The People's Free University: Alternative to the Corporate Campus and Model for Emancipatory Learning

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ABSTRACT: Our article describes how the People's Free University (PFU) emerged directly from a series of seminars at the University of Saskatchewan in the Fall of 2001 that addressed critical concerns about a discernible tendency on campus towards the adoption of a business corporate style of governance steered increasingly by marketplace priorities. The seminars, open to the public as well as students, staff and faculty, turned to a discussion on the significance of a "people's university" envisioned for the University of Saskatchewan by its first President, Walter Murray. Invoking Murray's vision opened the way to the remarkable beginning and subsequent creative program development of a free university. Examples of community-based adult education initiatives from which PFU drew are identified, situating it historically within an on-going critical legacy that has become even more relevant in the face of neo-liberal imperatives. The emancipatory pedagogy entailed is informed substantially through the theory and practice of Paulo Freire, Thomas Hodgskin and Alfred North Whitehead. Essential learning processes and guiding principles which characterize PFU pedagogy are illuminated under the rubric of "everyone can teach, everyone can learn." In drawing a connection between the PFU experience and resistance to attacks on academic freedom at the University of Saskatchewan, we align the enlightened aims of community-based popular education embodied in PFU against profit driven encroachments of corporate business interests.

RESUMÉ: l'article décrit la façon dont l'université libre des gens (PFU) est apparue directement à l'automne 2001 après une série de séminaires à l'Université de la Saskatchewan. Les séminaires traitaient de questions cruciales sur la tendance perçue sur le campus ; celle d'adopter la tactique d'entreprise qui est menée de plus en plus par les exigences du marché. Les séminaires ouverts aussi bien au public qu'aux étudiants, aux employés qu'au corps professoral, se sont transformés en discussion sur le sens de « l'université des gens », expression envisagée pour
l'Université de la Saskatchewan par son premier président, Walter Murray. L'ambition de Murray a ouvert la voie à des débuts remarquables et à une évolution ultérieure de la création du programme d'une université libre. Des exemples d'initiatives pédagogiques prises par des communautés adultes à partir desquels PFU a été imaginée, sont reconnus dans l'histoire au sein d'un legs fondamental en cours qui ne saurait être plus adapté à l'encontre des impératifs de néolibéralisme. Les théories et méthodes de Paulo Freire, de Thomas Hodgskin et d'Alfred North Whitehead ont inspiré la pédagogie inhérente, à caractère émancipatif. Les processus fondamentaux de l'apprentissage et les principes généraux qui caractérisent la pédagogie de PFU, sont en évidence dans la rubrique Tout le monde peut enseigner, tout le monde peut apprendre. En reliant l'expérience de PFU et la résistance aux attaques sur la liberté académique à l'Université de la Saskatchewan, nous mettons en place les objectifs bien réfléchis de l'enseignement public qui sont incarnés à PFU, contre des empiètements à but lucratif des intérêts de l'entreprise.

Introduction

To begin our task of writing this paper together (a meaningful learning experience in itself), we think it would be useful to identify briefly those relevant aspects

of our overlapping interests that led to a public critique at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) of the corporate campus and the emergence from that discourse of The People's Free University (PFU).

The teaching and research of Howard Woodhouse, a professor in Educational Foundations, is very much inspired by the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. From this perspective, he has drawn effectively on critical insights for an on-going defense against entrepreneurial university administrators allied to business corporate interests that ultimately diminish teaching and learning processes and the autonomous contribution of curiosity-based research.

As a professor of adult education, Michael Collins incorporates critical theory and cultural studies into his research and practice. Hence his concern with the ways that technical rationality now shape modern adult education practices in favoring top-down standardized curriculum and evaluation formats, in the service of business management style, known as Human Resource Development (emphasizing education for job training and the requirements of the economy), to the detriment of foundational adult education principles around autonomous learning and democratically implemented community-based initiatives as exemplified in the aims of the PFU.

