

Learning, Knowledge and Trade Union Renewal

An Analysis of the Student Experience of the MA  
in International Labour and Trade Union Studies

Ruskin College, Oxford (2006-2016)

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## **Abstract**

The global restructuring of the capitalist political economy of work has catalysed an existential crisis of trade unionism. The search for ways in which to renew and revitalise organised labour is the most urgent task of the global trade union movement.

In doing so however, this thesis asks firstly, when developing strategies for trade union renewal what role does learning and knowledge production play? Secondly it asks, how is that learning and knowledge gained through social action made material? The former question lays at the heart of this thesis investigation. The latter is a significant reflection of its findings.

This thesis explores the experience of an international body of trade unionists who completed the MA in international labour and trade union studies (ILTUS) at Ruskin College, Oxford between 2006 and 2016. The MA aimed to address the need for the renewal of organised labour, and exemplified Ruskin's historical role in assisting trade unions internationally in addressing the 'conditions for change'.

The thesis builds upon and expands in significant, original ways existing scholarship in the field of trade union education. It rests upon traditions of informal learning and knowledge production across social movement literature, which in turn is embedded in radical adult pedagogy including that of Freire and Gramsci.

Methodologically, the thesis applied a critical educational research approach to explore the impact of the MA learning experience. In doing so it involved students in a modified form of the co-production of research design. The research sought to

explore degrees of transformation and agential outcomes as a result of MA radical pedagogic and curricula processes. This was supplemented by learner's own critical reflexive analysis of impact on their movement practice. As such, the thesis applied the theoretical framework of *renewal actor* to analyse findings.

The findings of the thesis are based on empirical research comprising interviews with a purposive sample of current students and alumni. This methodological approach was allied to an online survey which was completed by the majority of those who enrolled on the MA.

The thesis finds that learners account for their experience of the MA in ways which reflect their embodied sense of trade union activism: that identity, consciousness and knowledge accrue as a result of informal learning undertaken through trade union struggle. Thus, a wholly original grounded theory of embodied activism forms the basis upon which findings attune to the renewal actor proposition. Findings however, move far beyond this proposition in epistemological and ontological terms to generate original grounded theories of *knowing* and *being*.

The thesis asserts that knowledge production processes and outcomes of MA learners mirror that of actors within allied social movements. As such findings argue for an *education for renewal* that draws on MA pedagogy to refresh trade union educational methodologies. This lays the basis for a more coherent set of relations with a wider of body of movements as part of an allied agenda for radical social change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and as means to achieve trade union renewal.

## The MA ILTUS Cohorts 2006-2016

Left to right in descending order is: 2006-08 cohort pictured outside Stoke House, this includes for one term Chevening Scholars<sup>1</sup>, 2008-10 cohort pictured outside Stoke House, 2010-12 cohort pictured at Walton Street, 2012-14 cohort pictured at the Bodleian Library, 2014-16 cohort pictured at the Levellers Day celebration at Burford, Oxfordshire.



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.chevening.org/scholars>

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# Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

How have we arrived at a global crisis of trade unionism? The restructuring of capitalism from the mid-1970s, as a dimension of a neo-liberal globalisation, has profoundly altered the relationship between labour supply, varieties of production and capital accumulation (Castells 1989; Barrientos, 2011). The resultant process of de-industrialisation across the Global North has profoundly altered the nature, scope and work of labour movements internationally (Munck and Waterman, 1998; McIlroy and Daniels, 2008; Munck 2010).

In the United Kingdom (UK) in particular the impact of de-industrialisation upon the labour movement has been debilitating (Phelan, 2006; Phelan, 2007). The slide in membership and collective bargaining coverage has inexorably sapped the traditional source of labour movement power and legitimacy. Simultaneously, the movement has been unable to regain this across a significantly atomised, diverse labour force (ONS 2017).

It is within the resulting parameters of the global focus on strategies for labour movement renewal and revitalisation, and the role of education and knowledge production as a distinct feature of this, that the research focus of this thesis is located.

This thesis is an exploration of the educational experience of trade unionists as they seek to critically interpret their collective and individual experience of the labour movement crisis. It seeks to determine how and whether through radical pedagogy transformative and agential outcomes may accrue and alter their contribution to strategies and practices for trade union renewal.

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to outline the primary research themes, research questions and their relationship to thesis findings within the overall framework of this thesis. As a result of this outline the chapter identifies those gaps in research and knowledge it seeks to fill and outlines the original theoretical framework deployed to interpret research findings, that of the *renewal actor* (RA), as well as introducing a subsequent theoretical explanation for findings; *embodied activism* (EA).

## **1.2 Why this Research and why now?**

In describing her overall experience of the MA, one interviewee described how, *I think my confidence has grown and my belief that I can actually do something that could impact and make a difference, in a small way, but nevertheless I do feel that that is possible now, and I didn't before.*

Through what process of learning did Student 1<sup>2</sup> (2014-16 MA cohort) acquire a conscious appreciation of her personal transformation and capacity to affect change,

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<sup>2</sup> Anonymised details of student backgrounds are cited on p.92 of the methodology chapter

and how might such an understanding contribute to securing a renewal of organised labour?

### The Global Crisis of Trade Unionism

The loss of power and influence of organised labour globally has culminated in a multiplicity of strategies for renewal and revitalisation (Fairbrother & Yates, 2003). Whilst a limited body of literature of labour and trade union studies locates activist education as a potential *source* for renewal (Forrester 2004), too little attention has been paid to the pedagogic *process* by which learning and knowledge production may actually be harnessed for this purpose.

As such, an examination of transformation and agency as a result of learning and activist knowledge production might arguably feature as a means to facilitate and accelerate trade union renewal. Thus the primary goal of this thesis is an examination of the experience of trade unionists as students. Its primary focus is to explore whether their experience of a discrete programme of learning centred on renewal may provide a contribution to labour movement regeneration. As such, at its simplest, this thesis asks, *what do we learn from the learning of trade unionists?*

### The MA International Labour and Trade Union Studies (ILTUS)

This thesis focuses upon on the experience of an international body of trade unionists who completed the MA in international labour and trade union studies

(ILTUS) at Ruskin College, Oxford between 2006 and 2016<sup>3</sup>. The outcomes of this thesis seek to make an original contribution to knowledge within the field of radical adult education and specifically trade union education. It does so in several ways. For example, this thesis explores the relationship between MA methodology and practice and the outcomes from analysis of research data that generated themes of *validation, praxis and tensions*. Importantly, iterative processes of analysis reveal that the significance of such unforeseen findings is that it rests upon a common experience of trade unionism paraphrased as the *hidden injuries of trade union renewal*.

This post-graduate programme, and its sister under-graduate programme, were predicated on providing a discrete, residential opportunity for trade unionists to build on their existing experience and knowledge to support their further and more focused contribution to trade union renewal. As explored further in Chapter 4 when defining the context of the MA, Ruskin College is one of the oldest, established centres for labour movement education globally (Pollins, 1984; Kean, 1999). These two programmes mirror not only the proximity of the institution to organised labour<sup>4</sup>, but are reflective also of an attempt to support the movement's short and long-term organisational and strategic needs.

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<sup>3</sup> As detailed in Chapter 4, the MA is no longer in existence, and the ILTUS programme area is now in demise.

<sup>4</sup> This meant, for example, that a number of trade unions provided scholarships and actively promoted the MA to staff and activists. Sample promotional material:

<https://www.unison.org.uk/news/article/2014/03/you-can-study-with-unison-at-ruskin-college/>

In the context of the longevity of this relationship, this thesis is an original attempt to critique the pedagogy of such programmes, discern their coherence and relevance to aid trade union renewal, and examine issues of outcome and impact.

The professional doctorate (DProf) thesis provides a unique and valuable opportunity to critically reflect upon practice. As such the thesis research agenda has been catalysed by my distinct positionality. In a career as adult educator and researcher spanning 26 years, the period as Programme Co-ordinator for the MA ILTUS marked a significant highpoint. As detailed in Chapter 7, the thesis provides an opportunity to root the long-term development of pedagogical practice around three over-lapping priorities.

First, to undertake an authoritative, empirical analysis of student experience in the context of an MA wholly unique to the UK, and positioned as contributing to the renewal of the labour movement. Surely if a programme was predicated on its renewal practicability it would be of value pedagogically and politically to have some evidence of this?

Second, it was deemed essential within the context of a radical pedagogy that alumni and students of the MA were informing research design through a modified form of co-production of the thesis. The adopted approach is outlined further in the methodology chapter. Primarily this was because the MA was conceived by Sue

Ledwith<sup>5</sup> as a programme *about* them and *for* them as actors central to labour movement renewal internationally.

Similarly, if movement-relevant theory (Bevington and Dixon, 2005; Choudry, 2015) was to arise from research findings, then it required the active participation of these scholar activists. It was their insight alone that could narrate a relationship between learning, knowledge and renewal by critically reflecting upon their experience of the programme and aiding the process of research design.

As Budd Hall states

Knowledge is produced and renewed by continuous testing, by acting upon one's theories, by reflecting upon one's actions, and by beginning the cycle again. It is the combination of social transformation and education that has created the kind of knowledge which forges the personal and communal commitment for sustained engagement. (1978 pp.13-14)

Third, in exploring the framework of MA pedagogic practice to determine degrees of transformatory and agential impact, it became necessary to draw on the literature on social movement education and knowledge production. This is a rich, critical source of material to appreciate better, for example, the role of embodied learning through social action. This better positions the argument in Chapter 7 for the relationship

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<sup>5</sup> Sue had initially created the MA in Women's Studies, and went to develop and validate the MA ILTUS.



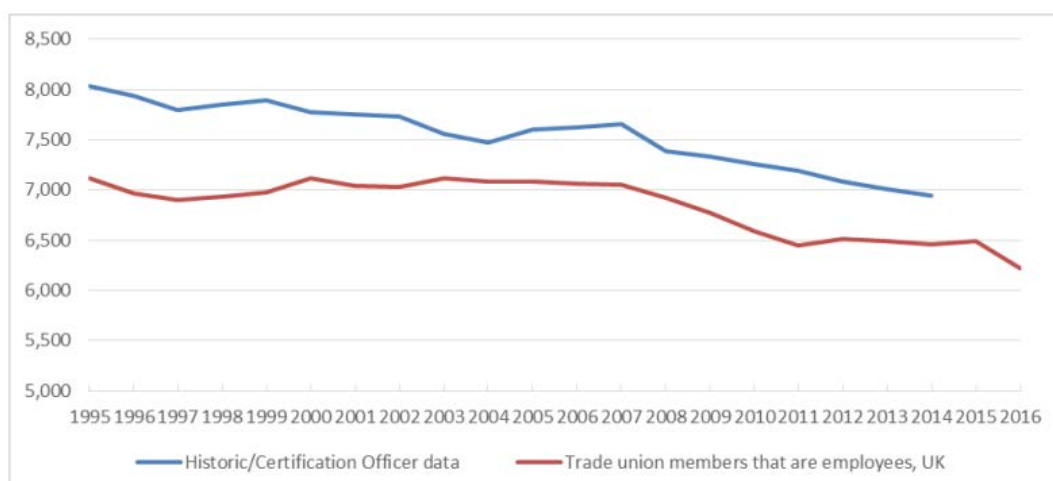
between an *education for renewal* and a more coherent, sustained relationship between labour and allied social movements in a joint agenda for radical social change.

### 1.3 Key Themes of the Thesis

This thesis has three central themes. These are, firstly, the basis of the global crisis of trade unionism. Secondly, the contested nature of trade union renewal in the UK which can be conceptualised through posing the questions, renewal *of* what, and *for* what? Third, and the core narrative of the thesis, the exploration of the potential role of learning and knowledge production as an aid to overcoming the contradictions between the sources of crisis and the nature of renewal responses. These themes are reflected in the sections and associated research questions below.

#### The Continuing Decline of Trade Union Power

At the time of writing, the UK labour movement received stark news. The official data on trade union density revealed in May 2017 that density in 2016 stood at 6.2 million members, 23.2% of UK employees (BEIS 2017).



**Figure 1:** Source: Trade union membership 2016: Statistical Bulletin. Published by Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), May 2017

This was a drop of 275,000 from 2015, and was both the largest annual fall in membership and, as revealed by Figure 1 below, the lowest recorded level of density since 1995. This contrasts with the UK highpoint in 1979 of 13.2 million members representing 53% of the UK employees. The Table helps depict the perilous decline of trade union membership and is a stark illustration of the crisis of trade unionism in the UK context.

A key basis of the crisis of trade unionism globally, but particularly in the UK, is a material decline in the forms and expressions of power and influence (Fairbrother & Yates, 2003; Stewart, 2004; Gall, 2013). Of these forms, trade union density, and the determination of who and why workers are members of a trade union, remains a key determinant of both a crisis, and measure, of renewal (Ledwith & Lotte-Hansen, 2012; Hyman & Gumbrell-McCormick, 2013; Hodder & Kretsos, 2015). Whilst the basis of the crisis, as revealed in the literature review, identifies a constellation of factors, I would suggest that declining membership represents both symbolically and practically the central element of the crisis.

### The Contested Nature of Trade Union Renewal

Put simply, this thesis asserts that the UK trade union movement has been unable to overcome the causes of the crisis of trade unionism via renewal measures to-date (Fernie and Metcalf, 2005; Gall, 2009; Atzeni, 2014). This is because it would require such profound re-shaping of the purpose and function of trade unions that it is beyond practicality and/or the imagination of extant leadership.

In a circular fashion, the continuing decline in density, has challenged the legitimacy of trade unions as the authentic representatives of workers' interest. Aggressive statutory reform throughout the 1980s, changing social attitudes, including those around class positions, and a profound re-shaping of work combine to accelerate this circularity (Hanson, 1991; Marsh, 1992; Phillips, 2018). Ultimately, the contemporary political economy of work questions the relevance of a civil society actor with which the majority of the UK workforce has no relationship.

As such, this thesis argues that renewal strategy to-date has not sought to transform the structures, cultures and organisation of the trade union movement to sufficiently accommodate the nature of the crisis of trade unionism, but instead maintained a status quo. The profound dilemma of renewal strategy is in determining in the modern era who trade unions are for and what role they play.

For Simms and Charlwood (2010) the initial challenge posed to trade unions in the UK is that the traditional 'voice' connecting losers and winners in the labour market never reflected a natural, social phenomenon, and rested instead on 'imagined solidarities'. They argue that a common, purposeful response to this is difficult to recreate in the face of profound legislative, political and social change: 'the collective interests of workers that are given voice by trade unions are a social construct. In other words, those collective interests do not simply 'exist'' (2010:126).

Whilst continuing evidence of trade union decline supports the assertion of Simms and Charlwood, their argument is not uncontested. For example, recent examples of organising and mobilisation amongst poorly paid workers in the hospitality industry

and so-called gig economy<sup>6</sup>, by both conventional unions and new forms of workers' organisation, are suggestive of a way to assert collective interests that do manifestly exist.

## Trade Union Learning and Knowledge Production

Within this context is the intersecting third theme, the core narrative of the thesis, which asks how and whether learning and knowledge production might constitute a key source of agency for renewal to either supplement or replace extant theory and strategy. As evidenced in this literature, trade union education and its purpose and place in a renewal agenda remains under-researched and under-theorised.

It is this core narrative of learning and knowledge production which seeks to make an original contribution to knowledge. It seeks to do so by providing shape and coherence to a critical pedagogy for renewal. It does so primarily by asking those who have experienced a model of this, what they made of their experience, and then attempting to theorise upon the relationship of this to supporting renewal strategy and activity.

In this sense an 'education for renewal' is, at its simplest, that which draws on traditions of adult radical education, consciously acknowledges the tensions and contradictions of existing renewal strategy, and reflexively explores that which may

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<sup>6</sup> <https://unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2018/october/hospitality-workers-rally-for-better-pay-and-union-rights/> and <https://iwgb.org.uk/post/5bbb3ff1bf94a/uber-drivers-to-strike-for>

impact positively on inherent tensions, thus enabling some form of impact on renewal.

### Defining the Renewal Actor and Embodied Activism

In order to devise an appropriate research methodology this thesis has utilised the theoretical construct of the Renewal Actor (RA) to perceive of any commonality of experience and outcomes of MA students<sup>7</sup> and alumni.

The specific goal was to gain insight into how and whether a capacity for praxis may be transformed through, for example, exposure to conceptual tools to allow for analysis of learning and knowledge. Similarly, there was a need to determine if agential capacity was transformed as a result of pedagogic exposure to, for example, international comparative insight upon arguably successful approaches to renewal.

In Chapter 5 findings theorise upon the RA through this approach and by generating original grounded theories of *knowing* and *being* from research data. Here we see how iterative stages of coding dissect the relationship between an exposure to radical pedagogy and a critical transformation of confidence, identity and consciousness which has deteriorated over time.

We should note here also, that during the iterative stages of data analysis there emerged a supplemental, and equally important insight, which is theorised in

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<sup>7</sup> The 'student' body represented here and throughout the thesis is the MA cohort of 2014-16.

Chapter 6 as the wholly original phenomena in the literature of labour studies and trade union renewal; embodied activism (EA).

As detailed in Chapter 6, EA is the basis upon which theories of *knowing* and *being* are predicated, and without which it is impossible to interpret the multiple ways of learning and knowing through trade union activism. As described in the chapter it was through the process of writing analytic memos (AM) during the process of coding narrative data that insight was gained on the literature of embodied activist learning. It was this initial exposure which thereafter generated a grounded theory of EA.

The critical pedagogy of embodied activist education (Ollis, 2010; Drew, 2014) is of particular relevance to radical adult education in that it distinctly acknowledges that learning which is informal, tacit, holistic in nature, and is derived from bodily and emotional exposure to the social world.

As such, a grounded theory of EA reflects informal learning through day-to-day trade union struggle and which comes to shape identity, consciousness and knowledge. This is a dialectical materialist appreciation shaped by an analysis of experience of work and trade unionism and as revealed in thesis findings. Over time this is overridden and subjugated as a result of movement culture structure and organisation leading to impaired degrees of self-confidence and low self-esteem arising in the phenomena identified in this thesis, the hidden injuries of trade union renewal.

As will be argued in Chapter 6, EA is understood and articulated through radical pedagogy, and specifically that which centres on praxis (critical reflective practice, dialogue, theorising, research) and without which theories of *knowing* and *being* cannot be asserted. As such, a radical pedagogy enables a process of *unlearning* and *relearning* and a pathway to activist scholarship through praxis.

#### 1.4 The Research Questions

Whilst the thesis themes create the overall infrastructure of the thesis, it is the research questions which create its shape and coherence. These research questions are:

1. What does trade union renewal mean?
2. What role can education play in trade union renewal?
3. What can trade union educationists learn from the experiences of Ruskin's MA ILTUS programme and student experiences?

As revealed earlier, these cohere with the research themes, and connect directly with the opportunity for critical reflection upon practice within the thesis.

Through direct engagement with these questions, we seek to comprehend whether learning and knowledge production has a role to play in trade union renewal. By analysing the experience of those who have undertaken the MA we seek to understand how and whether a radical pedagogy may have transformative and agential outcomes. Similarly, and on a long-term, practical basis, we seek to

appreciate whether MA methodology and practice cohere into a broader, generalisable *education for renewal*. The way in which research questions are addressed through thesis chapters is outlined below.

## **1.5 Theoretical Frameworks**

This section of the chapter will provide a thumbnail sketch of adopted theoretical frameworks, and outline the rationale for their selection. A more definitive outline of these frameworks and approach to analysis is given in Chapters Two and Three.

### **A Crisis of Trade Unionism**

The literature in the field of labour and trade union studies positions the central location of the crisis of trade unionism within a critique of the domains of globalisation and neo-liberalism; a conjoined politico-economic force herein referred to as a neo-liberal globalisation occasioning a profound restructuring of capitalist political economy. (Upchurch and Mathers, 2011; McDonald, 2013).

