



# Avec nous, dans la rue: Pedagogy of mobilization, university of the streets

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## OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF “CASSEROLES” *textes qui bougent au rythme du carré rouge*

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### **Avec nous, dans la rue: Pedagogy of mobilization, university of the streets**

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*[T]he world is our classroom, a place full of ideas and possibilities, and ... history is replete with examples of how, even during – and often as a result of – deep-seated crisis, change is eminently possible.*  
(David Austin, 2009, p.115)

This is a discussion – one of many that will take place today – which would not be happening without the willingness of thousands of people to take to the streets, put their bodies on the line day after day, for months on end, and, at the time of this writing, with no apparent end in sight. For that, I am deeply grateful.

The student strike against tuition hikes, and the broader mobilizations in Quebec since Bill 78 (the special law against student organizing and protests, among other draconian measures) passed, highlight the importance of organizing for social change in difficult times. Longterm efforts at coordination and education by student organizers and their allies have built and sustained this major mobilization. It is now viewed internationally as a major site of resistance against the erosion of rights to education and the downloading of economic crises onto the middle and working classes for the benefit of economic and political elites.

These organization and education efforts are happening in the general assemblies in which students have been organizing the strike, debating ideas, making decisions, voting, building strategies and solidarity. They're happening in teach-ins and other forums organized by striking students and in coalition work with other communities and movements to build connections and common fronts of struggle. They're happening in anti-racist organizing within the student movement, challenging racism and the ongoing marginalization of many racialized students in Quebec. This mobilization and education has spread to the neighbourhood marches, casseroles, and popular assemblies springing up across Quebec.

There's a lot happening in the streets, every day/every night – incrementally, incidentally, informally, through talking, exchanging, marching together, claiming and creating space, confronting power, building solidarities and trust – learning that could not take place in a classroom.

Critical adult education scholar John Holst (2002) writes that “there is much educational work internal to social movements, in which organizational skills, ideology, and lifestyle choices are passed from one member to the next informally through mentoring and modelling or formally through workshops, seminars, lectures, and so forth” (p. 81). He calls this the “pedagogy of mobilization” (p.87).

Theorizing social movements at a level which is too far abstracted from the dynamics, particularities and contradictions on the ground has severe limitations. What’s been taking place across Quebec, in the general assemblies of CEGEP and university students and in other spaces opened up by this vibrant movement attests to the potency of “learning from the ground up” (Choudry and Kapoor, 2010). A great deal of knowledge production, learning and theorizing is taking place in this movement, often occurring under the radar of where we tend to assume learning and education to take place. As Griff Foley (1999) notes, profound forms of informal learning may often be incidental and not even recognized as such, embedded as they are in social action.

The massive numbers of arrests and violent police actions against protestors are hard to overlook. This is a movement which is in turn infantilized, criminalized, brutalized by the state and sections of the media. For many engaged in this struggle, such conflict has facilitated profound learning about state power and the limits of liberal democracy. In thinking these issues through, the insights of the sociologist and activist George Smith (2006) come to mind. He suggests that there is a wealth of research material and signposts derived from moments of confrontation to explore the way that power in our world is socially organized. He contends that being interrogated by insiders to a ruling regime, like a crown attorney, for example, brings one into direct contact with the conceptual relevancies and organizing principles of such regimes.

School may be out for summer for many students, but those concerned with teaching and learning should perhaps consider the complementarity (and tensions) between formal academic education, and non-formal and informal learning in this struggle. As Paula Allman (2001) contends: “Our consciousness develops from our active engagement with other people, nature, and the objects or processes we produce. In other words, it develops from the sensuous experiencing of reality from within the social relations in which we exist” (p.165).

In our new book, *Organize! Building from the local for global justice\*\**, Jill Hanley, Eric Shragge and I identify three elements that are key to effective organizing: analysis, action, and critical reflection on practice. Without romanticizing the current movement, I have no hesitation in saying that I come across each of these elements on a daily basis in my engagement with these mobilizations and student activists. The Quebec movement is a rich site of critical learning. Further, the level of

engagement, sacrifice and collective struggle which many thousands of Quebec students have displayed so consistently is forcing many to re-examine their cynical view of today's youth as individualistic and self-absorbed. We cannot predict the course and outcomes of this movement but the conscientization and politicization of a generation of students – and their courage in taking action – offers hope for the future for many people who do not see 'business as usual' as a viable option faced with today's profound economic, political and ecological crises. Indeed, perhaps as historian Robin Kelley (2002) suggests,

...the most powerful, visionary dreams of a new society don't come from little think tanks of smart people or out of the atomized, individualistic world of consumer capitalism, where raging against the *status quo* is simply the hip thing to do. Revolutionary dreams erupt out of political engagement; collective social movements are incubators of new knowledge (p. 8).

**\*\* *Organize!* is being launched at a [panel event](#) which addresses the current movement in Quebec at Concordia University's School of Community and Public Affairs, 2149 Mackay, between 5-7pm on June 19<sup>th</sup>**

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