During the course of our informal discussions about future prospects for universities in view of influential policy formation enacted by Margaret Thatcher's government in the UK and that of Ronald Reagan in the USA, we realized how our overlapping interests unveiled for us what was happening to re-caste the role of universities according to corporate business values and the imperatives of the market. Though ample evidence of this tendency was increasingly apparent elsewhere, especially

in the UK and USA, colleagues we spoke to at the U of S in the early years of the millenium were not inclined to acknowledge that our own university was in line to experience the same imperatives driven by the expansion of neo-liberal ideology world-wide. Critical questioning about the discernible effects of corporate culture on campus was fairly subdued as the entrepreneurial discourse on the knowledge economy gained momentum in these times of neo-liberal ascendency. More completely than we originally envisaged, neo-liberalism is now manifest throughout Canadian universities with the prioritizing of marketplace criteria. The notion of higher education as a public good is replaced by a level of commodification which casts students as consumers, professors in time-consuming competition for funds, and a growing number of non-tenure track instructors (underpaid and overburdened) as casual labour. In this context, student fees and class sizes increase while programs in arts and science and curiosity-based learning and research are diminished.

Early confirmation that our initial critical observations were not fanciful came with the decision that our university should provide data designated by external non-academic agencies for inclusion in University League Tables. A former president, among other critics, publicly acknowledged the serious shortcomings of the methodology entailed. External pressures prevailed. Concern about flawed methodology did not deter senior administration from imposing a formal top-down campus-wide evaluation at the U of S. Despite claims that this "systematic program review" (SPR) was home grown, its pedestrian and absurdly reductionist design virtually aped formal assessments already deployed on other campuses. Ongoing Systematic Program Reviews, as with universities elsewhere, have been re-enacted subsequently

under various public relations induced headings. Evaluation processes such as these are, in large part, about transforming the idea of a university as a setting for intellectual thought and curiosity-based research into the business-oriented campus shaped by a new generation of CEOs. They support the enthronement of marketplace values, subscribe often unwittingly to the mantra of Margaret Thatcher - "There is no Alternative" - and regard innovation in an exclusively economic sense as the mission of the University. At the same time, the numbers of these highly paid managers have increased drastically, and student fees continue to escalate.

Structure of the Article and Methodology

The structure of the article is as follows. An initial account of how the PFU emerged at a time of growing corporatization shows how it drew its inspiration from the U of S's first president's declaration of the "people's university," as well as from philosophically grounded notions of participatory democracy. We then consider the connections between the PFU and local, national, and international traditions of community oriented adult education and analyze the meaning of emancipatory education. By locating the PFU within the humanistic conception of education, we show how it built on the idea that every human being has the capacity to learn, embodied in the motto "Everyone can teach, Everyone can learn." In order to further examine the concept of emancipatory education, we relate its pedagogical approach to that of recent social movements in North America. The systematic attack on the people's university at the U of S is analyzed in order to contrast it with the PFU's pedagogy and to highlight the ways in which the senior administration exerts control over financial and

academic decisions through such measures as TransformUS, which have been adopted at other universities. We conclude by emphasizing that examples of community based higher education like the PFU abound, demonstrating the need for, and efficacy of, such approaches. This, indeed, is a recurrent theme of the article that the PFU embodied a living tradition which resonates with people throughout the world.

Our adoption of a narrative methodology, sometimes referred to as an "interpretive-hermeneutic" approach (Bruner, 1996; Kerdeman, 2014), has several advantages: it enables insights into the experience of those who participated in the PFU, insights gained by rising to a meta-level in describing their key characteristics (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994) too often ignored by what Jerome Bruner (1996) calls the "set of shallow experimental routines" of a "causal-explanatory" approach (p.112). Indeed, narrative has the power to select out the most important aspects of human experience in order to construct meaningful and holistic interpretations (Schulz, 1997; Woodhouse, 2011b).

