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An analysis of the experiences of a selection of learners who completed a university-based programme for trade union women: what factors facilitated or hindered their 'plough back' of learning to build their trade union organization?



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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

This study set out to explore the effects of learning on a trade union organisation. The emphasis on learning in the South African trade union movement is often whether it results in building and strengthening union organisation. The trade union jargon used to describe this phenomenon is 'plough back'. The question that led to this research was whether the concept of 'plough back' was practically implemented in the case of a university course commissioned by the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU).

The research study took an in-depth look at the Higher Certificate in Economic Development (HCED), a university-based certificate programme for trade union women, which had an explicitly transformative learning objective. The study analysed the experiences of six shop stewards who completed the course, and explored whether they were able to apply their learning to build their union organisation.

A critical, interpretive, qualitative case study methodology was employed and the primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews with the sample of six participants. Interviews with course co-coordinators, lecturers and a union official provided contextual background for the study. Documentary evidence provided supplementary data.

My objective was to explore radical learning and its transformative effects. The conceptual framework therefore drew on emancipatory education theory, transformative learning and situated learning theory to interpret findings regarding participants' learning experiences on the course and their experiences of the effects of their learning in the union and elsewhere. I found much of the theoretical literature on the application of learning inappropriate for the study. So I also drew on feminist critiques of Freirian pedagogy and the critical literature on the limitations of Mezirow's theory of transformative learning to deepen the analysis of the

women's experiences from the perspective of building union organisation and the philosophy of worker education.

It is argued here that the question of whether and how learning is implemented is significantly influenced by the context and settings in which it occurs and that these contexts and settings are socially constructed. The HCED course was designed to link theory to participants' union practice as part of its integral transformative objective. The findings show that although the research participants in this study experienced significant individual transformation, plough back of learning in the union context was rendered almost impossible because of significant obstacles in the union context. Chief amongst these were ineffective organizational planning and a lack of leadership, exacerbated by gendered inequalities in the organisation.

The study concludes that in order for transformative education programmes such as the HCED course to translate into effective building of union organisation, the union has to be committed to fundamental transformation of the patriarchal organisational practices that hinder effective women's participation in the trade union.

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Acknowledgement

I thank Ditsela Workers Education Institute for giving me the opportunity to experience workers' education at so many different levels, first as a DANLEP participant and later as an educator. I will always be grateful to the organisation and its founding leadership for contributing to my personal growth and political understanding of the South African labour movement. The image on the cover of this dissertation is from a Ditsela Advanced National Labour Education Programme graduation and captures the emphasis of this study on the effects learning in the trade union movement. Without the organisational and comradely support of my comrades in Ditsela this project would not have been possible.

I thank Linda Cooper for her guidance and supervision through my entire experience of pursuing this degree and Bobby Marie for encouraging me to do it in the first place.

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This dissertation is dedicated to the NEHAWU women who willingly shared their stories with me and to all women trade unionists who struggle daily against the barriers to their full participation in their organisations.

Terms and Acronyms used

Student/ participant – the two terms are used interchangeably throughout the study to refer to the research participants. Student is often used in a formal context referring to their status as university students. Participant is used in an informal context referring to the women as participants on the union’s Women’s Leadership Development Programme.

Comrade refers to the sense of camaraderie among the trade unionists and originates from the apartheid tradition of activists who were engaged in the struggle against the system regarding each other as comrades.

ANCWL – African National Congress Women’s League

CCMA – Commission for Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration

CEC – Central Executive Committee

COSATU – Congress of South African Trade Unions

Ditsela – Development Institute for Training, Support and Education for Labour changed to Ditsela Workers’ Education Institute

FTSS – Full time shop steward, a union position to which a worker is elected by her fellow workers in a specific workplace.

HCED - Higher Certificate in Economic Development

HR – Human Resources

NEC – National Executive Committee

NEHAWU – National Education Health and Allied Workers Union

RPL – Recognition of Prior Learning

SACP – South African Communist Party

SLP – Social Law Project

UWC – University of the Western Cape

Chapter 1

Introduction

Rationale for the Study.

This interpretive and qualitative case study takes a critical look at the experiences of trade union women who were adult learners on a university-based certificate programme. The study sets out to explore what factors facilitated or hindered the application of learning in order to build the union organization.

I became aware of the Women's Leadership Development Programme, conducted by the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU), in my capacity as a trade union educator at Ditsela. Ditsela is a national workers' education institute where I was responsible for co-ordinating a similar programme targeted at women trade unionists. The NEHAWU programme presented an opportunity to take an in-depth look at a union programme that attempted to implement a policy decision taken by the union and within the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) to which the union is affiliated. That decision resolved to eradicate gender discrimination and to struggle for women's rights in general and in the workplace in particular (NEHAWU, 2005).

This chapter outlines the motivation for the study, and the context, goals and content of the programme.

Context of the NEHAWU Women's Leadership Development Programme.

NEHAWU is a national trade union formed by workers in the education, health, government and social welfare sectors in 1987¹. The union currently organizes professional and non-professional workers in the health, education and social development sectors as well as in state administration, parastatals and public entities. NEHAWU has a total membership of 236 000 of whom most are women.

¹ History obtained from NEHAWU website.

The following information provides the context in which the programme emerged and was gathered, through a review of documentary evidence and by interviews with a union official and the director of the Social Law Project (SLP) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC).

In 1999 NEHAWU considered itself a leading COSATU affiliate in terms of addressing gender issues and promoting women's leadership (SALB, 1999).

The union had committed itself to integrating women's development into its education programme and appointed a full-time gender co-ordinator in 2000 to implement that strategy. In 2004 the union made history by electing the first female president, Noluthando Mayende-Sibiya. Soon after her election Noluthando used her position and influence as president to support the launching of a major programme of women's empowerment and shop stewards' development. In particular NEHAWU wanted this programme to be an accredited tertiary qualification because 'for some reason people, especially unions do take accredited qualifications seriously' (SLP Director, Int. 2).

The union's National Gender Co-ordinator submitted a project proposal to the Social Law Project (SLP) at the UWC to complement its women's empowerment programme with an accredited course. NEHAWU included a list of topics that the union wanted the university to cover (See Appendix 4: NEHAWU project proposal).

This project proposal was duly accepted by the SLP, a research and training unit based in the Faculty of Law at the UWC and by Fair Share, an organization that ran economic literacy programmes for communities and which is now based in the School of Government at the UWC. Fair Share was already offering an undergraduate qualification: a Higher Certificate in Economic Development (HCED) that is registered as a Level 5 course on the National Qualifications Framework. SLP and Fair Share agreed that with some adaptation, the Higher Certificate in Economic Development could meet the union's needs (Fair Share Programme Co-ordinator, RB Int. 2). (See Appendix 5: HCED Course Outline).

The union itself then ran what they referred to as ideological training for the participants, before they attended the university programme. A union official explained that the ideological training was 'offered as a series of political schools' to ensure that participants had a firmly grounded understanding of union principles before they attended the university course. The union also wanted participants to understand how the union relates to contemporary national politics and how it relates to COSATU'. (NEHAWU Provincial Education Secretary, Int.1)

Locating the Nehawu Women's Leadership Development Programme in the wider context of worker education in South Africa.

Cooper (2005:3) provides a historical overview of worker education after the 1973 wave of strikes, in which she refers to three different views of how to 'support the re-building of trade unions for black workers.' The first view was that worker education should develop political consciousness among different layers of workers; the second view was that worker education should be aimed at promoting the personal and professional development of workers and a third view was that worker education should be tied to building the strength of the emerging unions on the factory floor. The third view became dominant when COSATU made a resolution at its sixth national congress in 1997 to the effect that 'strengthening organization was about improving [union] membership service at workplace level' on day-to-day issues and in broader campaigns to improve working conditions. (COSATU, 1997, Congress Resolutions)

However, there had been a further transition in the focus of worker education in the post – apartheid South African trade union movement. The focus had moved from worker education for 'liberation' to worker education for participation under conditions of social democracy in the workplace and wider society. There has been an increased emphasis on formally accredited education (Cooper, 2006). The NEHAWU programme seemed to adopt a combined approach where it began with non-formal union ideological education followed by a formally accredited mass education programme; this made it an unusual experiment of worker education in a changed context that was worth exploring.

NEHAWU selected women, mostly shop stewards and some union officials, from around the country to attend the three-year certificate programme at the UWC. The union also made a significant financial contribution to women's education by funding the programme from its own resources: this was at a time when a study of union education amongst COSATU affiliates found that the union's gender education programmes were affected by a lack of resources.²

I wanted to explore whether this programme, that seemed to enjoy political support from the national union leadership, also made a contribution to building union organization. In order to do this I looked at what it means to build union organization.

Building Union Organization.

The September Commission on the future of the trade unions was established by the COSATU Central Executive Committee early in 1996, with a mandate to investigate the changed political and economic conditions in South Africa and to assess whether COSATU's policies and strategies were appropriate to the new conditions.

The September Commission report made a distinction between organization building and organizational development. Organizational development is about a 'specific focus on internal organization issues such as organizational management, communication systems, financial management, staff development, working relations and administrative systems'. According to the report 'this is an area [that] trade unions have tended to neglect but it is essential for building an effective organization'. The September Commission describes building effective organization as democratic, dynamic organization amongst membership that is able to achieve the COSATU goals to defend worker rights, improve working conditions and wages and contribute to the transformation of society (September Commission Report, 1997:167).

The September Commission report further states that 'building organization is the traditional focus of trade union activism [it is about] building structures, mobilising members and launching campaigns (ibid: 87). NEHAWU's focus on the women's leadership programme was

² COSATU Organisational Renewal Report researched and presented by NALEDI in August 2003.

probably no different, although the organization building objective was not explicitly stated in the project proposal that was submitted to the UWC.

The project proposal mentioned that ‘...comrades would be given projects in application of skills acquired; for example, building a branch gender structure with a clear programme’ (NEHAWU, 2006). This means that the union intended to assign projects to the women during or after the HCED course that would enable them to apply their skills to build the union organization; these included building structures at their workplaces with a clear programme of action. This is what the September Commission report described as traditional trade union activism to mobilise union members for actions such as union campaigns.

The September Commission also states that there is an integral connectedness in the trade union movement, between the ability to build organization and the opportunities that exist or are created through the way that the organization operates and notes that:

Training programmes on their own will not change the way an organization functions. Training needs to be integrated with other aspects of OD. Too often in the unions we imagine that training and education will solve all capacity problems. There must be support and follow-up to ensure that people are able to apply what they have learnt, and to help them solve practical problems. In other words, the organization itself must be a learning environment, and the learning that takes place in practical work in the organization is probably as important as that which takes place in a formal programme (September Commission report, 1997: 190).

In the case of NEHAWU the union appears to have elected to build the organization by developing its women shop stewards because the project proposal that was submitted to the SLP states the following as one of the project objectives: to develop and equip women with the knowledge and skills to engage and take forward women’s issues at workplace level (NEHAWU, 2006). This study attempted to explore the women’s experience of applying or ‘ploughing back’ their learning in the trade union context.

Exploring the importance of 'plough back' in terms of the principles of worker education.

One of the aims of this study was to gain insight into the meaning of 'plough back' as it relates to the effects of learning experiences of the participants on the HCED course. This insight was necessary to understand their experience of applying their learning to build and strengthen trade union organization especially at workplace level. The metaphor of 'ploughing back' is used in its context as a transitive verb meaning 'to work at something and progress slowly and steadily'³ or to plough something into the soil to enrich it. This metaphor is significant for two reasons: firstly, because it implies moving forward slowly but steadily, often without looking back to see how much ground has already been covered and secondly, that the outcome of the ploughing action has an enriching result.

In its review of the Women's Leadership Development Programme the union requested all the provinces to report on whether the women had moved up in union structures or were promoted at work. The union did not seem to look at any of the aspects of organization building described above nor at any of the organization building objectives that were included in the initial project proposal to the university (NEHAWU, 2010).

My understanding of the principles of worker education that I have learnt from my experience as a union educator is that it:

- Acknowledges and values a worker's own experiences and shows how these contribute to building collectivism and solidarity.
- Builds the knowledge and skills of the working class to challenge and struggle against their economic, political and social exploitation in society.
- Recognizes and nurtures workers' leadership capacity within their own organizations.

³ MS Word Thesaurus

Historically the emphasis of worker education especially in radical trade unions has been its potential to educate and empower workers to take control of their destiny by struggling against oppression and exploitation (Cooper, 1998: 5, 11).

I therefore intended to explore, firstly, whether the formally accredited education programme was able to empower the women to apply their learning in order to build their union organization. Secondly I intended to establish what factors facilitated or hindered this application of learning. The main research question therefore was as follows:

In the experiences of a selected group of trade union women who were adult learners on a university-based Certificate Programme, what factors facilitated or hindered their application of learning in order to build their trade union organization?

Structure of the HCED Women's Leadership and Skills Development Programme.

The SLP director explained (DT, Int 2) that the UWC registered 291 women students on a three-year certificate programme that was adapted for the union from the existing university programme as mentioned earlier. The course ran on a block release system during the UWC winter vacation so that the trade unionists could be accommodated on campus. The group returned to Cape Town every year in June/July for three consecutive years from 2006 to 2008, to attend lectures and 'to learn, at the university' as most of them described it during the interviews conducted for this study.

Three different modules were taught every week of a three-week study block and students had to complete research projects and assignments between the study blocks.

As solidarity gesture between students who completed the course first and those that had to attend additional classes, one joint graduation ceremony was held at the end of 2009 for everyone.

The programme co-ordinators prepared the lecturers and tutors to teach working adult students at undergraduate level. The lecturers and the course co-ordinators who were interviewed for this study mentioned the preparatory processes and the emphasis placed on

“the importance of adult education approaches to teaching and best practice in the field of adult education”. (LC, Int.1; MP, Int.1; RB, Int. 2). A number of tutors who were Masters level students in the departments of law, adult education, gender and development, were carefully selected for this programme. They were trained on the principles of adult education and were briefed about the students’ trade union background. Tutors were paid to sit through all the lectures because the discussions during the tutorials afterwards were linked to the modular contents. Lecturers and tutors worked together on the structure of every module. (RB, Int. 2)

During a study block, students attended lectures every morning and tutorials in smaller groups every afternoon. In the tutorials groups there was time for discussions and workshops on the content covered in the lectures. Computer training and writing skills were also integrated into the programme.

Between July and November, students had to submit assignments: at this time, the lecturers, tutors and the programme co-ordinator facilitated provincial tutorials to cover areas that the students did not understand and gave them individual feedback on their assignments before they submitted a final assignment for assessment.

HCED Programme Curriculum

The adaptation of the modules from the original programme to the NEHAWU HCED is summarized in the table below. The modular content was adapted to address the union’s needs and to emphasise useful knowledge and skills for trade unionists.

Original CED Modules	Adapted Modules for NEHAWU
1. Communication and Information Management.	Adapted content to focus on shop stewards' communication needs in the union and the workplace.
2. Gender and Development.	Gender and Development.
3. Organizational Development looking at participants' organizations of origin.	OD in the trade union.
4. Local Government: Advocacy and Lobbying.	Labour Practice A –Theory and Practice of Labour Law.
5. Development Economics 1.	Development Economics.
6. Development Economics 2.	Labour Practice B – Dispute Resolution.
7. Training Design and Facilitation of Community Development Interventions.	Training Design and Facilitation of union/workplace based interventions.
8. Workplace Learning through the structured application of learning from the course in their community and organizational context.	Workplace Learning.
9. Research Project.	Research Project on HIV/Aids or Sexual Harassment in the workplace.

The course co-ordinator described the curriculum as consisting of three components running concurrently as a holistically integrated programme of knowledge and skills development. She described 'curriculum one' as the women shop stewards' work and life experiences as a key

factor that they brought with them into the programme. Lecturers drew on the participants' experience before they introduced new theories. 'Curriculum two' was their learning from the actual course modules and 'curriculum three' was the union as their primary environment of interaction with each other and with other workers. Throughout the course the students had to engage in collaborative-learning, which means that they had to share what they learnt on the course with their colleagues in the union and the workplace.

The Workplace Learning Module was a core component of the course with the highest credit value. All the other Modules ran independently of each other and Workplace Learning was integrated into the other eight modules. This module emphasised the application of learning and required students to apply the theoretical concepts of a specific module, for example, Gender and Development, in their workplaces or communities. They had to capture the experience of applying it in a reflective learning journal for assessment purposes.

