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NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY

WEBINAR (ENGLISH/FRENCH)
**BUILDING ALTERNATIVES THROUGH SOCIALLY-
USEFUL AND ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP**
JOIN US FOR A THOUGHT-PROVOKING WEBINAR

The presenters will address the most important challenges presented by the multi-dimensional crises facing (especially) communities that are socially marginalised, examine how they are responding to these challenges and explain what these responses mean for an alternative social system that aspires to building a genuinely democratic and humane society.

SPEAKER: ENVER MOTALA AND IRNA SENEKAL
(SOUTH AFRICA)
DATE: 10 OCTOBER 2024
TIME: 14:00 - 15:30 (SAST)
15:00 - 16:30 (EAT)
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Enver Motala is a Research Associate working at the Centre for Intergrated Post-School Education and Training at the Nelson Mandela University in South Africa. He has worked in the field of education and written about it over many decades. Irna Senekal an activist scholar at the Centre for Integrated Post-school Education and Training (CIPSET) at Nelson Mandela University. She uses participatory action learning and research approaches in working with unemployed graduates, farmworkers, urban farmers, small scale fishers' cooperatives and other organised community groups to build alternatives to the challenges of poverty, unemployment, inequality and ecocide.

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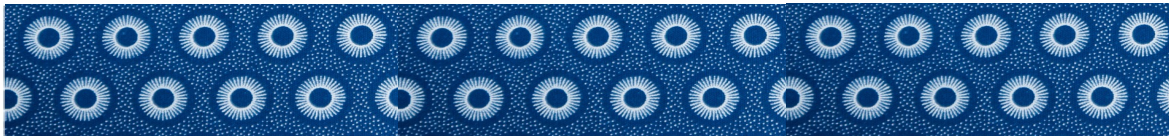
UNIVERSITY

Centre for Integrated Post-school Education & Training

Building alternatives through socially useful and engaged scholarship

Enver Motala and Irna Senekal

10 October 2024



Enver and I will be sharing our thoughts with you as a kind of reflexive thinking process, and we hope that you will bring your experience into conversation with what we are saying and hopefully into contestation too! Through questioning and problematising learning happens and our practice can move forward

We were asked to explore with you

- The challenges presented by the multi-dimensional crises facing communities that are politically, economically, and socially marginalised
- How are they responding to these challenges
- Explain what these responses mean for an alternative social system that aspires to building a genuinely democratic and humane society

Not really focused on the polycrisis which we understand the include the savagery of inequality, poverty, ecocide and war under which people and nature currently suffer and against which resistance is building

Our focus is rather on how we understand resistance/ alternatives are being built and can be strengthened through socially useful scholarship

what alternatives?

- draws on experience of working with organized groups of urban and rural working class communities
- collective process of inquiry, sharing and learning, rooted in immediate local struggles
- questions existing social, economic and political relations of power
- constructs a defense against dehumanization, exploitation and ecocide