Like the conference presentation on which it is based, the rest of the article is written as a dialogue. We have found this approach conducive to the kind of narrative about the People's Free University that we are exploring. It provides an accessible yet critical way to examine an alternative form of higher education that takes issue with the marketization currently engulfing universities.

Interchange: Problem Posing and Writing the Text Together
How did the People's Free University (PFU) begin?

Michael: It is not our intention to enthrone a discourse on The People's Free University Redux. But in answer to the kind of enquiries, which we have often

encountered, on how to begin a free university during a time when popular education movements are on the wane, our advice is straight forward: just do it. Now is the time. We can do it here. This vanguardist advice, albeit democratically enacted, actually reflects how the PFU began in Saskatoon.

In the fall of 2001, the largely informal bag-lunch seminars organized by the graduate adult and continuing education program at the University of Saskatchewan in 1984 moved decisively to an open public forum for addressing key issues of immediate political relevance. The politically charged pedagogical intent was signalled in the title of the first session held just before the invasion of Afghanistan: "Why War? Why Now? Why Canadians? Where is the College of Education on This?" (By this time, the adult and continuing education graduate program had joined the Department of Educational Foundations.) Apart from engendering a sense of solidarity among like-minded students, faculty and staff, a meaningful alliance was forged with activists of the local community-based peace movement. The next bag lunch public interest seminar series, beginning November 21, 2001, was entitled "U. of. S. Ltd: W(h)ither the Corporate University?" Each forum of the series, focusing on particular aspects of a burgeoning business corporate agenda at the University of Saskatchewan, was well attended and received local and national media attention. Meantime, then U of S President, Peter MacKinnon, unwittingly invoking the mantra of Margaret Thatcher, insisted that "there is no alternative" (TINA) to the adoption of a business corporate style orientation at the University. Subsequently, Howard Woodhouse has characterized this defeatist attitude, now pervasive on campus, as "selling out" (2009).

"Whatever happened to the People's University?" This question, posed with growing frequency during the sessions on "W(h)ither the Corporate University?," referred to a founding statement , cited by U of S historian, Michael Hayden (1983, p.295), made by the University of Saskatchewan's first President, Walter Murray, that "this is the university of the people, established by the people" (University of Saskatchewan, 1909, p.12).

Recalling the idea of a people's university set the course for the adoption of a democratic process in the development of the PFU. From the founding meeting on, it was understood that control of the institution should be effectively exerted according to the wishes of the majority. In addition to public meetings, planning committees were open to all members who wished to attend. Responsibility for chairing sessions was shared. In this setting, an open process of enquiry prevailed; everyone had a voice in the give and take of various points of view. This process (for which theoretical grounding can be derived, as examples, from the work of Jurgen Habermas (1984, 1987) on communicative action, Paulo Freire (1973) on dialogue and praxis , and John Dewey (1968) on democracy and education, may have appeared messy at first to those who had regarded Roberts' Rules of Order and focus groups as exemplars of democratic decision-making. Yet the approach spawned an impressive array of well-organized learning events in a very short time span. Thus, the PFU experience is illustrative of participatory democracy in action which casts learners as citizens, rather than individualistic consumers, who are engaged together in determining their learning needs. This form of engaged democracy in action, discernible in numerous popular education initiatives (the Occupy and Idle No More movements are recent examples), exposes the limitations

of even existing democratic style governments elected on the basis of one vote for every eligible adult citizen. And over the past three decades these "democratically" elected governments (more precisely viewed as plutocracies) are steered by globalized business corporate and financial interests. The value of individual voting, the benefits of universal franchise, are diminished accordingly. In these circumstances, the need for initiatives such as the PFU to sustain a meaningful discourse on genuine participatory democracy becomes an imperative.

Appropriately, the genesis of the PFU emerged spontaneously from a small but open meeting immediately after a bag lunch seminar by participants who wanted to respond to the question about the fate of Walter Murray's founding notion of a People's University in some practical kind of way. Since significant discussion at the public seminars had focused on tuition fee increases, the prospect of offering free courses was explored at this initial PFU meeting. Subsequent PFU organizational meetings (open to the public) were held at off-campus locations, mainly on the west side of town – a mixed blue collar, First Nations, and ethnic neighbourhood.