The Workplace Learning Module is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

The Gender and Development Module ran first because the course co-ordinators thought that the theory and content covered would not be as intimidating as the other new learning areas to the students.

The two Labour Practice Modules were designed to expose students to the theory and practice of Labour Law as 'the subject matter of [the shop stewards'] daily interaction as trade unionists. (Course Lecturer MP, Int.1).

The Research Project on HIV/Aids and Sexual Harassment in the workplace was designed to give the students a chance to apply basic research methods in terms of substantiating workplace issues with facts. (MP, Int.1).

The design of the above three modules suggests that they had a specific focus on the application or applicability of the learning whereas the other six modules were focused on developing hard skills. Students had to keep a learning journal in which they had to:

- a) record key learning areas from a specific module, which the course co-ordinator described as capturing their “aha moments”(the moment that they learnt something new or when something that they did not understand before suddenly made sense) and how they would share that particular learning (content and insight) with others who were not participants on the course, and
- b) record their experience of identifying a learning partner and together sharing key learning areas from the course with their peers.

Based on the background of the HCED programme, this study sought to explore the research question from the following perspectives.

1. The research participants’ experiences of what they learnt on the HCED programme?
2. What were they able to do with the learning: did they apply it in their union/workplace/elsewhere? If so with what intention?
3. What factors in the union and elsewhere encouraged or hindered their application of learning?

The chapters that follow are summarized below.

- Chapter 2: Describes the conceptual framework in which the research question is located.
- Chapter 3: Outlines the methodology used to gather information for this case study.
- Chapter 4: Explores the women’s experiences of the HCED course and their perceptions of factors that facilitated or hindered their efforts to apply what they had learnt.
- Chapter 5: Presents the conclusions drawn from this case study and suggests questions for further research.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

Introduction.

This chapter describes the conceptual framework in which the research question is located. As noted above, this study has as its key focus the experiences of a selected group of trade union women who were adult learners on a university-based Certificate Programme and the research question was: what factors facilitated or hindered their application of learning in order to build their trade union organization?

At the outset of this study my objective was to explore the concept of 'plough back' as it pertains to learning for the purposes of building and strengthening organization in a trade union context. The concept of 'plough back' is a piece of jargon specific to the South African trade union movement. It is embedded in trade union education discourse, and refers to what happens or should happen as trade unionists are exposed to new knowledge and skills that can help build trade union organization.

There are no theoretical examples available in the field of education that refer to 'plough back' as such. The closest concept to 'plough back' that I could find in mainstream education literature is the 'transfer of learning' or 'learning application.'

In order to explore the research literature relevant for my study, I focus first on literature based on the critical theory tradition of transformative or liberatory learning because the research participants are trade unionists and trade union organisations are characterised by the tradition of struggling for social justice, transformation of society and the liberation of the working class. The Women's Leadership and Skills Development Programme, that forms the focus of this study, also had a transformatory purpose because the union's objective in commissioning this

course was 'to equip women with the knowledge and skills to engage and take forward women's issues at workplace level.'(NEHAWU, 2006),

Following on this, I review the literature that focuses on the transfer of learning, and focus on Situated Learning theory because the transfer of learning would inevitably be located within specific contexts and I wanted to explore how contextual factors affected the women's learning experiences, from the university to the workplace and the union.

Theories of transformative learning.

Jack Mezirow's theory of transformative learning:

Mezirow defines transformative learning as 'learning that transforms problematic frames of reference (mindsets) to make them more inclusive ...and emotionally able to change.'(Mezirow, 2003:58). Fenwick points out that 'reflection on experience and particularly critical reflection are central' to Mezirow's theory of 'reflection on experience for transformation' (Fenwick, 2001:5).

Mezirow's (1978) original presentation of perspective transformation was based on a study of the experiences of women returning to college where they found many of their assumptions about their roles challenged. (English, 2005: 630-31).

This seemed relevant to the NEHAWU women's reflections on their roles in society, which they were supposed to undertake in the Gender and Development module of the HCED course. Mezirow's states that critical self-reflection is the process through which a person's mind is not changed but opened to questioning the validity of assumptions that were previously held. English (2005: 631) defines the process of reflection in three ways as follows. Thus, when something happens people can be led to reflect on what happened (content reflection), how they came to think about the world in a specific way (process reflection) and why it is important to them (premise reflection). It is that 'premise reflection' that is most likely to lead to the transformation of the mind to question previously held views. Merriam (2003) cited by English (2005) points out that 'a certain level of cognitive development is necessary before individuals

can engage in critical self- reflection'. Critical self- reflection is a developmental process which often leads to developmental outcomes.

Critiques of Mezirow's theory.

A key criticism of Mezirow's theory of transformative learning is its narrow focus on individual transformation (Wang and Sarbo, 2004:205). Mezirow's perspective of transformative learning is limited to individual emancipation insofar as critical self-reflection helps the individual to see the world differently but may not be empowered enough to do anything about the structure of society. However the realization that occurs through perspective transformation is still a learning experience even if it does not lead to change of the external environment. Following on from Mezirow's theory of transformative learning, I looked at Paulo Freire's theory of emancipatory education from the perspective of education for social change located within a collective as opposed to the individual.

Paulo Freire's and Antonio Gramsci's theories of emancipatory education.

Freire's educational philosophy and methodology as an educator was about empowering the 'dispossessed to actively participate in the transformation of their society' (Freire, 1970:10). Although his perspective on education sought to respond to the concrete realities of the people of Brazil it is applicable to the 'dispossessed people' all over the world. His early experience of oppression led him to realize that the dispossessed were silenced into submission by what they were taught about their position in society. Thus, education played a major role in maintaining a culture of dominance by the economically, politically and socially powerful by portraying the dominance of the powerful as a 'given reality'.

His central focus of education was that it had to lead to action: the use of theory in a practical way which is the central Freirean concept of praxis. Praxis is about conscious action. He therefore criticized the 'banking method' of education in favour of 'problem-posing' education. The banking method reinforces the status quo by positing it into students through educators who are often figures of authority. The problem-posing educational approach empowers students to engage with 'problems relating to their world and to themselves in the world.'(ibid:

62). Through problem-posing education students are challenged to respond to the challenges in their world. Freire in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970:65) argues that:

Education is constantly remade in the praxis. The banking method of education emphasises permanence and becomes reactionary; problem-posing education...is rooted in the dynamic present and becomes revolutionary. Hence it affirms women and men as beings that transcend themselves, who move forward and look ahead. Looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future.

I have included references to Antonio Gramsci in my review of transformative learning because like Freire, he advocated for the empowerment of the dispossessed in the struggle for socio-economic transformation. Their perspectives of consciousness-raising education are useful for this study that looks at the women's experiences of a consciousness-raising programme and whether they were able to do anything differently thereafter.

Peter Mayo (1999:155) discusses when transformative adult education might work from the perspective of Freire and Gramsci as 'two of the most cited figures' in the literature on transformative education. Freire and Gramsci theorised the 'limits and possibilities for social transformation' that transformative consciousness-raising education provides.

Freire's ideas and approaches were prominent during the time of populist action in Brazil influenced by the successful Cuban revolution in the region of Latin America. His ideas took effect amongst 'active trade unions, peasant leagues and worker organizations' (ibid: 156). The 'political climate [in Brazil] was conducive to liberatory educational practices'. It was during this period that his consciousness-raising literacy programmes were running successfully in his country. However when the political situation changed after the military coup in Brazil, Freire was forced into exile and so his consciousness-raising programme was halted.

Similarly in Italy in the pre-revolutionary period in 1920 'attempts to carry out meaningful education' of the working class were stamped out by the rising Fascism. Mayo (1999) argues

that based on the Brazilian and Italian experiences 'it seems that during periods of mass popular mobilization before dictatorships...transformative activities can become consolidated within the popular tradition and therefore constitute an important source of popular resistance during times of repression'.

The key observation that both theorists have made is that consciousness-raising education is only effective within a context of mass mobilisation and not in isolation.

Freire advocated a realistic expectation of education: that education on its own, however radical it might be, cannot transform society unless there is a wider context of social movement activism prevailing to transform society (ibid:159).

According to Mayo, Freire warned against 'isolating educational activity from a broader range of transformative education' (Mayo, 1999:159). In a conversation with Ira Shor, Freire said that:

Liberating education in general and the single classroom in particular cannot transform society by themselves. This limit [of liberating education] needs to be repeated so that none of us mistakes what dialogical learning means. (ibid: 159-160).

Mayo (1999) explains that if Freire's pedagogy were carried out in isolation it would only involve 'intellectual praxis' that would transform people's consciousness but it would not encourage direct political action by the oppressed to change their plight. When the educational process is linked with social action then it would lead to 'revolutionary praxis'. Examples of 'revolutionary praxis' would be countries where successful struggles for liberation were led by strong social movements; these include Latin America and Africa, with South Africa in particular, where the struggle against the apartheid system of widespread oppression was waged at many different levels in society. In South Africa, the struggle against apartheid was also a catalytic struggle for social movement unionism. Thus, worker organization was not narrowly focused on workplace issues but was a form of trade unionism that characterized the 1970s and 1980s when trade union struggles were located within the wider struggle for social and political transformation. Trade union campaigns were linked to the broader anti-Apartheid

struggle (Bezuidenhout, 2000:10). This bears relevance to this study regarding the broader trade union education context in which the Women's Leadership Programme was located.

Mayo draws on the ideas of Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire to explore the potential for transformative adult education in different social, political and economic contexts. Drawing on their experiences of their native countries and in their respective geographical regions, Freire and Gramsci have highlighted the importance of the combination of educational and social actions, in a complementary manner to struggle for and to influence the transformation of society. It cannot be the sole responsibility of transformative adult education to advocate social transformation but it can play a significant role in educating and mobilizing mass popular movements into action for social change under certain conditions. For the purposes of this study, I have only focused on the ideas of these two leading voices in the theory of transformative adult education in terms of opportunities for transformative adult education.

A feminist critique of Freirean Pedagogy.

A feminist critique of the theory was important for this study to avoid locating the women's experiences uncritically in a generalised view of adult education but rather to enable an in-depth analysis of the women's experiences.

Weiler (1996:128) in her critique of Freirean pedagogy notes that 'feminist theory is a contemporary approach that validates difference, challenges universal claims to truth and seeks to create social transformation in a world of uncertainty'. One of the claims to truth that feminist educational critics are challenging is the assumptions of classic liberatory pedagogies like Freire's, of a collective experience of oppression. The feminist educational theorists argue that within the wider spectrum of oppression there are further subsystems of oppression such as 'sexism, power of race, sexual preference, physical ability and age' that cause further contradictions or tensions amongst already oppressed societies or different groups within an oppressed society.

Weiler (1996) therefore argues that different groups all struggling for liberation and social transformation will have different goals of liberation. The goals would be specific to each group or individual's experience of oppression.

It is the universal generalisations from a male perspective that Weiler (1996: 129) is challenging in terms of Freire's writing of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. She argues that Freire fails to address the possibility of contradictory and simultaneous oppression and dominance: whilst a man might be oppressed by his boss at work he could at the same time be oppressing his wife at home, or the White woman who is subjected to sexist exploitation could in turn exploit the Black woman. Weiler notes that in this abstract, generalisations about oppression, Freire tends to ignore or gloss over 'contradictions and tensions that exist in social settings in which overlapping forms of oppression exist'. He assumes that 'all oppressed people are submerged in a common situation of oppression and that their shared knowledge of oppression will lead them to collective action' (Weiler, 1996: 132). She explains that feminist pedagogy asserts the same core components as Freirean pedagogy thus, consciousness-raising is an empowering phenomenon, that oppression exists and so too does the possibility of ending it and fulfilling the desire for social transformation. The difference is that feminist pedagogy is influenced by the overall political commitment of women's liberation. Thus, the foundations of 'experience and consciousness-raising on which feminist pedagogy rests, are grounded in historically situated social change movements'; for example, the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s in the U S A. The women's departure point during the period of the civil rights movement was always their personal experience, in their consciousness-raising discussions and activities. They believed that 'theory and practice were intertwined as praxis'.

As the women's liberation movement progressed, politically committed women went on to establish women's studies courses and programmes in universities because like Paulo Freire, 'they assumed that education could and should be a means of social change.'(ibid) and they tried to run radical courses in traditional formal university institutions. This view of the limitations of trying to achieve radical outcomes through formal education programmes has

relevance to this study which focuses on the formal education programme part of the broader women's empowerment programme.

Finally, Weiler concludes that the complexities raised by feminist pedagogy do not discount other liberatory pedagogies or the goals of social justice and empowerment. Feminist pedagogy is about recognizing difference and working within it and through it to raise consciousness. (ibid: 147).

Summary of transformative learning.

Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation highlights the emancipatory effects that a life changing experience could have on individuals. However, Mezirow's theory is limited to individual perspective transformation. The radical pedagogy of Freire and Gramsci adopt a focus on collective consciousness-raising that could challenge conditions of oppression and build struggles for social transformation under conditions of mass popular mobilisation. Feminist pedagogy echoes the Freirean goals of social and political transformation but also highlights the importance of recognizing subjective power and issues of significant difference amongst the oppressed that must be taken into account in the process of consciousness-raising and struggling for social and political transformation. This study draws on the above perspective of transformative learning due to the consciousness-raising aspects of the HCED course which was my case study.

In the following section, I continue the literature review by exploring the literature on the transfer of learning as the study is concerned with how the women's learning experiences are transferred across different situations or contexts.

Transfer of Learning.

Brookfield (in English, 2005: 627) describes the transfer of learning as 'the process by which learners apply, in settings outside of an adult educational setting, the skills and knowledge they have learned within that setting'. Cantor (1992 also cited in English, 2005:627) makes a distinction between 'positive and negative' transfer of learning. Positive transfer occurs when students or learners apply the skills and knowledge that they have been taught. Negative

transfer occurs when learners do not apply what has been taught, but the desired outcomes occur anyway. Cantor describes a key factor in positive transfer as 'the ability of adult educators to help learners link new information to information they already know, and the ability of educators to demonstrate to learners the relevance for them of the skills and knowledge being taught'(English, 2005:627).

Vella, Berardinelli and Burrow (1998 also cited in English 2005) describe the transfer of learning as one of the three dimensions of programme accountability in the field of education. The other two dimensions of programme accountability are changes in learners' knowledge, skill or attitudes that result from a programme and changes in the learners' organization that result from new learning. The latter two dimensions of programme accountability are applied to the analysis of the women's experiences of the HCED course and how it impacted on their own learning and the application of their learning to their union.

However the transfer of learning is not a simple process of automatic or mechanical replication across contexts. Caffarella (1994, cited in English, 2005:627) points out those critiques of the lack of direct transfer of learning 'sometimes fail to recognize the existence of institutional, political and community factors' that prevent the transfer of learning. This study explores the women's perceptions of what helped or hindered their application of learning.

Critiquing the discourse of the transfer of learning.

Brookfield (cited in English, 2005:627) critiques the discourse of the transfer of learning for its conceptualization of learning as a 'package of decontextualised skills and knowledge that is transferred from the adult educational setting to the workplace, community or family context.'

This notion of the transfer of learning as something that can be transferred across settings and contexts implies that learning is a commodity that exists apart from people. Brookfield critiques the 'commoditisation of the complex process of learning' because he maintains that looking at its 'exchange value' (what it's worth in monetary terms) overshadows its 'use value' (how it

helps the adult to develop self confidence, to draw new meanings from life, and to be opened to new perspectives of the world).

A second critique of the concept of transfer of learning focuses on how it ignores the ways in which the learner's own personal attributes (her gender, class ,race, ideology)... and subjective experience frame how learning is understood and applied (English, 2005:628). The critique includes the failure of the concept to acknowledge the extent to which the learner's social, cultural and economic status in society influences her application of learning to fit a specific context and that it is impossible to transfer knowledge and skills just as it was taught in the first instance.(ibid:629)

Drawing on studies of situated cognition, dialectical thinking, reflective judgement, embedded logic, everyday cognition, post-formal thinking and practical reasoning Sinnott (1998 cited in English 2005) emphasises that modes of thought and analysis learned in formal education are **reframed** (my emphasis) and skewed by learners to fit the contexts through which they move. The critique further states that the logic that adults apply is a form of practical logic that springs from a deep understanding of the context of the situation. It involves being aware of very subtle cues whose importance only become apparent to those who have the benefit of a lengthy and mindful immersion in experience (English, 2005:628 -629).

My understanding of this is that learners combine logic and practicality, learnt through many different contexts and life experiences, with the new knowledge and skills learnt in formal education settings to suit the specific contexts in which they need to apply their learning.