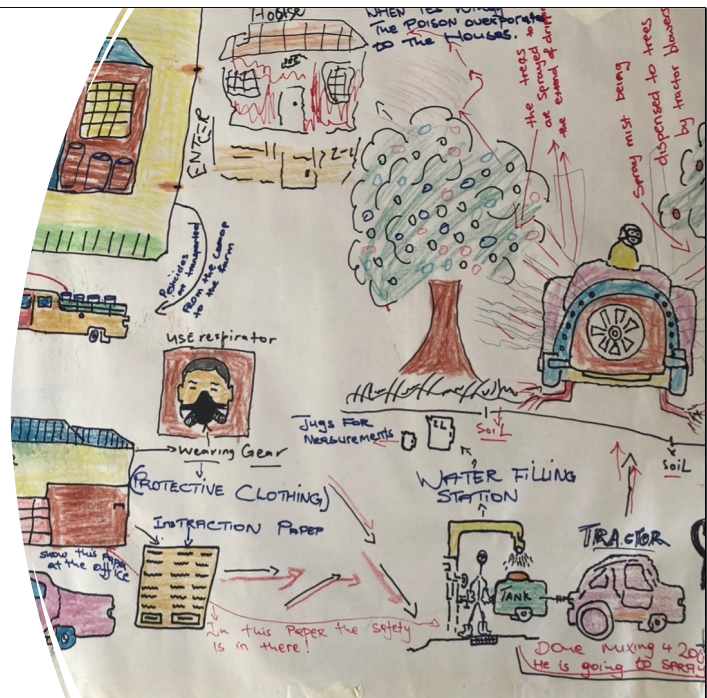


- My story is connected to the activist learning supported by research, learning and action with a social movement of farmworkers and people alienated from the land they work; Work is enabled through a local organisation Khanyisa education and development Trust. Its name refers very suitably to bringing light and its focus is on education for social just development.
- How could socially useful scholarship - here understood as scholarship where the purpose is to bolster struggles for alternatives led by those directly experiencing the pain, material loss and oppression from the interlinked issues dispossession, inequality, poverty and ecocide -face reality (CLR James and Grace Lee Boggs)
- Alternatives develop through action emerging from the lived experience of communities and their search for social, economic and political justice

- Alternatives are animated by a collective process of thinking in action to change social, economic and ecological oppressions
- Alternatives form part of a struggle to build counter power; struggle for power to shift dominant thinking and social relations and claim an alternative space where the possibility for social, economic and ecological justice can take emerge (Sprenen' third space)

starting points

- o forming and holding a space for an ethics of care and solidarity to take root
- o process of story telling and community mapping
- o surfacing experience; making experience observable
- o collective unpacking and analysis
- o community-based research as a shared capacity to inquire and a right to question current 'wisdom'

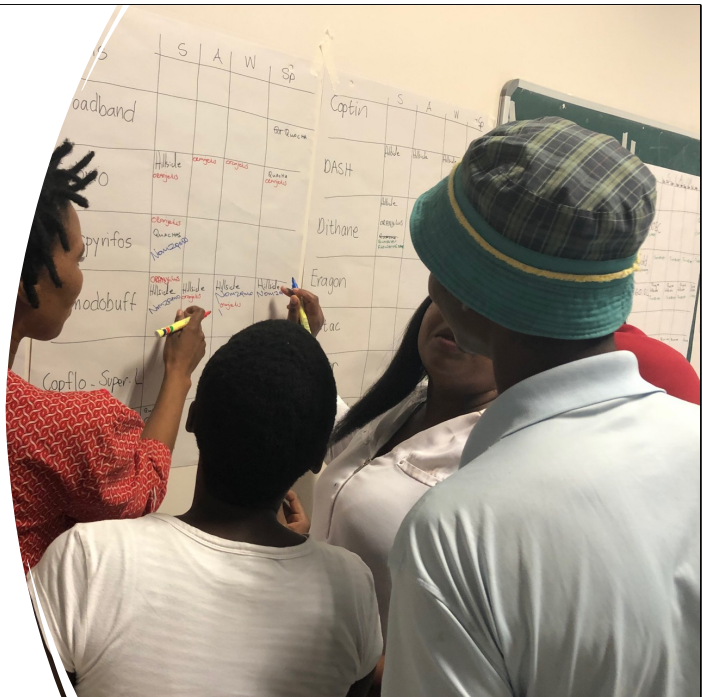


- o Forming and holding a space - physical space safe from intimidation and disruption; affective space where alternative ways of being with one another can emerge (respectful disagreement; care; recognition of common humanity and of social difference); organisational space from which to step out into collective action;
- o Space from which to face reality - all the contradictions, different social locations and accompanying privilege, and pain of our current world will enter this space
- o Not a discussion of methods - enough examples - processes of making experience observable; building up layers to this map that are guided by questions
- o Make visible what is known from experience so that the knowledge embedded in experience can be interrogated and brought into conversation and contestation with other forms of knowledge (history of pesticides; export of pesticides)

banned in EU to countries in Africa; reports on pesticide damage to environment; activist databases; assurances of safety; lack of information)

learning from experience

- learning as a collective, transformative process
- learning is on-going, interactive process filled with contradiction and contestation
- at heart of any possibility for transformative change