From the outset, there was no problem in finding enthusiastic volunteers who wanted to teach. Over 200 learners, ranging in age from 12 to 82 and varying in formal education from Ph.D.'s to those who had given up on formal schooling, enrolled in the first PFU classes. Students in academically oriented classes (the PFU program, also included public lectures and workshops) had the option of submitting work for detailed feedback and conventional grading. In this regard, the PFU anticipated the wider adoption in higher education, including the University of Saskatchewan, of a policy that grants credit for past experience through prior learning assessment (PLA).

From which traditions both in Saskatchewan and elsewhere did the PFU draw?

Michael: The PFU valued a grass-roots approach that is consistent with the province's historical legacy in community oriented adult education which combines an understanding of our capacities for self-directed (autonomous) learning with a commitment to education as an emancipatory means to social justice and equality. In this view, education cannot be neutral; it is inherently political. For Saskatchewan, we can look to the work of Watson Thomson who, in Michael Welton's assessment "utilized small study groups .... the indispensable context for learning to transform self and society through dialogue and action" (1987, pp.154-155). Though somewhat less radical, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool also favoured a well-organized community-based approach in its contribution to adult education for progressive social change in rural communities.

Elsewhere, quintessential Canadian adult education initiatives such as the Antigonish movement, Frontier College, Newfoundland's Fogo Island project and Quebecois popular education are sources of inspiration from which founding members of PFU have drawn. Similarly, the guiding principles of PFU are akin to those of the free university classes at Berkeley during the 1960s and Highlander Folk School "unearthing seeds of fire" (Adams, 1975). In particular, the Swedish study circle method is well adapted for PFU pedagogy.

We interpret the history of these social and educational movements as evidence of an ongoing emancipatory impulse among different groups and peoples. In order to be true to these living traditions, we incorporate the concept of emancipation as integral to our notion of emancipatory learning. We believe the PFU marks an event from which we can imagine afresh those

aspects of adult education as emancipatory learning that matter to us most. This orientation corresponds to that of Thomas Hodgskin, adult educator, political economist and co-founder of the mechanics' institutes in the UK at the start of the 19th century, for whom the education of a free people should be in their own hands (Collins, 1994, p.32). Yet Hodgskin was no romantic. Whereas Karl Marx praised the usefulness of Hodgskin's work in the *Critique of Political Economy* (Marx, 1989) and all three volumes of *Das Kapital* (Marx, 1986, 1983, 1984), he was critical of what he regarded as the fanciful notions of utopian socialists. Though middle class sponsors, concerned that the lower classes should be informed according to current middle class values, were generally opposed to what the education of a free people in their own hands and in their own interests entailed (classes in political economy, for example), mechanics' institutes pre-figured the emphasis placed on worker education by the more militant Chartist and Trade Union movements later in the century. Yet Hodgskin's quest for the education of a free people, taken up partially by the PFU and increasingly relevant in these times, is still an unfinished project

In recent years, the educational theory and practice of Paulo Freire, in particular, has been paramount in forging a global discourse on the emancipatory potential of education. For Freire education is the practice of freedom. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1983) and *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1973), Freire explains why education cannot be neutral. Education in this view is inevitably a political process whether it serves, through critical enlightenment, the common interests of the majority of people or merely reproduces existing institutional arrangements, the status quo, that further the interests of a privileged minority.

Freire identifies dialogue, consciousness-raising *(conscientization)* and praxis as key overlapping dimensions of a methodology that were apparent in the emergence and development of the PFU. Briefly stated, dialogue in this regard joins people in a purposeful, but essentially non-coercive, attempt to reach an understanding in common about their shared reality with a view to changing it for mutual benefit (Collins, 1998). *Conscientization* refers to this learning process whereby people move from a naïve taken-for granted consciousness to a critical consciousness that empowers them to participate together in the transformation of their world. In praxis, critical reflection and action inter-twine and inform each other as an ongoing dialectical process.