In the context of the UK, the specificity of this crisis is the profound impact upon those heavily industrialised sectors that traditionally sedimented trade union power, expressing this also through a class dimension. The reinforcing role of highly aggressive anti-trade union statutory reform combined significantly to destabilise a once considerable force in UK polity. This process has culminated with questions of legitimation and purpose of the trade union movement, not least in those emergent



sectors, for example finance and technologies, where trade union density has remained light (Towers, 1989; Kelly, 1990; Mason and Bain, 1993).

### Contradictions of Renewal Strategy and Practice

As identified earlier, the primary theoretical basis that frames a contradiction of UK renewal strategy to-date, is that which asserts an inability and/or unwillingness of the labour movement to address the questions, *of what*, and *for what*? (Ledwith, 2009; Simms and Holgate, 2010; Martinez Lucio and Perrett, 2009)

As such, for example, the literature reveals the relative inability of the trade union movement to adequately develop inclusive organising strategy to cater for increased migration following the accession of A8 countries in the European Union (EU) (Anderson, Clark and Parutis, 2008; Aziz, 2015) as a feature of renewal strategy.

One response, offered by Simms (2010<sup>8</sup>) is that the reconstitution of labour movement power rests upon the redefinition of union identity and collective interest representation specifically to reflect the heterogeneity of the 21<sup>st</sup> century labour force. In examining the relative failure of existing renewal strategies in the UK to-date, focusing on organising, employer partnerships and mergers, Simms contends that it is precisely because the movement has not been able to collectively assert a clear position on *whose* interests are central to renewal and *how* collective interests

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<sup>8</sup> This is an unpublished version of a conference paper. The author's permission has been sought and granted to cite from this publication.

may be most effectively represented, that renewal strategies globally, but specifically the United Kingdom UK, have failed to arrest decline.

Simms' stark conclusion helps pinpoint the elusive, contradictory nature of renewal when pointing out at the time of writing that it "helps explain why trade unions have left 13 years of Labour government control in a weaker position than they entered it" (2010:17).

### The Renewal Actor

The theoretical framework adopted to formulate the theoretical framework of the Renewal Actor (RA) commences with an acknowledgement of the relative absence of learning and knowledge as a feature of the renewal literature. As Chapter Two reveals, both the literature defining labour studies (Munck, 2009; Brookes and McCallum, 2017; Taylor and Rioux, 2018) and that covering different elements (Milkman and Voss, 2004; Armbruster-Sandoval, 2004; Tait, 2016; Lopez, 2004; Gall, 2009; Cohen, 2006) combine to omit an explicit focus upon the pedagogical principles of labour studies, much less a radical pedagogy for labour movement renewal. Thus the theoretical framework of the RA was devised specifically to examine the degrees to which defined pedagogical processes, predicated specifically on supporting renewal, could identify ways in which MA alumni and students could be identified as having achieved specific transformational and agential outcomes.

The value of adopting Mezirow's theory of transformative learning as one dimension of the RA theoretical framework is in the way it has helped shape an appreciation of narrative evidence in interviews and survey. This data spoke heavily in the first instance of deficit, limitation and, quite specifically, a lack of confidence and knowledge amongst trade union activists; not untypical of adult working class learners (Merrill, 2004; James and Nightingale, 2005; Reay, 2009).

The dimension of agency is introduced in three ways drawing upon Hay's (1990) insights on the theory of structure and agency in the context of movement-oriented learning, and is thus highly relevant to interpreting the impact of the MA.

Firstly, Hay's notion of 'strategic learning' reflects the MA's pedagogic root of praxis in the context of renewal and of the intersection between non-formal, informal and formal learning. Second, as empirical evidence reveals, MA learning and teaching methodologies reflect and project the collective/movement-oriented ambitions of students and alumni. Last, narrative and thematic analysis of research data significantly underlines outcomes from a process of learning that is fixedly described in a collective context, and places substantial value on this.

The RA framework was initially considered sufficient as an analytical device to help shape the thesis research process, and thereafter articulate findings. What was wholly unforeseen during the iterative and cyclical process of coding research data however, was the profound, degree to which student narratives spoke of a positioning intersecting with that of the RA that required theorising in its own right, embodied activism (EA).

The subsequent and emerging theoretical approach draws upon a classic, mainstream literature on embodied learning focusing on learning processes that involve affect, emotion and the body (Brockman, 2001; Clarke, 2001). In the context of political/social activism and learning there have been recent attempts to bridge what is argued as a privileging of traditional cognitive approaches to learning and to generate a somatic approach (Matthews, 1998; Crowdes, 2000) that reflects the multiple ways of learning and knowing through activism. This latter literature has been instrumental in the emergence and development of a theory of EA, and particularly instrumental here has been the work of Tracy Ollis (2010, 2012, 2014, 2015) and others including Drew (2014, 2015) and Fonow and Franzway (2016).

### An Education for Renewal

The framework adopted in this thesis recognises both the historically important role of learning and knowledge to pursue the interests of the trade union movement across the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the inherent tension when elements of such an approach are framed to support the interests of capitalist political economy (Lewis, 1993; Holford, 1994; Fieldhouse, 1996; McIlroy and Daniels 2008). It is in this context that the literature asserts the inefficiency of current models of trade union education to support renewal activity (Simms 2012; Simms and Holgate, 2010).

The thesis argues for a refreshed approach to trade union education to support renewal efforts: an education for renewal. It seeks to examine how and whether the

MA's radical pedagogy provides such a blueprint. In doing so it draws upon the literature of education and knowledge production across a diverse range of social movements (Bevington and Dixon, 2007; Choudry and Kapoor, 2010; Novelli and Ferus-Comelo, 2010; Choudry, 2015) which in turn is rooted in the traditions of radical, critical pedagogy (Mayo 1999).

## **1.6 Thesis Chapters**

The thesis has been organised and presented in the following way.

The literature review (Chapter Two) immediately follows this, in order that early theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the approach can be established. A key goal of the chapter is to address research question one. Furthermore, it pays attention to that literature which forms the theoretical foundation of the RA and EA propositions and relates these clearly to questions two and three.

Chapter Three then provides a definitive outline of the methodology used in this thesis with a focus upon the innovative approach of the co-construction of research design. This chapter also provides a clear insight upon the approach to crafting the conceptual framework to analyse research findings. As is required from a thesis for a Professional Doctorate this chapter also reflects upon the author's positionality in approaching the research exercise.

The relevance of Chapter Four is to place the MA ILTUS programme in a global and national context, not least in reference to the trade union renewal agenda, and

correspondingly, explores the stated aims and ambitions of those who enrolled. Here, for example, we can see the tradition of the MA at Ruskin in enabling trade unions to respond to the 'conditions for change'. This chapter helps provide practical, and historically comparative, insight upon research question two.

It is from Chapter Five that the thesis deepens its interrogation into the third research question by interpreting the renewal experience of MA ILTUS students and alumni. Here the thesis first explores the degrees to which research findings intersect with the theoretical framework of the RA. The primary data sources here are interviews and evidence from an online questionnaire completed by all MA alumni and students. Findings were largely unforeseen and whilst they facilitate a comprehensive enabling of the RA framework, they do so by generating grounded theories of *knowing* and *being*.

Chapter Six provides insight into the unforeseen outcomes of a critical stage in data analysis, and which cohered fluidly with extant literature to help shape a theoretical explanation for findings of EA. There is detailed insight of how data generated from interviews is analysed. This insight is critically important, not least as it sheds light upon resultant depth gained from interviews shaped through a process of co-construction of research design. The thrust overall is to reveal evidence of a genuine attempt at methodological rigour and insight. This chapter responds directly to research question three and informs question two.

Chapter Seven addresses research question two, and nuances further the findings identified in Chapter Five by drawing together strands to argue for an all-embracing

*education for renewal*. A particular ambition here, not least in seeking practicability and generalisability of findings, is to argue for a form of synthesis between learning and knowledge production methods and modes in allied social movements and labour movements, with a specific focus on the UK.

The thesis concludes with a discussion and concluding remarks in Chapter Eight. Here, the thesis directly summarises the thesis response to each research question. This chapter will also synthesise the core strands of the thesis locating these within the dominant, urgent call for trade union renewal, and the examination of learning and knowledge production as an authentic aid to this. This chapter will shed some light on the challenges posed to the generalisability of findings, and identify potential responses to these.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to frame the thesis research questions, providing a coherent synthesis of relevant literature and theory addressing each one. In doing so it will also outline those central features of the literature which provide conceptual coherence for the purposes of analysing data and producing findings.

As outlined in Chapter One, and discussed further below, the role of learning and knowledge in the context of trade union renewal remains under-researched and under-theorised within existing literature. Thus the specific outcomes of this chapter are to structure suitable theoretical frameworks for two purposes. First, to enable an investigation into the experience of those who have undertaken the MA to explore degrees of transformatory and agential outcomes. Second, to determine whether MA methodology and practice cohere into a broader, generalisable *education for renewal*.

#### Coherence with the Research Questions

This chapter begins with a reference back the primary basis of the global crisis of trade unionism, thus appreciating that, as sketched in Chapter One, this is the catalyst for an agenda to renew and revitalise trade unionism.



Here, we address directly research question one, shifting focus from the global nature of the crisis of trade unionism, to then shift our primary focus to the UK national context.

An underscoring of the global, politicised root of this catalyst is critical in then querying by what degrees the renewal agenda, pursued principally at the level of the nation state, can sufficiently cater for the rapid, violent rupture in the settled base of organised labour. We go on to explore the specific contradictions of extant renewal strategy in the UK, as it seeks to regain power, influence and legitimacy. As a result of this contradiction we are left to ask not only *how* this agenda may itself be renewed, but also *whether* it can be.

This initial focus helps locate primary drivers for the chapter to move next to detail that literature which explores the relevance of learning and knowledge production within trade unions in responding to research question two. Here, in framing an appropriate theoretical framework, we draw upon the literature of social movement learning and knowledge production, which in turn is predicated upon traditions of radical, critical pedagogy.

The shaping of a coherent relationship between renewal, learning and knowledge production is the core feature of this chapter. This section of the chapter constructs an examination of key thematic literature central to address the third research question. Here the literature explores the means by which conceptualised and applied notions of transformative learning cohere with theories and applications of

agency to create a theoretical framework to be deployed in Chapter Three against which narrative data is analysed around the proposition of renewal actor (RA).

As is revealed in Chapter Five, findings enable a coherent engagement with the adopted theoretical framework, but move beyond this in an unforeseen dimension to generate grounded theories of *knowing* and *being* to more fully inform outcomes from the MA experience.

## **2.2 Renewal: A Crisis of Power, Influence and Legitimacy**

### Restructuring the Global Economy

The empirical and theoretical basis of a global crisis of trade unionism is typically posited as arising from the emergence of the conjoined phenomena of a neo-liberal globalisation (Harvey, 2005; Gindin and Panitch, 2012; Stedman Jones, 2014). Thus it is argued that the significant developments attributable to globalisation, occasioning a profound re-shaping of production, exchange and distribution in world markets have been aided through neo-liberal policy (Weiss, 1998; Newell and Wheeler, 2006; Harvey, 2010; Major, 2014).

A key outcome of this can be generalised as a process of de-industrialisation across the Global North starting in the mid-1970s, corresponding with an increase in the economic activity of newly-industrialising countries (NICs) occasioning the rise of a

new international division of labour (NIDL) (Froebel, 1981; Radice, 2014; Charnock and Starosta, 2016) reflecting a global industrial shift in productive networks.

Although we shall move forward below to explore the implications of this crisis in the UK context below, it is important to say that, in the modern era, the re-shaping of work and employment globally have been affected separately, and in combined ways, by the rise in precarious work, particularly in what is known as the gig economy, and new technologies including artificial intelligence and robotics (Ford, 2015; Bloodworth, 2018; Kessler, 2018; Prassl, 2018; West, 2018)

### The Renewal Agenda

The argument of an existential crisis of trade unionism (Jacques and Mulhern, 1981; Gorz, 1982; Regini, 1992; McIlroy and Daniels 2009) has catalysed a series of coping strategies and initiatives including mergers, new organising techniques and creation of new member services broadly categorised as the renewal agenda (Behrens et. al. 2004; Stewart, 2004; Phelan, 2007(a); 2007(b)). This agenda, revealed as contested and contradictory in the literature, has had limited effect particularly in the global north in halting the long-term decline in trade union membership and collective bargaining coverage, traditional proxies for trade union power and influence (Simms & Charlwood, 2010; Jepsen, 2016; Eckhard, 2015; Bewley, 2013).

More broadly and chronically however is the correlation between trade union decline and the rise in relative economic inequality globally, and once again, particularly in the Global North. This is reflected in the significant rise in insecure work, depression of wages and attendant impacts on health and well-being (Baker, 2004; Jaumotte & Buitron 2015; Baccaro, 2008; Hayter, 2011).

The 'end of labour' thesis, as expounded by social scientists like Manuel Castells (1996) and Guy Standing (2010) (see also Jacobi 1986; Bassett, 1986; Beaumont, 1987) is a further explanation for the crisis in trade unionism. This approach is however, problematic. It relies too heavily, it is contended, on an assumption that the diminished structural and associational power of established trade unions, and emergent forms of workers' organisation, cannot determine new, innovative ways to overcome the corrosive structuring conditions of the new global economy.

Empirical evidence documents insurgency in territories assumed tame for the purposes of capital's expansion (Ness, 2015; Scipes, 2016, Ren, 2016) and renewed sources and forms of labour power in those regions consider depleted of agency (Ness, 2014; Sinwell and Mbatha, 2016; Choudry and Smith, 2016). Similarly, in the UK, the potentially debilitating encroachment of the gig economy has been met with a concerted response by both established trade unions and most notably by new forms of workers' organisation (O'Connell 2017).

To some degree these developments reflects Silver's (2003, 2014) account of the methodical and recurrent making, unmaking and remaking of working classes and of

workers' movements in direct response to phases of capitalist expansion and contraction as characterized by Schumpeter's notion of 'creative destruction' (1954).

### **2.3 The Nature of Trade Union Decline in the United Kingdom**

The dilemma of trade union renewal in the UK rests on an analysis of the way in which power, influence and legitimacy have been eroded. Specifically, there is a need to underline the data and literature which supports Hyman's (1999) contention that UK trade unionism is comprised a shrinking, privileged rump of the labour force, and is incapable of overcoming on-going profound change across the economy.

A sustained process of de-industrialisation starting in the 1970s has had drastic impacts on long-established heavy industries e.g. mining (Johnson, 1991; Riddell, 1991; High, 2017; Hall and Jacques, 1983; Gamble, 1988; Williamson, 2015)). The direct impacts on long-established, highly unionised industrial communities has precipitated significant change in identities consummated on class, occupation and the symbolic nexus with trade union membership (Ford and Goodwin, 2014; Jones, 2016; Evans and Tilley, 2017). The era is synonymous with the key shift away from a post-war era of consensus, to one characterised as less collectively oriented and more driven towards consumerist atomization (Slater, 1998; Furedi, 2002; Cova, 2007; [Baudrillard](#), 2016;).

The resultant shift in the UK economy is to one principally considered a service sector economy (Tyler, 2017; ONS, 2016, 2017), and in which and one in which trade unions have relatively little presence (Lynch, 2009; Simms, 2013; BEIS, 2017).

Thus, an increasing 'never membership' (Gallie, 1989; Blanden and Machin, 2003; Bryson and Gomez, 2005; Wilman, 2007) has significantly reshaped a historically positive attitude towards trade unions, particularly amongst young workers (Hodder, *ibid*; Williams and Quinn, *ibid*). This shift, accelerated as a result of economic austerity measures since 2010 has precipitated a continuing shrinking and reconfiguration of the public sector, the UK redoubt of trade union membership. By 2017 public sector employment stood at 17%, the smallest proportion of the UK workforce since records began in 1999 (ONS 2017).

Whilst longitudinal data on trends in membership density and collective bargaining coverage in the UK provide some insight on the relative decline of trade union power (Daniel and Milward, 1983; Cully, 1999; Millward, 2000; Kersley, 2006; Wanrooy, 2013) we need also a means of explaining the data in more nuanced ways. So, this analysis starts with an interpretation of current data and moves on to locate these trends in more significant, structural ways.

The last data available places trade union membership in the UK at 6.2 million workers, 23.5% of the UK workforce (BEIS 2017). This is down from the historic peak of 13 million workers in 1979 which represented a density of 53% (Charlwood and Metcalf 2005).

In the context of crisis and the search for a way to reassert trade union power, influence and legitimacy – and particularly through increased density - an analysis of trends revealed through the latest BEIS is critical. This is essentially because the data presents the average trade union member as atypical in the context of the UK's

labour force, labour market, and across wider society when compared with allied data ((Disney, 1990; Wanrooy, 2013; Felstead, 2015; ONS 2016).

More worryingly is the fact that, whilst in the recent era women have been more likely to be members of a trade union than men, the data reveals that whilst male membership fell by 2.8% in 2016, female membership fell by 5.4%, the biggest annual fall in female membership levels since records began.

The employment status, demographic and sectoral location of trade union membership is inconsistent with empirical and theoretical trends in work and employment in a number of ways.

This includes three critically important, overlapping examples. First, the relative inability of trade unions to recruit young workers (Cregan, 1999; Tailby and Pollert, 2011; Hodder 2015; Hodder & Kretsos, 2015, Williams and Quinn, 2017). Second, acknowledged challenges of organising migrant workers (Martinez Lucio and Perrett, 2009; Connolly, 2012; Tapia and Turner, 2013). Third, the significant difficulties of engaging with workers contracted under atypical contracts or working as freelancers or are self-employed (Gall, 2005; Boehm and Zweimuller, 2012; Alberti, 2013; Forde; Wynne; 2015; Slater, 2016; Balaram 2017) with disastrous consequences when examining the data on the increasing scale of zero hours contracts as a form of employment contract (ONS 2017).

## 2.4 Imagined Solidarities

The acute, specific ways in which trade union power and influence have shrunk reveal in the literature that the renewal dilemma is not simply answering questions of what, and *for* what, but additionally, *what* are trade unions for, and, profoundly, *who* are trade unions for? Whilst the literature does speak of trade union 'resilience' (Danford, Richardson & Upchurch 2003; McBride, 2005; Atzeni, 2014; Hodder, 2016), and the essential role of unions as civil society actors (Frangi, 2017; Wanrooy, 2013) the basic issue for Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick (2014) is their lack of relevance for the majority of workers.

The ideological counter-revolution of the past three decades has placed unions very much on the defensive. They are often seen as representing a vested interest: those who are already relatively secure in the labour market, and who have relatively good wages and working conditions; those who are in most cases winners or at least not major losers in the process of economic restructuring. But unions have to convince themselves and others that they are the voice of the majority, that they represent the losers as much as the winners, and that they want to convert the losers *into* winners. (2014:203)

Such analysis asks us to query how and whether, in the contemporary context, trade unions retain a prevailing, widely accepted legitimacy and authority to be considered, particularly by non-unionised workers, as their principal representative social actor,



able to voice and legitimise their collective interests, and supporting these through the deployment of appropriate power resources.

For Simms and Charlwood (2010) the basic challenge posed to trade unions in the UK is that the traditional 'voice' connecting losers and winners in the labour market never reflected a natural, social phenomenon, and is impossible to recreate in the face of profound legislative, political and social change: 'the collective interests of workers that are given voice by trade unions are a social construct. In other words, those collective interests do not simply 'exist'" (2010:126).

For these authors, and others (Cronin, 1984; Stevis and Boswell, 2007; Connaughton, 2013) their analysis rests upon Hyman's earlier thesis that organised labour historically reflected 'imagined solidarities' of the mass-production era industrial working class (1999). This was the idea that a predominantly white, male, full-time employee in manufacturing industry constituted the 'legitimate' interests of organised labour reflects for Hyman (1999) Durkheim's notion of 'mechanical solidarity', of standardisation imposed through homogeneity (1997).

Thus, the UK trade union movement is left determining whether the contemporary diverse, complex workforce has a common set of interests, and thereafter whether it may be seen as a legitimate and capable agent of these.