This critique means that the study has to be mindful in its analysis of how the curriculum of the HCED was developed and taught in the university context and the extent to which it may have been reframed to fit the different contexts through which the women move.

A third critique of the discourse of the transfer of learning stresses the role played by oppressive social and political structures in preventing the transfer of knowledge and skills outside the classroom. This critique cites the example that 'in families, communities and

workplaces the adult who begins to question accepted values and practices can easily commit cultural suicide without being aware that it is happening' (Brookfield, 1995). For example if a woman learns about the negative effects of male domination in a classroom situation and tries to challenge patriarchal practices in a community where it is accepted as a norm she may find herself ostracized from that community.

The above theories that are located in a critical and emancipatory tradition emphasise that learning and its transferability is context-specific and so I next looked at Situated Learning theories that focus on learning through participation in different contexts.

Situated Learning theories.

The situated nature of learning, remembering and understanding is central to the theory on the transfer of learning (Hanks cited in Lave and Wenger 1996:11). The foregrounding of learning as a social practice makes it conceptually useful for this study because they pose the question: 'what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place?' It is not about acquiring a body of knowledge and skills and then transporting it uncritically and reapplying it later in a different context.

Lave and Wenger's situative perspective maintains that learning is rooted in the situation in which a person participates, not in the head of that person as intellectual concepts' (Fenwick, 2001: 34). This perspective stems from their efforts to pursue the argument of 'learning as a social collective, rather than individual, psychological phenomenon' (Lave, 1996:149)

According to the situative perspective of learning, the emphasis is on improving one's ability to participate meaningfully in different communities of practice (Fenwick, 2001:35).

Lave and Wenger's central concept in terms of looking at situated learning is that of 'legitimate peripheral participation' (LPP).

The concept of LPP is defined as the process of engagement through which a learner goes when she is exposed to a community of practice as a newcomer and not quite able to engage in the context as the rest of the members in that community of practice; instead, she participates to a

limited degree at a peripheral level but still with legitimacy as a newcomer in the community of practice. (Hanks, 1991).

Lave (1996) maintains that knowledge is created by the above-mentioned elements interacting with each other: 'knowing is entwined with doing'. The objective for the newcomer is to be fully integrated into the community of practice by learning about the norms and standards of practice in that community. For these Situated Learning theorists 'learning is a way of being in the social world, not a way of coming to know about it'.

Through their focus on learning as a social process rather than a cognitive process, Lave and Wenger look at what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place (Hanks, 1991:14). The main premise of their theory is that 'meaning, understanding and learning are all defined relative to contexts of action and not to self-contained structures' (ibid: 15). Learning happens in a 'participation framework' where different participants interact with each other and are learning through their interaction with each other and with the environment.

Implications for adult educators from the Situated Learning theorists' perspective.

Fenwick (2001) maintains that from the Situated Learning theory perspective, the educator's role is to assist learners to participate meaningfully in the communities of practice that they choose to enter. Fenwick (2001:37) suggests that in order to do this, educators must provide 'scaffolding' to assist the learner from self-directed learning to generalising their experience to transferring the skills acquired to different contexts.

Relevance of the Situated Learning theory perspective in the trade union context.

Cooper (2005) in her doctoral thesis analysed trade union education pedagogy from an Experiential and situated learning perspective and considered Lave and Wenger's foregrounding of learning rather than transmission/teaching, and their conception of *learning as social practice*; the latter is useful in analysing learning in the trade union context. Cooper

(2005:49) maintained that learning in the trade union context might be present in all sorts of activities, not only those recognized as 'training' or 'education' events.

In the background to her case study of informal learning in a trade union Cooper (2006) argues that 'the trade union movement...can be seen as one of the most significant adult learning institutions in South Africa, historically and currently'. Friedman (1987:499, cited by Cooper: 32) describes trade unions as 'laboratories for democracy', pointing to their role not only as sites of learning, but also as sites of knowledge production. She argues that trade unions offer many 'collective spaces for workers to share and compare experiences and develop new understandings'. (ibid: 32)

Cooper (2006) notes that situated learning theory captures the collective dimensions of learning and the close relationship between learning, identity construction and values all of which are important in the trade union context. She asserts 'that there are two significant features of the trade union's organizational culture which promote inclusion and participation, and thus possibilities for learning as social equals:

Firstly, the widely distributed nature of the [union] educator role and the part played by ordinary workers as educators. Ordinary workers share experiences and work collaboratively to construct common understandings. Cooper cites the 2002 SAMWU strike as a time in the union when the boundaries between educators and learners became diffused as workers assumed the role of the 'collective educator', using mass action to communicate several messages including their collective power to the world at large.

Secondly, Cooper draws on the Vygotskyian constructivist paradigm when she reflects on the role of culturally-embedded, symbolic tools of mediation in adult experiential learning. In her case study of pedagogy, learning and knowledge in a trade context she notes that a range of symbolic tools of mediation play a key role in facilitating learning, especially oral-performativity in the South African context. This means that oral communication dominates in union meetings

where workers display the trade union values of democracy by treating each other with equality and respect.

Another symbolic tool of mediation in the trade union context, that Cooper describes, is story-telling as an integral part of information-sharing and comparing of experiences in meetings. (Sitas, 1990 cited by Cooper: 41) argues that the different forms of oral-performativity signal a space for ordinary people to draw on familiar, historical, cultural resources to mediate knowledge and meaning and give voice to their experience and knowledge.

In her article on the trade union as a learning organization, Cooper (2006) concludes that she found the use of Situated Learning theory useful in viewing a range of 'everyday' activities within the trade union organizational context through a **learning lens** (my emphasis). Based on her case study "the trade union as a learning organization", which values collectivism and social solidarity, organically nurtures knowledge creation. However the weakness of Situated Learning theories to acknowledge power relations in society is also noted in her case study by the observation that 'there has been growing pressure for greater knowledge specialization to enable unionists to deal with a complex range of policy issues;; this has been accompanied by the increased foregrounding of those with specialized expertise, and pressure from union members for formally accredited courses '(Cooper, 2006:42).

The Situated Learning tools of analysis that Cooper applied to her study are also conceptually useful for this study to understand learning in the contemporary South African trade union context.

Through this study I hope to explore the collective learning experiences that the women may have had through their participation in the HCED programme that has helped them to make a contribution to strengthening their union.

Clarity of purpose and struggle with a vision.

Grossman (2006) in his essay on "Grounding dreams of hope across time and space" argues that hope is about a collective vision of power to challenge exploitation and struggle for

change. In this essay he suggests that a collective unifying vision is a source of hope for the working class across the world. The vision of something different to the capitalist system engenders a sense of empowerment to action, which I understand as the realization of agency. The struggle against the apartheid system was characterized by hope and collectivism which brought about change and made history. Grossman (2006: 4) argues that it is difficult, especially for working class women today, because:

they are forced to live fragmented lives, to mobilize in struggles which are fragmented, to participate in organizations which are fragmented. They are forced to live in a world that undermines their struggle for collectivism. Underlying all of this is a vision which is fragmented.

He argues that historically it was 'collective hope [that] made things possible, which would have been impossible without a vision which could fuel workers' courage and determination'. In the final analysis he notes that the hope came from a 'strong resistance' to the status quo (ibid: 6). Resistance is a source of hope. Amongst workers, during the struggle against apartheid the resistance was 'grounded in the everyday experience of organizing' in the workplace, on the streets, in communities, schools, places of worship everywhere organizing around a collective vision of a future without oppression and exploitation.

Grossman's point about clarity of purpose and a collective vision as driving forces behind strong action is relevant to the study for exploring the organisational and contextual factors that influenced the NEHAWU Women's Leadership Development programme and the women's experiences of action afterwards.

Hegemonic power relations replicated in trade unions.

In sociological terms agency refers to the link between a problem and a solution; i.e. agency is the power or ability to do something about a problem that will result in a solution to the problem. A radical Marxist view of power suggests that it includes influence on non decision-making, on the outcome of decision-making and shaping actual decisions. (Overview of

Marxism, <http://www.smirnov.demon.co.uk/socialism/overview/power.htm>). For the purposes of this study I will explore how women experience agency and power in society.

Although trade unions organize workers to struggle for social change, they are also representative of the unequal society in which they organize. The union's purpose as a learning organization is to empower workers to challenge hegemonic power in the capitalist workplace and beyond. But Cooper (2005:176) notes that in some instances union pedagogy in workshops and meetings replicates societal power relations in complex ways. The inequalities are reflective of racial, gendered and other differences. She notes that the pedagogic opportunities in union meetings are weakened as a result of the exclusionary practices that exclude some union members from sharing their knowledge for collective organization building.

Conclusions on Conceptual Framework.

The theoretical approaches to adult education that were explored in this chapter provide the conceptual tools that I drew on to analyse the women's experiences of attending the HCED course and applying their learning in the trade union and elsewhere.

The critical theory of transformative learning was conceptually useful for analysing the women's experiences of critical self-reflection and whether it equipped them for confident participation in the union and the workplace.

The theory on the transfer of learning as a social process and not a mechanistic process across contexts was useful for analysing the women's experiences of applying their learning, across different contexts.

The situated learning theoretical perspective provided the conceptual tools to analyse the factors that facilitated or hindered the application of learning.

Finally I drew on the sociological perspective of the relationship between structure and agency in adult education to explore the women's experiences from the centrality of the inevitable gender and power relations in trade union organization.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This case study sets out to document the experiences of trade union women who were adult learners on a university-based certificate programme, and based on those experiences, to investigate what factors facilitated or hindered their application of learning in order to build their union organization.

Reasons for using the case study approach.

The qualitative case study research approach allowed for in-depth investigation into the participants' experiences and into the contexts in which they might have applied their learning. Although a case study presents a research challenge because its findings cannot be generalised, its value lies in the in-depth analysis of a particular phenomenon and it can inform or enrich the theoretical understanding of that phenomenon.

The NEHAWU Women's Leadership Development Programme was significant because it was the first programme of its kind in South Africa to be offered only to women trade unionists on such a large scale and to be completely funded from union resources only. The NEHAWU Women's Leadership and Skill Development Programme that ran from 2006 to 2008 was a useful contemporary case study to look at instead of a historical case. The case study method as Yin (1994:9) suggests is advantageous when "a how or why question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control". This bears relevance to this study because I wanted to capture how the women experienced a university-based programme and why they were either able to apply the learning or not.

Data gathering process.

The main sources of data for this study were semi-structured interviews with course participants, a union official that was responsible for education, two university course co-ordinators and two course lecturers. I also gathered information about the Women's Leadership Development Programme from course materials, union documents and other course reference material that I obtained from the UWC.

Interviews.

The primary focus of the study was on the women's personal experiences of the HCED course and contextual factors that aided or hindered their application of learning. The interviews with the course co-ordinator and two lecturers covered their experience of designing and teaching the course to adult trade union women students. The interview with the union official who was responsible for the union's provincial education programme focused on his observations of whether the women were applying their learning to build union organization. The interviewing process is described below:

- Firstly, I held a brief open-ended interview with the HCED Course Co-ordinator, who was working at Fair Share and UWC at the inception of the NEHAWU project; to obtain background information on the course.
- Secondly, I conducted semi-structured interviews with six trade union women who completed the HCED course in 2008. I adapted the interview questions slightly after the first four interviews because the assignment questions that the women had to answer became much clearer after I read the course material of the Research Project Module. (See Appendix 2 a and 2b)
- Thirdly, I conducted a structured interview with the lecturer who taught the two Labour Practice Modules and the Research Project.
- Next, I conducted a structured interview with the lecturer of the Gender and Development Module and I also read through the course material and student evaluations of the module.

- I then conducted a semi-structured interview with the NEHAWU Gauteng Provincial Education Secretary.
- My next open-ended interview was with the director of the Social Law Project at the UWC; that director negotiated access for the NEHAWU women shop stewards to the university and partnered with Fair Share in the delivery of the HCED course for NEHAWU.
- Finally I conducted a structured telephonic interview with the course co-ordinator, who was also responsible for the Workplace Learning Module. She described the Workplace Learning Module as the 'glue' that held all nine modules together.
- All the interviews were between one and three hours long.
(See Appendix 1 for a full schedule of interviews)

I attempted to secure interviews with two other union officials, who were directly involved in the conceptualization of the Women's Leadership Development Programme and who liaised with the university. Those attempts did not succeed and it seemed to me that they were deliberately avoiding being interviewed.

Sampling.

The main objective of this study was to record and analyse the women's experiences of attending the HCED course and the factors in the union, the workplace and the community that enabled or hindered them from applying what they had learnt, to build their union organization.

The interviewees were selected from among 238 shop stewards who successfully completed the course at the end of 2008. All the interviewees were selected from Gauteng Province to facilitate in-depth face-to-face interviews because I was also based in Gauteng. I had hoped to interview a range of shop stewards according to their years of experience in the union; thus, ranging from shop stewards who were newly elected just before they attended the university programme, to those who had more years of experience. I wanted to analyse whether their years of experience in the trade union influenced their experience of applying their learning

after the course. However I could not obtain this level of detailed information from the union when I was contacting the course participants to arrange interviews.

I was only able to secure interviews with six of the Gauteng- based participants who completed the course. They were selected to represent shop stewards based in public and private institutions. Those interviewees represented the education and health sectors organized by the union. They also represented a range of workers in terms of occupational categories in their workplaces as shown in the table below.

On the subject of their experience as shop stewards, their experience ranged from a shop steward who was elected in 1987 to another who was elected in 2006. One of the participants was a shop steward until 2009 but she was not re-elected; although she is still a union member but she's not actively involved in the union.

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Interviewee (Pseudonyms)	Union Position	Years of union experience	Job
Hazel	Branch Secretary	24 years 1987 - 2011	Cleaner(Health Sector)
Mabel	Shop steward	13 years 1998 - 2011	Administration Clerk (Health Sector)
Margaret	Part –time Branch Secretary & Regional Office Bearer	5 years 2006 – 2011	Human Resources Clerk (Health Sector)
Nelisiwe	Regional Gender Co-ordinator	7 years 2005 -2011	Central Surgical Sterilisation Department Assistant(Health Sector)
Thandi	Shop steward/Branch Secretary/ Regional Gender Co-ordinator	12 years 2000 – 2011	Nurse(Health Sector)
Eunice	Member	13 years 1998 – 2011	Faculty Officer- Student Administration (Education Sector)

All participant interviews were structured around the following core questions but I also posed nuanced questions in each interview, depending on issues raised or emphasised by the participants. The main interview questions were about:

- the women's understanding of why the union selected them and not anyone else in the union to attend the course: to test their understanding of selection criteria that the union may have applied to participant selection(this was the first Why question).
- their personal goals and objectives for agreeing to attend the course once they knew that they had been selected from their region in terms of union demarcation.
- the key lessons that they learnt on the course and about their role as women in society.
- their understanding of 'plough back' or what they were expected to do after the course.
- their experience of what helped or hindered them to 'plough back' after the course to make a contribution towards building the union.

(See Appendix 2 (a) and 2(b) for a full list of interview questions)

Interview with a trade union official.

I planned to interview a number of key trade union officials who were responsible for the conceptualization of the Women's Leadership Development Programme to discover, how the participants were selected, what was the union's objective for this programme and to what extent were the shop stewards able to apply their learning to build union organization. However I was only able to secure one interview. I believe that there was a deliberate avoidance of several attempts that I made to interview union officials, who were directly responsible for the programme, but the reason for the avoidance was unclear to me.

I conducted a two hour interview with the Gauteng Provincial Education Secretary who was the provincial educator in 2006 – 2008 when the shop stewards were attending the HCED course. He was not an educator at the inception of the programme and therefore had no information about how the shop stewards were selected to attend the HCED course. He was however able to reflect on how the union perceived the participants' experience during the course and the

potential for applying their learning after the course. (See Appendix 3 for a full list of interview questions).

Interviews with the Fair Share Programme Manager and the Social Law Project Director.

Three interviews of approximately two hours each were conducted with the overall course co-ordinator from Fair Share School of Government at the UWC. She was responsible for the overall co-ordination of the programme on behalf of Fair Share and she was also responsible for the design, delivery and assessment of the Workplace Learning Module. Although she resigned from Fair Share midway through the programme she continued co-ordinating the Workplace Learning Module until the first group of students graduated in 2009. The interviews were focused on obtaining background information on the conceptualization of the NEHAWU Women's Leadership Development Programme from the university's perspective and on her experience of running the Workplace Learning Module. She drew on her institutional memory of the HCED course and subsequent research that she did for Fair Share on the experience of the NEHAWU project.