In this light, the PFU can be regarded as emerging within a critical legacy exemplified in the emancipatory pedagogy of Thomas Hodgskin, Paulo Freire, and other outstanding popular education initiatives such as Highlander Folk School, which have advanced the quest for social justice and equality alongside a concern for community interests and the environment (Collins, 1998).

What do the learning processes "Everyone can teach, everyone can learn" espoused by the PFU mean? How were they put into practice?

Howard: The PFU built upon the humanistic conception of education that every human being has the capacity to learn and that their own experience and interests form the basis of knowledge. The metaphor commonly used to describe this process is that of organic growth in which the learner gains a more inclusive range of thought, feeling, and action.[1] On this view, learners are quite capable of teaching others as their experience and interests expand and their range of understanding and feeling for others grows. This approach was the basis of

the PFU, where learning and teaching with-others-in-community was the norm; or, as Michael Collins put it, a community of "friends teaching friends" was established (1994; 1998). By building upon the humanistic conception of education in this way, the PFU invited learners and teachers to alternate in their pedagogical roles quite seamlessly.

What did this mean in practice? That there was a diversity of courses and a variety of teaching and learning styles offered. Courses took place in several accessible locations, and those offered at St. Thomas Wesley United Church in one of the poorest core neighbourhoods of Saskatoon attracted the largest number of students during the first semester in 2002. Qualified people from the community as well as recognized university teachers provided learning opportunities to many adults who could not otherwise afford higher education. For two years, classes were offered free of charge ranging from the theoretical - Aboriginal spirituality, Canadian legal and political systems, scientists questioning science, music, astronomy, and health care ethics – to the practical – How to construct a resume and learning portfolio, success in the workplace, gardening, and composting. Learners were encouraged to speak to their own experience as they were invited to a dialogue, founded on adventure in which ideas were explored, practices examined, and social norms critiqued (Whitehead, 1967). A series of café discussions also attracted participants on such topics as alternative budgets, factory farming, the criminalization of dissent, and global education (Collins, 2003a, 2000b; Woodhouse, 2009).

In this way, the PFU invoked the imagination as the intellectual and emotional capacity of learners to comprehend and discuss alternatives to the status quo. Imaginative learning is often denied in more formal

settings by what Alfred North Whitehead calls the teaching of "inert ideas" that do not relate to the learners' experience and "are merely received into the mind without being utilized, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations" (1957, p.1). In contrast, at the PFU there was a concerted effort to relate abstract ideas to concrete or lived experience, thereby overcoming the dichotomy between the two (Woodhouse, 2014). This process encouraged learners "to construct an intellectual vision of a new world" in which their own capacities could be actualized, and they could avoid the tendency, which Whitehead decries in modern education, to produce "minds in a groove ... [focused on] a given set of abstractions ... [where] the groove prevents straying across country" (Whitehead, 1957, p.93; 1953, p.197).

In what ways is the PFU connected to current and future emancipatory forms of education?

Michael: The PFU can be viewed as an exemplary initiative within a discourse (theory and practice) on emancipatory education. (Elsewhere, we have drawn meaningful connections between the PFU, critical theory, process pedagogy, cultural studies, and participatory research (Collins, 2003a, 2003b; Woodhouse, 2005, 2009). As mentioned, the PFU emerged originally from a public forum concerned with critical issues around the acceleration of corporate business style innovation on campus. By the same token, a PFU orientation would constitute a **purposeful educative dimension** within a wide range of environmentalist and other politically engaged groups who make the case that widespread and serious attention to the effects of climate change and its causes is imperative. In this regard, a critical understanding of how deregulation and the enthronement of free market criteria has led to an intensification of

corporate power that is eroding democratic processes. However, we are learning from the genuinely democratic counter-discourse evident in fast-breaking initiatives like the Occupy Movement, Idle No More, and student demonstrations on the streets of Quebec. These recent social movements arrive already imbued with the spirit of the PFU. It is not all about critical analysis and political activism. As an emancipatory form of education PFU pedagogy also meets the need for an enriched curriculum that includes poetry, music and drama as well as community gardening and craft work.

