

Union Education for Progressive Development: The Case of the Canadian Autoworkers

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The CAW's PEL and Empowerment

- Pressure for and gain the more equitable distribution of goods within Canadian society (Navarro and Shi, 2002).
- Progressive development of Canadian society by expanding freedoms (Sen, 1999).
- The Core Program of the CAW's PEL program is one avenue to increase worker empowerment and development as freedom in Canada by strengthening the labour movement.

The Core Program

- 4 week program
- Critical assessment of the economy, politics, and equity issues
- Biannual sessions at the CAW's Port Elgin Training Facility
- Analytically separated the curriculum into 5 major themes: education, media, history, economy, and politics

Amartya Sen (1999)

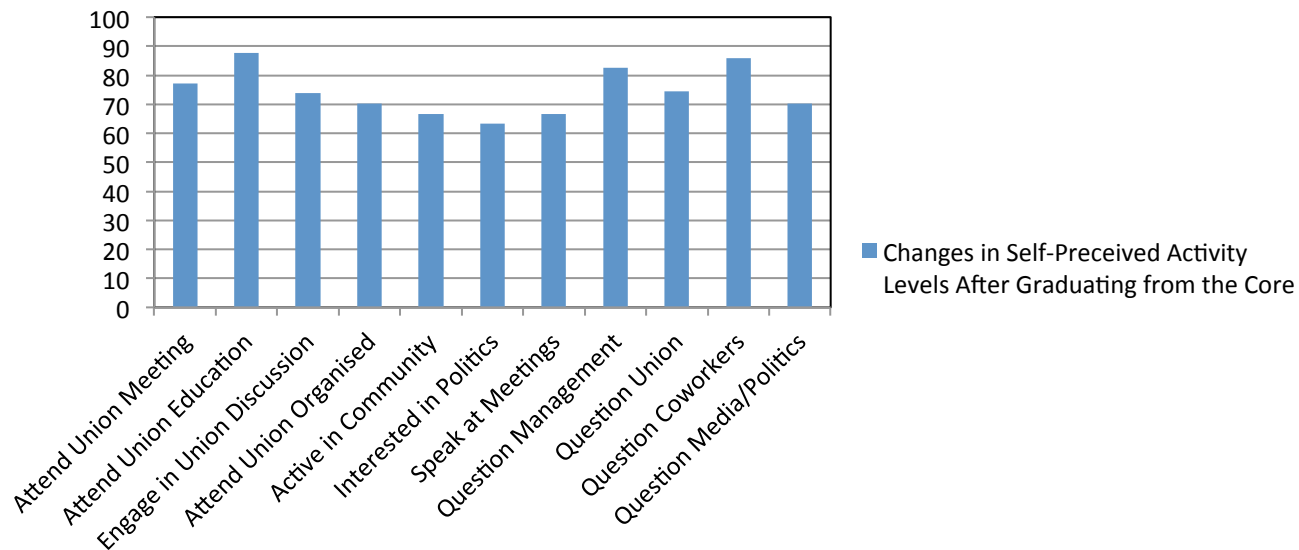
Development - “a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” (p. 3)

- i.) political freedoms
- ii.) economic facilities
- iii.) social opportunities
- iv.) transparency guarantees
- v.) protective securities

The CAW's PEL as Progressive Development

- CP's curriculum offers an alternative understanding of socio-political and economic issues
- Builds confidence and strengthens membership participation