An interview was also conducted with the director of the Social Law Project (SLP) which together with Fair Share was jointly responsible for the delivery of the HCED course. The interview focused mainly on the background of the collaboration between the UWC and NEHAWU. The interview focused on why the union approached the SLP when they decided that their Women's Leadership Development programme should include a university accredited part and what this type of partnership with the trade union meant for the university. (See Appendix 6 for the list of interview questions)

Interviews with course lecturers.

Interviews with lecturers were conducted to gather information on how some of the modules were taught to the women trade unionists and how their learning was assessed.

Two course lecturers, besides the co-ordinator, were interviewed based on their availability and the prominent reference by the participants to the modules that they facilitated in the HCED

course. The first module was Gender and Development and the other module that the participants mentioned as the most relevant to them was the Labour Practice modules A and B. For the purpose of this study I looked at the content and teaching of the Gender and Development Module, the Labour Practice Module, the Workplace Learning Module and background of the overall course. (See Appendix 7 for a full list of interview questions)

Documentary review.

Several documents about the course were reviewed as part of the research. (See Appendix 8 for a full list of documents that were reviewed) They included the following:

- A report on the success of the Women's Leadership Development Programme that the union's education department submitted to a national union meeting in December 2010 (NEHAWU 2010).
- The Workplace Learning Module's learning material and support material for students that was designed to guide them through the process of applying what they had learnt and to record their learning reflections for assessment (UWC, 2006).
- The Gender and Development Module course material, facilitator's report and participants' evaluation comments (UWC, 2006).
- The Labour Practice Module course material (Social Law Project, 2006).
- A Report of the first Block of the course that was prepared for NEHAWU by the course co-ordinator (Fair Share 2006).
- A proposal outlining what the union wanted to have included in the NEHAWU Women's Leadership and Skill Development Programme that was submitted to the Social Law Project⁴; it was on the basis of the proposal that the union negotiated access for the women unionists to a university accredited programme(NEHAWU 2006)

⁴ The Social Law Project director referred to the document as the union's blue-print.

Data Analysis.

The questions listed below formed the basis on which interviews were conducted and the broad themes around which the responses were analysed.

Data was grouped in terms of responses to the following questions:

1. The women's understanding of what selection criteria were used to identify who should attend the HCED course.
2. Their personal goals for agreeing to attend the course.
3. The relationship between what they were learning on the course and their role firstly as shop stewards and secondly as women in society.
4. Their understanding of what plough back means and whether in their opinion they were able to do it in the union, the workplace or elsewhere.

Then I compared trends, similarities and differences:

I analysed the participants' responses in terms of emerging trends, similarities and differences and then I analysed the rest of the interviews to build a contextual picture in which the women's experiences of the programme was located. The analysis included the course lecturers' experiences of teaching the course to a group of trade union women as adult learners and the unintended positive outcomes of that experience.

Next I related the findings back to the theory:

I drew on the theory and practice of adult education as discussed within the critical consciousness framework of emancipatory and transformative learning. I analysed how it related to the women's experiences. Then I looked at the transfer of learning from the Situated Learning theories perspective: What helped the women to apply what they had learnt? What hindered them from applying what they had learnt?

Finally I tried to formulate a holistic picture of 'what was going on' in this case study.

Here, I looked at what picture of 'plough back' the women's real experiences were presenting and the factors in the union and elsewhere that affected their experiences.

Data Presentation.

The analysis is presented in three parts. The following chapter first presents a narrative account of the women's experiences starting from when they were informed that they were selected to attend the HCED course, continuing through the process of learning when they attended the course and then describing their experience of trying to apply what they had learnt after the course when they returned to their everyday contexts as unionists, women workers and members of their respective communities. The women's personal stories give a rich account of their experiences of the learning process and life back in the workplace, union and community afterwards. Therefore I included their voices as the first part of the analysis. Their anonymity has been ensured through the use of pseudonyms. However because their union roles were important to take into account in the analysis their actual union positions are mentioned.

In the second part of the data presentation, I attempted to draw out commonalities from their experiences and to highlight significant differences where they were evident. The third part of the chapter focused on what factors encouraged or hindered their application of learning.

In the final chapter, I draw out broad conclusions of the case study and relate these back to the literature and theory and to the women's experiences.

Validity.

Yin (1994:91-92) suggests that the use of multiple sources of evidence aimed at 'corroborating the same fact or phenomenon' renders the case study as a research strategy more reliable than other strategies.

Triangulation in this study was achieved: firstly, by drawing on the participants' experiences of the course such as the key lessons learnt and the contextual opportunities to apply the learning; secondly I compared the participants' experiences to the lecturers perspectives of what participants were taught and how it was assessed and thirdly, I sought the union official's

opinion on the course objectives and his observation of the participants' application of their learning.

To ensure the validity of this interpretive case study and its integrity I have made a concerted effort to remain unbiased as a trade union educator and a NEHAWU union member when I conducted the research. I did however declare my union membership at the beginning of every interview. Although I have tried to maintain complete objectivity throughout the research process, there is no doubt that my interpretation of the data is influenced by my context as a trade unionist and my beliefs about the radical objectives of worker education to build the working class struggle for social, economic and environmental justice.

I clarified at the beginning of all participant interviews that the purpose of the study was for academic research, which was independent from the university [UWC] and the union (NEHAWU) and that the purpose of my research was not evaluative in any respect. Due to the small sample of only six course participants interviewed for this study, the conclusions cannot be generalised to other participants on the course. Therefore there is a need for further research of the NEHAWU Women Leadership Development Programme that could be generalised. I hope that the findings of this case study may generate further research interests.

Ethics.

All the participants in the study gave written consent to be interviewed, recorded and quoted for this study (See Appendix 9 Informed consent form). These I submitted along with my proposal for ethical clearance from the university.

A copy of the dissertation will be sent to the participants for their comments. Copies will also be made available to Fair Share, Social Law Project and the NEHAWU National Education Department for their records and hopefully the union will discuss the findings as an educational resource.

Chapter 4

Findings of the Study

This chapter discusses the NEHAWU shop stewards' experiences as trade union women who were adult learners on the Higher Certificate in Economic Development course. It addresses two key questions:

Firstly did the women manage to apply their learning? And

Secondly, what factors in the union, the workplace and elsewhere encouraged or hindered the application of their learning?

To address these two key questions this chapter is structured into three main parts:

Part One – presents vignettes of the six women workers and their experiences of what they learnt on the HCED course and how they applied what they learnt.

Part Two – addresses the question about whether in the experiences of these women, they were able to apply their learning in their union, their workplaces and in other contexts.

Part Three – focuses on what factors encouraged or hindered their application of learning.

Part One:

The Learning Experience - Vignettes of the women shop stewards' experiences of the HCED course.

These are the stories of the six women shop stewards who agreed to share their experiences of participating in the three-year HCED program. They reflected on their experience of being students from their perspective as women workers, trade unionists and political activists. Each story reflects mainly on the women's experiences of:

- Understanding the union's objectives for enrolling them specifically, from among many other shop stewards, on the HCED course.

- Personal goals and reasons for agreeing to attend the course.
- ploughing back or applying what they learnt in different contexts, especially in the trade union to build the organization and
- What facilitated or hindered their application of learning.

Pseudonyms are used to protect the women's identity but their actual trade union positions are acknowledged in recognition of this case as a special NEHAWU project.

Hazel - the Branch Secretary's Experience.

Hazel is a full time shop steward (FTSS), employed at Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital as a cleaner. As a FTSS she is paid by the employer although she only attends to union matters at the institution; these include attending union and management meetings and representing union members to management. Hazel started working at the institution in 1982 and was one of the union's founding members in 1987, when she was also elected as chairperson of the shop stewards' committee. She has been a FTSS since 2004.

The usual bustle of a public hospital formed the backdrop to Hazel's work and life at the hospital where she had not cleaned for the past six years because she was a FTSS but she still took a keen interest in the cleaning as she reflected on how difficult it was to obtain the correct cleaning material from the Public Health Department to maintain the newly renovated hospital.

Hazel's understanding of the union's objective for enrolling her on the HCED course.

Hazel thought that the union had realized the need to develop women leaders because "at least 90% of union members are women". She believed that she was selected to attend the course because she was already actively participating in the women's structures of the union. According to Hazel the union also wanted to build negotiation skills amongst shop stewards especially in the institutions where there was a resistance from management to implement new [labour] laws. She felt that building women's leadership in the union meant that women

could hold strategic decision-making positions in the union structures; for example, chairperson or deputy chairperson.

Hazel's personal goals and reasons for attending the HCED course:

She was especially proud of the opportunity to attend university. "We made history with this course at the university because they [lecturers] asked what we want there because we know everything: we said that we want (competence) certificates, not certificates of attendance only"⁵.

Hazel did not meet the university's admission requirements of grade 12 so she had to go through the process of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). This was her chance to prove that she could be successful at university.

Application of learning at a personal level:

The greatest lesson that she had learnt was that she was able to cope with studying at university, an experience that she credited to the RPL process and the support and guidance that all the RPL students received to prepare them for the HCED course. Hazel confidently reflected that: "I always knew my rights as a unionist even here at work but I felt less qualified [educationally] but now I am so bold!" Obtaining a formal qualification was affirming at a personal level as she said that "even in my community those who are qualified always look down on you if you don't have matric". This expression suggests that it was important for her to have her informal union experience validated through a formal qualification because it built her self esteem.

⁵ This statement implies that the women wanted a formal accredited qualification as opposed to the non-accredited trade union courses that they attended previously where they received certificates of attendance not certificates of competence.

Application of learning in the workplace:

Hazel described an instance where she used her position and influence as a shop steward on the management of the hospital, to apply what she had learnt on the HCED course. It was during the second year of the course when she applied what she had learnt about planning and budgeting to address problems in the hospital's laundry department. The hospital's CEO appointed her to the change task team in the laundry.

She used this platform to negotiate the implementation of occupational health and safety laws in the workplace, drawing on what she learnt about good negotiation skills. She was more aware of negotiating to reach consensus rather than a confrontational approach without proposing alternatives. This was a positive experience for her because it earned her respect from the management and helped her to promote worker rights in the workplace.

“Management was using me to push the unions to do the right thing, and I've done it. I made sure that things were done in agreed time frames. Most workers were getting sick in the laundry so we had to develop a wellness plan for that department and I started [organized] the health and safety committee in the laundry. If you don't use the law you will be selling out the workers”. (FTSS Int.1)

Application of learning in the union:

The union had told the women that they were planning to set up Regional Legal Departments to decentralize the handling of members' disciplinary cases and that the women would be part of the Regional Paralegal Teams to implement what they had learnt on the HCED course. At the time of the interviews, more than a year after the course, Hazel had only attended the first planning meeting and nothing happened since then. She had learnt from the Labour Practice modules that unions often lose cases because of a lack of planning and not adhering to the court's timeframes so she was concerned that they were delaying the process of setting up the paralegal teams to co-ordinate disciplinary cases.

She was very articulate about the union's observation that the organization was spending resources on members' cases that were referred to the CCMA or to the Labour Court and that most of these cases were not even won by the union. Hazel noted that the union planned to

save costs that were incurred for legal fees, and rather invested the union's money in sending the shop stewards to university so that they could implement what they had learnt on the course, in the union.

This union Branch secretary stated confidently "combining my experience as a shop steward with what I have learnt on the course I have no fear!" A statement that I found puzzling in relation to the very next point that she made about the skills that she learnt on the course:

- The most important skill is planning – to plan ahead.
- The importance of mandate seeking and decision-making.
- Reporting back to the people you are representing.

I found it puzzling because I assumed that someone with over twenty years experience as a unionist would be familiar with the main union principle of seeking membership mandates and the principle of accountability to union members. In my experience of democratic practice in the South African trade union movement, mandates and collective decision-making are the cornerstones of accountability. And yet she was only learning the importance of the latter two points on a course after twenty years as a trade unionist.

Hazel's final observation was that there were tensions between women and men in the union's paralegal department because the men were not happy that only women shop stewards were able to attend the HCED course. These underlying tensions led to delays in giving women a chance to implement what they had learnt on the HCED course to bring about change in the union.

Hazel drew on her twenty-three years of experience at the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital and her active participation in the union since its inception, as she reflected on why the union had decided to embark on the Women's Leadership Development Programme in 2006. She also expressed disappointment at the union's inability to follow through on its objective of empowering the women to implement what they had learnt on the HCED course in the union.

Protecting the union's reputation at the institution was very important to Hazel in her capacity as a full time shop steward.

Mable - shop steward in a Community Health Centre.

The second interview was held at a Community Health Centre in Tladi, Soweto, with Mable who is an administration clerk at the Centre. She was elected as a shop steward in 1998, while working at the bigger Zola clinic and when she transferred to the Tladi Community Health Centre in 2010 she still retained the shop steward position. Mable also still reports to the union structures at the Zola clinic which is a bigger clinic in the regional cluster of Community Health Centres, where union members' problems from the different institutions are referred to the regional level. She was nominated by the Branch chairperson with three other shop stewards from the region to attend the HCED course.

Her understanding of the union's objective for enrolling her on the HCED course was to "rebuild the union", which she explained as increasing union membership numbers. Mable left school in Standard 8(now Grade 10) so she considered this as an opportunity to continue her formal education. Similar to Hazel, Mable spoke very enthusiastically about her experience on the RPL course:

They were so helpful in [getting] us to understand what we were learning. It was four difficult years⁶ being mixed with people who know everything⁷ and we had to pull ourselves up there. After the RPL, even the [HCED] course was not difficult. (SS Int. 2)

In preparing the women for their prospective roles and responsibilities as mature university students, they were oriented to support systems and resources on campus such as the writing centre and the library.

⁶ Three years of the course preceded by a year of going through RPL.

⁷ Referring to the shop stewards who were qualified nurses and university graduates

Mable's personal goals and reasons for attending the HCED course:

The introduction to the library as an information resource was very useful to Mable because she had not visited a library before.

I never knew how to use a library but through the RPL course I learnt the benefits of many learning resources, Thanks to the RPL. I learnt that nothing is impossible and that I have the ability to communicate calmly with everyone, even the matron [at the clinic]. I learnt the value of perseverance..., it has motivated me. As a woman I can do anything.(SS Int.2).

Mable also placed herself under pressure to do well on the course because she had not studied for a long time. She described her lounge table as a hive of activity for the four years that she was on the course. She kept all her books there to refer to them and to write down ideas as they occurred to her, while she was attending to domestic chores.

Application of learning at a personal level:

Mable described her experience of applying what she learnt in the following way:

The communication skills are applicable everywhere. At first I was shy to speak in front of union members in a big meeting but now even the matron approaches me for advice. They do not know everything, so they ask me for advice as a shop steward. **Nowadays we sit down and address issues politely.** (my emphasis and observation of how the shop stewards were taught about a different model of negotiation with management, moving away from confrontational negotiations and meetings to a consensus-seeking model) In most union meetings that I attend I do not really have a chance to speak because it happens that the same (5) people will always talk in the union meeting while the rest just listen. But I use my skills in the church to rectify all our difficulties; they have elected me as a secretary in my church group (SS Int.2).

Application of learning in the workplace:

Unlike Hazel, Mable's experience of management at the institution was a negative experience.

Management does not give us time to share with others what we have learnt. So you tend to forget everything. Since I've been here [at Tladi clinic] there has never been a union meeting. We hold general meetings at Zola where every branch will report on its problems.

Mable felt that she was not able to apply her learning in the workplace because the management would not give her the chance to discuss with her colleagues what she had learnt on the course. In her experience it was not always easy to do research for the course assignments in the workplace because the management would become suspicious whenever she asked questions about workplace systems and procedures.

Application of learning in the union:

Mable believed that union members now have more confidence in her. She also felt more confident in running the union branch on her own because union members showed her more respect as a shop steward. She was able to encourage people to talk about their problems and she felt more assertive as a woman believing that women could do anything. She was still disappointed about her own lack of participation in union meetings but cited as the reason that only a few people seemed to dominate and speak in union meetings. Mable and the other shop stewards who also attended the HCED course had approached the provincial educator to arrange for them to talk to some of the union members about the course. During the first year of the course while she was still at Zola clinic they had regular union meetings. She reflected that at an individual level she was able to share with union members and colleagues what she had learnt at university. Also, she had noticed that union members' attitudes had changed from being constantly aggressive towards management to [being more prepared] to discuss issues.