## Trade Union Power

Whilst the capacity of trade unions in the UK to reimagine popular, contemporary notions of solidarity between disparate workers across the contemporary labour market and labour force remains elusive and contradictory, an equally contested concept is that of determining the way in which trade unions accrue and deploy power resources to advance the interests of members.

McGuire's four-fold typology (2014) for identifying and analysing the sources of trade union power (associative, structural, institutional and discursive) is collapsed by Simms and Charlwood into two cruder forms, drawing on French and Raven (1968), into that of legitimacy power and coercive power. The latter approach is arguably weaker in its conceptualisation, as it lacks the former's case study analysis to assess theoretical rigour. Despite this, we are left nonetheless with a question of how best to evaluate the means by which trade unions can accrue and deploy power in the context of on-going decline.

This challenge is all the more acute when examined from the simple equation of the 'union premium' or 'wage mark-up' (Booth 1995). These account for differentials in pay and other terms and conditions between trade union members and non-members, as well as between sectors of comparative density difference (Schmitt, 2008; Bryson, 2014; Breda, 2015). Literature in the domain of renewal, and empirical evidence, chart a persistent decline in this premium in the UK and globally (Blanchflower and Bryson, 2004; Bryson and Forth, 2010).

## Workers' Interests

A central goal of renewal strategy centres arguably on a re-examination of the twin, contested pillars of trade union purpose: the representation of workers' collective interests, and the deployment of resources of power in pursuit of these (Cohen, 2006; Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick, 2010; Le´vesque and Murray, 2010; Crouch, 2017). Edwards and Wajcman (2005) and Fox (1971) concur with Simms and Charlwood as to the social construction of workers' interests historically. This has however, as reflected by Hyman, tended to privilege male, manual, full-time, permanent workers (Bain and Price 1980).

Thus a body of literature has been generated under the umbrella of renewal that centres upon the determination of the legitimate, prevailing interest of trade union members. In Gregor Murray's (2017) timely analysis of three decades' research of renewal strategy and practice he uncovers a form of 'democratic experimentalism' in attempting to reach those predominantly outwith trade union membership. As the latest data reveals, this form of experiment has thus far failed.

## Renewing Renewal?

As shown above, a survey of the literature of trade union renewal does indeed generate a clear sense of why renewal strategy is required, and of its relative failures to-date. Simms and Charlwood prescribe pessimistic outcomes for renewal strategy, particularly in the UK. Responding to Hyman's (1999) optimistic sense of a reimagining of collective solidarities they write that 'we see little basis for such

optimism in practice; such renewal would take a leap of imagination that is not, in our view currently evident in the British trade union movement' (2010:144).

For those like Ledwith (2000, 2007, 2014) and Kirton (2006, 2013, 2015), a prevailing, related issue is of a gender democracy deficit whereby women represent the majority of the workforce and of membership, but not those in leadership or strategic decision making positions. Thus, it is not simply that trade unions need a renewal agenda, but there is a profound dilemma of determining what and who this is for.

Nevertheless, when surveyed, the majority of the UK public has, since 1975, agreed that trade unions are 'essential to protect workers' interests'<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, as discussed earlier (Silver *ibid et. al.*) there is critically important evidence in the UK (and globally) of the innate capacity of organised labour to reconfigure form and purpose innate to capital expansion and contraction. The inherent implication, it is contended, is the need to explore why the renewal agenda appears incapable of common forms of solidarity and a regeneration of power

Thus, we move from a focus on the nature of the crisis of trade unionism, to explore how and whether learning and knowledge production may be that vehicle which enables, in part at least, the means by which the renewal agenda may be refreshed.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/attitudes-trade-unions-1975-2014>

## 2.5 Learning, Knowledge and Trade Union Renewal

The purpose of this section of the chapter is to construct theoretical framework through which empirical evidence of MA methodology and practice is analysed to examine whether this coheres through findings into a generalisable education for renewal.

The search for an education for renewal is not simply however, an academic exercise. Since the election of the Coalition government in 2010 there has been a series of setbacks, including the significant loss of public subsidy for the bulk of trade union education, under the umbrella of the Trade Union Act (2016). This includes new restrictions of the use of facility time for trade union activities and around industrial action (Trade Union Act 2017, TUC, 2017) critically important ways in which knowledge is produced through informal learning. The Act is seen by many as a profound assault on the work of trade unions, and an infringement of human rights (Bogg, 2016; Hendy and Ewing, 2016) culminating in 'an authoritarian intrusion into the liberty of individuals to associate freely, form trade unions, and protest' (Liberty 2015:3).

In constructing a theoretical framework to pursue an education for renewal, this chapter is framed around the following three areas.

First, to acknowledge the central role that learning and knowledge has played specifically in the formation of the UK trade union movement across the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and more broadly in the working class project of 'self-improvement'.

(Rose, 2001; Holford, 1994). Second, to establish that intrinsic to this historical and contemporary analysis there has been a central contradiction in the purpose of some forms of trade union learning and education. This has, for example, resulted in little or no impact on measures of trade union power, influence or legitimacy, despite substantial public subsidy, in the renewal era. (Simms 2012; Simms and Holgate, 2010).

As a result of this understanding, we then move to the third, and final focus, a theoretical framework that allows for the multiple ways of learning and knowing through trade unionism. In devising the framework of an education for renewal we draw here significantly upon the literature of education and knowledge production across a diverse range of social movements (Bevington and Dixon, 2007; Choudry and Kapoor, 2010; Novelli and Ferus-Comelo, 2010; Choudry, 2015) and closely associated with radical, critical pedagogy (Mayo, 1999; Youngman, 1986; Brookfield and Holst, 2010).

### Really Useful Knowledge

Fieldhouse (1996) captures the educational tension in the emergence of the working class as a significant social and political force in its own right. For Tories there existed the fear of educating those beyond their natural abilities, but who recognised the need for the 'ground to be cultivated' (Harrison 1961:3-5). For liberals there existed a view, which ultimately triumphed, of the need for universal education, but that still 'needed to control and direct the thoughts and actions of the increasingly powerful working class' (Simon 1974 126-7).

For Fieldhouse however the most important developments are those that were inspired and sustained through independent, informal, autodidactic, self-help and mutual improvement approaches of radical working class movements like the Chartists (Rose, 2001; Flett, 2004; Silver, 2007). Two aspects of this approach are of critical relevance for this thesis.

The first is documented by Fieldhouse on movement approaches to the production of 'really useful knowledge' (1996:15). Johnson (1979) applies the phrase in the context of the 1832 Reform Act and the rise of the Chartist movement. Johnson's accent is on the development of political knowledge through what we may contend is a language of critique, in questioning prevailing political context. Fieldhouse writes 'In this radical working class world, education without politics or politics without education were both deemed inadequate' (1993:15).

The second aspect relevant here is around the non-conformity of knowledge production resources, spaces and techniques to develop and deploy knowledge in a given political context. As Fieldhouse states

Education was not regarded as separated from other social or political activities, nor adult education from childhood education. It was informal, ephemeral, often non-institutional, lifelong. It embraced communal reading and discussion groups in pubs, clubs, coffee houses, workshops and private homes and the provision of reading rooms and other facilities for reading collectively-bought newspapers and radical literature. (1993:15)

This literature portrays two important features. First, that historical analysis is a critically valuable source in relating learning to the way in which movements acquire and deploy power and influence. Second, and as explored through findings in Chapter Six, key to this analysis is the accent upon politicised, independent, informal learning.

### The Contradictions of Trade Union Learning and Education

The suggestion of a contradiction in learning and education to pursue trade union interests is not new (Holford 1994). However, in the context of this thesis the literature that places that contradiction in the context of renewal is of profound concern. A central contention of this literature is that significant, sustained public subsidy during the modern era, both for core activist education and allied skills-oriented education provision aimed at trade union members, has played no formative role in reversing or even slowing trade union decline (Payne, 2001; Shelley, 2007; Simms, 2012).

An examination of the literature reveals that there is historical lineage (Holford, 1994) connecting a political contradiction in the early development of workers' education and a now more practical contradiction in the modern era of renewal. This practical contradiction sits at the heart of the purpose of trade unions in a capitalist economy and reflects the renewal dilemma around issues of power and legitimacy.

The ideology that informed trade union education and industrial relations training was based upon Labourism's split between industrial and



political...The presentation of workplace skills training as neutral failed to acknowledge that exclusion of a critical examination of politics and power in unions, industry and society, taking the wider context as given, was liable to legitimise existing authority relations and the politics of the status quo...And a conception of lay activists as a subaltern stratum was at the expense of conceiving lay activists as a critical, empowered cadre. (McIlroy 1996:283)

In *Teachers and Leaders* by Richard Lewis (1993) this contradiction is depicted as a central feature in the emergence of the workers' education movement during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was the basis of the seminal Plebs League strike at Ruskin College in 1908. Tensions sat between university-based advocates of a liberal education, and those who saw this as a ruling-class ploy to subvert nascent working class radicalism, and strived for an independent form of workers' education.

The first decade of the twentieth century saw the emergence of labour as a credible political force and also saw organised labour develop as a national force in the economic life of the country. The participation of labour in the government of the country became a realistic prospect, but also industry-wide disputes and the threat of a general strike were no longer confined to the dreams of advanced trade union activities or the nightmares of the defensively minded bourgeoisie. (1993: xiv-xv)

This tension prevailed as the labour movement, (political and industrial) transitioned through an accrual of power, influence and legitimacy into the post-war era of

consensus (Hinton, 1982; Laybourn, 2001) adopting what Ralph Miliband (1983) labelled as 'labourism' as part of this settlement (see also: Minkin, 1992; Thompson, 1993; Schulman, 2015). Whilst the literature portrays residual ambition for socialist transformation (Hinton, 1975, 1983; Ackers and Reid, 2016; Addison, 1994; Laybourn, 1997) Miliband exposes the dominance in the post-war and modern era of 'an ideology of social reform, within the framework of capitalism, with no serious ambition of transcending that framework' (ibid).

For Fieldhouse labourism's doctrine came to reflect, through state funding of trade union education from the mid-70's, the dominant influence upon the core model of trade union education. Thus capturing trade unions as industrial relations partners through corporatism (Panitch and Leys, 2001; Calveley, 2007), and attempting to curb latent militancy maintaining the state's hegemonic industrial relations position (Hyslop, 1988).

It can be argued that Fieldhouse over-generalises not least when acknowledging empirical accounts of heightened militancy and conflict between the labour movement and the state during the 1960s and 1970s. The broader point here however, is an appreciation through the literature that the renewal dilemma, and specifically the diminution of power and legitimacy, rests in part on the legacy of labourism, and in the incorporation of the labour movement into a form of now redundant hegemonic status quo.

A dominant, labourist model of trade union education<sup>10</sup> can be argued as playing a role here. The maintenance of this historical model in the era of renewal reveals why it has been unable to contribute to revitalisation efforts. This labourist argument is mirrored in a diverse literature examining, for example, trade union responses to restructuring in European steel manufacturing (Stroud and Fairbrother 2005), the introduction of new management practices (NMP) in the form of lean production in car manufacturing, Royal Mail and the civil service (Stewart and Martinez Lucio 2011) and, most notably, in the account of the relative failure of the TUC's Organising Academy (OA). This remains the flagship labour movement initiative<sup>11</sup> generated specifically to rejuvenate the labour movement (Simms 2012; Simms and Holgate, 2010).

This is not to say that at the micro level trade union education has played no significant role in transforming personal lives and fermenting activism. Ross et al (2011) provide a rich, detailed account of participative, active approaches to adult education which yield profound insight on the power of trade union education in assisting adult 'learning journeys' during the heavily-subsidised era of New Labour. At a prosaic level this research queries the ability of trade unions to replace like-for-like models and standards of education without public subsidy. More importantly though in the context of this thesis, is a conclusion which queries the political sustainability of models of education rooted in corporatist approaches to employer

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<sup>10</sup> In Chapter 7, when reflecting upon the development of a personal pedagogy, I document my experience of this.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/mt/observatories/eurwork/articles/industrial-relations/the-tuc-proposes-an-organising-academy>

partnership and which may flounder due to 'the problems of inhospitable management, issues to do with time, cost and work intensification remain and [which] may impact negatively on the progressive pedagogical model that proves so attractive to workers' (2011:36).

In surveying the period of New Labour government 1997-2010 to assess a relationship between a positive political environment, renewal initiatives and increased power resources through the potential for increased density, and particularly in traditionally hard-to-reach communities and sectors, Holgate and Simms state

It is of concern, therefore, that having invested so much in organising activity within a benign context, that aggregate union membership has done little more than stabilise. Whilst it is probably true that membership would have declined further without the investment in organising, against this background, stabilisation is less than optimal. (2010:8)

In his synthesis of the relevance of the pedagogical approaches of Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire to transformative adult education Peter Mayo (1999) helps crystallise further a deep sense of contradiction around the relationship between trade union education and learning strategies and renewal. In particular he requests conscious appreciation of the pervading role of neo-liberal ideology in adult education, which casts a query across the significant body of skills-oriented educational provision facilitated by trade unions.

## **2.6 A Theoretical Framework of an Education for Renewal**

The call to examine the learning and knowledge needed to assist renewal rests first, on an examination of the catalysts of the crisis of trade unionism, and second, on the relative failure of renewal strategy, and educational activity within this, to stem decline. Following this is an understanding also that traditions of radical adult pedagogy have supported trade union resurgence historically (Croucher 2017), and provide allied social movements with frameworks to aid organisational change and innovation (Hall, 2012).

Moreso however, in the context of a crisis of trade unionism, the literature of social movement learning (Kapoor and Choudry 2010; Choudry, 2015) offers greater critical engagement with the nature of knowledge created informally through social action and how this is harnessed to generate and sustain civil society actors. In comparison the literature of trade union education is found wanting (Holford, 1994; Bridgford and Stirling, 2000; Forrester, 2004; Ball, 2010).

As such our approach to a theoretical framework of an education for renewal reflects social movement literature. We appreciate the way this draws upon the over-lapping approaches to the political dynamics of adult education reflected in the writing and teaching practice of Paulo Freire (1970, 1976, 1990, 1997) and Antonio Gramsci (1971,1995) coupled with other leading theorists and practitioners.

## A Non-Neutral Political Education

It is argued that a central starting point is an explicit commitment to a politicised approach to learning and knowledge. The specific approach argued for is a framework that is led by the material day-to-day experience of trade unionists. For example, this allows for critical appreciation of the failures of renewal strategy to-date in the context of gender democracy and as revealed by findings (Ledwith 2013, 2002). Such an approach, as discussed further in Chapters Seven and the Conclusion, affords trade union educationists the critically important opportunity to critique the crisis of trade unionism, and the opportunities for renewal, from the perspective of women's lives.

Whilst writing from differing social and political perspectives, both Freire and Gramsci shared a common understanding of the political nature of adult education. This perspective centred their ontological realisation of personhood in the context of hegemony, power and privilege.

Freire stated explicitly that the process and outcomes of educational activity were eminently political writing that 'it is impossible to deny, except intentionally or by innocence, the political aspect of education' (1976:70). He characterised the facilitation of coercive power and domination through education, as well as other means. He reserved his greatest contempt for the top-down 'banking' (1970:58) approach to education, which treats the learner as 'object' of the learning process, thus imbibing a 'culture of silence' (ibid:75).

Hegemony is defined in a Gramscian sense 'as a social condition in which all aspects of social reality are dominated by or supportive of a single class' (Livingstone 1976:235). For Gramsci civil society is the sphere through which ideas and beliefs are shaped through the media, employers and educational institutions in order to 'manufacture consent' and gain legitimacy (Gramsci, 1971; Heywood, 1994). For Gramsci, every relationship of hegemony is an essentially educational relationship.

Thus a framework must consciously avoid a means to maintain silence or manufacture consent. Instead it must, for example, enable a critical engagement with the renewal dilemma around the loss of power, and how to regain this. A feature of this re-think around consent is the relationship with the state in funding extant models of education. What is funded currently is episodic, formal, often physically divorced from the workplace (and public/social space), accredited, delivered by 'experts' (including myself since 1994) and is predicated on an instrumental approach to technical and legalistic skills redolent of Freire's banking metaphor.

Thus the model for an education for renewal proposed in Chapter Seven is a conscious break from the past.

The Central Role of Experience

As revealed through narrative data in Chapter Six, trade unionists root their learning in a dialectical materialist analysis of experience gained through the social relations of production. This is revealed as the critical prefigurative stage in both experiencing the contradictions inherent within organised labour as a feature of capitalist political economy, and also identifying alternative possibilities and courses of action (Cooper 2005, 2009).

For Gramsci the factory council movement was predicated on an a priori knowledge produced as a result of workers experience of political and social upheaval in the period leading up to 1920 (Mancini, 1973; Schecter, 1991). For Freire it was only through a 'pedagogy of question' (Bruss and Macedo 1985:9) that workers could decode versions of their own reality. This dialogic process is not only central to shaping and equalising relations with educators, it is paramount to overcoming any preceding cultural alienation suffered from prior experiences of learning. As outlined in Chapter Five, theories of knowing and being are illustrative of an educational approach to overcoming such alienation.

Kolb (1984)<sup>12</sup> has been central to exploring the explicit relationship between the process of learning and experience defining this as 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (cited in Thorpe, Edwards &

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<sup>12</sup> As is depicted in Chapter Seven Kolb's learning cycle is adapted to model the framework of an education for renewal.



Hanson 1993:155). Houle (1980) supplements Kolb further by underlining the relevance of everyday experience as of value to learning and thus results in 'education that occurs as a direct participation in the events of life' (ibid: 221).

Thus, the accent in the framework upon that knowledge gained through informal learning is critical methodologically as it reflects the tradition in trade union learning of experiential and situated education (Joyce and Weil, 1972; Dewey, 1993; Nardi, 1996; Boud & Miller, 1997; Jarvis, 1987; Keeton, 1976). The framework would however, shift a priority towards privileging informal learning as the precursor means by which social actors learn and acquire knowledge. Additionally, the framework consciously engages with those critiques of Kolb, for example Kayes (2002), in acknowledging that language, tacit and social knowledge, are intrinsic dimensions of experiential learning.

### The Continual Cycle of Reflection

For both Freire and Gramsci the principal role of reflection upon experience is around analysis of the dialectical relationship between hegemonic oppression, critical awareness (and consciousness) and transformation through praxis. As Freire states 'reflection upon situationality is reflection about the very condition of existence' (1970:81).

Writing from a broader, social perspective than Gramsci, Freire acknowledges that whilst economic, social and political oppression may realise a 'culture of silence' (ibid:12) there is an innate capacity within people to become critically aware and conscious of this oppression given appropriate frameworks and tools. As such Chapters Five and Six reveal powerful, dynamic evidence of this critical awareness as a result of the MA experience.

Such frameworks allow for stepping aside from experience enabling practice with such tools, for example questions, encouraging critical examination of assumptions and enabling outcomes of agency, theory and change. As Ledwith and Springett (2010) write, 'It is the continual cycling of action and reflection through critical questioning that forms the basis of transformation and praxis. This interweaving produces a fabric of critical knowledge and thoughtful action' (ibid:151).

This iterative, process of critical reflection is central to the MA ILTUS programme as is outlined further in Chapter Four. So, for example, whilst students are required to produce a critically reflexive assignment (Schon, 1983; Jarvis, 1987; Barnett, 1997; Jacobs, 2008) on the impact of MA study upon their activist/political values, they must also locate the ontological and epistemological influences upon the methodology of their dissertation research.

For Gramsci issues of knowledge relate to critical reflection on the nature of power and domination through hegemony and are outlined most clearly in his *Selection from the Prison Notebooks* (1971). The internalisation of dominant ideas as 'common sense' assert a control over knowledge that only critically educative processes can

overcome. Epistemological reflexivity thus is the basis for challenging false consciousness as it enables, through critical reflective practice, for example, the inherent contradictions within extant trade union renewal strategy, as revealed through thesis findings, to be challenged through a 'philosophy of praxis' (ibid:321). Thus pedagogically, as an overtly political act, the prior experience and knowledge of adult learners, whether gained through cognitive or embodied processes, must be valorised, privileged, and treated as an educational scaffold.