In the process of creating a fulfilling collective learning environment, the PFU experience enables us to raise parlous questions about the means, contrary to liberal humanist guiding principles, by which our publicly funded universities are being hijacked and reconstructed.

Is there a relationship between the current opposition to administrative attacks on academic freedom at the University of Saskatchewan and the PFU?

Howard: The vision which animated the founding of the PFU was "the people's university" articulated by Walter Murray, the first president of the U of S, who insisted that *"There should be ever present the consciousness that this is the university of the people, established by the people, and devoted by the people to the advancement of learning and the promotion of happiness and virtue"* (University of Saskatchewan, 1909, p.12). Murray's statement was made in the historical circumstances of a newly emergent province in which mercantilist agricultural production was dominant. The sentiments embodied in it are striking. They set the U of S apart from the more elitist Anglophone universities in Ontario and Quebec, and aligned more closely with other universities in Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia

(McLean, 2007). While the idea that the U of S should belong to the people can be interpreted as a justification for the existence of a fledgling institution to taxpayers, there is at the same time a strong emancipatory element to it. The advancement of learning was to be shared among the people of Saskatchewan, and the goal of university education was the common good of the province.2 Murray's language may appear rhetorical, even archaic – how many university presidents today would dare to make the claim that learning leads to virtue – but its message that all knowledge advanced at the U of S was to be shared with the people of the province is undeniable (Woodhouse, 2005; 2009).

A systematic attack on the people's university has taken place in the last couple of decades. This corporatist approach finds its core in the senior administration's attempts to centralize control over academic and financial affairs to an unprecedented degree. Collegial decision making, once the established form of university governance, has been subverted in several ways: the formation of a central committee of top administrators (the Provost's Committee on Integrated Planning), which controls millions of dollars annually, disbursing them at will; a massive growth in the number of administrators who now outnumber faculty3; the dismantling of the General Academic Assembly as the forum for academic decision making4; its replacement by University Council, which has become stacked with administrators from associate deans upwards; the imposition of a flurry of integrated plans designed to plough money into "Signature Areas," many of them "attractive to corporate interests" (Card, 2014, p.4); the introduction of TransformUS, a "program prioritization process" designed to restructure both academic programs and administrative units because of an alleged "structural deficit" of $44 .5 million.

TransformUS was based upon the methodology of Robert Dickeson (2010), which was designed for restructuring programs at technical and community colleges in the United States, not at a so-called "research intensive" university in the U15 in Canada. Among other things, Dickeson proposes "to measure quality by assessing inputs: the quality of faculty, students, facilities, equipment," and he concludes "there is little debate that quality inputs do make a significant difference in sustaining quality" (p.75). Not only is quality reduced to quantity, but the latter statement is a tautology: quality sustains quality. Nevertheless, Dickeson's methodology has been adopted by the universities of Guelph, Regina, Brock, and York. One hundred and sixty members of staff were dismissed from the U of S during the period of TransformUS, many of them marched off campus by private security agents (Matheson, 2013). Among U of S faculty critical of TransformUS was economist Eric Howe (2013), who had resigned from the Academic Program Transformation Task Force, because he saw TransformsUS as "intellectually bankrupt" and riddled with "biases" (pp.4, 1).5 Others like Terry Matheson (2013) questioned the existence of the "structural deficit" in light of previous healthy budget reports (p.3), while Len Findlay (2014) saw TransformUS as "deeply flawed" and "a major waste of time and resources" despite the effort of "honest faculty" who had worked on the task force (p.3), and Claire Card (2014) was critical of TransformUS as a means of restructuring the U of S so as to better serve the interests of the mining industry. The widespread scepticism towards claims of a $44.5M deficit was later confirmed by the Vice President Finance at a meeting of University Council in February 2015: "The University 'sort of' had a surplus and a deficit at the same time; last year $497M in funds was (sic) allocated and $494M in