Mable described plough back thus: "to give back and share my experience of the university with others". She embraced what she learnt about communication and she was able to apply it at work and in her church. The experience of union meetings being dominated by a few speakers prevented her from making a contribution at union meetings and therefore she requested the provincial educator to set up a platform for her and other shop stewards to share what they had learnt with other union members. Moving from a bigger workplace where the union

seemed to be more active, to a smaller institution, also hampered her ability to apply her learning in the way that she had hoped to do.

Margaret: part –time secretary of the shop steward’s committee at a Provincial hospital and Regional Treasurer.

Margaret is a human resources clerk at the Sebokeng provincial hospital in the Vaal region of Gauteng province. The interview was held in her office at the nurse’s home of the Sebokeng Hospital. She was serving in her third term as part-time Branch secretary and in the seventh year as a shop steward. At the same time that the HCED course began in 2006 she was elected as Regional treasurer. In terms of the recognition agreement between the union and the employer, those union members elected to regional office bearer positions in the union are allowed to be released from work on a fulltime basis to fulfil their union responsibilities. Margaret should therefore have been released from the hospital to meet her obligations as a regional office bearer of the union. However, the Department of Health would not release her due to job requirements at the institution. This situation frustrated Margaret because she felt that she would be more influential in regional decision-making if she could be in the Regional office every day.

Margaret’s understanding of why the union enrolled her on the HCED course:

In Margaret’s opinion the union wanted to empower women who were actively participating in the union to be nominated to strategic union decision-making positions⁸. She was nominated as one of five shop stewards from the Sedibeng region to attend the course.

Her personal goals and reasons for agreeing to attend the course.

Margaret wanted to empower herself, to obtain a certificate and to gain knowledge that would be useful in the workplace and the union. She was not sure what to expect from the HCED course but she was glad to obtain a University Certificate. Margaret’s highest qualification

⁸ Strategic positions in her opinion are that of Branch or Regional secretary or chairperson and being able to deal with day-to- day union work.

before the HCED was a Technikon Diploma in Public Management. She noted that some of the other shop stewards who already had Diplomas or Degrees refused to attend the HCED programme. For her it was different because although she already had a Diploma, she obtained it through distance learning, so the HCED experience would be her first time attending university. She was excited to be on the university's campus and to interact with the academic staff.

Application of learning at a personal level:

Margaret's experience of attending the course was that it was tough being a worker and studying at the same time. The women found it difficult to meet assignment deadlines but in Margaret's experience the university was very accommodating and would grant extensions when deadlines were not met. She noted that they also got help from the union during provincial workshops arranged by the union, where those who were more experienced could explain the things that the others did not understand.

Application of learning in the union:

Margaret noted that there were no specific union-related assignments on the course. But she drew on her union experience when she had to do assignments for the Labour Practice Module. She approached the assignment case studies on disputes from a trade union perspective.

Margaret explained that she sometimes represents union members in disciplinary cases at the workplace and she also 'guides' new shop stewards on how to handle disciplinary cases. She also applied what she learnt from doing course assignments to dealing with actual disciplinary cases. She found the provincial tutorials and the assignment reviewing with the tutors very useful.

She gave an example of an instance where workers wanted to go on strike and the shop stewards advised them of the correct procedure to follow. The shop stewards drew on the content of the Labour Practice Module and consulted the lecturer for advice, because they did not know exactly what to do and they did not want the union [officials] to discover their lack of

knowledge. An interesting point is that the women felt safer seeking advice from the lecturer than from the union officials.

Margaret noted that the training she received from the union before the HCED course on how to handle disciplinary cases was too basic.

We were just given basic training but not in-depth training on how to deal with workers' cases. I discovered that as a shop steward I did not know how the union functions and what protocol to follow inside the union. The Labour Practice and Organizational Development Modules of the university course dealt mostly with union matters (Part-time Branch secretary, Int. 3).

Lessons learnt about women's role in society:

Margaret felt that she learnt a lot, especially from the Gender and Development Module.

We used to be undermined by men but I learnt that I can stand up and say whatever I think is correct. I learnt that a woman is also somebody, now I can argue my points in the union but it is not always easily accepted by the men. The men said that the course had taught us to disrespect them. Being alone back in the branch, it is difficult to implement what you have learnt because people know that you always used to be quiet and now you speak up. So we gradually explained that we were only trying to help the union, [we should] decide things together and also make decisions affecting women directly. The majority members in the union are women so they look up to us as role models, more people (women and men) now come to me for advice. This makes me feel proud because I know that I am still learning as union members ask me for advice. (Part-time Branch secretary, Int. 3)

Lessons learnt about Economics and Development

Margaret learnt about women's development in the rural areas on the Development Economics module but she soon realized that it would not be easy just to implement or apply what she had learnt. Margaret reflected that despite having the knowledge, the participants were not sure about how to approach development, especially in the informal settlements. However she felt that the NEHAWU Vaal Region could facilitate interventions with the ANC (as COSATU's political alliance partner).

Margaret's experience of implementing the lessons that she learnt on the course:

She felt that it was difficult to implement anything in the union, unless she raised issues in union meetings. Margaret felt that the weekly regional Office Bearers' meetings did not address education issues at all, and that she would probably be able to correct this practice if she was in the regional office on a full time basis.

However her experience of union leadership meetings was that sometimes 'they take what you say and other times they just put it aside.' She felt that the union does not 'trust the women' to be part of the paralegal teams that were supposed to be set up after the HCED course. The women were told that after the course they would be part of Regional Paralegal teams and if they performed well they would go to provincial level and eventually to national level. Since attending the HCED course she had not been consulted on a single case at regional level. But at the branch, union members consulted her for advice more than before the course. Margaret felt that there were fewer complaints from union members because she had explained the workplace policies and procedures to them. Margaret also felt that more union members trusted her to represent them in disciplinary hearings. Therefore, application was easier at the union branch level. But Margaret felt that she wanted to apply what she had learnt on the course at a regional level in the union.

Margaret's understanding of what plough back means:

She understood plough back to mean taking the knowledge that she gained from the university back to the people to help them. She noted that all the participants were not equally active in their workplaces and branches⁹ after the course. Margaret believed that the problem of not sharing the knowledge equally across the region could be addressed through having joint branch workshops in the region. The regional and the provincial union structures said that the women from the university must do something to educate other union members but nothing

⁹ Referring to the level of activism or involvement in union matters by participants after the course.

was done. She believed that she was empowering the members at her branch, but she was concerned about the other branches too.

That is why I feel regional workshops should be organized for them. The five of us, shop stewards from the Sedibeng region, who were all course participants, do phone each other just to talk about how things are going in our respective branches and to ask each other for advice on our problems. I see this as a contribution to the union and it is valued by the members. But members see this really as me, the human resources clerk helping them in the workplace and not necessarily as their union shop steward. They do not see NEHAWU representing or helping them. That is why regional activities are important because then it happens under the NEHAWU banner. But here in my branch they say NEHAWU is powerful because of me. (Part-time branch secretary, Int. 3)

Reflections of what facilitated or hindered the application of learning:

Although Margaret felt empowered by her experience on the Gender and Development Module, when she returned to the union after the course she was confronted by the challenge of gender dynamics and power relations between women and men again. She persevered to some extent and was able to convince her male comrades that women also have a voice in the union, especially on issues that affect them directly. However, she was not convinced that she was applying her learning because she was not doing it in a meeting or workshop setting, although she was mentoring new shop stewards and representing union members in the workplace.

Nelisiwe –the first Regional Gender Co-ordinator’s experience.

I interviewed Nelisiwe at the NEHAWU Regional Office, in Krugersdorp. She was the only participant who preferred to be interviewed at the union office instead of at her workplace. Nelisiwe has worked at a private hospital as an assistant in the Central Steam Sterilisation Department (CSSD) since 2009. She has been a union member since 1998 and was elected as a shop steward in 2004 and Regional gender co-ordinator in 2007 while she was employed at a different hospital. Just like Mable she retained her shop steward’s position when she moved to

the new workplace. Her term of office, as a shop steward, ended a month before the interview in May 2010 but she was still serving the union as Regional gender co-ordinator¹⁰.

Nelisiwe's understanding of the union's objectives for enrolling her on the HCED course;

She was nominated in a meeting to represent the region, by the regional chairperson. The union wanted "to empower us as women." She also understood that the union's regional and provincial leadership expected the participants from the HCED course to 'plough back to the workers'.

Nelisiwe's personal goals and reasons for attending the HCED course:

She was actually interested in being a Labour Relations Officer but she was advised at work, first to study nursing and then to pursue a career in Labour Relations. Therefore, the HCED course was a stepping stone towards her ultimate goal of being a Labour Relations Officer.

Application of learning in the community:

Nelisiwe explained that she was struggling to teach others because they were not responding to her efforts and the advice that she tried to share with her colleagues and with women in her community. She had given the Gender (and Development) module to a colleague to read so that she could read about the issues that applied to her personal situation.

By doing this, Nelisiwe believed that she was sharing what she had learnt about gender, in her workplace and her community. But her experience has been that women who experience abuse are stigmatized by it and were not keen to discuss it or to report even serious cases of abuse. So as much as she was able to inform other women about their rights ,especially with

¹⁰ According to the union's constitution 'the members of the union in each workplace must elect, by ballot and from among themselves, shop stewards who hold office for three years'.(NEHAWU Constitution Chapter 4 and Chapter 20). The union constitution also states that any shop steward, or any member holding any position in the union, shall no longer hold that position if they are no longer employed in the workplace which elected them. However, both Nelisiwe and Mable retained their positions as shop stewards when they moved to different institutions and were not re-elected there as shop stewards. This struck me as a weakness in the coordination of the union's workplace leadership.

regard to gender based violence there were social circumstances beyond her control which prevented the women that she was 'teaching' from taking further action despite knowing their rights.

Application of learning in the workplace:

Nelisiwe found the Labour Practice Modules most useful in the workplace especially the Code of Good Practice on Sexual Harassment included in the Labour Relations Act. She realized that the Employment Equity Act is only partly implemented in her workplace. She had asked to see the Employment Equity Plan, the production of which a statutory requirement is and whose aim is to make all workplaces more representative of the demographics of South African society in terms of race, gender and people with disabilities. She realized that in spite of Labour Laws to regulate good employment practice the laws were not always implemented by employers.

Application of learning in the union:

In the last module of the course she learnt about how to represent workers at branch level although it was not very different from what she learnt on the union's shop stewards' induction course. She explained that she never had a chance actually to represent a union member in a disciplinary hearing because there were no cases at her previous workplace and at her current workplace she did not know all the union members.

Nelisiwe felt that she was not able to do anything for union members at work because the management was very restrictive and she did not know all the union members yet. She felt that she had wasted her time on the [HCED] course because she could not share anything with other workers. Her experience as a shop steward in her previous workplace seems to have been different from the current workplace. " ... but in Hospital X it was different, the union was vibrant, we held regular meetings and we did not have to go to the Human Resources Manager to get permission to have a union meeting." Although there was a more vibrant sense of union organization at the previous workplace, she was unable to make a link between the HCED course and her experience as a shop steward.

Nelisiwe felt that she did not have time for anything because she worked shifts and had a baby to take care of. She was however keen to remain serving the union as a shop steward because she felt that she 'went to the university with members' subscriptions but was not giving anything back to them.'¹¹

In response to the question about the meaning of plough back, she said that it is "to give back to the workers what I have learnt but like I said before nothing has happened."

She has never held a meeting or facilitated any training as a Regional gender co-ordinator either. She indicated that the Regional Secretary had once suggested that they should visit the different workplaces in the region to explain the meaning of gender to union members but it never happened.

Despite Nelisiwe's general sense of despondence she felt that she had gained something from the HCED course especially from the Gender and Development Module. At a personal level she had negotiated with her male partner to share domestic chores because she was working shifts.

At the end of the interview Nelisiwe wanted to give this message to NEHAWU:

The union must ensure that we are ploughing back. They must come back to us, use us. I am going to go back to my files now because this interview has been an eye-opener. The union must help us to find different ways to plough back, because there were those who went on the course who were newly elected shop stewards and I wonder how are they doing now are they the same as me? (Regional gender co-ordinator, Int.4).

At the beginning of the interview Nelisiwe spoke in very broad and general terms about the HCED course, which created the impression that she may not have completed the course. As the questions were more specifically directed at what lessons she had learnt from the course, she felt exposed that she had not really learnt or used anything from the course. She suggested that I should rather interview the Regional Secretary because she "is good".

¹¹ Nelisiwe was referring to the union expenses for the HCED course that were paid from membership subscriptions

This was the first interviewee that gave the impression that she had not really engaged with the HCED course, although the university records indicate that she successfully completed the course.

Thandi – the second Regional Gender Co-ordinator’s experience

Thandi is also a Regional gender co-ordinator from another region. We met at the coffee shop of the private hospital in the inner city of Johannesburg where she has been a nurse in the psychiatric ward for the past five years. Thandi has worked at the hospital since February 1997 and her highest qualification is a Diploma in assistant nursing. She was elected as a shop steward in 1999 and as a Branch secretary a year later in 2000. Thandi became the Regional gender co-ordinator in November 2009. She was very proud of obtaining the HCED certificate.

Thandi’s understanding of the union’s objectives for enrolling her on the HCED course:

Thandi was the union’s provincial co-ordinator for private clinics at the time and explained that she was actively participating in union activities. She was therefore nominated by the provincial office to attend the course.

Thandi’s personal goals and reasons for agreeing to attend the HCED course:

She agreed to attend the course because she saw from personal experience that women in the community were facing many challenges as single parents. She also wanted to ‘upgrade’ herself to get a better job where she could earn a better salary. She wanted to do Labour Law and research and maybe even facilitate educational workshops in the community.

Thandi then articulated her views, from a party political perspective as chairperson of the ANC Women’s League in her municipal ward, about community challenges and how they could be addressed. Thandi found it easier to make changes in the workplace than in the community because in the workplace it was easier to negotiate with the Human Resources Department to change workplace policy.

Application of the learning in the community and at a personal level:

She noted that she learnt many lessons on the HCED course, especially about the importance of doing research, which was what she had done in her community. This is evident from the type of community projects that she was involved with.

She found the Gender and Development Module challenging because it dealt with issues that were affecting women personally. Thandi reflected on how her experience of doing the assignment of the Gender and Development Module helped her to deal with a family issue that had been troubling her family since her childhood¹².

The experience of looking at issues affecting her at home and then to write it all down was evidently a very emotional experience for Thandi. She said “it was a good assignment because I just wrote down my personal experiences. The Gender course opened my eyes and my mind.” Her learning from the Gender and Development Module gave her the courage to confront many other personal issues from a gender perspective.

Application of learning in the union:

Thandi felt that she did not really learn anything about the union except that as a shop steward she was not following the correct procedures in the workplace. “I learnt the importance of following the correct policy, procedure and laws in the workplace.”

She reflected on how the lecturer for the Labour Practice Modules taught them that shop stewards in the workplace were a ‘threat’ to management because shop stewards knew about following correct procedures. Thandi indicated that although she appreciated her responsibilities as a shop steward ‘it was not always easy being a shop steward’ because when members are advised against something, they perceive it as the shop steward colluding with management. Thandi reflected on a key lesson that she learnt about not creating false

¹² Based on my reading of the course material of the first Module after the interview, I assumed that she was referring to the assignment “Breaking a gender norm”. Participants had to break a norm associated with their gender role and had to evaluate the impact of this on themselves and others.

expectations amongst members in dealing with disciplinary cases, because it may cost the shop steward her credibility amongst members.

She felt that winning disciplinary cases builds confidence [among workers] in the union. Her own confidence had been developed by learning about the correct procedures to follow when dealing with cases and she felt that having a confident shop steward in the workplace would help the union too because it builds members' confidence in the union.

Lessons learnt about women's role in society:

Thandi spoke about her activism in her community where she addresses women's social and economic problems. She gave a vivid description of a range of initiatives that the women in her community had taken. For example: when I asked her about her role in the women's committee in her block of flats, it seemed that she was actively involved in a collective effort to support and uplift other women. She explained how the women were working together on projects to support the unemployed women in the community:

- The unemployed women were providing a community safety service to ensure that women were not attacked at a nearby taxi rank. This made the women feel that they were useful in their community.
- The women arranged supervised homework sessions for all the children in their block of flats to support working parents. They used the opportunity to mentor teenagers to make a contribution to the wider community.