For Crowther, Martin and Shaw (1999) in exploring the relationship between popular education and social movements, the framing and generation of political aims and ambitions rest on an assumption that prior experience must be structured in such a way to allow for critical interrogation. This sense of circularity is critical, as it enables experience to be mediated and reconstructed in order for learning to take place from it. As Brookfield (1987) asserts, wider social transformation rests on the capacity of adult learners to critique, interrogate and challenge prior learnt assumptions which structure experience and knowledge as an instrumental feature of the dialectical tradition.

Following from this, we may ascribe experiential learning as reflecting Ledwith and Spingett's 'continual cycling of action and reflection' (2010) generating theory which requires testing and further reflection and adaption as a result. This generative recurrence rests however, on a structural appreciation of the metaphor of dialogue as a central constitutive element in the radical adult education process.

## The Liberating Role of Dialogue

The work of Habermas on communicative action theory (1984) reflects the positions of both Freire and Gramsci around the reproduction of domination through the existing social order. Prevailing misogynist attitudes towards women, and 'women's work', for example, can become prevailing, accepted truths arguably to the extent that they become embedded in the cultural and organisational practice of trade unions also (Ledwith and Hansen, 2012; Kirton and Healy, 2013) and delimit a critical examination of this from a renewal perspective. It is from this precise perspective that, reflecting thesis findings. Chapter Seven focuses specifically on gender in defining the critically important role of education in the process of trade union renewal.

Thus for Habermas, 'Every process of understanding takes place against the background of a culturally ingrained pre-understanding' (ibid:100). Thus dialogue is a liberating political act and as Freire states, a pedagogy of the oppressed 'must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed (1990:30). As such both Freire and Gramsci insisted on an interchangeable, mutually reinforcing education relationship between 'teacher' and 'student', 'every teacher is always a pupil and every pupil a teacher' (Gramsci 1971:350). Whilst both determined that the 'teacher' would be required to provide authority and direction, not least in fostering the skills of critical analysis, nonetheless in order that pedagogy be political in orientation and outcomes, the dialogic relationship should not rest of deposits of ideas and knowledge on the part of 'experts'.

As such the framework of an education for renewal rejects the notion of 'experts' and relies instead on informal encounters between trade unionists intent on sharing and reflecting upon common experience, and theorising upon this. The accent then is upon reciprocity and trust, and also in a fundamental belief that adult learners have an innate capacity for reasoning, critical thought and analysis, such that 'propaganda' (Freire 1990:49) is alien to the educative relationship.

### Critical Thinking and Action

The dialogic relationship between critical thinking and action as is considered by Freire, Gramsci and others to be essential in framing a shared, solidaristic sense of existence as capable of transformation through praxis. As such, Freire argues that the basis of critical thinking is "thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved" (1990:73).

In recognising such an appreciation the framework relates explicitly to the workplace, home, or other social setting, reflective of Gramsci's sites of social practice, as the material basis of experience and setting for learning and knowledge encounters. Similarly, the framework's ambition allows for learning and knowledge production free

from those risks and harm documented explicitly through narrative data in Chapters Five and Six.

The reflective, critical analysis of experience to achieve liberation from oppression is a recurring theme in adult education explored through transformative learning (Mezirow 1990) self-directed learning (Brookfield 1985), action research (Carr and Kemmis 1983) models of the learning process (Jarvis 1987, 1992) and techniques of facilitation (Boud et al 1985, Boud 1987).

For Freire personal and political agency springs first from a deconstruction of experience. Critical questioning of authority and power relations has the material, multiple outcome of generating confidence in structuring counter-narrative and building organisations to take action for change.

Only beings who can reflect upon the fact that they are determined are capable of freeing themselves. Their reflectiveness results not just in a vague and uncommitted awareness, but in the exercise of a profoundly transforming action upon the determining reality. *Consciousness of* and *consciousness upon* are, therefore, inseparable constituents of the transforming act by which men become beings of relation. (2000:40)

Thus the foundation of conscientisation is the prerequisite of praxis. And, like Habermas (1984), Brookfield (1995) and Horton (2003), Freire and Gramsci share a

common perspective that all adults have an innate capacity to generate theory through reflection and can engage in transformative acts to generate social change. As such, and as detailed in Chapter Four, the framework supports the long-term ambition of education for trade unionists at Ruskin College, which asserts the validity of research shaped through experience, learning and knowledge for broader movement strategy and practice in the context of renewal.

### Place and Space

Through his seminal text *Theatre of the Oppressed* (2008) Augusto Boal helps reveal the powerful, radical role of theatre as a popular form of communication, expression and learning.

Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it. (xxxi:1992)

At the heart of Boal's political approach was that the learning space was not conventional, that anyone can act as a result of this learning, and that the word act, was about taking action. For the purposes of the framework, his legacy is to reveal that the radical imagination can be fused between that appears mundane, the grievance hearing for example, and the multiple ways that informal, embodied learning from this can be critically interpreted through dramatic, and other means.

The theory and practice of Jean Lave (1982, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1996, 2012) and Etienne Wenger (1998, 2002, 2011, 2014) is instrumental in an approach of 're-conceiving' what learning is, where it takes places and who learners are. Here, situated learning references a given space or site as a point for the engagement in identified activities but more importantly, the *sharing* of this experience as *intrinsic, essential* [my emphasis] to the process of learning and the creation of communities of practice that embody learning.

As thesis findings reveal a key source of agential transformation as a result of the MA experience, was the capacity to share common experience of the crisis of renewal, and devise alternative theory in a dedicated space.

A concluding element here arises in McDermott's (1999) premise as learning as ingrained in the relationships between people.

Learning is in the conditions that bring people together and organize a point of contact that allows for particular pieces of information to take on a relevance; without the points of contact, without the system of relevancies, there is not learning, and there is little memory. Learning does not belong to individual persons, but to the various conversations of which they are a part. (1997:17)



The 'system of relevancies' reflects situated learning theory's focus on learning from and within organised social systems. Similarly, Gramsci's notion of the transition from common sense to good sense, as explored further below, in the process of realising praxis rests on the existence of the 'homogeneous social group' (Gramsci 1971:49) reflecting, for example, the workplace organisation of trade union representatives.

Thus the framework explicitly supports complementarity between experiential and situated learning (Nardi 1996) as a means of generating communities of practice. The accent ultimately is upon a consideration of learning as social, embodied, and predicated upon a deepening of relationships around shared values and participation.

## **2.7 The Renewal Actor and Embodied Activism**

This final section of the chapter is that which addresses research question three, via a review of key thematic literature. As such the role of the chapter is to enable an appreciation of the relationship between the literature and the approach to data analysis. It does so in two ways.

First, to devise a theoretical framework to allow thesis findings in Chapter Five to determine any commonality of experience which informs the proposition of RA. Here, the chapter explores the means by which conceptualised and applied notions of transformative learning link with theories and applications of agency. Second, to structure a framework through which the applied, supplementary proposition of EA

may be understood and conceptualised in order that theoretical coherence may be established in Chapter Six.

Allied to this understanding is a practical appreciation of the constituent features of both the RA and EA, enabling a grasp of how these are subsequently framed in the findings chapters.

### The Renewal Actor

As established in Chapter One a key goal of the thesis is to make an original contribution to knowledge by exploring the experience of those engaged in a discrete programme of learning, and then attempting to theorise upon any coherent relationship between this and the RA. The theoretical framework devised to deploy the RA proposition, and that aids subsequent analysis, draws distinctly on Jack Mezirow's theory of transformative learning (1990, 1991, 2000, 2009) and its intersection with Colin Hay's approach to strategic learning in his theory of structure and agency in activist contexts (1995).

Both approaches require some conceptual nuancing however. For example, whilst Mezirow and Freire share an awareness of the role critical reflection plays as central to critique, it is Freire who extends this dimension in adult education as essential to an emancipatory pedagogy enabling a sense of transformatory agency through praxis, whilst Mezirow is concerned with essentially depoliticised individual outcomes primarily (Cunningham 1992).

Similarly, whilst Hay's approach is applied distinctly across social movement learning and knowledge production literature (Ferus-Comello and Novelli, 2010; Novelli, 2007; Robertson, 2006) and offers a rich, broad base to explore the relationship between activism, learning and agential outcomes, he does not write in that context himself.

Nonetheless, Hay enables a recognition of the multiple ways of learning and knowing (Naples, 1998; Speed, 2004, Kinsmann, 2006; Choudry, 2014) through day-to-day trade unionism, and across multiple sites of contestation (including within trade union organisation itself) in a way unaddressed by the small body of literature on trade union education

### Transformative Learning

Transformative learning is defined as 'the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (Mezirow 2000:7-8).

Mezirow draws on Kitchener's (1983) three levels of cognitive processing to locate epistemic cognition as a central characteristic of transformative learning. Thus,

'epistemic knowledge has to do with reflections on the limits of knowledge, the certainty of knowledge, and the criteria for knowing (1983:230).

It is this epistemic cognition for Mezirow that forms individual 'frames of reference' reflecting 'many of our most guarded beliefs about ourselves and the world' (2000:16). Through processes including reflective discourse Mezirow argues that we are able to achieve a 'critical assessment of assumptions. It leads towards a clearer understanding by tapping collective experience to arrive at tentative best judgement' (2000:11).

Cohen and Piper (2000) devise a framework for the analysis of transformative learning theory and practice in an adult residential setting. This is particularly valuable for the analysis of MA student and alumni narrative. This places a heavy emphasis on stories of transformation predicated on reinforced notion of solidarity which derive from sustained periods of time in reflective dialogue.

Drawing on Simpson and Kasworm (1990) the residential aspect of learning can be seen as a 'learning sanctuary'. The notion of sanctuary is particularly important as student narrative reflects a dominant sense of requiring capacities spatial and temporal for study away from domestic, occupational and activist workloads.

The residential aspect of the MA programme may also account for an analysis of findings which are indicative of Bordieu's theory of habitus (1984, 1986). For

Bourdieu habitus reflects thoughts, beliefs etc. drawn from processes of socialisation. Such processes reflect proximity to, or distance from, differing forms of capital: social, cultural, economic and symbolic. As such, any analysis of an extended, residentially-based, educational experience cannot discount the forms of habitus that may accrue and/or solidify as a result.

## Agency

As reflected in examples of student narrative, issues of agency are cited as reflecting a positive outcome from an educational experience, and a reconfirmation of identity and consciousness as an activist. In her analysis of the changing social identities of a new layer of trade union activists Sian Moore (2011) helps locate the theory of structure and agency in the context of the trade union activism.

Here, *structures* are the political, social and economic factors delimiting trade union activism within the UK. Whilst *agency* is explored through a questioning of whether subjective and ideological dimensions of activism – whether the new management practices (NMP) introduced in the late 1980's for example have a tendency towards individualism and away from collectivism are altered as a result.

Colin Hay's (1995) approach to structure and agency has been located within the debate on knowledge production, popular education and strategic learning across labour and allied social movements by Novell (2010) amongst others. In his analysis

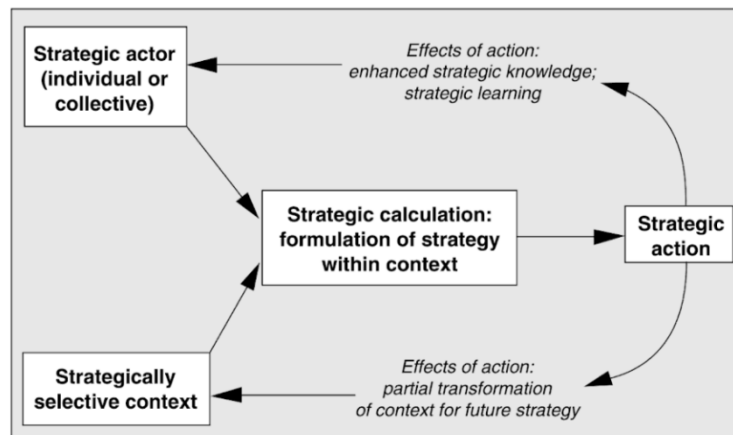
of a counter to privatisation in Colombia Novelli argues 'in this process of resistance and development of alternatives, these movements are also engaged in counter-hegemonic knowledge production, which plays a key role in determining success or failure' (2010:12-13).

Although Novelli applies Hay in a broad movement/organisational context, 'taking place within time and space through struggle and contestation' (ibid:124), his focus nonetheless is wholly relevant for the purposes of analysing evidence of agency expressed by MA students and alumni as a result of their educational experience.

This is because, firstly, Hay's notion of 'strategic learning' (see Figure 2 below) allows us to depict the activist as strategic actor, whilst secondly, the strategic context reflects the MA's educational focus upon renewal. Third, the process of strategic calculation can be accounted for in the MA's pedagogic root of praxis to theorise upon renewal, which can be accounted for as strategic action.

Finally, in relation the outcomes of strategic action back to the actor, narrative and thematic analysis of research data underlines agential outcomes from a process of learning which is fixedly described in a collective context, and places substantial value on this.

Figure 2: Structure, strategy and agency in the strategic-relational approach (Hay 1995)



In his classic account of the relationship between adult education, political struggle and social transformation, Bud Hall (1978) can be drawn upon to further support the cyclical relevance of Hay's strategic learning-actor-agency cycle as a suitable theoretical device to analyse student experience of the MA.

### Strategic Learning

In his discussion of differing epistemological and ontological perspectives of structure and agency Hay locates his approach of strategic learning within the meta theory of critical realism identifying Bhaskar (1975, 1979, 1986) and Jessop (1990) as central to his approach. As such there are two, specific elements of the critical realist approach which are of importance in the context of this thesis, and methodological approach to interpreting the experience of students.

The critical realist approach to structure and agency seeks to overcome what is perceived as an unnecessary dualism. Instead, the relationship is seen as dialectical and interwoven. Applying the metaphor of two metals found in the alloy of a coin Hay argue.

Hence structure and agency, although theoretically separable are in practice completely interwoven. The properties of the coin (society) derive not merely from the sum of its component metals (structure and agency) but also from their complex chemical interaction. (2002:137)

Thus for MA students and alumni, and the analysis of research data, what is interwoven is a perspective that structure comprises not just those political catalysts of a crisis of trade unionism, but also arguable forms of union hegemonic practice whether institutionally, organisationally or culturally. It is this 'complex chemical interaction', not least for MA students and alumni who are trade union employees, which combine forcefully it is argued, to resist agency and generates the arguable thesis of embodied activism (EA)<sup>13</sup>.

Reflecting Hall's thesis of theory testing, the MA's central focus on critical reflective practice on the ways in which learning (both formal and in/non-formal) is occurring

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<sup>13</sup> As revealed through findings in Chapter Five, the specific relevance of the critical realist approach in generating a grounded theory of knowing is within its focus on strategy, strategic action, consequences and strategic learning as a result.



across a nexus of platforms and aiding the approach to praxis, it is arguable that the student experience reflects this critical realist approach

Strategies are operationalised in action, and such action yields effects, both intended and unintended. Since individuals are knowledgeable and reflexive, they monitor the consequences of their action routinely (assessing the impact, and their success or failure in securing prior objectives). (1995:201)

As discussed in Chapter Five, there are vacuums in Hay's approach, and these are essential in terms of clarifying, for example, structure and agency within the context of organised labour, and challenge to learning and knowledge as an aspect of this.

### Unpacking and Understanding the Renewal Actor

Whilst Chapter Five reveals the dynamic ways in which the RA could be ultimately theorised through original grounded theories of knowing and being, nonetheless the original conception of the theoretical framework withstands. This seeks to determine whether an experience of 'strategic learning' in the context of trade union renewal may have positive, transformative and agential outcomes on MA students and graduates. More specifically, the framework seeks to determine whether findings determined a capacity to overcome the known dilemmas of the renewal agenda, equipping MA graduates with an altered perspective of the self within the collective in

the context of renewal, and capable of applying praxis to generate alternative theoretical and practical approaches to trade union renewal.

In a practical sense the framework seeks to determine the tangible degrees to which students and graduates are capable of appreciating the multiple, overlapping nature of the renewal dilemmas and locate themselves in strategies to overcome these.

Thus there is an explicit attempt to explore the degrees of transformation of perspective upon the self within organised labour and to assess reflexive change arising from the experience of learning.

## Embodied Activism

There is a classic, mainstream literature on embodied learning focusing on learning processes that involve affect, emotion and the body (Brockman, 2001; Clarke, 2001).

In the context of political/social activism and learning there have been relatively recent attempts to bridge what is argued as a privileging of traditional cognitive approaches to learning and to generate a somatic approach (Matthews, 1998; Crowdes, 2000) that reflects the multiple ways of learning and knowing through activism. This latter literature has been instrumental in the emergence and development of a grounded theory of EA.

Foley (1999) is the seminal literature in the field of informal activist learning through action bodily and cognitively, turning social movement practice, regardless of location, pivotal sites of learning and opportunities to mobilise for change.

Thus we can shift decidedly from current cognitive approaches to trade union education, and appreciate better the performative role of trade unionists, and their informal learning and knowledge production which is bodily manifest.

From the routinised role of the workplace representative or official bodily representing workplace interests, through to physical representation of resistance on a picket line, to the egregious acts of blacklisting, the bodily representation of activism and representation in a trade union context portrays on a daily basis the most common form of symbolic power and resistance. As such these daily acts construe a major source of learning and knowledge production, although they remain a neglected source of inquiry across renewal literature (and strategy and practice) and that around trade union education.

In this sense, we can engage trade union struggle with the established notion of the 'body politic' as conceptualised by Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987), and as discussed further in Chapter Six, thus relate embodied learning with that knowledge which is tacit. As such we can relate a literature of embodied learning through social action (Ollis, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015; Drew, 2014, 2015; Fonow and Franway, 2016).

In Tracy Ollis's (2012) *A Critical Pedagogy of Embodied Education* there is important insight into the way in which the prosaic nature of day-to-day movement practice is understood as the primary location of learning and knowledge production.

This empirical research explores ways in which activist learning is embodied and how their use of the whole person informs how they 'make meaning' and their 'ways of knowing'...Activists learn from one another on the job of activism. Through situating themselves in the practices of activism and through socialisation with one another, they develop a habitus of practice and, through time, space and the opportunity to practice become experts at what they do. (2012:11)

As the current basis of state funding for trade union education undergoes further reduction<sup>14</sup>, the practical resonance of Ollis in the era of renewal, is capturing a clearer sense of what learning takes place freely, and how best to harness this to reassert power and influence.

By supplementing Ollis with Jesson and Newman's (2004) approach to defining three domains of activist learning as instrumental, interpretive and critical we can better grasp for the purposes of renewal, how to exploit that knowledge gained informally, to appreciate the role of that what should be provided formally.

Similarly, in appreciating the realities of learning and knowledge production in the trade union renewal, we must appreciate also that this has a contested dimension.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/funding-allocations-to-training-providers-2017-to-2018>

In his book, *Learning Activism: The intellectual life of contemporary social movements* (2015) Aziz Choudry helps develop the EA concept through his discussion of learning from tensions and contradictions in struggle.

Tensions exist between past present and future. Indeed, processes of learning and producing knowledge in movements and activism can also be fraught with many different tensions and contradictions...All movements for change themselves, and the learning and knowledge they produce, are contested terrain...Their connections and relations between people in movements and their relations to structures of power are crucial. How we work within movements as well as study or evaluate them itself demands reflection and critical engagement. (2015:10-11).

Choudry's position here is of critical importance as we can perceive of these tensions as more than the brutal, internal encounters synonymous with movement politics, but further stages and processes also informing the way in which embodied learning occurs.

This is an important dimension of the theoretical framework as it enables an engagement with the very real outcomes of this tension revealed through findings through the phrase, the hidden injuries of trade union renewal.