revenue taken in. The $3M deficit assumes that all of the money in the allocation process is spent as budgeted; however, a surplus exists in the sub allocation streams of approximately $21M due to money not being allocated in its entirety, leading to an $18M surplus" (University of Saskatchewan, 2015). TransformUS was officially abandoned at the U of S in 2014, but a "gentler" version based upon six main "priorities" has since been adopted (Hill, 2014).

In many ways, the most egregious of these actions was the Board of Governors' granting veto power over tenure to the president who could then act as "gatekeeper" to the careers of faculty. In his arbitration award Andrew Sims made it clear that both parties were in the wrong: "It was the board's process that was flawed as a result of the president's advice and the decision to accept that advice" (Warick, 2014). The University Act as the constitutional mission of the university under public funding and the law had been usurped. The impetus for the veto came from then president Peter MacKinnon, who had used it in the case arbitrated by Sims. The senior administration which had initially persisted by launching an appeal against the decision, finally agreed to drop it following negotiations with the faculty association (Barnhart, 2015). Nevertheless, MacKinnon (2014) continues to uphold the right of presidents in market based terms:

> And presidents must exercise rather than delegate or concede their authority to make recommendations to the board [of governors] on awards of tenure. These are multi-million-dollar investments by universities, and it is part of the board's fiduciary responsibility to be satisfied on the part of its senior executive

that every such investment is a good one.
(p.150)

On this view, faculty are no more than resources,
much like pork bellies or stocks and shares, and the
overriding authority of any president is to ensure they
maximize the money invested in them through the award
of tenure.6

As a culmination of this totalizing corporatist
approach, the director of the School of Public Health was
stripped of tenure and marched off campus by security
officers in May 2014. He had made public a document
criticizing the president for preventing deans from
speaking out about TransformUS. The threat to academic
freedom was palpable. A tidal wave of condemnation
resulted in the senior administration scrambling to change
course, reinstating Robert Buckingham's tenure but not his
position as dean. As pressure mounted on the University
both from without, in the form of the Canadian
Association of University Teachers, and within, including
a large student demonstration, the Board of Governors
held two emergency meetings. Shortly before the first on
May 19, the provost resigned. Following the second, the
chair of the chair of the board announced that President
Ilene Busch Vishniac had been terminated without cause.7
Two months later, the chair of the board herself resigned
after a protracted dispute over her legitimacy to remain in
the position. And a few days later, the vice-president of
human resources stepped down. None of this would have
happened without ongoing pressure mounted by students,
faculty, staff, alumni, and the general public in the form of
motions of no confidence, letters to the editor, and rallies
against the corporate ethos embodied in TransformUS.
The actions of this diverse coalition were animated by an
opposing vision of the university and its functions to that

espoused by senior administrators. And they reemphasized the *praxis* of the people's university first articulated more than one hundred years earlier.

Conclusion

As we have shown, the PFU took its name in part from Murray's defining vision. It built upon the founding president's idea that teaching and learning, scholarship and research, should serve both theoretical and community interests (Hayden, 1983). As a community based form of higher education open to all regardless of their ability to pay, the PFU established connections with local not-for-profit organizations and learned from the knowledge and insights which they embodied. At the same time, many of the teachers and learners at the PFU were connected with the broader intellectual community through the process of research and learning.