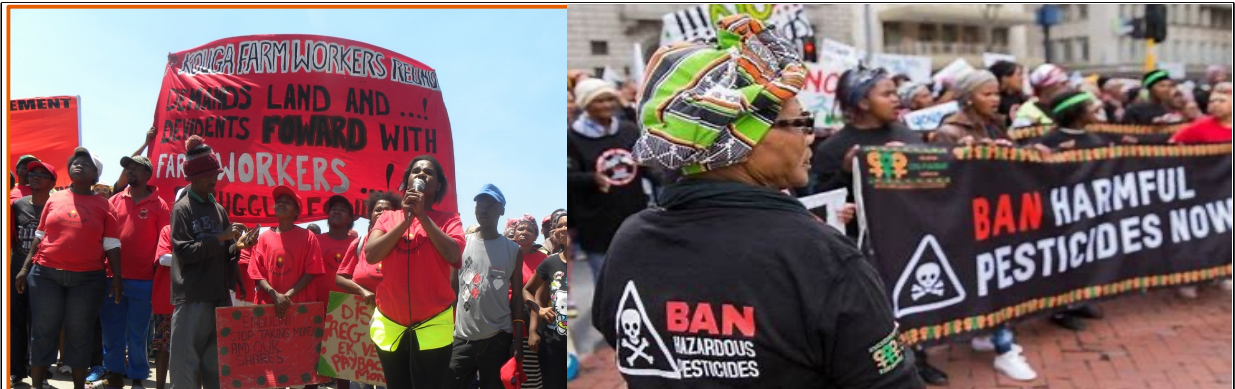
- Exploring the social world of experience (every day and night Carpenter and Mojab) is recognising relationship between context, activity, person and person as part of a group with a shared objective
- Recognising socially useful research “as **situated activity do not separate action, thought, feeling, and value and their collective, cultural-historical forms of located, interested, conflictual, meaningful activity.**” Jean Lave
- Participation in our collective life world is a process of changing understanding in and through practice and involves learning,

- unlearning and relearning
- Open-ended creative process/es of learning in action requiring useful and tested knowledge, skill, imagination, improvisation and experimentation with resources at hand
- Through this personal and collective changing understanding that alternatives to current injustice come to life

mobilising and organising

- testing where the energy is
- mobilising community support
- formulating demands and building a campaign
- taking action
- sustaining efforts by connecting struggles and building/strengthening a social movement





and so?

- o education for alternatives, as cycles of research, analysis, reflection, action, and building collective power to shift structures of oppression and exploitation
- o educator-researcher as learner standing in 'armed love' with struggles for socially just alternatives

... a praxis which insists upon the unity of thought and action, contending that research and organizing in this context are mutually constitutive and that knowledge production in these movements is dialectically related to the material conditions experienced in struggles for social and economic justice - Aziz Choudry

- o And so, what does this say for us as educators?
(invite you to consider that in discussion)
- o It's an observation made by many others that education is not neutral and requires choosing sides.
- o As an educator standing in "Armed love" says Freire is the fighting love of those convinced of the right and duty to struggle against oppression and is essential to a progressive educator (and may I add engaged scholarship)



socially useful scholarship

- Socially useful scholarship must be located in the world of real relations, social struggles, and the effects on the lives of human beings
- The concept of engagement is the subject of contradictory interpretations
- Engaged scholarship - construct real relations of respectful solidarity with communities, their organisations and social movements
- Engaged scholarship is about the actual process of engaging with communities. not about the scholarship of engagement

1. Socially useful scholarship cannot contemplate a retreat into the world of concepts, dialogue, and theorisation alone. It must be located in the world of real relations, social struggles, and the effects on the lives of human beings.
2. For universities, engaged scholarship is to understand how in daily practise an inherently distant world of academic life can construct real relations of respectful solidarity with communities, their organisations and social movements.
3. Engaged scholarship is not about the

scholarship of engagement which is about its typologies and characteristics which is not about the actual process of engaging with communities.

4. The very concept of engagement is the subject of contradictory interpretations which arise from the very form and nature of the relationships between academia and its constituencies - affecting how the aims and purposes, interests, the nature of the relationships itself, and its methods are interpreted and developed.



socially useful scholarship

- The communities are mainly of the working class, having evolved historically from the rural communities in the continent and elsewhere
- the persistent failure of governments, at every level, to meet even the basic conditions of life for such communities
- communities have formed organisations, movements, cooperatives and other forms of combination to defend themselves and to advance their socio-ecological struggles

1. The communities I refer to are mainly of the working class, having evolved historically from the rural communities in the continent and elsewhere. Parts of this community continue to exist in such rural communities, but colonialism and conquest has dispossessed and forced millions off the land and into crowded urban settings where life is a daily struggle.
2. This struggle is worsened by the persistent failure of governments, at every level, to meet even the basic conditions of life for such communities. The reality of the

multidimensional crisis – the polycrisis that faces urban and rural working-class communities has destroyed the prospect of achieving even the minimum of human rights in a democratic society almost impossible.