### Unpacking and Understanding Embodied Activism

Whilst Chapter Six accounts for the unforeseen nature of EA as a key dimension of thesis findings, it goes on to present this original grounded theory as occupying an

essential role in enabling an appreciation of the relationship between the ways in which identity and consciousness initially forms amongst trade unionists as a result of learning and knowledge gained through their physical and social day-to-day experiences of activism.

Thus the critical importance of EA is in acknowledging the innate intellectualism of activism otherwise ignored within the literature, and that as research data reveals is that which acted as the basis to enrol on the MA. Importantly the theoretical framework helps analyse in Chapter Six that data which reveals the extent to which confidence and identity are diminished as a result of the tensions that exist within organised labour, but that is transformed and renewed as a result of an exposure to radical pedagogy through the MA experience.

Ultimately, and as discussed in Chapter Seven and the Conclusion Chapter, the essential role of EA is in providing the basis upon which grounded theories of *knowing* and *being* are predicated, and significantly endorses the argument to develop and deploy an education for renewal.

Overcoming contradiction sits at the heart of the theoretical frameworks. The contradictory nature of trade unionism within the dynamic of global capitalism would invariably generate a model of education to enable this incongruous relationship. Thus the theoretical frameworks outlined for the RA, EA and an education for renewal whilst presented in an academic context, are intended to generate generalisable outcomes. The following chapter on research design enables clearer insight on the role of theoretical frameworks in generating generalisable findings.

# Chapter Three: Thesis Design, Methodology and Conceptual Framework

## 3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a coherent understanding of the relationship between thesis design, the selected methodological approaches to undertake the research and the process of generating findings through adopted conceptual and analytical frameworks. Whilst this chapter provides a classic 'defence' of adopted methods, it will reveal that findings pursued profound, unforeseen trajectories. Whilst this is not problematic per se, there will be a clear outline of the way in which methodological rigour was maintained to generate coherent theoretical outcomes from findings as detailed in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

In the context of a thesis to complete a professional doctorate (DProf) this chapter necessarily focuses upon issues of positionality and reflexivity in selecting the research topic and overall approach to design. As such it will detail the pedagogical decision to adopt a modified approach to co-construct thesis research design. In the context of thesis findings, this decision reflects a deep, and abiding personal pedagogy which has sought over time to co-construct knowledge as an expression of the democratic value of education bound in radical pedagogy.

This chapter first outlines key aspects of thesis design, which includes a reflexive discussion about the selection of research question and the methods used. Second,

the chapter focuses on key decisions taken around issues of research methodology, and includes the approach taken to ensure a representative sample of interviewees.

The chapter's third stage is to introduce and illustrate its approach to analysing data drawn from interviews and the online survey through the constructivist grounded theory method of Charmaz (2000, 2006, 2008) and allied to narrative analysis and the use of analytic memos. The specific approach here is to reveal the fluid, iterative stages of coding which, allied to Chapter Five, depict the way in which the early interview code of validation shapes the generation of the grounded theories of *knowing and being*.

The chapter then moves forward to outline the approach to ethical considerations.

The chapter concludes with an outline of the conceptual framework informed by the literature review and adopted for data analysis purposes.

### **3.2 Thesis Design**

#### The Nature and Context of Practitioner Research

I enrolled on the DProf specifically to reflect critically upon a career as an adult educator in the labour movement, and to help gain the confidence, skills and knowledge to run the MA ILTUS programme successfully.

Given the renewal context of the MA I was drawn to a doctoral programme which enabled practitioners to '*critically appraise existing analysis of work and its national and global contexts in an original manner and from a global and social justice*



*perspective*<sup>15</sup>. As such, and in the context of the thesis, I looked forward to the opportunity to situate my practical and academic experience of the MA in order to *'conceptualise, design and implement a research project for the generation of new knowledge or understanding at the forefront of researching work.'*<sup>ibid</sup>

Thus I sought to craft an approach which focused on the MA specifically as research focus, but that allowed me to draw upon a significant body of practitioner experience of working with trade unionists in responding to their significant day-to-day demands.

In her focus on practising reflexivity as a feature of DProf research Smith (2009) urges that research is expressed through the material, historical experience of those researched.

Researching human subjects raises inevitable questions about the impact of the researcher's own values and beliefs on their choice of research subject; their conduct of research and engagement with research subjects; their interpretation of these subjects actions and words; and presentation of their research. (2009:63)

As such, findings pay specific attention to the differing locations of MA alumni across organised labour globally, and their dialectical materialist analysis of this experience. Similarly, on-going reflexive analysis is attended to through the thesis, for example in

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<sup>15</sup> WLRI DProf Handbook 2013

the discussion of the unforeseen nature of findings, and how this aids the shaping of an education for renewal in Chapter Seven.

### The MA ILTUS and Positionality

As discussed in Chapter One<sup>16</sup>, the adoption of the MA ILTUS as my thesis research focus was due to its role in catalysing DProf enrolment, and also because qualitative data didn't exist on issues of impact upon students or renewal practice.

Initially, the thesis focus on the MA was to be conducted as a case study with the adoption of the methodological approach of Yin (2014) and Flyvberg (2006) amongst others. This approach was abandoned however, as this would lead to context-dependent knowledge, rather than naturalistic insight upon the relationship between students and their complex, on-going relations within organised labour as social actors in the context of renewal. Similarly, as an adult educator within organised labour, I wanted to generalise from findings through theoretical induction with lessons for learning and knowledge production more broadly and relevant to trade unionists and educators in their interrelationship around day-to-day struggle and trade union renewal.

On reflection my positionality informed the changed orientation of the research focus. Whilst the MA could be measured in terms of enrolments, and the educational attainment of students, there existed no qualitative insight into the outcomes of their

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<sup>16</sup> Broader positionality is also discussed in Chapter Seven, for example as a past student of Ruskin College.

engagement with radical pedagogy or their broader impacts upon trade union renewal.

Thus my role as programme co-ordinator of the MA gave me a significant opportunity to identify the way in which the thesis should be designed to provide such insight.

This central managerial role involved day-to-day operational matters for example in relation to the scheduling of core and visitor teacher, as well as strategic oversight over curriculum design and pedagogic influences. A critically important aspect of this role was in liaison with course applications, selection interviews, and decision making on an offer of a place. This process would often run over a period of 6-12 months, including help in locating financial assistance, and thus enabling me to develop a close working relationship with applicants prior to enrolment.

I argue that the strength of this approach supported a conscious Freirean teaching relationship between labour movement peers, which had positive outcomes for students, and in aiding the growth of the MA over time. My close proximity to students and alumni had positive and negative attributes for the research process. It is arguable that my close involvement was a factor in the co-operation offered to co-construct research design and the depth gained in narrative data. It is arguably the case also however, that this proximity had detrimental effects upon bias within the research process

This bias may have sort, for example, to present research participant experience of the MA in an unnecessarily positive light based on an assumption that this was

helpful to the thesis research process, and with little or no critical, reflective analysis. Similarly, my analysis of research data may have lacked a stringent capacity for objectivity as my close relationship to the programme, its students and alumni, obscured rational detachment. These concerns were discussed early in my relationship with my thesis supervisor, and were consistent dimensions of determining research design. As a result, this is addressed specifically below as part of ethical considerations, and features in allied sections of this chapter.

### A Modified Approach to Co-Production

The co-production of meaning and knowledge gained through educational and research experience and between different actors is traditionally located in the pedagogy of Freire (1970) and Dewey (1897, 1938, 1990). It sits squarely in the paradigm of critical educational research (Giroux 1989) and is typically situated in a broader literature of participatory action research (PAR) (Horner 2016). As such my original intention for thesis research design was a fully-fledged form of PAR, as the radical basis of the MA had pre-figured active student and alumni thesis engagement.

It was clear that this couldn't work however, given the significant workloads of students and their dispersed status nationally and internationally. In seeking still to ensure active student contribution to thesis activity and opting for a modified form of co-production, I decided to gain student perspective on the co-production of thesis design, and in particular around the development of the renewal actor framework.

The adopted approach to the modified form of co-production can be categorised as embedded and discrete. Although specificity on these approaches is outlined below, in general terms the embedded approach sought to ensure that all students of the 2014-16 MA cohort had a conscious appreciation that their student experience ran parallel to my period of fieldwork, and would inform research data. The discrete approach sought to exploit the knowledge and experience of full-time students within that cohort, and particularly, their higher degree of exposure to curriculum and pedagogical practice. The overall approach is detailed as follows.

*Embedded:* With the start of the new MA 2014-16 cohort in October 2014 I ensured that they were aware from the outset of their role as co-producers of the thesis. This helpfully introduced and accentuated the nature of the MA as radical pedagogy, and underlined my affinity with them as a fellow student. Following the submission of my thesis research proposal in 2013, I then aligned discussion of thesis design where this fluidly occurred also as part of the curriculum during MA residential workshops. The implications for design are acknowledged in comments throughout the thesis.

*Discrete:* Two focus group interviews were held in 2015 with full-time students of the cohort on 14<sup>th</sup> May and 10<sup>th</sup> June as they neared the completion of the programme. Whilst the May interview focused on the nature of co-production, the June interview was more holistic. This centred on their evaluative experience of the MA, and sought to shape research design more broadly. The interviews specifically exploited their common experience of the programme, and their collective identity (Munday 2006) within the larger, on- part-time cohort. Both interviews were recorded, transcribed (Appendix Three) and coded around questions I had prepared going previously and

deployed a semi-structured format. As with other interviews students were supplied with pre-cursor material to help inform the discussion<sup>17</sup>.

As is revealed through focus group narrative the dialogue is frank and purposeful.

The discussion on the framing of the renewal actor in the May interview included the following:

The theorising about what needs to happen isn't the same as someone doing it. If your purpose is to create a renewal actor, and you want someone who is capable of renewing their union, they are not going to need to have just academic skills, they are going to need to communicate ideas into acceptable formats and explore that using different presentational skills and that is perhaps beyond what an MA can do. (Appendix Three)

As is seen in Table One below, the outcomes from the focus group discussions had a direct, positive contribution to research design. For example, in supporting the inductive, constructivist research design students accented the need to explore the objective nature of the MA experience, and avoiding any attempt to refer to the theoretical framework of Renewal Actor. Instead, and as shown in the Table, they suggested attention to an authentic articulation of experience, unbounded by a sense of how this would be subsequently interpreted theoretically.

As a result, a particular way in which research design was informed is reflected in the nature of questions developed for interviews and the online survey (Appendix Two and Four). Additionally, the interview technique adopted a concentration upon

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<sup>17</sup> For full-time students this included their 2,000 word written statement that accompanied their MA application.

participants' objective critical reflection of experience, and not least as a supplementary means to challenge any explicit or implicit bias which favoured my role in co-ordinating the MA.

The specific ways that the focus groups informed thesis design, and implementation are framed below in Table One below.

Table 1: Focus Group Impact on Thesis Research Design

Informed through Focus Group	Design Implication
Don't mention the renewal actor initially. Focus on meaning-making.	Not identified explicitly. Questions are open and focused explicitly on experience in context of renewal
Focus on how development/impact is framed by the individual	Adoption of inductive and grounded theory method and open questions.
Focus on issues of transition (confidence, consciousness etc.) pre and post-MA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A focus on MA enrolment aims in interview, and reflection of these.</li> <li>• Explicit questions in survey.</li> </ul>
Try and tease out stages and ways in which development transpires.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A focus on critical reflexive practice, for example, in interview, and reflection of effect of this.</li> <li>• Q15 in survey, for example, focuses on change/development</li> </ul>

As is revealed in Table One the overall thrust of focus group insight was to allow students and alumni to explore the MA experience, and the impact of this, from their own perspective. Here then these students could aid Blumer's (1969) notion of sensitising concepts to guide interview and survey development, for example in the focus around aspirations for enrolling on the MA, and not mentioning the notion of the renewal actor unless this emerged, as this may have precluded original, organic critical reflection on the experience of the MA.

Despite the suggestion of not formally mentioning the RA the students understood, in the context of the MA, why the renewal actor framework would seek to create a direct relationship between learning, knowledge, transformation and action, and were highly positive of this approach. As the quote above reveals, the MA full-time cohort agreed with the conceptualisation of the renewal actor, and saw this as a useful framework within which experience and outcomes could be shaped. Further supportive commentary in the focus group interviews included the following.

You should be very optimistic. The notion of us being renewal actors is a critical one. Nothing changes without energy and action, nothing at all. I think the whole premise is excellent. (Student Seven)

## The Research Questions

At a formulaic level the research questions reflect Bryman's (2016) criteria for developing and evaluating issues of purpose and structure, and through his approach a positioning of Marx (1997) to help identify sources. As can be discerned, thesis research questions follow the convention of moving from the general to the specific, and although not appreciated fully until the process of coding and data analysis was underway, proved highly suited to interrogate findings and generate corresponding grounded theory.

From a practitioner perspective I knew already that questions two and three would reflect Sandberg and Alvesson (2013) and 'looking beyond the obvious' to focus on empirical and theoretical gaps in the literature. Thus the shift in research focus from



a case study corresponded with a greater likelihood of generating original insight and knowledge.

As such, question one was well-placed to achieve this from two perspectives. First, as a result of its critical focus on problematising, reflecting Alvesson and Sandberg (2011), the trade union renewal agenda in the UK. Second, and as such, challenging the root metaphor (Morgan 1997) of renewal enabling a leveraging of learning and knowledge as an essential springboard (Burrell and Morgan 1979) into questions two and three.

Whilst the questions served their purpose well from the perspective of reflexive practitioner research, it is important to document relative weaknesses in the adopted approach. At a prosaic level, and as discussed in the Conclusion Chapter, questions two and three should have changed place. In a more accurate layering of questions, and in pursuing the generalisability of findings, the contribution of education for renewal is more accurately the final stage of research inquiry.

Additionally, and explored in the more detail around issues of methodology below, is whether the questions carried sufficient depth and rigour for a doctorate-level thesis in the paradigm of critical education research (Popkewitz and Fendler 1999; Apple, Au and Gandin, 2009). Similarly, whether an omission of the relationship between ideology critique and reflective practice (Morrison 1995a, 1995b, 1996) had precluded greater sensitivity toward a participatory approach to generalising findings to overcome systems and interests within organised labour which are inimical to learning and knowledge.

I am though conscious that this perspective is reflexive, and based on what I uncovered via the questions as-is, and through a process where narrative was

framed freely by students and alumni through open questions in interviews and the online survey. Arguably findings are a first step towards a goal whereby the original grounded theory arising from this thesis is shared with research participants to gain this insight. On the basis of practical proposals outlined in the Conclusion Chapter follow-on engagement with research participants would make political and pedagogic sense.

### **3.3 Thesis Methodology**

In providing an overview of the adopted methodological approach Silverman (2016) suggests the author focuses upon theoretical assumptions, rationale for choosing the particular data, and approaches to extrapolation.

In the first instance it is important to stress that the overall approach adopted was inductive, privileging the epistemologically interpretive and ontologically constructionist perspectives of those who had experienced the MA. Over time it became clear, particularly during the process of data analysis, that the broad philosophical approach adopted was the interpretive paradigm of critical education research (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Mertens, 2007; Smyth, 2014). Drawing on the tradition of critical theory the research process evolved into a concentration upon degrees of transformation through an analysis of power, ideology and vested interests as dispersed through trade union, and allied, structures.

In particular the thesis focused upon empirical and theoretical determination of the contradiction of extant renewal strategy and policy, and spotlighted limitation and

contestation of traditional approaches to trade union education as an intrinsic feature of this. Supplementary to this was an appreciation that trade union education was under-researched and under-theorised.

Herein, and methodologically, the thesis sought to deploy analysis of narrative data in two contexts. First, to shed overall light upon the impact for learning and knowledge production as a result of the radical pedagogy of the MA, and to discern whether such outcomes could be theorised as the renewal actor. Second, to generate from this pedagogy a generalisable model of an education for renewal.

## Approaches to Data Collection

### Interviews: Participants

As detailed further below, the constructivist grounded theory research method (CGTM) benefits from the rich depth of experience gained through interviews. As such a purposeful sample of 10 students<sup>18</sup> were selected and interviews were held with a group comprising current students and alumni between January-February 2016.

Table Two below helps illustrate that the purposive approach to selection was premised on parameters differentiating upon the basis of: full and part-time students, year of enrolment, gender, ethnicity, trade union official/activist/other and nationality.

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<sup>18</sup> Sue Ledwith, developer of the MA, was interviewed also on 20/06/16. This interview was to aid the writing of the Context Chapter and to inform findings.

It is important to acknowledge the importance of these parameters as they reflect multiple, overlapping dimensions of thesis research design, the MA programme, its teaching, and cohorts over time. As a result the sample affords dynamic, contrasting opportunities for diverse, competing perspectives of student and alumni experience from the time of the first cohort in 2006 in the following ways.

First, it is important to acknowledge that the majority of students from 2006 were part-time, with full-time cohorts being in the minority and only becoming a mode of study option from 2008. Necessarily, their student experience differed, with part-time students, for example, having a direct MA experience principally through MA residential weekends, and full-time students being residential on-site, and taught weekly, and thus having a more concentrated experience of the MA, and their time at Ruskin College overall.

Second, the year of enrolment is of importance for several reasons. These include the need to acknowledge that a dispersed sample from 2006 allows for perspectives from those who have had greater opportunity to apply and critically reflect upon their MA experience. Additionally, over time MA cohorts (particularly the part-time mode) grew in size allowing for differentiated experience of group and teaching dynamics.

Third, gender is a critically important parameter to analyse not least because of the central role of gender, and of feminist research methods that were a central component of the MA curriculum and pedagogic practice. At a prosaic level any analysis of the student experience thus should reflect this orientation and be

examined for. More specifically however, was the need to account for any form of differentiation in the experience between male and female students, with thesis findings unpicking this analysis at several key stages.

Fourth, parameters of ethnicity and nationality were deemed important to account for in determining differentiation of perspective not least because the MA programme rested on a core dimension of international comparison in labour studies. Similarly, the differing national educational systems or traditions of MA cohorts over time would allow for varying perspectives on the nature of the MA's radical pedagogy.

Finally, the parameter which accounted for differentiation based on whether students or alumni were employed as FTOs, or were trade union activists in a conventional sense, or had a differing status e.g. active within or employed by an allied organisation, again allows for differentiation of perspective on student experience. More specifically however, this parameter accounts for the need to overcome a particular, historic bias, and as noted in the literature review (for example Darlington and Upchurch 2012) against FTOs. Thus a specific goal here, is to account for the identity of FTOs as trade union activists in their own right, but also of the tensions which give rise from this role in the era of trade union renewal.

Ten interviews in total were held and sought to reflect perspectives from all of the five cohorts of each two-year programme starting in 2016. In total 58 people had completed the MA between 2006-2016, thus interviews represented 17.24% of this.

Table 2: Sample of Student Interviews

Name	Status
Student One	Part-time student, 2014-16, female, White, activist, English
Student Two	Part-time student 2006-08, female, White, activist, Scottish
Student Three	Part-time student 2012-14, female, White, FTO, Australian
Student Four	Full-time student 2010-11, female, White, FTO, English
Student Five	Part-time student 2010-12, male, White, FTO, English
Student Six	Full-time student 2014-15, male, White, activist, English
Student Seven	Full-time student 2014-15, male, Black, academic, Zambian
Student Eight	Part-time student 2008-10, female, White, academic, English
Student Nine	Full-time student 2008-09, male, Tagalog, UN official, Filipino
Student Ten	Part-time Student 2012-14, female, Black, activist, English

#### Interviews: Questions

In a move that was reflecting good practice outcomes from the focus group interviews, the GTM intensive interviewing method (Fontana and Frey, 2005; Seidman, 1997) was adopted around broad, open-ended questions exploring the relationship between MA learning, and knowledge in the context of renewal. The interview accent was upon exploring meaning of their narrated renewal experience with the MA as the deployed frame and as shown in Appendix Two. As detailed further below, the approach to the development of interview questions, and subsequent analysis was influenced by the thematic narrative tradition allied to the GTM (Riessman 2014).