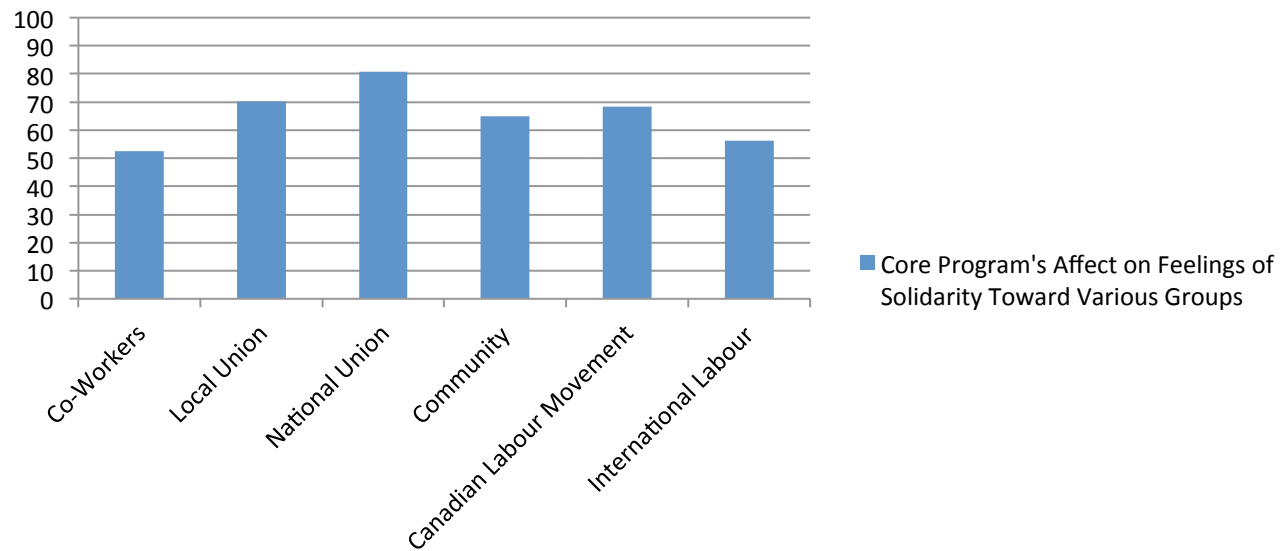
Percentage Change in Attitudinally –Based Activity Levels After Graduating from the Core Program (More Likely to...)



Attend Union Meeting	77.2%
Attend Union Education	87.7%
Engage in Union Discussion with Friends, Family or Co-Workers	73.7%
Attend Union Organised Events	70.2%
Active in Community	66.7%
Interested in Politics	63.2%
Speak at Meetings	66.7%
Question Management	82.5%
Question Union	74.5%
Question Coworkers	86.0%
Question Media/Politics	70.2%

Source: Data provided by Weststar (2004).

More likely to Feel Solidarity Toward Various Groups: Percentage Change After Graduating from the Core Program



Co-Workers	52.6%
Local Union	70.1%
National Union	80.7%
Community	64.9%
Canadian Labour Movement	68.4%
International Labour Movement	56.1%

Source: Data provided by Weststar (2004).

Political Freedom

- Empowering workers to directly impact decision-making governing bodies, corresponding to education for democratic citizenship (Nussbaum, 2010).
- Strengthens worker identity while finding a 'voice' to participate in public dialogue (Roth, 1997, 1997b).
- Undermining the “culture of silence,” increasing the capacity to scrutinise and criticise authorities (Freire (1970) as cited in Carnoy, 1974, p. 19; Sen, 1999).
- Challenge economic modes of development that undermine human capacities, the welfare state, and labour

Economic Freedom

- Understanding of economic facilities, which could alter the conditions of exchange (Sen, 1999).
- Inequity of economic entitlements
- Redistributive elements of economic growth and critiques the present allocation of resources.
- Challenge the logic of privileging competitive capital accumulation over the interests of labour and the developing of human capacities.

Social Opportunities

- The importance of continued learning
- Worker-centred educational experience
- Prioritises the linkages between individual experiences and broader economic and social justice issues
- Elevates both formal and informal knowledge of working people
- Program participants are more likely to run for elected office positions within the union (Weststar, 2006).
- The labour movement as a site for increasing the life chances for the majority of Canadians by struggling for state investment in social provisions.

Transparency Guarantees

- Increase critical thinking abilities which is tied to the maintenance of a healthy democracy
- Focus on media literacy and labour-centred skepticism

“They taught about the class societies and how media can change things around to benefit themselves or whoever it is that's powerful. I don't look at the paper in the same way that I used to” (PEL Interview as cited in Roth, 2007, p. 13).

Protective Securities

- Demand the maintenance and increased distribution of protective securities within Canada (Spencer, 1994; Terry and Abdullat, 2004).
- Cultivate solidarity and empathy for the struggles of others, increasing a sense of communal responsibility (Friesen, 1994; Nussbaum, 2010b; Sears, 2003).
- Solidarity despite difference increases the conviction that providing a strong welfare state is morally right (Kuisma, 2007; Nussbaum, 2010).
- Friesen's (1994) conviction that "through a more effective workers' education movement [a] different 'social order' can [be mobilised], an alternative community, that builds community-based values" (p. 187

CAW PEL: Canadian Union Renewal

- Contributes to the development of instrumental freedoms at an individual level while providing the possibility to increase such freedoms at a broader societal level.
- Viable avenue for revitalising the labour movement in Canada.
- Positive impact on the continual and dynamic process for development as freedom
- Bridging the gap between the CP's theory and sustained practice in the union, workplace, and community.
- Attitudinal Measure → Participant Observation

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