In these and other ways, the PFU strengthened Murray's vision. Rather than romanticising that vision in this article, we have interpreted it for the purposes of community based adult education today. While recognizing the different social and historical context in which it was articulated, we drew strength from the view that knowledge and learning are to be shared among different groups and social classes. This emancipatory potential, which Murray invoked, thrived at the PFU between 2002 and 2004. Evidence for the need and efficacy of community based higher education abounds. One such example is "The University of the Streets," established by Concordia University in Montreal, another is a popular series of learning experiences at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, a third is the "Philosophy in the Community" series of monthly talks from the U of S itself, the fourth was a series of seminars marking the

renaissance of the PFU in the spring of 2013, and a fifth the Université Populaire de Caen (UPC) in Normandy, France. Like the PFU, the UPC has offered courses free of charge in a wide variety of areas, and operates independently of any university. It was founded by Michel Onfray, who took early retirement from teaching philosophy to "provide an education for ordinary people to understand the world by offering alternative visions to further global market totalization, which now controls ... the very ways in which we think" (2006, Authors' translation). With support for its educational functions provided by the local community, the UPC enables the vision of an open university beyond fees and bureaucracies in a "concrescence" of resistance to and supersession of the market model of education (Woodhouse, 2011a; McMurtry, 1998). Most recently, a documentary film on the Purple Thistle Learning Collective entitled "Common Notions: No Handbook Required" (Berman, Browne, & Collins, 2016) has been selected for showing at the Doxa Documentary Film Festival. Founded by grassroots community activists who are advocates for alternative education, the Purple Thistle, as with the PFU, is guided by learning principles which reveal the creative potential and empowerment that emerge when people take their education into their own hands. In this hopeful scenario, we continue to draw on our PFU experience, "unearthing seeds of fire" (Adams, 1975), and guided by the principles of an emancipatory pedagogy.

session, the other presenter, and the audience for their questions and comments, which have enriched the article. We also wish to thank the review panel for their comments.

Notes

1. See John McMurtry (1988). The humanistic tradition of education has different strands. On the one hand, Paulo Freire, Noam Chomsky, and those in the tradition of critical pedagogy seek radical social change (Collins, 1998); on the other, John Dewey, Bertrand Russell, and Alfred North Whitehead in the liberal tradition argue for greater individual, social, and educational freedoms (Hendley, 2011).

2. Women were represented at the "people's university" from its inception, their numbers growing to match those of men in certain colleges. Aboriginal peoples were largely excluded until the opening of the Indian and Northern Education Program, Indian Teacher Education Program, Northern Teacher Education Program, Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program, and the Native Law Centre in the 1960s and 1970s, Hayden (1983, pp.62, 142, 301). An extension program, situated initially in the College of Agriculture, provided knowledge to farmers and their families throughout the province and later became the Extension Division, introducing credit and non-credit courses in a wide variety of subjects (McLean, 2007, pp.11-17). The Extension Division was disbanded in 2007.

3. According to a document circulated by the Academic Integrity Committee in March 2014, the number of administrators at the U of S grew by more than 104% between 2000 and 2013, totalling 1,335. Faculty increased by 11.6% in the same period, numbering

1,109; and student enrollment increased by 10.9% to 21,610.

4. The General Academic Assembly now meets once a year, comprising the president's speech and the opportunity for faculty and students to ask questions. It has only once had quorum enabling decision making to take place at a special meeting called by faculty concerned about administrative control over the College of Medicine in September 2012.

5. Between March and November 2013, the task force adopted review criteria, designed templates as the basis for gathering information, and reviewed a total of 485 programs (not departments). A system of four quintiles was adopted with the aim of assigning 20% of all programs to each quintile, varying from "investment" to "disinvestment" of "the resources they consume" (University of Saskatchewan, 2013, p.11). *The Report of the Academic Program Transformation Task Force* claimed that because of an alleged budgetary crisis "our assessment was not exclusively focused on the quality of programs or on the soundness of the objectives underlying the creation of the programs" (p.13). Professor Howe resigned in the summer of 2013.

6. Recently Mackinnon, interim president of Athabasca University, was warned by the Canadian Association of University Teachers that the institution could "face possible censure by CAUT Council in November unless they (sic) agree to remedy violations of basic university governance principles and address concerns about academic freedom," CAUT (2015, p.A5).

7. University of Saskatchewan (2014, p.1).

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