As the interviews aimed to gather acute, reflective insight on developmental outcomes arising from the MA those interview participants who were graduates were issued in advance with the following:

- 2,000 word statement supporting their MA application.
- 5,000 word reflexive assignment.
- A copy of their MA dissertation

Where interview participants were current students, and for example had not completed their dissertation, they were issued with the following in advance of their interview:

- A note outlining primary pedagogical influences, approach and strategy
- A sample of student assignments and dissertations.
- Student profiles from 2006

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded<sup>19</sup>. A copy of the interview information sheet and consent form is provided as in Appendix One, with the interview schedule provided in Appendix Two. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour, and interviewees were seen once. Seven interviews were held face-to-face at Ruskin College. Two were held by telephone and one by Skype. All interviews took place during January-March 2016. It should be noted that one additional interview took place on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2016 with Sue Ledwith, who created the MA programme. This was to ensure original insight upon the aims of the MA programme in order to support analysis of outcomes from alumni and student perspectives.

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<sup>19</sup> These records will be retained in accordance with LMU guidelines.

## The Online Survey

It was not considered appropriate or of significance to adopt a quantitative mixed methods approach, as measures of enrolment or attainment, were seen as insignificant when measuring the impact of the MA experience. However, it was considered essential in the context of validity and reliability to have a secondary source of data and that represented the perspective of the majority of alumni and students.

The online survey was designed using Survey Monkey online cloud-based software, and was released to all alumni and current students from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016 to run for a three month period. A total of 49 participants completed the survey generating a response rate of 84.48%. The survey questions were designed on the same principles as the interviews i.e. focusing on issues of the impact of the MA experience in the context of renewal, in order that narrative data could be more easily coded and analysed thematically. There were 17 questions in total in the survey, more than the 8-9<sup>20</sup> in the interview. This was due to the survey needing to cover ground formally, that the interview technique would achieve informally.

The benefit of an embedded, online approach was that it catered for the internationally dispersed nature of alumni<sup>21</sup>. But it was understood also that good practice in survey design (Dillman, 2014; Bryman, 2016) needed to cater for the tension between challenging workloads, and the likelihood of summary responses, and the desire to seek through open questions, a depth of insight and perspective upon which the GTM relies.

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<sup>20</sup> This variance accounts for questions for MA graduates, and those who were current students.

<sup>21</sup> Countries represented included South Africa, Netherlands, Kenya, Nigeria, India.



In designing the survey around the research questions and insight from the focus group interviews, participants were encouraged to frame developmental outcomes from the experience of the MA in their own terms, with this approach evidenced through narrative data deployed throughout findings chapters.

Further, whilst interviews, following the intensive methodological approach, tended to be wide-ranging, and premised on the direction interviewees wanted to pursue, the survey could be more directive and generated a body of data of significant depth to allow for rigorous degrees of analysis.

As revealed through analytic memos (Appendix 5), and discussed further below, survey and interview data was coded and analysed simultaneously. As is shown below and in Chapter Five, there is careful description of how categories and themes generated from interview and survey codes converge in generating grounded theory. Similarly, whilst there is little differentiation in the insight gained via interviews and the survey, there is strict attention in findings chapters, to providing insight on the processes of grounding theory from the data through iterative stages of analysis, and the means by which meaning is generated through findings.

#### Participant Observation and Fieldwork Diary

A particularly valuable means of complementarity with other data gathering instruments was insight gained from a form of participant observation (PO) during MA residential workshops and maintained in fieldwork notes (Appendix 6). Whilst there is no claim to PO affording depth akin to ethnomethodology or anthropology, my approach was more attuned to that of Schensul et. al. (1999:91) who define participant observation as ‘the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher

setting'. In this sense, for example, I affirm learner sensitivity towards the residential setting of the MA as supporting the arguments made in Chapters Five and Six around their experience aiding outcomes definable as habitus (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1986) and communities of practice (Wenger 1998).

It is arguably the case that PO attributes to validity of methodology in adding an additional research method, but moreso, from the perspective of DeWalt and DeWalt (2002:92) who argue 'the goal for design of research using participant observation as a method is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method'. Given that the original grounded theories generated from thesis findings rest upon commonalties attributed to the social context of group learning during the MA, PO was, I argue, a sine qua non of this thesis research approach.

The approach here however, acknowledges those critiques of PO, for example, arising from the Mead-Freeman controversy (Cote 2000) and the problematic role of informants, and akin to the problem identified by DeMunck and Sobo of informant neutrality (1998). Additionally, there is the concern of Johnson and Sackett (1998) who argue PO cannot reflect an accurate sense of culture, but moreso the observer's interest in it, and is thus biased. As can be seen in the findings chapters, the approach to PO attempts to avoid these problems by firstly, not relying on students as informants (i.e. asking questions directly of them) at any stage, and relying on observation during residential workshops solely. Second, through the deployment of observation to essentially confirm insight gained through the dominant

role of interview and survey data, and thus not disrupting issues of culture or phenomena discerned by students and alumni from their perspective.

Fieldwork diary notes provided valuable insight upon the 'lived experience' of the MA over time. The diary was a valuable depository for contemporaneous notes to record student's accounts of their subjective experience by delineating the flow and pattern of learning and enabling me to recall, reconnect and critically reflect upon particular episodes of teaching and learning. Whilst good practice literature exists to promote the diary as a research method (for example Sanjek 1990) critiques exist which reflect those subjective dimensions of research and the researcher as outlined above (for example Spradley 1980). As the findings chapter reveal, and akin to the role of PO, the fieldwork diary became less of a research method per se, and more of a secondary aid for reflexivity, and iterative interpretation and analysis of data and findings. As such, it is arguably the case the fieldwork diary did not fall foul of the weaknesses attributable to this method.

Although not perceived as such from the outset of thesis fieldwork, the diary became more of what Reeves (1994) identifies as records of learning-in-action. In acknowledging the philosophical and methodological positioning of the critical educational approach, Reeves' stance also prompts conscious awareness of the researcher's agenda in forming and reflecting upon notes, and of the broader politicised space within which adult learning and development occurs within.

## Validity and Reliability of Qualitative Research Methods

As stated above, the decision to adopt qualitative research method alone, centred on the understanding of a naturalistic inquiry in a context-specific setting (Golafshani 2003), and one which approached the study from the underlying philosophical nature of activist learning and knowledge production. A key challenge in defending the validity and reliability of the interview and survey method was that is sought engagement between those in the midst of their MA experience (principally the interviews) and those at some distance from it (principally the survey).

In essence however, the balance was that the survey sought engagement from those alumni with significant opportunity to test and measure the MA outcomes of the MA experience over time, with those in interviews who had contemporary and immediate sensitivity to its impact upon them. As such the approach deployed in each method was semi-structured, allowing participants to determine their own means to frame and narrate the MA experience and impact.

The greater volume of narrative data gained from the survey was considered beneficial in responding specifically to the challenge of validity of adopted research methods. As such, and reflecting the concerns of Lincoln and Gubba (1985) the survey method sought to diminish concerns of validity around researcher and respondent bias and reactivity. It was felt, for example, that elapsed time following MA graduation would reduce the likelihood of reactivity and respondent bias. Similarly, in reflecting Robson's (2002:176) assertion that reliability in qualitative studies is a matter of 'being thorough, careful and honest in carrying out the

research' the research process, as detailed further below, accounted clearly for reliability concerns around the interview process, including the wording of questions, and an appreciation of the power dynamic (Breakwell, 2000; Cohen et al., 2018; Silverman, 2016).

It is critically important to add also that, in aiding the validity and reliability of selected methods, there was a recognition of comparative research method (for example Sica 2006 and Cohen et. al 2018) to ensure that differentiation in narrative data could be accounted for cultural and other variation. For example, evidence of MA impact borne of the significant emphasis of gender in the MA curriculum, and of the relevance based on the gender of students and alumni, could be discerned and accounted for. Evidence of this comparative approach is highlighted throughout the findings chapters.

### Approach to Data Analysis

On reflection, it's clear that the approach to data analysis has produced original insight upon the social conditions of the production of knowledge in the context of renewal, and enabled an exploration of the multiple ways of ways of learning and knowing through trade union struggle. As discussed explicitly through findings, and further below, the nature of the grounded theories generated through this thesis were unforeseen. As such, and again revealed in detail throughout the findings chapters, there is a strict and explicit approach to outlining the processes and stages of analysis. The following sections of the chapter sheds more light upon this approach by embedding a depiction of the stages of analysis of research data which provided

shape and coherence between the interview code of validation and the subsequent generation in Chapter Five of the original grounded theories of *knowing* and *being*. This depiction is important also to grounding the way in which the interview code of redundant knowledge provides the basis for the generation in Chapter Six of the original grounded theory of embodied activism.

### Coding and Narrative Analysis

Following principally the guidance of Saldana (2016) interview and survey data was subject to iterative coding processes, thus examining this material for a 'word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing or evocative attribute' (2016:3). Interviews were transcribed and coded simultaneously thus, it is contended, rendering greater insight at the precise point of repeated listening for transcription purposes. Narrative codes were adopted for the interview transcripts, whilst survey codes were typically in-vivo – with categories and themes discerned from these. Saldana was instructive also, and as revealed below, in the construction of *code maps* to depict insight upon coding assembly and interpretation, and *post-coding* as a means to undertake iterative, successive stages of analysis.

The approach to coding was informed by Catherine Riessman's (1996, 2002, 2014) approach to the thematic analysis of personal narratives. I sought this influence as in the context of critical educational research it privileges, respects and treats as valid people's story-telling of their lives through narrative accounts. Riessman insists also that narrative is an instructive means to narrate the 'identity' stories in the dialectical relationship between people and movements.

Moen (2006) cites Vygotsky's (1978) approach to the developmental perspective in his study of human beings, and Bakhtin's (1986) focus on dialogue as falling within the framework of sociocultural theory in explaining the origins of the narrative research approach. In this context Riessman (2005) accounts for the modern interest in narrative as influenced by movements rejecting positivist modes of inquiry and the influence of master narratives of theory. In outlining differing approaches to narrative analysis Riessman relates the thematic approach as that best suited to the GTM.

The thematic approach is useful for theorising across a number of cases – finding common thematic elements across research participants and the events they report. A typology can be constructed to elaborate a developing theory. Because interest lies in the content of speech, analysts interpret what is said by focusing on the meaning that any competent user of the language would find in a story. Language is viewed as a resource, not a topic of investigation. (2005:3)

In devising interview questions (Appendix Two) an accent was placed around encouraging critical reflection upon the MA experience, and asking participants to read selected materials to concentrate their focus. In a concrete sense participants were also asked to relate their experience directly to the renewal debate.

On reflection, and as described in the findings chapters, the process of coding and data analysis did not prove problematic. Indeed, the process of exploring for common categories and themes from across the codes felt organic and fluid.

Similarly, and as described in Chapter Five, it was felt that the approach to thematic analysis enabled the early acquisition of findings, and from this the definitive development of original grounded theory.

### Analytic Memos

During the process of data analysis, and in generating grounded theory, the most valuable outcome was in the maintenance of analytic memos (AM) during the process of transcription and coding. As discussed in detail throughout findings chapters, it is arguably the case that theory came into being largely because of this device. As claimed by Rogers (2018:890) 'Once analytic memos are written, they become data as well, and researchers are able to use the coding process to code and categorize each memo'. As such, there is careful attention to the way in which AM not only captured the generation of theory from the first cycle of coding, but also the way in which the instrument became a form of data in itself. As such Appendix Five requires reading to gain a concrete sense of the AM as research instrument throughout the process of data analysis and form of data in its own right. Similarly, a distinct appreciation for the role of AM will arise from the reading below of the methodological approach to coding.

### Grounded Theory Method (GTM)

The constructivist grounded theory method (CGTM) of Cathy Charmaz (2000, 2006, 2008) was adopted for the purposes of data analysis and the generation of theory.

This approach was politically and pedagogically important given my particularly close



personal relationship to key defining features of the research focus. No matter the claim for objectivity Charmaz acknowledges the researcher's interpretive influence in GTM, arguing 'we construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives and research practices' (2006:10).

I sought however, not to overlay heavily the reflexive practitioner ambitions of the thesis, with a critically important primary aim to relate learning, knowledge and renewal. The CGTM method was, I argue, the principle means by which the process of findings were, first, expressed through clear, logical, portrayal, and second, central to structuring insight that generated grounded theories of *knowing* and *being* and through these, embodied activism. As revealed in findings, the method enabled a rational depiction of stages of analysis in the form of concepts including analytic momentum, carrying capacity and theoretical logic.

As is depicted below the CGTM allowed for close attention in Chapters Five and Six to the source of grounded theories in the form of the interview codes of validation and redundant knowledge. Further the method insists upon clear definition of the iterative stages of analysis, but also, and as displayed in both chapters, a clear sense of the power, purpose and pattern of categories in the way that they cohere to form theory. Additionally, I contend that it was CGTM that demanded the precise attention to meaning in narrative data that yielded the original coined phrase 'hidden injuries of trade union renewal' that I devised and applied in the findings chapters.

## Responding to Critiques of the GTM

An attention to critiques of the GTM, not least around validity (Strauss and Corbin 2008) have ensured that the thesis methodological approach to research design incorporates good practice features which maintain validity including reflexivity, documentation of data sources and theoretical sampling (Kolb 2012). Notably, as a DProf thesis rooted in critical reflection upon professional practice (Fulton et al 2013), the focus on reflexivity as a means to strengthen validity, recognises that its role is to avoid arguments of bias and/or reactivity in the handling, analysis of research data, and in its subsequent portrayal as findings (Bickman and Rog 2008).

In this vein the methodological approach engages with more generic critiques of the GTM, including that in its desire for rigour as a research method it becomes overly prescriptive and, to cite Andreski (1972), 'The over-emphasis on methodology and techniques, as well as adoption of formulae and scientific terms, exemplify the common tendency to displace value from the ends to the means. (1972:108-9).

Thus it was understood that the approach to data collection and analysis could not reflect an approach that was formulaic (Timonen, Foley and Conlon 2018). Nevertheless it was required to embed and project a robust, thoughtful approach to generate insight and theory from the narrative data collected in interviews, the online survey, and allied means. As such the following elements were adopted, and discussed when portraying findings in Chapters, Five, Six and Seven.

First, an approach to the simultaneous transcription of interview and survey data with the first cycle of coding. Second, a careful and evidenced approach to the construction of codes, categories and themes from the data solely, and not allowing inference or interference from other sources. Third, an approach to evidencing comparative method and outcomes from these, and particularly between the first and second cycles of coding. Fourth, and as discussed specifically in Chapter Six in the generation of an original grounded theory of embodied activism (EA), is evidence of the way that theory advances during steps in the process of analysis, and that could not be foreseen.

Finally, the maintenance of analytic memos (AM) during the long-stage of data collection and analysis. This was an authoritative means to capture insight, and define the generation of theory when writing-up thesis findings. As discussed in Chapter Five, for example, without AM, it is argued that the generation of insight and theory could not have occurred in the fluid, concrete way that it had.

In evidencing the approach adopted to ensure validity and illustrate reflexivity, the next focus of this chapter is a depiction of the methodological approach to the analysis of data emerging from iterative stages of coding. As is detailed further in Chapter Five, this rigorous methodological approach relates the initial interview code of validation with the subsequent original grounded theories of *knowing* and *being*.

### 3.4 Exploring Validation

As was noted earlier, Saldana (2016) provided a simple, yet highly effective methodological framework for coding, analysis and the generation of grounded theory as the period of fieldwork came to an end in Spring 2016. The subsequent series of findings as expressed through this process felt daunting, but also exhilarating, as they demonstrated a real sense of the impact of the MA experience on student's personal, educational, political and trade union lives. Not unexpectedly the findings were complex, and warranted clear definition. As such, Saldana suggests that we approach telling the story of how findings are arrived at, and the interpretation of them, 'one thing at a time'.

After your exhaustive qualitative data analysis you may have come to the realization of how intricately everything interrelates, and how difficult it is to separate ideas from their contexts. But rest assured that discussing one thing at a time keeps you focused as a writer, and keeps us focused as readers. (2016:287)

In adopting this practice, this section of the methodology chapter commences with a focus on the role of the interview code 'validation' as the bedrock upon which findings cohere. This analytical process is made easier through the embedding of Analytic Memos (AM) as reflective of good practice in the process of coding as an aspect of the grounded theory method (GTM) (Charmaz 2006). As outlined earlier, and in Chapter Five, AM as a process of note taking was maintained extensively

during the simultaneous process of transcription and coding, and has enabled, it is argued, a fine, acute distillation and mapping of findings.

The sense in which the rigour of the adopted process of data analysis helped shape an early sense of validation as a core theme of findings is exemplified with the interview of Student 1 in February 2016 (2014-16 cohort) as a then student of the MA. She was a long-standing shop steward for the Public, Service and Commercial (PCS) trade union in the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

Here Student 1 describes how important her experience of the MA has been particularly in renewing her confidence, and her personal sense of validation. The quote is striking, and illustrates pointedly why validation is a central theme of thesis findings.

If I had just been [Student 1] in the branch I wouldn't have got through the first layer [the union]. It is as simple as that. I would have to have gone through my branch. You can put motions to conference, and I would have been allowed to do that, and I would have had to get the backing from my branch. Then it would have had to go down to conference, and then I would have to get the support of everybody else. And by the time we would have done all of that I would have been 90.

Whereas this way [the dissertation] it has given some validity to what I am doing and given me an open door to go and ask these questions to people who can start to put things in place and influence things more quickly than going through the normal channels. (Student 1)

When generating the initial codes from Student 1's interview, and then subsequently reflecting on these during iterative coding stages, it is important to acknowledge that these reflect the broad, core basis upon which findings cohere in Chapter Five, and the corresponding findings chapters, to generate grounded theory.

The interview codes for Student 1 were:

Confidence – Authority – Space – Validity - Impact

Thus it was this first cycle of narrative coding that yielded what would become, in adopting Saldana's (2016) approach to code mapping, the dominant categories, themes and ultimate theorisation of the MA ILTUS experience. As illustrated by the series of AMs maintained during this process, the avoidance of a computer-based approach to synthesis and analysis of research was arguably more organic, and necessary to aid the exploration of situated and experiential learning.

The central role of the code validation warrants further explication. This is because this dominant theme which emerged from the first cycle of interview coding, is a powerful, sharp and short expressive summation of findings revealed in this chapter, and is central to thesis findings overall.

As such, we can understand validation as conceptualising the outcome of a process that makes meaning, through processes of learning and knowledge production, through the material experience of trade unionism in the era of renewal. Its specific context is a sense of alienation from dominant trade union cultures and organisation, culminating in a deterioration of confidence. The manifestation of validation is a

renewal of confidence, identity and consciousness embedded in praxis, gained through radical pedagogy, and expressed through theory.

### Outcomes from the First Cycle of Coding

Figures 3 and 4 below depict the outcomes of the first cycle from coding interviews and the online survey in mid-June 2016. There is some noticeable differentiation in the process by which the motif of validation emerges through coding stages as a distinct coded, thematic and theoretical finding.

Notably, in the first cycle of online survey data analysis it is confidence which is the second-most quoted term coded (stated on 16 occasions). In the cycle depicting analysis of interview data the allied codes of confidence and validity are those which overlap with survey data and begin to generate a common expression of findings as grounded in narrative. As is described further below, what we can see emerging through these code maps is evidence of agential and transformative outcomes as a result of an educational experience.

This personal sense of profound, personal transformation is rendered in stark form throughout both interview and survey data. Here Student Two speaks emphatically of increased confidence as a result of the MA, and clearly also of how this enacted her sense of agency. Student Two was a part-time student in the first MA cohort 2006-08. She enrolled as a UNITE activist in a legal role in the financial services

sector. By the time of her interview (February 2016) she had migrated to New Zealand and was completing a PhD.