3. Yet, some of these communities have formed organisations, movements, cooperatives and other forms of combination to defend themselves and to advance their socio-ecological struggles against the wide range of exploitative, oppressive, gendered and other discriminatory practises.



socially useful scholarship

- Community organisations and movements are a great source of knowledge and understanding about the life-giving strategies and practices
- Return to the source for understanding the scholarly attributes of knowledge developed out of an association with the communities of the university
- there are real barriers for us in the university system for the realisation of these ends
- The purposes of such engaged scholarship cannot be synonymous between the university and community

1. Community organisations and movements are a great source of knowledge and understanding about the life-giving strategies and practices to represent the interests of their communities and for advancing the interests of society as a whole. Such knowledge is the result of the direct experience gained in the struggles faced by communities.
2. It is there that we must return to the source for understanding the scholarly attributes of knowledge developed out of an association with the communities of the university. The struggles

intrinsic to such life is likely to produce real understanding about how communities have and devised the strategies necessary for their survival.

3. But there are real barriers for us in the university system for the realisation of these ends – and they lie not only in the administrative hierarchies of power and bureaucratic demands of such research and knowledge, but in the very nature of the choices which inform how to approach such knowledge and the grip of the criteria for outputs required of such research and its uses.
4. The purposes of such engaged scholarship cannot be synonymous between the university and its community whether or not these engagements are based on 'respectful' relationships between the university and the community, since that does not by itself result in equivalent purposes even if the methods used in arriving at outcomes is mutually satisfactory.



socially useful scholarship

- For the university it is an activity which is inseparable from its knowledge producing, discovery, teaching, learning and supervision functions
- For them, the purpose of engaging with universities is largely to meet an exigency, the need to support culturally syncretical, integrating, and indigenous processes for self-organization.
- Academic establishments and researchers must go much further - this requires a radical shift in their orientation to the purpose of constructing solidaristic forms of engagement with communities

1. For the university it is an activity which is inseparable from its knowledge producing, discovery, teaching, learning and supervision functions. And it contributes essentially to the aspirations of individuals even if they are doing the work as a group
2. For communities, the process of engagement is not about these issues which are incidental to its willingness to engage. For them, the purpose of engaging with universities is largely to meet an exigency, the need to support culturally syncretical, integrating, and indigenous

processes for self-organization. It is best expressed through shaping the possibilities of useful outcomes, for finding the linkages with other forms of struggles in which the community is engaged more widely and solidaristically, for clarifying more deeply the nature of the exigency with which communities are confronted - through research about the facts of circumstance, through analysis, experimentation, and strategic thinking. It is for widening the reach of social agency and its mobilisation in support of increasingly democratic and accountable practices within communities.

3. The meaning of this is that academic establishments and researchers must go much further than they are able or permitted to and this requires a radical shift in their orientation to the purpose of constructing solidaristic forms of engagement with communities. Such scholarship must be self-critical and understand its intellectual limits.



socially useful scholarship

- o begin to have frank discussions about the aims and purposes, values and orientations of such scholarship
- o research must be quite explicit about its intention to support the mobilisation of social agency
- o enrich, broaden, and challenge dominant understandings of how and where education, learning, and knowledge production occur
- o provide, critical conceptual tools with which to understand, inform, imagine, and bring about social change

1. This cannot happen without choices being made and interests declared - not just academic and intellectual but socio-political, historical and ethical. Through that we can begin to have frank discussions about the aims and purposes, values and orientations of such scholarship.
2. In contexts such as our own, such research must be quite explicit about its intention to support the mobilisation of social agency. It does not simply emphasize the methodologies shared between academics and community groups but is much more about the purpose to which the

research is put and how it can be used.

3. Such work can greatly enrich, broaden, and challenge dominant understandings of how and where education, learning, and knowledge production occur and its transformative purposes. It can provide, at the same time, critical conceptual tools with which to understand, inform, imagine, and bring about social change.