Thandi explained that she took the initiative, as the chairperson of the ANCWL in her ward, to call all the women together and to talk about the challenges facing them and to discuss ways to address the challenges. Thandi also used the knowledge and skills that she had learnt about Economics and Development, to manage her personal finances and to advise the other women in her community.

Application of learning in the workplace;

Thandi explained how she and the other shop stewards at her workplace advised members in disciplinary matters and how this had won them the members' trust:

Members do trust me because when HR approaches me with a problem I go straight to the [affected] member to gather all relevant information .When we get to the meeting [with management] and all the facts are revealed if the worker is wrong we advise the worker and if the management is wrong we advise them too, in this way we are able to avoid disputes in the workplace (Regional gender co-ordinator, Int.5).

All three shop stewards, representing 58 members in the institution, attend the meetings with management, thus the meeting skills that Thandi learnt from the course are shared with all of them.

She noted that the content of the course was very important because it helped her to answer many unanswered questions. Thandi was the only shop steward in this study who had the full experience of participating in the union's regional gender structure as its co-ordinator, of being part of a Regional Paralegal team and serving on the HIV/AIDS committee after attending the HCED course. According to the union official the union wanted the women to be active gender co-ordinators, to help facilitate the union's campaign on HIV/AIDS and to strengthen the union's paralegal capacity. She withdrew from provincial union activities before the HCED course and returned to union regional and workplace or branch activism afterwards.

Thandi is a well informed shop steward. She knew about the collective agreements in the private hospitals and her references in the interview suggest that she is obviously using these agreements in her engagement with management. In her opinion, her biggest contribution to the union is being able to win disciplinary cases and so attract or recruit members to the union. Her reflections in the interview suggest that she was actively involved in the workplace and more actively involved in her community. Thandi shared an emotional personal story and said that she has drawn directly from what she learnt on the course to deal with her personal issues. The Gender and Development Module especially helped her to make sense of her personal

circumstances but it also equipped her to confront her personal challenges. I am grateful that she had shared this personal experience with me!

Eunice – experience of an ex-shop steward and now union member.

Eunice is a Faculty Officer in Student Academic Administration at a university. At the time of the interview she had recently been promoted to a new position in the university. Eunice joined the union in 1998 and served as a shop steward for eleven years until 2009. She only missed the 2009 shop stewards' elections because she was off sick at the time otherwise she felt that she would have been re-elected. However, she remains a union member but she is not actively involved in union structures anymore, except for attending union branch meetings at her workplace. Eunice said that she is "still available to help the union because of what it has done for us".

Eunice's understanding of the union's objectives for enrolling her on the HCED course:

She was not sure about what criteria were used for deciding who should attend the course in Cape Town. She just received a fax message from the union's Regional office informing her that she was amongst a group of shop stewards who would be attending a course on Women's Leadership at the UWC from June 2006. She was already studying at the time but she put it aside to attend the union sponsored course. A year before they registered with the UWC the women attended a union "political school" to prepare them for the university course and the union facilitated the whole university registration process on their behalf so they did not have to travel to Cape Town to register.

Eunice's personal goals and reasons for attending the HCED course:

Eunice said that she was curious to see what women would be taught about leadership in a course for women only. She hoped that it would give her the leadership skills that she needed, to address the challenges that she was facing as a union leader at the time. The women were not even sure about the academic level of the course; they did not know whether it was at certificate or at diploma level. Eunice was none the less excited about having the opportunity to

study at an institution of higher learning and understood the HCED course to be part of the union's Women's Leadership Development Programme.

Application of learning in the workplace:

Eunice became more aware of women's role in her workplace and she realized that women were still disadvantaged in the workplace; for example there were more men than women employed in senior academic positions. She learnt about the importance of interacting with her colleagues, to share her own experiences of the course with them and also to listen to what they had to say about the subject under discussion; for example, discussing gender and hearing their views about it and then sharing with them what she had learnt on the course about gender. "Something new that I learnt about the workplace is that as a union we have to use our watchdog power in labour relations at the workplace." She meant that the shop stewards should not wait for members to complain about unfair labour practices but that they should be vigilant to avoid such practices.

Experience of co-operative learning with a learning partner:

Eunice was the only one who spoke about her experience of co-operative learning and the structured application of learning as per the Workplace Learning Module.

Her learning partner was a lecturer and a union member, who was prepared to assist Eunice, despite her own teaching demands. "Finding a learning partner was difficult because some people were saying that you are going to get the certificate but what am I going to get from being your learning partner?" Having the lecturer as a learning partner was useful because she was familiar with teaching and learning practice, which made their structured application of learning easy to implement. Eunice and her learning partner shared their passion for serving the union in what they were doing.

Application of learning in the union:

Eunice reflected on the importance of understanding Labour Law and knowing how to interpret Labour Laws. She related her experience of representing a senior staff member, a professor, in a disciplinary case while she was attending the HCED course. It was a very important case to win to build the union's reputation amongst senior academic staff and also for her reputation as a shop steward because "I wanted them (management) to see that although I am not a professor I knew what I was doing." She consulted the lecturer of the Labour Practice Modules about the correct process to follow and the correct legal terminology to use, to obtain all the relevant legal facts about the case. This experience boosted Eunice's confidence about understanding and applying Labour Law.

Unfortunately Eunice did not record this rich learning experience in her cross-curricular learning journal because she had already submitted it to the course co-ordinator for assessment. It was a pity that the learning, confidence building and growth that she experienced during the handling of that particular disciplinary case was not recorded during her formal learning process and maybe not even in the union. This is a classic example of the nuanced application of learning that cannot always be documented. This example negates the expectation that every piece of learning can be recorded and measured to test its impact.

Lessons learnt about women's role in society:

Eunice learnt that women have a major role to play in society although she felt that women undermine each other and she referred to the "pull her down syndrome" prevalent in unions. This syndrome is a concept used to express non-supportive behaviour among women in the trade union. Eunice indicated that she learnt about this and other concepts regarding women's role in society on the 'preparatory political school' offered by the union before they enrolled the shop stewards on the HCED course.

Eunice shared enthusiastically what she had learnt about economics on the HCED course. Although she confused some economic terms and concepts she understood that economics

was relevant to her own everyday life. She remembered the assignment that she had to do for the Development Economics module and how it had helped her to understand statistics better and to understand news about financial indicators every evening on the news broadcast.

Eunice's reflection on applying what she had learnt:

She explained that after the HCED course she was more familiar with the Labour Relations Act and that she understood socio-economic issues in the country better. She further explained that the Training Design and Facilitation module had prepared her to organize effective workshops although she had not yet conducted any workshops. Although she was not a shop steward anymore, Eunice felt that she always had to know her worker's rights.

Eunice and all the other participants, except Thandi, were waiting for the union to create a platform for them to share their learning:

I am still waiting for the union to write me a letter about when we are supposed to be assisting the paralegal team with cases since we have got this experience. The union has to write a letter requesting my release from the workplace, since I am no longer a shop steward I cannot just attend to union matters without informing the employer, you know now that I understand labour relations better I know that I can't do things as I please. The region only called me to come to a meeting during working hours; that's when I asked for the letter but I still haven't received anything since earlier this year when they called me to tell me about this programme of assisting the paralegal team. I know that I must plough back to the union. I don't have a problem in doing that (Union member, Int.6).

Eunice's reference to plough back and the context in which she used it, suggests that she felt that there was an outstanding commitment on her part, to the union after attending the HCED course. However she was waiting for the union [by implication the union officials] to approach her for assistance¹³. She had already thought about what support she could offer the union

¹³ Eunice expected to be approached either by the Regional Secretary or any other union official at any level of the union because they all knew who had successfully completed the HCED programme.

now that she was no longer a shop steward. Eunice felt that she could assist the paralegal team or offer her time to the union's Regional gender desk¹⁴.

She thought that the other women, like her, who have been on the course, could be invited to union regional meetings to share what they had learnt. Eunice's sentiment that the union should make use of the people that have been developed was shared by the other participants. They felt that the union office was aware of their development and successful completion of the HCED course and should therefore facilitate a process for them to apply or share their new knowledge. In the workplace, Eunice was glad that the employer acknowledged her development and took it into consideration when she was promoted, but she still felt that the credit was due to the union:

I feel proud of the union because most people feel that NEHAWU is not for professionals but it is as a result of a NEHAWU initiated development programme that I have been promoted, so in my new position I will be flying the NEHAWU flag higher (SS, Int.6).

Just like Hazel, Mabel and Thandi, Eunice was especially appreciative of the formal qualification that she obtained through the Women's Leadership Development Programme.

Eunice demonstrated her vast institutional memory of the workplace as she reflected on her experience as a shop steward when many of the policies regulating employer and employee relationships were developed. She felt that she still had much to contribute to the union at her workplace but because she was no longer a shop steward she felt that the other shop stewards were not willing to listen to her suggestions.

¹⁴ The portfolio of responsibility for the union's gender programme is the Gender Desk.

Part Two:

In this second part of the chapter I explore the women's understanding of 'plough back' and examine whether they were able to achieve what they understood as 'plough back'.

The women's understanding of plough back.

The women expressed their understanding of 'plough back' as follows:

- It was about 'teaching' others what they had learnt at the university. This view was shared by all the women but with variations of specificity about who to teach and how they thought it should happen. Mable and Margaret thought that specific platforms should have been created by the union where they could share what they had learnt. Eunice and Hazel just wanted to be given the opportunity in existing union or workplace fora to share what they had learnt.
- Thandi was not sure about what plough back meant, so she posed her response as a question back to me in the interview, looking for affirmation about her understanding of the concept of plough back. "Is it about going back and researching things that we were doing on the course?"
- Eunice felt that she had an obligation to her union to 'give back' to newly elected shop stewards what she had learnt although in her experience newly elected shop stewards were not always willing to be taught and advised by the previous shop stewards.
- Both Hazel and Thandi who had more than twenty years' experience in the union felt that plough back was about building a good reputation of the union in their workplaces. They believed that the union's reputation is strengthened when union members receive good service and the union defends them against management in disciplinary hearings.

In my opinion all the women understood that plough back entails giving back to the union what they had gained from the Women's Leadership Development Programme. Their understanding of how to plough back varied. Some believed that they should stand before other union members and tell them what they had learnt whilst the more experienced shop stewards understood that plough back was integrated into their shop stewards' role, of serving members better with their newly acquired knowledge and skills.

The women's experience of whether they were able to plough back or not.

In terms of their understanding of the concept of 'plough back' four of the six women felt that they had not yet been able to plough back because, to them, the most tangible way to give back or share the knowledge and skills that they learnt on the HCED programme would be through facilitating workshops for their colleagues. Mable, Margaret, Nelisiwe and Eunice therefore felt that they had not yet fully applied their learning.

However when considering the wider research question posed by this study, about the application of learning to build union organization, the women's experience is comparable with the definition of building union organization used in this study.

The September commission describes building effective organization as democratic, dynamic organization that is able to achieve the COSATU goals to defend worker rights, improve working conditions and wages and contribute to the transformation of society. (September Commission Report, 1997:167).

Based on the above definition, the following experiences shared by the women support evidence of their contribution towards building trade union organization:

- At least three of the women described how they felt confident in dealing with disciplinary cases at the workplace because they had learnt about the correct procedures to follow. Margaret, Thandi and Eunice shared specific instances of how they had applied their learning from the Labour Practice Modules to win members' disciplinary cases in their workplaces. Margaret's opinion was that NEHAWU was strong in her workplace because of the respect that she had gained

amongst union members in dealing with cases and advising other shop stewards on disciplinary cases. Thandi's opinion was that just by winning disciplinary cases the union becomes more visible and popular amongst workers thus recruiting more members because they believe that the union will protect them when workplace disputes arise. Eunice's experience of successfully representing a senior staff member in a disciplinary hearing, and being able to consult the relevant lecturer on legal technicalities in the process, boosted her confidence but also demonstrated that the union was not only serving staff in junior job categories at the university. Therefore they had all defended worker rights.

- Hazel, Mable and Thandi shared their experience of feeling better equipped to communicate with management in a way that benefitted the union and management. Their ability to communicate with management in a non-confrontational manner improved relationships between the union and management. Mable described how she had educated union members to engage with management constructively to avoid conflict. Thandi spoke about how she facilitated communication between workers and management through a mutual understanding of workplace policies to build consensus. Hazel applied what she had learnt on the HCED programme to help facilitate organizational change processes in her workplace.
- Hazel's experience of using the Occupational Health and Safety Act to motivate for the improvement of working conditions in the laundry at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital and Thandi's experience of raising awareness amongst workers about the Netcare chronic care policy for HIV positive workers to access treatment are examples of the women applying their learning to improve working conditions and making a contribution to the transformation of society.
- Mable's experience of being able to run a union branch on her own, sharing what she learnt at university with union members and colleagues and holding regular

union meetings to share information at her previous workplace(the bigger Zola clinic) are all examples of building dynamic and democratic organization.

- Margaret felt that she was empowering union members at her branch. She was however concerned that the sense of empowerment amongst union members was not shared across all the union branches in the region. She felt that regional union workshops would make the union more visible in that region. However the five shop stewards from the Sedibeng region supported each other, spoke about how things were going in their respective branches and shared advice on their workplace problems.

Conclusion: women's experience of 'plough back'.

The women felt that they had not been able to plough back what they learnt because they were not 'running workshops' or standing in front of other union members, teaching them what they had learnt. However, I would argue that their day-to-day activities in the workplace and the union were examples of plough back to build union organization.

In my view the women's experiences indicated the lack of a coherent union strategy to make their application more conscious. For example in Margaret's opinion the individual efforts by shop stewards to empower members was useful, but union members saw this really as her own, individual contribution as a human resources clerk rather than as a shop steward. "They do not see NEHAWU representing or helping them; that is why regional activities are important because then it happens under the NEHAWU banner." In her opinion the shop stewards' individual actions are not recognized as a union contribution but are rather applauded as an individual's good work in helping others.

Margaret's observation was confirmed by the union official (Union official, Int.1). He noted that the union still needed to internalize the fact that all the women had been trained, to be aware of the skills that they had acquired, and to develop a plan to 'draw them in to share their experience.' He felt that the union had not yet recognized organizationally, what the women

had learnt on the HCED course nor knew how to use their new knowledge and skills in the union.

Part Three:

Participants' perceptions of factors encouraging or hindering application of learning.

In this section I discuss the factors that the women felt either encouraged them to apply their learning or that hindered them from applying their learning. I will focus on the following factors:

- Participants' understanding of how NEHAWU decided who should attend the course.
- Participants' understanding of the union's objectives for enrolling them on the HCED course as part of the union's Women's Leadership Development Programme.
- The correlation between participants' personal learning goals and the organizational objectives and how this might have affected the application of their learning.
- Contextual issues in the union and elsewhere that either facilitated or hindered the application or ploughing back of the learning.
- Finally participants experience of how the HCED Course Curriculum facilitated or hindered their application of learning.

Participants' understanding of how NEHAWU decided who should attend the course.

There was no consistent understanding amongst the participants of how NEHAWU decided whom to enrol on the HCED course. They did not seem to know of any clear selection criteria applied to decide who should attend the course. It seems that there was also no consistent approach to informing the women why they were selected. This observation was confirmed by the union official, when he reflected that union members who did not attend the course questioned how and why those who attended were selected.

I don't think there were any specific criteria used to select them. Provinces were just asked to select participants. As the programme proceeded we realized that we should have developed some selection criteria because those who were left out wanted to know what criteria was used to select those who were included in the programme. (Union official, Int.1)

This confirms the participants' lack of clarity about what the union's objectives were and why they were specifically selected from among many other shop stewards to attend the HCED course. This lack of clarity is further expressed in what appears to be the absence of a clear implementation strategy after the course.

The course co-ordinator reflected on the diversity of the group that felt like teaching more than one audience. There were some who were bored by the content because they already had tertiary qualifications and those who were experiencing the content for the first time really enjoyed the course. She believed that the union's choice of participants for the course and their academic ability did affect the execution of the curriculum and its impact on the workplace and the union.

Participants' understanding of what NEHAWU hoped to achieve by enrolling them on the HCED course.

The women noted the following reasons why they thought the union had enrolled them on the course:

- Hazel said that the union wanted to develop women's leadership capacity because most union members are women. In her opinion it was about grooming the women for strategic decision-making positions such as chairperson or secretary from branch to regional level.
- She also thought that the union wanted to build the shop stewards' negotiation skills to implement new Labour Laws wherever there was resistance from management.
- Mable thought the purpose was to 'rebuild the union' by increasing union membership, although she was not sure how the course would achieve that. Thandi shared a similar idea and in her opinion the course was envisaged to build shop stewards' capacity to defend union members in disciplinary cases.