It is a confidence thing. The confidence that you've got the knowledge and understanding to argue back either within the movement about what you are doing or within the movement on that this is an important thing. Here are the reasons why it is historically important, and here are the reasons why it is important now. It was one of the things I wanted to do the Masters for, to have the arguments. To be able to sit with people and say, what I felt was right, but I couldn't argue, because that was the whole legal realism thing. But now I have the evidence that says, and that's why you are wrong and I am right.

As can be seen from the note which summaries initial theorising upon coding of survey data (Figure 3) it states that we can perceive of findings as 'opportunities to research renewal identities, options and tensions. Praxis is key to confidence building', as is portrayed so clearly in the above quote. As such, there is a critically important overlap here with the themes which emerge from the coding of interview data (Figure 4) which are, validation, praxis and tensions.



Figure 3: First cycle of coding from online survey Figure 4: First cycle of coding from interviews

Code (and occurrence)	Sub-Code	Category	Theme/Concept	Theory
Supportive cohort	10	Cohort		
Friends	1			
International Cohort	2			
Inter-Union Cohort	1			
Shared experience	1			
Tutor support	2	Teaching		
Teaching quality	12			
Teaching/Freire	1			
Pedagogy	1			
International focus	1		Confidence through praxis	
Academic paper for c	1	Praxis		
Opportunity to research	3			
Writing academically	1			
Academic skills	2			
Theory/analysis	1			
Critical thinking/skills	5			
Becoming an academic	1			
Now published	1			Opportunities to research renewal identifies options and tensions. Praxis is key to confidence building
Research skills	2			
A thinker	1		Community of Practice	
Insight	1			
Accessibility of HE	1			
Confidence (generic)	16	Confidence		
Confidence /research	1			
Confidence/articulation	1			
Life changing	1		Renewed activism	
Enjoyment	1			
Profound MA impact	2			
Chance to study TUs	1	Activism		
Seeing my place in TU	1			
Broadened TU activism	1			
International dimension	8			
Guest speakers	2			
A space to think/reflection	2	Space		
My role in renewal	1			
Safe environment	1			
TU Renewal options	19	Renewal	Renewal options identified	
Belief in the grassroots	1			
Query praxis	1	Query MA		
Unions dictate research	1		Renewal contradictions identified	
Emperor's clothes	1			
TU Renewal contradictions	8	Tensions		
FTO as specific	1	FTO		
Profound rejection	1			

Code	Category	Codes	Category	Codes	Category
Confidence		Debilitating Movement		Reflexive	
Validity		Non-Inclusive Movement		Intellectual Solidarity	
Acting		TU Lack of Interest/Resistance		Impact	
Belonging		FTO Internal Conflict	Renewal	FTO Trade Union Identity	
Therapeutic		Renewal Tensions	Contradictions	Distance Travelled During	
Liberation		Trade Union Structures		Renewal Strategies	
Legitimacy	Knowing (epistemology)	Failure		Globalising Solidarity	Impact
Authority	(Consciousness)	Redundant Knowledge		Global Union Mission	
Agency		TU Neglect/Resistance		MA Impact on Trade Unions	
Personal Development		Limiting/Limited Nature		FTOs as Classmates	
Knowledge		The Employer (TU)		Networking	
Breaking down Barriers		Organising Academics		Professional Trade Unions	
				Poor Prior HE Experience	
Common sense/Good sense		Inter-Union Liaison			
Dialectic		Cohort Dynamics/Solidarity	Cohort	Themes	
Praxis		Role of the Group		Validation Praxis Tensions	
Critical Reflective Practice	Praxis (Action)				
Research Process		Gender			
Pedagogy for Pedagogy		International	Curriculum	Summary of Analytic Memo 1 (b) (b)	
A Critical Mind		Leadership		It hasn't been easy to try first to code deep, profound meaning, and to then attempt to squash this into a category of my own assumption, and then to try and determine a substantive theme. I knew where I am heading (or at least want to get to) I just don't want to allow bias to cloud a natural, organic process of conceptualising or theorising the more natural outcomes of what the data is telling me. This is made more urgent as I feel it will be important to argue that these initial codes are primary to an explanation of	
Opportunity to Research		Domestic Workers			
Progressing to PhD		Precarious Work			
Expression					
Pre-cursive State/Space	Being (ontology)				
Temporal/spatial					
Time to read/think/analyse					
Activist momentum					
Why am I a trade unionist?					

In response to research question three, we can thus summarise findings at this first stage as immersion through praxis as a means to critically explore renewal as essential to validating consciousness as trade unionists.

In a critically important early insight upon thesis findings, it is important to underline the way in which Figure 4 helps illustrate the generation of the categories of *knowing* and *being* from interview data and which is detailed further in Chapter Five. As is discussed in Chapter Five, it these categories which enable ultimate theorisation of

the RA, and allow for a clear understanding of transformational and agential outcomes from the MA. Also detailed in Chapter Five, and critically important to understand in response to research question three, is why the renewal experience of MA cohorts results in the depletion of agency, and how the MA has been a critically important transformative experience in response.

Whilst the outcomes of the first cycle evidenced commonalities in a positive, constructive way, and portrayed from the outset the core domains of findings, two concerns were incurred as a result.

The first concern was that the coding process was delivering what I wanted it to, and a form of bias might be affecting outcomes. This bias, for example, could seek to reflect the key theme of renewal contradiction as presented in the literature review and upon which substantive credence was needed from findings.

The second was that, as dominant findings emerged from the outset of the process of data analysis, I would need to methodically and rigorously generate evidence of 'working backwards' to ensure rigour and discipline in evidencing reliability and validity of findings. As such, taking care to explore and explain how I see findings emerge from the first cycle of coding, and how this enabled ultimate theorisation from them is a key aim of the approach here of relating the methodological process of data analysis to Chapter Five and the corresponding findings chapters.

As a result of these legitimate concerns the decision was taken to adopt a second cycle stage of coding, as this reflected a good practice measure of GTM, but to modify the approach. As a result a two-stage re-coding transition exercise was undertaken, following guidance as outlined in Saldana (2016), and that was based on the

analysis of in-vivo codes drawn from interviews. Both stages of this process are mapped and appear as Figures 5 and 6 below.

### Outcomes from the Second Cycle of Coding

As detailed earlier in the chapter, the response to concerns around the strength and coherence of findings from the first cycle of coding, led to the decision to undertake a second cycle. As such, Figures 5 and 6 are code maps based on a further stage of analysis focusing on codes drawn from interview data, and under-taken as a two-stage process. This process was completed during 21<sup>st</sup> June 2016.

What is evidenced in Figure 5 is a painstaking first stage process of re-examining interview codes for further insight and meaning within the theme of validation, and more broadly given the concern of bias of evidencing a form of 'working backwards', to ensure reliability of the process of data analysis. Here, we can see new categories emerging which, whilst reflective of those of the first cycle, generate even greater insight into the meaning of the MA learning experience for students and alumni.

These are:

Processes/stages of learning – consciousness – self-perception – action/impact – research experience

Whilst analysis of these is detailed further below, it is important to say here that what these new categories help reveal broadly is that successive MA cohorts feel capable of identifying clearly the relationship between the direct, personal impact of the MA, and an altered consciousness.

Figure 5: Coding Transition Phase

Figure 6: Coding Transition Phase:

Re-Coding for Validation (1<sup>st</sup> Stage)

Re-Coding for Validation (2<sup>nd</sup> Stage)

Coding Transition Phase: Re-Coding for Validation (21/06/2016)		
First Cycle Codes from Interview Transcripts (1st Stage)		
Analysis	Process/stages of learning	Notes whilst coding
A huge liberatory experience	Consciousness	Process/stages of learning
Understanding the world	Consciousness	Achievement
Lack of trust in self/doubt	Self-Perception	A sense of being
I have always felt outside the labour movement	Self-Perception	Activist identity
Validity	Action/Impact	Research experience
Potential to change the environment	Action/Impact	Consciousness
Writing as a treatment	Process/stages of learning	Action/Impact
Lack of trade union confidence	Self-Perception	
Reflexivity	Process/stages of learning	
It has to be experiential, it has to be rooted in your life	Process/stages of learning	
Alienated from knowledge	Self-Perception	
Good sense from common sense	Consciousness	
Lack of support for systematic critique of trade union	Self-Perception	
Knowledge as power	Consciousness	
Human solidarity	Action/Impact	
Organic intellectual	Consciousness	
Confidence	Action/Impact	
Redundant knowledge	Self-Perception	
No need to think or analyse the trade union job	Self-Perception	
Praxis	Process/stages of learning	
Improving my activism	Action/Impact	
The impact on myself and the wider world	Action/Impact	
An ability to critique trade unionism internationally	Process/stages of learning	
I am a different person	Action/Impact	
Authority	Action/Impact	
Articulation	Action/Impact	
Dislocation	Self-Perception	
Consciousness	Consciousness	
Makes me more effective as an activist	Action/Impact	
Space	Process/stages of learning	
The concentration on research	Research experience	
I have a heightened sense of belonging to the labour movement	Consciousness	
Research exposure to international trade unionism	Research experience	
Teaching staff as trade unionists	Process/stages of learning	
Critical reflective practices	Action/Impact	
To see how I could challenge the movement	Self-Perception	
It gave me the confidence to articulate myself	Action/Impact	
Increased trade union activism	Action/Impact	
Improving workers' education	Consciousness	
Alternative forms of workers' organisation	Consciousness	
Doing research is not for an elite	Research experience	
Movement-oriented research	Research experience	
Activist scholars	Research experience	
Testing myself	Self-Perception	
A fear of failure	Self-Perception	
It has reminded me of how fundamentally I am a trade unionist	Consciousness	
Transformation	Action/Impact	

Coding Transition Phase: Re-Coding for Validation (21/06/2016)		
First Cycle Codes from Interview Transcripts (1st Stage)		
Codes	Categories	Theme/Concept
Analysis	Process/stages of learning	
Writing as a treatment	Process/stages of learning	
Reflexivity	Process/stages of learning	
It has to be experiential, it has to be rooted in your life	Process/stages of learning	The experience of learning
Praxis	Process/stages of learning	
An ability to critique trade unionism internationally	Process/stages of learning	
Space	Process/stages of learning	
Teaching staff as trade unionists	Process/stages of learning	
Critical reflective practice	Process/stages of learning	
A huge liberatory experience	Consciousness	
It has reminded me of how fundamentally I am a trade unionist	Consciousness	
Understanding the world	Consciousness	
Good sense from common sense	Consciousness	Conscientization (critical consciousness)
Knowledge as power	Consciousness	
Organic intellectual	Consciousness	
Consciousness	Consciousness	
I have a heightened sense of belonging to the labour movement	Consciousness	
Alternative forms of workers' organisation	Consciousness	
Lack of trust in self/doubt	Self-Perception	
I have always felt outside the labour movement	Self-Perception	
Lack of trade union confidence	Self-Perception	
Alienated from knowledge	Self-Perception	Attribution
Lack of support for systematic critique of trade unionism	Self-Perception	
Dislocation	Self-Perception	
Redundant knowledge	Self-Perception	
No need to think or analyse the trade union job	Self-Perception	
To see how I could challenge the movement	Self-Perception	
Testing myself	Self-Perception	
A fear of failure	Self-Perception	
Validity	Action/Impact	
Potential to change the environment	Action/Impact	
Human solidarity	Action/Impact	
Confidence	Action/Impact	
Improving my activism	Action/Impact	
The impact on myself and the wider world	Action/Impact	Agency
I am a different person	Action/Impact	
Authority	Action/Impact	
Articulation	Action/Impact	
Transformation	Action/Impact	
Makes me more effective as an activist	Action/Impact	
It gave me the confidence to articulate myself	Action/Impact	
Improving workers' education	Action/Impact	
Increased trade union activism	Action/Impact	
The concentration on research	Research experience	
Research exposure to international trade unionism	Research experience	
Doing research is not for an elite	Research experience	Knowledge Production
Movement-oriented research	Research experience	
Activist scholars	Research experience	

In turn, Figure 6 captures in the second stage of coding that analysis which generates new themes in allaying codes to the categories which they generated.

These themes are:

The experience of learning, conscientização/critical consciousness, attribution, agency and knowledge production

Whilst insight upon findings generated from this second stage are detailed in

Chapter Five, it is of critical importance to state here that a key way in which findings

shift as a result of the second cycle of coding, is that the theme of attribution locates

the experience of renewal, whether as activist or FTO, as that which has degraded

their confidence and capability as trade unionists. In this sense, we can better frame

a response to research question three.

Before we move forward in Chapter Five to analysing the outcomes of this two-stage re-coding process, it is important to acknowledge the underlying analysis which informs it. In notes embedded in the first-stage code map is evidence of reflective analysis enabling the emergence of the distinct categories. These include the following.

The impact of the MA has to acknowledge degrees of consciousness-building (space/time) but the overwhelming outcome of impact is around being able to 'do' research, generate theory and relate this to their lived experience of activism and work.

Whilst the notes portray valuable insight overall from the first-stage of the second cycle of coding, their specific relevance in the initial development of theories of *knowing* and *being*, is the reference to the importance of the MA as a means to transcend the general failures of renewal efforts, and the personal implications of this. This critical finding is detailed further in Chapter Five.

These contemporaneous notes, it is argued, reveal insight upon students and alumni narrative data evidencing Foucault's (1982) capacity for a language of critique in articulating a highly conscious sense of value and regard for their experience of the MA, and the relationship between power and knowledge. This critique, as demonstrated by student narrative, also evidence Freire's (1970) pedagogical approach to conscientização reflecting a critical evolutionary process reflective of epistemological curiosity and ontological comprehension.

Student Three (2012-14 cohort), a full-time official (FTO) for public sector trade union UNISON, reflects this dominant sense of value and regard for the experience of praxis. Here she shares a defined sense of agency, crafting a trade union sense of identity and consciousness allied to scholarship.

It [the experience of completing the MA] has given me enormous self-confidence to be able to challenge, to be critical, to be political in my response not only to employers, but also within my own organisation. It makes me feel that I am able to confidently articulate those issues around Greece, the future of the Euro and have a sense that I can do more than just be a trade union official, and at some point I would like to do more. I am intensely proud of it, even though no-one acknowledges it.

#### Full-Time Officials (FTO)

The insight of Student Three, and the other FTOs who completed the MA, helps shape original insight on the specific experience of trade union staff generally, and specifically in the context of learning, knowledge and renewal. This explicit, rigorous approach helps explicate in thesis findings that which is specific to the parameter of FTO in the interview sample identified earlier. Those employed by trade unions (FTOs) comprised approximately 50% of 2006-2016 MA cohorts. Given this significant representation it was felt important to gain specific insight on their educational experience, for example to illustrate any variance with activists. Just as importantly, and as argued in the literature review, was the need to shift an essentialist view of FTOs as bureaucrats (for example Darlington and Upchurch

2012) and to acknowledge their established identities as trade union activists in their own right.

The accent on renewing trade union consciousness and identity is one common to FTOs who contributed to thesis research. Student Four, a FTO with UNISON, and based in the South East region, completed the MA as a full-time student between 2010-11 whilst on sabbatical. Her interview in February 2016 thus allowed for a critically important period of reflection on the impact of the MA on her as an employee of a trade union. Here she reflects on her distinct, profound need to regain and validate a personal and formal distinction as a trade union activist – and separate this from her FTO role – on completing the programme.

As soon as I went back into the workplace there were elections and again because I wanted to put something back from a trade union point of view. I have now stood down again. I did it for four years after the MA. And that was quite important to me that I wanted to go back into the workplace as a trade unionist, as well as a union officer. I am really pleased I did that.

Certainly I was very influenced in having come from here [Ruskin College] and I needed to be a trade union activist as well.

And yes I have that experience of working with branches and they'll say, oh it's alright for you, you are a full-time official, and I like to say, even if I don't make a big thing about it, actually I am a trade union activist with UNITE. It still feels important for me to know that, well you might think that, but I am a trade union activist as well.

The phrase 'I wanted to go back into the workplace as a trade unionist' helps reveal the differing ways in which MA students and alumni feel that a conscious sense of identity as a trade unionist is impaired as a result of their experience of trade unionism in the era of renewal. Arguably this sense is heightened for FTOs who, for example, can be more tightly aligned to failed renewal efforts. Thus validation gains a broader conceptual meaning as an underpinning means to appreciate, and also nuance, the variation of narrative between FTOs and activists around a key finding of this thesis, and is detailed further in Chapter Five.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

From a practical perspective ethical approval to pursue the thesis was granted in 2014<sup>22</sup>. This process required conscious appreciation of allied policy when, for example, framing acquisition of consent<sup>23</sup> and appreciating, allied to relevant teaching, ethical considerations for DProf research.

The principle ethical dilemma was that of close proximity to students, and through this a means for bias and subjectivity to corrupt the research process. When this issue was raised in a discussion during an MA workshop students stated frankly that the putative dilemma was instead an advantage from my perspective, particularly in terms of appreciating, for example, why students enrolled, and discerning impact experientially.

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<sup>22</sup> London Metropolitan University Research Ethics Form, 2010

<sup>23</sup> London Metropolitan University Research Ethics Policy and Procedures, 2010



The ethical dilemma is addressed throughout the thesis by clearly and openly revealing the degree of my long-standing personal relationship with Ruskin College. Similarly, through the adoption of the constructivist form of GTM, acknowledging a bias in research interpretation and orientation. For example the goal of a generalisable model of an education for renewal reflects a career in trade union education and, as revealed in Chapter Seven, a deep desire to impact positively upon this pedagogy as the basis to create, pragmatic, educative relations with allied social movements.

The dilemma was addressed also by clear, honest presentation of potential problems when and where they arose. So, for example, in Chapters Five and Six I express a concern of (a) perhaps only seeing in coding what I wanted to and (b) as a result identifying core findings at too early a stage. Accordingly, each potential problem is addressed directly. For example, the clear exposition of the stages of analysis is explicitly tailored to address this ethical consideration.

This potential dilemma was addressed also through the significant use of open questions for the interview and survey, and following the focus group guidance, not attempting to steer the direction of either towards the renewal actor orientation of the thesis.

All data collected as part of the thesis research exercise was held confidentially and reflected University guidelines, the Data Protection Act (1998) and GDPR (2018). Paper documents were also held securely, but separately and in locked cabinets.

Following thesis submission University guidance will be followed also for the appropriate retention, and ultimate destruction, of data gathered to complete this thesis.

### **3.6 Thesis Conceptual Framework**

Maxwell (2013) helpfully summaries the primary purpose of a conceptual framework as a feature of qualitative research.

The most important thing to understand about your conceptual framework is that it is primarily a conception or model of what is out there that you plan to study, and of what is going on with these things and why—a tentative theory of the phenomena that you are investigating. (2013:39)

In producing the framework, and structuring this section of the chapter, Maxwell suggests the framework be situated in an appropriate research paradigm and comprise experiential knowledge, existing theory, pilot research and thought experiments, illustrated via a concept map. The latter two aspects will be allied to work undertaken via workshop discussion with the 2014-16 cohort and focus group interviews. Thus the sections below inform the conceptual framework of renewal actor. Additionally, the allied conceptual map identifies the way in which the renewal actor proposition was materialised through findings in grounded theories of *knowing*, *being* and embodied activism (EA).

## Research Paradigm

Although not fully appreciated until the process of determining thesis findings had been concluded, the paradigm of critical educational research is that most suited to both the conceptual framework, and the generalisable thesis outcome in the form of an education for renewal. In the context of this paradigm, and as framed by Carr and Kemmis (1999), the intention is to explore the subjective means by which trade unionists interpret their experience of renewal from an educational perspective.

A critical social science, therefore, must attempt to move the 'interpretive' approach beyond its traditional concern with producing uncritical renderings of individuals' self-understandings, so that the causes of distorted self-understanding can be clarified, explained and eliminated.  
(Carr and Kemmis, 1999:137)

Thus, the framework seeks to interpret through critical self-reflection factors informing transformative and agential outcomes as a result of the experience of the MA.

