As we have seen, there are few studies that explore the connections between volunteering and learning. We hope to make a modest contribution to this field.

NOTE

[1] This can be especially seen in the case of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (Thomas, 1998) where recognition of prior learning can either be a recognition of a person's previous experience through life and/or a commodification of that learning.

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