- Nelisiwe understood that the union wanted to empower the women to plough back to the workers what they would learn on the course. Because she felt that she was not ploughing back to the workers, she described the HCED course as ‘a waste of time’!

Three of the women noted that it was only later on, after the programme ended, when they received notification from the Provincial Education Secretary that they would form part of an envisaged Regional Paralegal team. The apparent lack of follow through from the union on this request frustrated the women because there was no progress in setting up the Regional Paralegal teams. The women lacked a clear sense of the union’s objectives for enrolling them on the HCED course; this was an inhibiting factor because if they did not understand why the union wanted them to attend the course then they would not be clear either about what would count as application of learning in terms of the union’s expectations.

Comparison between personal goals and union goals.

The union may not have communicated its goals for enrolling the women on the HCED course but once they agreed to attend they had their own, personal goals for attending. The following goals were common:

- The opportunity to attend university was a common goal, among three of the women who had no post-school qualification or that the post-school qualification was not obtained from a university. Margaret for example already had a Diploma, but it was obtained through part-time studying and so the HCED course was an opportunity to attend university. Eunice pointed out that at the beginning it was not even clear whether the university qualification would be pitched at Certificate or Diploma level but they were just excited about going to university.
- Hazel and Mable who did not have matric, wanted to have their informal experience acknowledged through a formal qualification. Hazel felt that although she knew her union and worker rights she always felt inadequate amongst her peers. Mable simply embraced the opportunity to return to formal learning after 24 years.

Other personal goals were:

- Nelisiwe considered the HCED course as a stepping stone towards her ultimate goal of being a Labour Relations Officer.
- Eunice was already occupying a leadership position so she was 'curious to see what women would be taught about leadership in a course for women only'.

The dominant consideration amongst five of the six participants was the social status of attending university and their goal was to obtain a formal qualification. This confirmed Cooper's observation about the 'growing pressure from union members for formally accredited courses' (Cooper, 2006:42). One of them emphasised that as trade unionists they were tired of attending union courses and only receiving Certificates of Attendance. The value that the women attached to this accredited programme was also confirmed by the Labour Practice lecturer, who observed that the women were prepared to work hard to meet the assessment criteria of the Modules because they wanted to pass. Despite the union's initial attempt to maintain the union principles of collective development and collective progression for all the participants, the women succumbed to the student mentality of individual assessment for individual progression. Passing meant obtaining an accredited qualification irrespective of the level at which it was pitched on the National Qualifications Framework.

The women did not express a clear understanding of the union's goals for enrolling them on the HCED course, which suggests that the union's goals were not communicated to them. These were:

1. To develop well rounded women cadres in NEHAWU.
2. To equip office bearers with knowledge and skills that would be useful during and after their term of office (lifelong skills & knowledge).
3. To sustain the development of women by transferring knowledge, skills and experience through mentoring programmes.
4. To develop a second layer of women leaders in the union.

5. To develop/equip women with the knowledge and skills to engage and take forward women's issues at workplace level.(NEHAWU, 2006)

In the NEHAWU Education and Training Service Centre report to the CEC (2010 : 11-13) the following are stated as measures effective development in terms of the union's objective for enrolling the women(mostly shop stewards) on the HCED course:

1. To build leadership skills that could benefit the women as individuals for growth within the organization and at workplace level. The report covers growth in the union in terms of the number of women occupying positions of chairperson, secretary, gender co-ordinator, participation in other committees in the union and promotions at the workplace.
2. To realize the union's vision of equal representation between women and men (50-50) in leadership especially at branch or workplace level. This is in line with the union's gender policy on the quota system. The union positions targeted for gender parity are secretary and chairperson.

The above-mentioned objectives do include personal development of participants as one of the union's goals. However, the women's goals focused almost exclusively on their own personal and academic development and did not emphasise the need to contribute to the organization. This incongruence between the union's goals and the participants' goals could have been an inhibiting factor in terms of the women's application of learning in the union as they had not clearly understood what was expected from them by the union.

Participants' perceptions of how the union context facilitated or hindered the application of their learning.

According to the union official (Union official, Int.1) the decision to enrol the women on the HCED course required internal political pressure and negotiation to ensure wider union support for the Women's Leadership Development Programme and to fund about three hundred women-shop stewards and union officials to attend the HCED course. Once the political battle had been won to fund the Women's Leadership Development Programme it seems that apart

from logistical support to have the women registered at UWC, assistance with travel arrangements and arranging provincial tutorials, there was minimal input from the union on the course content or substantive support for the shop stewards to complete the course successfully. In the (NEHAWU, 2010) CEC Report the union's provincial education structures raised concern because comrades who attended the Women's Leadership Skills Development Programme were not used by the union. The report states that 'they are not used in a way of ploughing back the knowledge [that] they have gained in the university'.

The participants perceived the following union contextual issues as factors that encouraged application of learning:

- Support from other union members who were not participants. Margaret described how the more experienced unionists helped the participants to understand the course content that they were struggling to understand. This example captures the essence of what Lave (1996:149) describes as 'learning as a social collective, rather than individual psychological phenomenon'. It also affirms Cooper's argument of the trade union as a learning organization where 'knowledge creation and solidarity are organically nurtured' (2006:12). There was no evidence of a union mentorship programme as stated in the union objectives, but the above organic examples support the theory on the social aspects of learning.
- Having their participation on the course validated by their peers in the union. Margaret shared her experience of being viewed as a role model by other women in the union and being asked for advice by union members.
- Being elected or appointed in the strategic decision-making positions as envisaged by the Women's Leadership Development Programme. Thandi was the only respondent who was appointed as Regional gender co-ordinator, who was part of the paralegal team and she was serving on the HIV/AIDS committee, after attending the HCED course; this allowed her to apply her learning through the different union forums where she was actively involved.

The above-mentioned factors facilitated opportunities through which the participants were able to apply what they learnt. However it was not an unproblematic process of applying their learning as there were also factors in the union that hindered them from applying their learning.

Most of the participants reflected on how they were frustrated by the lack of a coherent union education plan that could facilitate the application of learning in a direct way to benefit the union's collective membership.

The lack of a coherent union education plan was confirmed by the union official, as he mentioned that there was a disjuncture between thinking at the national, provincial, regional and branch levels of the union, in terms of how to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and skills acquired by the women in the union (Union official, Int.1) His solution to this problem was that a national meeting should be convened to consult the women on what they had learnt and how best to apply their learning in the union.

Hazel, Mable and Thandi felt that it was easier to apply what they had learnt at the union branch level than at any other level in the union. But Margaret who shared the same experience as the others felt that any application of learning would be more effective if it happened 'under the union banner at a regional level'. This would mean that they could share their learning with more union members.

The culture of male domination in union meetings made it difficult for the women to apply their learning when they were 'alone' again after the course. Margaret described her experience of trying to convince the men to listen to her suggestions of why it was important for women to have a voice in union and workplace matters that affects them. Her experience confirms Brookfield's (1995) critique of the discourse of transfer of learning. Brookfield argues that the discourse does not sufficiently recognize 'the role played by oppressive social and political structures in preventing the transfer of knowledge and skills outside the classroom' (ibid: 630).

Brookfield's argument about the limitations to the transfer of learning across contexts is further illustrated by Hazel's observation regarding the establishment of Regional Paralegal teams. The union had identified the need to build paralegal capacity among shop stewards to deal effectively with membership disciplinary cases. However, according to Hazel the implementation of the decision to establish Regional Paralegal teams was delayed due to power struggles and tensions between women and men in the union's national legal department: the men were unhappy that only women shop stewards attended the HCED course. These underlying tensions led to delays in giving women a chance to apply their learning and serve union members effectively in the most efficient way.

Participants' perceptions of how the workplace context encouraged or hindered application of learning.

The workplace is the primary site of engagement between employers and unions and it is usually a site of contestation between the two parties but the women shared several positive experiences that enabled them to apply their learning in their workplaces. They reflected on how they applied the communication skills to create co-operative workplace relations instead of confrontational communication with employers.

Hazel was acknowledged by the CEO of the Baragwanath Hospital for her ability as a fulltime shop steward, in the meetings where she represented the union. The recognition created an enabling environment in which she could apply her research and planning skills.

Mable also applied her newly acquired communication skills to encourage collegiality in her workplace. She described how she challenged everyone to accept a colleague who was subjected to homophobic discrimination.

Thandi's experience of having adopted a conciliatory approach to solve workplace problems before the HCED course had earned her a certain level of respect from management. This made it difficult for her to win members' trust because union members would sometimes suspect

that she was colluding with management when she advised them to follow due process and procedure to deal with grievances and disputes.

The experiences of feeling equipped for better workplace communication may have helped the women to implement their learning, but my concern is that it may have weakened union militancy at the workplace too.

However some of the women also encountered hostility in the workplace when they tried to apply their learning for example when they attempted to gather information on sexual harassment and HIV for the Research Module. In one instance management was reluctant to divulge any information and in another instance the participant found it difficult to conduct research about such sensitive issues.

The difficulties that they experienced hindered them from applying their learning in the way that the curriculum was designed and made the workplace learning component of the course difficult for them to implement. Eunice found it especially difficult to do the research in her own workplace. The administrative process of obtaining permission to conduct the research took up all the time so there was not enough time to conduct the actual research in her workplace. She felt that this was a missed opportunity to teach people in the workplace about their rights in terms of sexual harassment or being HIV positive in the workplace.

Thandi on the other hand found it much easier to conduct the same research in her workplace because she spoke to everyone, management, union members and non-members. She obtained the information from the management easily, but it was difficult to obtain information from the respondents due to the stigmatisation around the issue of HIV/AIDS and sexual harassment.

Mable found it very difficult to access information in her own workplace. So, for the research project, she explored a case of sexual harassment at another institution and obtained information from her friends instead of going through the formal channels. Mable's experience was also reflective of Brookfield's critique of the transfer of learning based on the learner's own

positionality or subjective experience of how learning is understood and applied (Brookfield, cited in English, 2005:628).

Participants' experience of how the HCED Course Curriculum facilitated or hindered application of learning.

Participants felt supported and nurtured through the entire learning process. This made them confident to apply their learning. The course co-ordinators and lecturers confirmed that the course was consciously designed to facilitate the application of learning. The Recognition of Prior Learning course prepared the women, who did not meet the university's entry requirements, for the following three years of the HCED course. The provincial tutorials between the study blocks reinforced the learning and offered personal attention to develop their assignment writing skills. The curriculum planning and implementation was designed to make a contribution to 'women's empowerment and skills development'. The course was relevant to the union because of its practical nature (Fair Share Annual Report, 2006:30).

The participants mentioned different modules when they reflected on the course and their experience of applying what they had learnt.

Due to time constraints and limited access to all the lecturers of the different modules the study was focused on the Gender and Development Module and the Labour Practice Modules because the participants found these two most relevant to their daily activities as shop stewards. I also reviewed the Workplace Learning Module because of its specific focus on the application of learning in the workplace.

Gender and Development Module.

As noted in Chapter 1 the Gender and Development Module was the first module because the course design team thought that it was less academic and would be accessible to the participants because they were familiar with the gender topic. According to the course lecturer: "It [gender and development] could be related to what they already knew about gender. They could get to grips with it and then think critically about it." (Dr LC, Int.1)

Two participants quoted examples directly from this module when they spoke of applying their learning. Mable explained how she drew on the Gender and Development Module to challenge discrimination against a colleague at work on the basis of his sexual orientation. Thandi drew on this module to address personal issues. She reflected that “it was not easy to learn about gender but it was about things affecting us at home... the gender course opened my eyes and my mind.”(Regional gender co-ordinator, Int. 5)

The lecturer’s opinion, based on what she read in their assignments, was that participants learnt that their personal experiences and perceived individual choices were part of the bigger patriarchal picture in society. This opinion was confirmed by Nelisiwe’s experience of being able to negotiate the sharing of domestic chores with her male partner and Thandi’s experience of drawing directly on the Gender and Development Module’s assignment to address gender based personal issues that she was not able to understand or resolve before. Thandi’s experience confirms what the assignment questions of this module required participants to do; thus, think critically about their role and position as women in a patriarchal society and workplace/organization.

Margaret’s experience of persevering to convince her male comrades in the union meetings that women should address issues that affect them, demonstrates a positive experience of critical self-reflection. She mentioned that the ‘male comrades’ wondered why she suddenly spoke up in union meetings, which is something she never did before. She also challenged the assumption that men should make all decisions even on behalf of women while the women were there to speak for themselves. This experience of critical self-reflection and perspective transformation on the active role of women in decision-making supports Mezirow’s theory of perspective transformation (Mezirow, 2003). It is the process through which previously held assumptions are questioned. In Margaret’s experience she not only questioned the assumption of men’s decision-making role but she also challenged it to bring in a different perspective. However, Margaret was unable to challenge the patriarchal organisational culture because she still felt that she did not have the power to suggest ideas for key transformative education activities that would empower women. She felt powerless despite her leadership position as a

regional office bearer in the union. Margaret's experience of feeling unable to make recommendations for changes in the union's regional meetings confirms the limitations of individual transformative learning that does not lead to changes in the external environment (Wang and Sarbo, 2004:205).

Labour Practice Modules A and B.

According to the lecturer, the philosophy of the Labour Practice Modules was to help participants feel comfortable about the legal terrain in which they were operating.

The first and second year modules dealt with the basics of disciplinary hearings, Employment Equity and jurisprudence respectively. In the third year, participants did a basic research module to help them to understand research methodology and the importance of knowing how to support facts with relevant evidence.

The importance of well researched facts resonated with Hazel, because she mentioned the importance of research to support arguments in any situation with thoroughly researched facts. Margaret had the Labour Practice material on her desk and mentioned how she referred to it every time that she had to address a union member's grievance in the workplace. Nelisiwe shared her experience of questioning how Employment Equity was implemented in her workplace and she was 'teaching' other women in the community about their rights. Thandi drew on the Labour Practice Module to inform union members about their rights and responsibilities in the workplace and Eunice shared quite a detailed experience of drawing on the Labour Practice Module and consulting with the lecturer on a specific disciplinary case that she was handling in her workplace. The participants' experience of what they had learnt about following workplace policies and procedures and the consensus seeking approach to communications with management suggests that they had internalized the understanding of employer and employee rights in the workplace. The participants' reflections confirmed the lecturer's observation that they learnt a lot about Labour Law and the extent to which workers' rights are curtailed by the employer's rights.

The lecturer used her corporate labour law background to give participants' an employer's perspective of labour law. Participants must have valued her experience because she mentioned that they still emailed her for advice this was at the time of the interview in August 2010.

Workplace Learning Module.

The intention of the Workplace Learning Module (WPL) was that students should share their learning within the union/workplace and apply their learning to their outreach work within their communities.

However the course did not take sufficient account of participants' workplace contexts, especially power relations, and how this might impact on their ability to do an assignment that required them to apply their learning. This was confirmed by the challenge that was noted by the lecturer of the Labour Practice Modules. In hindsight she felt that the participants 'came up against immense difficulties in attempting to do the research projects in their workplaces but[they] may have lacked the language to verbalise how difficult it was.' Also:

There were many logistical issues that shop stewards had to contend with during the course, from an educational perspective. Perhaps the expectation of them doing research in their workplaces from the positions that they were at was very difficult and the lecturers could have facilitated the process better with greater involvement by the UWC as the learning institution. Perhaps lecturers should have asked for more feedback from the students about how they were coping with the research and should have offered to help them. (MP, Int. 1)

Whilst the course co-ordinator described the WPL module as the 'glue that held the HCED programme together' the participants did not reflect this in the interviews. This may be because participants were not interviewed about their experience of specific modules but about their reflections on the course in general and how the curriculum helped or hindered the application of learning.

Because the participants all passed the course, it follows that they met all the assessment requirements. One of which was to keep a Learning Journal that had to be submitted for

assessment. My observation of the limitations of relying on written evidence for a very practical component of learning is that it makes it difficult for the assessor, without observing the practice, to verify the validity of what is written down as learning/application evidence.

An unintended consequence of the HCED course was the impact that the participants had on the two lecturers that were interviewed. MP was struck by how much stronger the women's oratory abilities were than their writing skills and so she did not place too much emphasis on their writing ability in the assessment as long as their arguments were clear. LC realised right on the first morning with the group that they were not the traditional passive student audience just listening to the lecturer but that they were there to participate and to be heard, the introduction session that was planned for half an hour lasted for two hours because the participants were engaged. The lecturer appreciated that experience so much that she has since changed the Gender and Development module based on the experience of teaching it to the NEHAWU participants.

Factors that facilitated application of learning in contexts other than the union or the workplace:

The HCED course was historically designed to link community, organizational and personal development (Fair Share Annual Report, 2008: 14) so I asked NEHAWU participants to describe their experience of applying their learning beyond the union and the workplace.

Both Hazel and Thandi applied their learning through their political activism. Thus, Hazel reflected on the respect that she held among her peers in political structures of the ANC and SACP. Hazel applied her learning as an ANC sub-regional representative on health and as the secretary of the SACP in her region. She shared her experience of applying the planning skills that she learnt on the course in these forums too. Hazel felt that she had learnt the importance of accountable representation and she tried to apply this wherever she was engaged in the union, in the workplace and in political structures.

Thandi used her leadership position in the ANC Women's League, to mobilize other women in the community as active agents of change in addressing women's issues. Thandi applied the hard skills and soft skills to her political activism. Thandi's political and community activism was spaces where she felt able to take initiatives to bring about change. She had identified many challenges in her community and felt empowered by the skills learnt on the course, to do something about those challenges to facilitate a change. She also reflected on how the Gender and Development Module equipped her with the knowledge to understand her personal circumstances better and with the skills to confront her personal challenges.

Mable indicated that after trying unsuccessfully to apply her learning in the workplace, she turned her attention to the church where she was elected as the secretary. She felt able to assert herself and everyone respected her position as secretary of the committee. She was able to apply her skills to resolve difficulties in the women's committee at the church.

Nelisiwe reflected on how she had tried to share her learning from the Gender and Development Module, with women who were experiencing gender based violence and abuse in her community. She also applied that learning to her personal life when she negotiated with her partner to share domestic chores and childcare responsibility.

The common factor in these examples was that the women felt empowered to do something about problems that they had identified. They could identify the problems that they were confronting, they planned and facilitated changes to the problems identified and could use what they had learnt on the HCED course to help them in their solidarity building efforts.

Fuller and Unwin (2004) suggest that expansive learning environments, that create opportunities for engaging in multiple and overlapping communities of practice at and beyond the workplace, also provide the basis for integrating personal and organizational development. Although the women were union leaders in their workplaces when it came to other union structures, the union bureaucracy seemed to curtail the creative activism that they were able to exercise in the above mentioned examples. Therefore, in the union context, women felt that

the only real opportunity to apply their learning would be in a teaching situation but that it had to be arranged by someone other than themselves.

According to Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situative Learning perspective, learning is rooted in the situation in which participants find themselves; it follows that the knowledge and skills acquired on the different modules of the course would be intertwined with the contexts in which the participants found themselves at a particular time applying what they had learnt.

Conclusion about the factors that facilitated or hindered learning application.

The women acquired the knowledge and skills to assert themselves wherever they were participating as demonstrated by their reflections on how they were able to assert themselves; in the workplace when dealing with workplace challenges, in the union when educating men about women's relevance in union decision-making to build the union and, in personal and community situations to take responsibility for addressing challenges facing them.

The women reflected too that they were able to adapt and apply what they had learnt about communication, planning, research, finances, economics, development and case handling to different contexts such as dealing with conflict in the workplace, planning and strategizing to some extent in the union and, engaging in political activities as shop stewards, gender activists, political and community activists.

They were able to identify how socio-economic issues affected women in particular, and they were able to challenge gender norms in their personal lives such as sharing domestic chores and negotiating time for themselves to be able to study for three, and in some cases four, years.

The women reflected on how the Communication and Information Management Module equipped them with useful communication tools, which they used in the workplace but not to strengthen the union in the workplace. They did not, for example, reflect that they were able to convene better union meetings. They applied the communication tools to build consensus with employers but not necessarily to build stronger union structures in the workplace. They referred to how they drew on the Labour Practice Modules when dealing with union members'

grievances and disciplinary issues. Despite giving examples of applying what they had learnt, the women felt that they needed more opportunities for structured application by teaching others

In the women's experience the course content, knowledge and skills equipped them to apply their learning in a range of different contexts. They found it easier to apply their learning outside the trade union than directly inside the trade union. They drew on what they had learnt when they dealt with grievance and disciplinary matters on behalf of union members but they were not always confident about applying their learning in other direct trade union activities. The main factors that hindered learning application was that the participants were waiting for the union to initiate a 'plough back' programme in which they could apply their learning by teaching others. The union's patriarchal culture and organizational inefficiency hindered them from applying their learning especially through decentralized paralegal teams. I think that the women's inability to take the initiative to share their learning in a structured way with colleagues and union members, and deferring to their male counterparts, is possibly reflective of the patriarchal, organizational culture of trade unions. There is a disjuncture between policy statements, such as the union's constitution, and what happens in reality in the day-to-day running of the organization. The disjuncture between union policy and practice requires fundamental structural and cultural change at all levels of the union.

The impact of the male-dominated organizational culture combined with organizational incapacity is reflected in Hazel's observations of the underlying tensions in the union's paralegal department. On the one hand the union had identified the need to save legal costs by empowering shop stewards to handle members' disciplinary cases effectively and efficiently but on the other hand, tensions existed between the women and the men on the issue of why only women were selected to attend the HCED courses; this situation led to delays in implementing the strategy.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

Introduction:

This interpretive study set out to explore whether in the experience of trade union women, who were adult learners on the Higher Certificate in Economic Development course, the contextual conditions in the union and elsewhere encouraged or hindered the application of learning to build their union organization.

Primary data was gathered from in-depth interviews with six of the participants, about their experience of the course and of applying their learning after the course. Supporting evidence was gathered from semi-structured interviews with two course lecturers, the only union official available for an interview and from course related documents.

Conclusions are discussed in three broad categories in this chapter:

1. The NEHAWU Context in which the women were located
2. The women's understanding of 'plough back'.
3. Course structure and content.

NEHAWU Context

NEHAWU had stated five key objectives for this programme, including;

1. To develop all rounded women cadres in NEHAWU.
2. To equip office bearers with knowledge and skills that would be useful during and after their term of office (lifelong skills & knowledge).
3. To sustain the development of women by transferring knowledge, skills and experience through mentoring programs.
4. To develop a second layer of women leaders in the union.

5. To develop and equip women with the knowledge and skills to engage and take forward women's issues at workplace level. reference

Linked to the objectives were the following outcomes that the union wanted the participants to achieve by the end of the HCED course.

1. To demonstrate an understanding of the basic concepts of gender.
2. To make the link between gender and women's experience in society today.
3. To take control of their lives economically, politically and socially by transferring their knowledge and skills into different contexts and actively participating in communities and the [ANC, COSATU, SACP] alliance debates.
4. To effectively engage at workplace level.
5. To be able to demonstrate a range of organizational skills e.g. negotiation skills, research skills, conflict management etc.
6. To influence decision-making. reference

The objectives and envisaged outcomes indicated that the union wanted the programme to have mostly a qualitative impact on the union. However in the union CEC's review of the Women Leadership and Skills Development Programme (NEHAWU, 2010) it did not do justice to measuring its qualitative contribution to building the organisation. Instead the CEC report reflected only on how many course participants had been elected as chairpersons or secretaries of union structures and how many were promoted in the workplace. Thus the emphasis was on quantitative criteria and not qualitative criteria in terms of producing women's leadership to build the organisation.

Cooper (2006) maintains that unions are 'laboratories of democracy' and she draws on situated learning theory in terms of its usefulness for analysing learning as social practice within the union. However my findings challenge the situated learning theory perspective as it does not help to identify what needs to happen in cases where the community of practice needs to be transformed before any socially useful learning can be applied. The union platforms such as leadership meetings where the women wanted to apply their learning were mostly hostile which made application difficult. Lave and Wenger's (1996) situated learning theory proposes

that participants should be given the opportunity to participate meaningfully in different contexts. But in the union the course participants were not given opportunities of 'legitimate peripheral participation'. This observation is confirmed by the union's provincial education structures in their report to the CEC where they raised concern about the inability to integrate 'comrades within the structure of the organisation' (NEHAWU, 2010).

Patriarchal power relations in the union

The participants who had more years of experience as shop stewards were able to take initiatives in their workplaces, in political and community activities to apply what they had learnt but found it more difficult to do so within the union beyond the workplace or union branch level. For example, the delay in establishing regional and provincial paralegal teams was caused by male resistance to the idea that their female counterparts had the knowledge and skills to represent members in disciplinary cases. Instead of educating the men about working with the women and learning from them, top union leadership had resolved to include men in the next HCED course. This is a step backwards in the initial struggle to convince the union to commit to a programme for women only.

Despite the union identifying decision-making positions such as chairperson and secretary to be targeted for women leaders, the women's experiences of being elected into these positions suggest that the union did not at the same time address patriarchal organisational practices. The union official was especially disappointed that all the women in the union had not managed or even tried to influence Regional union congress resolutions that would benefit women union members (Union official, Int.1).

The participants' experiences of hostile patriarchal practices supports Weiler's (1996) view of 'contradictory and simultaneous relations of oppression and dominance' overlapping in many causes for social transformation such as those in the trade union movement. It seems that while the trade union is engaged in the struggle against oppressive socio-economic systems, it has failed to address its internal contradictions of male trade unionists oppressing their female counterparts.

Weak union organisation in the workplace.

Shop steward structures in the workplace serve two major purposes: they ensure that workers' interests are articulated and that agreements with employers are implemented (South Africa.info, 2011). A union's strength can therefore be measured in terms of how members' rights are protected and their interests advanced in the workplace. NEHAWU itself had identified weak workplace organisation as a major challenge at its seventh national congress in 2004 (NEHAWU, 2005). From the evidence gathered in this study, this weakness of union organisation in the workplace is evident in the following instances;

- Women shop stewards were not empowered to take initiatives in their workplaces to share their knowledge and skills with other union members.
- An apparent lack of understanding that a shop steward has to be elected from among workers in a specific workplace. Two of the course participants retained their shop steward position when they transferred from one workplace to another without being re-elected in their new workplaces. They were among those who were not able to apply their learning in the workplace because they were disconnected from the union members who had elected them.

The September Commission Report (1997) described union organisation building as building structures in the workplace with a clear programme of action and mobilizing union members for action such as union campaigns. But the participants in this study seemed more focused on following legal procedures than mobilising for any clear workplace programme of action as suggested by the September Commission.

Marie (1992: 21) notes that the change in union organization size and complexity has increased the demand from membership for services but organizational inefficiency threatens the ability of the union to respond to members' day to day problems. The changes in Labour Legislation since the early 1990s led to basic worker rights being covered by law and following this Marie (ibid) argues that unions tend to see local problems relating to worker rights as problems that

require a procedural response as opposed to problems around which workers can be mobilized for collective action to challenge employers. A case in point in this study is the workplace where the shopsteward preferred to consult the Labour Practices (guide?) on the correct procedure to follow in a strike situation rather than to focus on the issues that led to the workers embarking on strike action.

This total reliance on legal procedure indicates a limitation to the claims made by radical pedagogy about the extent to which consciousness-raising education can translate into transformative action.

Union organizational culture – a barrier to participants’ realising their agency.

The lack of a clear union strategy towards the Women Leadership Development Programme affected the extent to which the participants could articulate or implement a clear course of action after the HCED course. The experience among the two research participants who were actively engaged in community activities to benefit women was very different from their union experience. In their community activism they were involved in struggles with a clear purpose and that was an empowering experience. Whereas their experience of male domination and the lack of a clear union strategy left them feeling relatively disempowered in the union.

The women’s experiences of difficulty in challenging the union’s patriarchal organizational culture substantiates Weiler’s (1996) critique of Freire’s generalization about oppression that glosses over ‘contradictions and tensions that exist in social settings in which overlapping forms of oppression exists’.

The women had clearly undergone significant personal transformation over the three years of the HCED course, a process that is described by Mezirow’s theory on perspective transformation. However this process did not enable them to break down the barriers to women’s participation that they faced in the union. This supports the critique that Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning is too narrowly focused on individual transformation. Wang and Sarbo (2004:205) argue that although transformative learning promotes individual

emancipation because critical self- reflection helps the individual to see the world differently it does not help to empower them sufficiently to change the structure of society.

Participants' understanding of the meaning of 'plough back'

As noted at the beginning of this thesis, to plough back is 'to work at something and progress slowly and steadily'¹⁵ or to plough something into the soil to enrich it. However the findings in this case study indicate that the participants' understanding of plough back was that they had to be explicitly teaching others what they had learnt. They failed to recognize the many other actions that they were engaged in, especially in the community and the workplace as slowly and steadily applying their learning and enriching the context in the process. If they had recognised their community actions as plough back they might have been motivated to draw on those experiences more strongly in the trade union context.

The disjuncture between the women's understanding of the purpose of the course and the union's goals led to the women focusing almost exclusively on their personal and academic development and at the expense of making organisational contributions. The women did not have a clear understanding of what the union expected from them and they seemed to have left it up to the union officials to organise opportunities for them to plough back their learning.

Course structure and content.

The university made a significant effort to accommodate the special group of trade union students on the HCED course. This was affirmed by the women's description of the supportive learning environment from the Recognition of Prior Learning process all the way through to the provincial tutorials. The UWC staff were prepared to receive a group of experienced trade union leaders and they designed the programme in a way that would draw on their experience before introducing new knowledge and skills. The course was designed with the intention that participants could implement what they learnt in their workplaces and communities.

¹⁵ MS Word Thesaurus

However there were a number of factors that acted as obstacles to the application of learning. The structure of the HCED course, especially the Workplace Learning Module was based on the principles of radical pedagogy, yet the women's new knowledge and skills did not translate into radical transformative action in the workplace and the union. I believe that the lesson for union education programmes in this case is that transformative education without a clear and integrated plan for wider organisational transformative action is of little value. It confirms Mayo's (1999) view that education alone cannot radically transform an organisation there has to be political will and commitment to real transformation.

The fact that the university relied on written assignments as proof of implementation, was problematic because the actual implementation could not be verified. The Workplace Learning Module was specifically designed to ensure the application of learning based on "the rationale that ongoing practice and reflection of the learning process would create a hunger for new and continued learning" among the participants (RB Int, 3). Sarachild (cited in Weiler, 1996:136) argues that people are not politicised by books or ideas but by experience. Therefore despite all the 'scaffolding' that the educators had built into the course to assist the participants and raise their consciousness so that they could generalise the knowledge and transfer the skills it is only their personal experiences that might have eventually led them to take action, including action in the union.

The women were inspired by the social status of being university students and they put a lot of effort into obtaining a pass mark because they wanted the qualification possibly more than they wanted to build a stronger union. Although the union tried to negotiate for collective recognition of competence at the beginning of the course, the union and the participants accepted the university's requirements of individual assessment. I believe that the emphasis on individual rather than collective competence was a hindrance to ploughing back, and points to the limitations of such a formal university course in being transformative.

In the final analysis, in the experience of the six course participants who were interviewed for this study the university-accredited part of the NEHAWU Women Leadership Development

Programme of 2006 built their individual confidence to cope with a university course but it did not make a significant contribution to building union organisation as envisaged by the union's proposal to the university. Ineffective organizational planning and a lack of leadership, exacerbated by gendered inequalities in the organisation appear to have hindered the application of learning to address genuine union problems such as declining membership and poor service to union members.

Limitations of the study and the need for further research

The findings of this study cannot be generalized as a reflection of the experiences of all 291 women who attended the course, because it only focused on the experiences of six women who were part of the union's Women Leadership Development Programme. The study has however raised several questions that may require further research to determine the effectiveness of the NEHAWU Women Leadership Development Programme. There will inevitably be many more nuanced experiences of the application of learning that were not adequately captured in this study, this highlights the limitation of measuring the impact of learning.

To gain further insight into the effectiveness of the union's Women Leadership Development Programme the following research could be conducted:

- A wider study of the 291 participants' experiences of the programme
- A tracer study of a wider group of past participants of the HCED course.
- A deeper study of the impact of male domination and other organisational and contextual issues in NEHAWU

There are also broader political questions about a union Women Leadership Development Programme that could be explored, for example:

What defines women's leadership in the trade union context? What will the organisation look like demographically, what type of decisions will be made and how will they affect union members irrespective of whether they are male or female?

This study has clearly pointed to some key factors in the union's internal politics and organisational culture, its organisational strength in the workplace, and the nature of its communication with course participants; that would need to be seriously addressed in order for it to be possible to build and strengthen union organisation through transformative education programmes.

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