## Experiential Knowledge

I am fortunate in that a DProf thesis expressly seeks an exposure to researcher identity and subjectivity as a dimension of research design. In the context of informing the conceptual framework, and as revealed in the map below, this experience sought to discern the extent to which students and alumni felt they had

genuinely crafted through praxis insight upon their approach to the contradictions of renewal practice to-date, and their role within organised labour. Whilst my experience of education had informed this question to a degree, the value of the research would be in gaining greater critical insight upon this over a ten-year period, and from students dispersed across organised labour nationally and internationally.

## Existing Theory

The conceptual framework of the renewal actor is located at the intersection of Mezirow's (2000) theory of transformative learning, and Hay's concept of strategic learning (1995) in his theory of structure and agency. These construct a frame and enable an evaluation to determine degrees of change over a period of time which is determined by research participants but where the MA is located as central pivot. The MA pedagogic experience is that used to determine transitional effects.

With reference to Mezirow the focus here is upon the ways in which the MA's dominant structuring of critical reflective practice, and specifically through praxis, affects epistemic cognition of the self in the context of organised labour. Here, there is a specific examination of how individual 'frames of reference' (2000:16) alter through radical pedagogy in the context of renewal

Correspondingly, there is a need to deploy Hay's strategic learning-actor-agency cycle at the counter-posing end of the frame. As illustrated in Figure Two, the strategic relation that conditions degrees of agency is the tension between renewal,

and specifically the contradictions of renewal, and the consideration of relevant constraints upon agency.

Hay determines that actors can be 'conscious, reflective and strategic' (1995:131) but constrained by countervailing forces. In essence then, the role of the conceptual framework is to ask how and whether an educational experience generates degrees of agency that can overcome constraining conditions. As Hay states.

For, to act strategically, is to project the likely consequences of different courses of action and, in turn, to judge the contours of the terrain. It is, in short, to orient potential courses of action to perceptions of the relevant strategic context and to use such an exercise as a means to select the particular course of action to be pursued. On such an understanding, the ability to formulate strategy is the very condition of action. (1995:132)

The role of radical pedagogic practice is that which mediates the relationship across the frame and, as depicted, is that which may enable change cognitively and/or agentially. As such it is important to recognise the dominant influences of Freire (1970, 1976, 1990, 1997), Gramsci (1971,1995), Schon (1978, 1983, 1987), hooks (1993, 2004) and others.

Although not a feature of the conceptual framework, it is important to acknowledge that in framing findings and the generation of grounded theories of *embodied activism, knowing and being*, the literature of social movement learning and knowledge production and embodied learning were critical. This includes Ollis, 2010,

2012, 2014, 2015; Drew, 2014, 2015; Fonow and Franway, 2016, Bevington and Dixon, 2007; Choudry and Kapoor, 2010; Novelli and Ferus-Comelo, 2010; and Choudry, 2015.

### Pilot Research and Thought Experiments

Maxwell's (2013) premise here is upon pre-cursor activity and consultative mechanisms that I contend were reflected in the use of focus group interviews and residential workshop discussions as an aid to the modified form of adopted for the co-production of thesis research design. Maxwell acknowledges the validity of these means to inform the conceptual framework when he writes that, 'people's ideas, meanings, and values are essential parts of the situations and activities you study, and if you don't understand these, your theories about what's going on will often be incomplete or mistaken' (2013:67).

In particular I would argue that these means of engagement aids the conceptual of mapping of thesis research in the following ways. First, in depicting students and alumni as occupying a central tension between the need to renew organised labour, and the relative inability to achieve this. Second, by acknowledging that, despite the personal impact of praxis achieved through radical pedagogy, ideological and hegemonic constraints may impede transformative and agential outcomes. Thus, MA students and alumni are notionally in the middle of central tensions which ask whether, the root of MA pedagogic influence is sufficient to challenge dominant forms of ideology and hegemony, both within organised labour and without, to enable outcomes pursuant of the renewal actor. As can be understood, this tension

is polarised between the crisis of renewal, and the challenge to assert confident sense of the self in the context of the collective.

Invariably, on writing up findings and completing the thesis overall, there are ways in which reflexive scrutiny of research design identifies strengths and weaknesses of the adopted approach. A key weakness is in not foreseeing the depth of narrative around issues of confidence and leading to the themes validation, praxis and tensions. I am not sure that this may have affected design, but possible may have nuanced interview and survey questions. In response however, an arguable strength of design was in the open, dialogic format of interview and survey questions.

It was the extent and depth of narrative data which ultimately enabled the generation of grounded theories. This data was characterised as portraying a rational honesty around the limitations and possibilities of trade union learning and knowledge in the context of renewal. Its abiding tone was that of positive outcomes from a pedagogy of hope.

On this basis we can now move to interrogate the historical and contemporary context of Ruskin College and of the MA ILTUS programme. The following chapter details also the basis for the creation of the programme, and its intended outcomes.

# Chapter Four: Contextualising the MA ILTUS Programme

## 4.1 Chapter Introduction

Speaking at the conference that launched Ruskin College in 1899 co-founder Walter Vrooman proclaimed:

The Ruskin students come to Oxford, not as mendicant pilgrims go to Jerusalem, to worship at her ancient shrines and marvel at her sacred relics, but as Paul went to Rome, to conquer in a battle of ideals. (Colls & Dodd 1986:62)

In setting out the political and pedagogic context of the MA ILTUS programme, and in the wider setting of the ethos and mission of Ruskin College, it is not fantastical to proclaim that we inherited this ideal, placing learning and knowledge at the centre of social emancipation.

The purpose of this chapter is to aid an understanding of two overlapping, but distinctly different, dimensions in contextualising the MA. First, what exactly was it that Ruskin College was responding to in devising the programme? Second, and in what way did the MA seek to meet the needs of those enrolling? A complementary reading of the literature review and findings chapters will help respond to these questions and support the chapter's focus on the arguably coherent relationship between the MA's curricula and pedagogical approach and thesis findings in the form of theories of *knowing, being* and embodied activism.

Whether the MA was a 'success' in responding to these questions is addressed in Chapter 7. The central purpose of this chapter instead is to aid an appreciation of the arguable way in which the MA occupied a dual location of universal political and



pedagogical intent, a location that was predicated on an appreciation of the future of organised labour internationally within the capitalist economy of work.

This section of the chapter starts by introducing the unique role developed by Ruskin College in the latter stage of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to aid the UK, and in part international, trade union movement to address the 'conditions for change' as materialised through a global crisis of unionism. It is of critical importance to place Ruskin and labour movements in this wholly unique symbiotic relationship. Without such an appreciation, it would be difficult to understand how it was possible to devise a post-graduate programme that could be seen as independent of the labour movement, but championed and promoted by it also.

The chapter then moves forward to present a central component which relates teaching and learning strategy that was innate to the MA to narrative data and thesis findings. The approach relates attention in Chapter Two to the way in which the MA embedded traditions of radical pedagogy to Chapter Seven and the explication of curriculum and pedagogic practice. In a practical sense, this section of the chapter aids an account of the positive nature of narrative data with the central features of the MA, and its relationship to findings.

In order to support an external critical review of the MA I then examine outcomes from the evaluation of contextual and pedagogical coherence undertaken via the Open University's then Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships<sup>24</sup> (OU

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<sup>24</sup> Ruskin College does not have degree-awarding powers. All HE programmes are validated by and awarded by the OU. By the time of my dismissal from Ruskin College the CICP had been replaced by the Open University Validation Partnerships <https://tinyurl.com/y8chqh6l>

CICP) through their annual institutional review framework. This rigorous peer-review exercise, outside of the five-yearly revalidation cycle, was the primary means by which coherence between contextual forces shaping curricula and pedagogic rigour was assessed.

The chapter concludes with a clear illumination of the relationship of the chapter with the core thesis narrative and thesis research questions. This section of the chapter allows the reader to reflect on the context of Ruskin and the MA programme prior to moving to the first of three findings chapters.

## **4.2 Origins**

### Ruskin College and the Conditions for Change

The stewardship of John Hughes, (Ruskin College Principal 1979-1989) refined the intellectual role of an institution already at the forefront of progressive change for working class people industrially, politically and economically<sup>25</sup>. Whilst he worked at Ruskin for 30 years, the last ten as Principal must have been difficult. For whilst Hughes had played a role at Ruskin during its apogee, the era from 1979 onwards is that which the geographer David Harvey refers to as the project to restore and consolidate class power as a dimension of the neo-liberal order (2003, 2005) precipitating a crisis of trade unionism in its wake, thereby unsettling a significant educational and political consensus upon which Ruskin had been predicated.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/nov/22/john-hughes>

Thus, writing for the *Industrial Tutor* journal in 1984 Hughes addressed the crisis head on in educational terms and styled his response as the challenge to Ruskin College in responding to the 'conditions for change'.

A college centrally concerned with the long-term education of working men and women needs to be actively exploring the role it should play – the concerns and objectives it seeks to express, the structures through which it seeks to articulate those concerns, and the actual style and method of the educational processes it engages in. (1984:16)

An exemplar of 'the role it should play' was in devising the Ford pay claim on behalf of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) (TURU 1984). This work was consolidated in 1976 when Hughes co-established the semi-independent Trade Union Research Unit (TURU), the leading union movement research vehicle and in operation until the mid-1990s. In this way, he had championed the relationship between education and knowledge in the form of research necessary for labour movement consolidation and stability. Throughout its history Ruskin has been conscious of its role to ensure the progress and well-being of trade unions. Thus, its embrace of the renewal agenda reflects a central mission of the institution.

### The Activist Researcher

A legacy of Hughes' dedication to this work is the book, *Trade Unions and Social Research* (1993), arising from a 1991 conference at Ruskin on that theme. The initiative sought to demonstrate that knowledge produced by activists from their

localised perspectives in a capitalist economy were as valuable as that produced through conventional means in traditional scholarly settings. In the context of the UK I am not aware of a similar book which explores the potential for a democratic, participative form of 'research as engagement' premised on developing the relationship between activist experience, praxis and the knowledge needed for movement practice, and accounted for thus.

Human activity is seen as occurring within a social context and can only be understood in terms of its location within a social context. It is the interpretive tradition of research which recognises the importance of understanding the subjective world of human experience, of emphasising 'action' as opposed to 'behaviour' because of the subjective meaning attached to the former. (1993:10)

#### International Labour and Trade Union Studies (ILTUS)

In summarising his 1984 article and looking forward to Ruskin's position in responding to the crisis of unionism, Hughes wrote, 'In the main, Ruskin College's initiatives have sought to re-combine long term educational development with the use of research both to interpret change and to stimulate a reasoned and strategic response to it (1984:22). As the 20<sup>th</sup> century drew to a close Hughes articulated a

view of research and theorising based upon activist knowledge and experience as common movement practice, reasserted under the conditions for change<sup>26</sup>.

With research increasingly a function undertaken in-house by unions the College launched the ILTUS department in 2000, coinciding with the commencement of my part-time role at the College.

Drawing on my diverse union teaching experience around this time,<sup>27</sup> I was acutely aware that the day-to-day informal learning of union officials and activists enabled them to discern the way in which the UK economy was being reshaped through domestic policy and external forces.

I was conscious also of an absence of time and space to critically reflect upon this experience, alongside capacity to critique this through relevant analytical frameworks. I was unsurprised following my appointment at Ruskin to hear that Denis Gregory<sup>28</sup>, and Sue Ledwith were working on the validation of new undergraduate and post-graduate programmes respectively to respond to this vacuum.

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<sup>26</sup> The particular educational vehicle that Hughes refers to here is the two-year, full-time, residential Diploma in Labour Studies. I undertook the Diploma at Ruskin College 1989-1991. In 1993 the Diploma ceased as Conservative education policy no longer favoured, amongst others, long-term residential education.

<sup>27</sup> For example working with trade unions across the criminal justice sector (NAPO, PCS, UNISON etc.) developing strategy to respond to privatisation, outsourcing and restructuring.

<sup>28</sup> Denis had originally been recruited to work for TURU. He was the first ILTUS Academic Co-ordinator.

The OU validation process was completed in 2005 including consultation with UK trade unions and the Trades Union Congress<sup>29</sup> (TUC) enabling recruitment and the two new programmes to commence in 2006<sup>30</sup>. The research-based, international orientation of both programmes were part of Hughes' legacy, and particularly in his accent upon '*credible structures and educational processes*'. As a result, from early 2006, an ILTUS pathway consolidated progression routes from generic and bespoke programmes of education for trade union officials and activists onto the BA and MA programmes.

As is illustrated by the quotes below from the BA and MA validating documents two central ambitions are revealed. First, to demonstrate the way in which both programmes sought to craft contextual coherence between the external dynamics of renewal and the internal crisis of trade unionism. Second, to ally the relationship between activist knowledge, learning and research in order to recognise and accredit the intellectual work intrinsic to pursuing renewal.

In recent years trade unions have seen a decline in density due to numerous factors and responses to this have been sought through various models of organising workers. This redesigned degree programme aims to critique concepts and models that are relevant to students' everyday lives as labour movement activists. (BA ILTUS Background Document P.5)

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<sup>29</sup> This liaison ensured, for example, the creation of BA and MA scholarships from trade unions.

<sup>30</sup> Although my primary focus was the MA, I taught on both programmes from the outset.

The course philosophy and approach is centred on the role and place of labour movements internationally in the ongoing debate about labour movement crisis and renewal. The Ruskin MA offers practitioners and scholars of such change, the conceptual, analytical and critical framework for understanding and explaining, making links with, and comparing and contrasting their own and fellow and sister students' depth and breadth of labour movement experience. It aims to encourage students to think beyond the 'envelope' about new and creative strategies of labour movement renewal and transformation and their own role and identity in this.

(MA ILTUS Programme Specification P.3)

### Independence and Congruence

When positioning both the BA and MA as relevant, progressive steps in the ILTUS pathway, it was understood that they needed to reflect degrees of independence and congruence with the UK trade union movement. In practice, this meant independence from the cultures and structures of trade unions in order to reflect critically, for example, upon the contradictions in the context of renewal. Naturally however, both programmes would need to enable students to see themselves as congruent to the future of organised labour, not least in respect of their activist knowledge, experience, and manifest desire for learning. That the programmes were considered original and timely is reflected in much of the narrative data, including that below.

My primary aim was to study, for the first time, at HE level and to achieve the qualification. However, as the course progressed I realised that achievement was probably within my grasp and my focus changed. I wanted to get an understanding and confidence around the subjects so that I felt I was able to better inform my own practice and ultimately enlighten my own students. I was energised by the whole experience - this can be attributed to the delivery, the subjects and the research, but primarily because it was a shared experience with like-minded people (Survey Respondent 29).

The ambitious decision taken to construct the FE-HE pathway in critical labour studies in the era of a crisis of trade unionism, to provide 'a shared experience with like-minded people', was rational but audacious also in a number of ways. For example the creation of trade union graduate and post-graduate provision was occurring at the same time that human resource management (HRM) policy and practice was challenging a prevailing consensus of the relevance of trade unions in the workplace (Brewster and Hegewisch 2017), and by extension eliminating industrial relations as a field of critical social science from many leading higher education (HE) institutions (exemplified by the brutal episode at Keele University<sup>31</sup>).

This thrust, allied to New Labour's waltz to the mood music of employment partnerships as a feature of its own domestic neo-liberal policy, (McIlroy and Daniels

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/jan/28/thedeathofindustrialrelations> see also <file:///C:/Users/ianmanborde/Downloads/Industrial%20relations%20draft%20bura%20statement.pdf>



2008), accentuated the reality of a new era. Amongst other dynamics, bitter industrial disputes<sup>32</sup> and the prevalence of blacklisting as a dominant tool of union busting tactics, culminated to suggest that rank and file trade unionists remained far too under attack to devote time to a BA or MA.

Ruskin's ambitious manoeuvre worked nonetheless, and both programmes were successfully launched and recruited well between 2006 and early 2017<sup>33</sup>. The ILTUS pathway was the College's critically important approach to supporting the 'conditions for change' in the era of trade union renewal.

### The Unique Status of Ruskin College

With the creation of the ILTUS department, and the formation of a unique, dedicated pathway, which brought together traditional and new, radical learning opportunities for trade unionists, Ruskin was now wholly distinct in the UK and strategically placed to enable trade unions to respond to the conditions of change. Before we move on to explore the distinctive nature of the MA within the pathway, it is important to catalogue the extent of the unique status of Ruskin College per se when compared to other institutions with similar ambitions whether in further or higher education.

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.striking-women.org/module/striking-out/gate-gourmet-dispute>

<sup>33</sup> By March 2017 the entire ILTUS staff team was dismissed through a combination of poor management and antipathy towards the programme area. At the time of thesis writing-up Ruskin College is being required to sell assets and merge to remain viable. <https://www.tes.com/news/ruskin-college-could-have-sell-assets-survive> and <http://column.global-labour-university.org/2017/06/ruskin-trade-union-college-is-under.html>

The first critical distinction was that of the pathway itself. The College's historical hybrid status of offering higher education (HE) within a further education (FE) setting enabled it to combine traditional opportunities for activist learning with the opportunity for progression to higher education. The strong historical relationship across the labour movement of the UK, and internationally, was a key catalyst for the creation of the pathway, but ensured further the distinction of Ruskin College.

The presence of trade unionists on the governing body of Ruskin College was notable from the outset of its creation (Pollins 1984) however, without this continuing formal relationship between the labour movement and the College, neither would feel accountable to make the pathway effective for their respective needs. Thus, whilst the composition of the governing body was a distinct dimension of the College's unique status, it enabled the constituent aspects of the pathway to be heavily promoted by the trade union movement, and financially supported.

The creation of educational bursaries by trade unions, and the TUC, to support enrolment onto the BA and MA ILTUS programmes was a defining, unique character of Ruskin College, and of the pathway, and was critical to supporting promotional activity<sup>34</sup> and the successful growth of both programmes. Thus, over time, a corollary of this growth was the volume of trade unionists who had completed FE-level awards, and graduated from HE-level provision, and who were involved informally and formally in aiding the promotion of Ruskin College broadly, and the ILTUS pathway specifically. As we move forward to explore the early ambitions of the MA

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<sup>34</sup> See p.7 of an MA ILTUS brochure for an example: [https://issuu.com/mailtus/docs/ma\\_outlined\\_version\\_1](https://issuu.com/mailtus/docs/ma_outlined_version_1)

programme, it is important to acknowledge that its success was heavily contingent on the factors outlined here.

#### **4.3 Relating the MA Programme to Thesis Findings**

In order to present a coherent relationship between the strategic practice of the MA programme and narrative data and thesis findings, three key MA dimensions are examined here. First a broad focus that relates MA curricula and pedagogic approach with thesis findings. Second, locating the MA as an independent space to critically reflect on experience helps illustrate a critically important dimension of educational practice which generated significant positive commentary in narrative data. Third, it is important to account for the form of oppositional knowledge generated by students, and the activist-scholar fora and networks that they became connected to as a result, in accounting for their confidence in articulating and disseminating this knowledge.

##### Contextual Approach

As I reflect critically on MA activity between 2006-2016 and thesis findings, it is clear that this programme helped to construct critical engagement with learning and knowledge gained through day-to-day union struggle and through embodied activism (EA). It sought to provide to trade unionists the conceptual tools to critically reflect on their contextual experience of the crisis of trade unionism and, through praxis, to contribute the theory, strategy and practice required to support trade union renewal.

Accordingly, this radical approach centred upon a dialectical theory of consciousness in which thought, action and social relations were inseparable. As thesis findings evidence, the process of praxis related informal, embodied learning in an uninterrupted, transformative process of meaning making, enabling a theory of *knowing*, to that knowledge gained formally through the MA.

Whilst it engaged with everyday experience it enabled agential outcomes which could compensate for what I have phrased as the hidden injuries of union renewal. As such the grounded theory of *being* outlined in Chapter Five reveals the MA pedagogy as attending to a lack of confidence in-part engendered through contextual movement structures and cultures. This sense of a lack of confidence, and a conscious need to overcome this, is a dominant characteristic of narrative data, as with this survey comment.

For me, much of my intention related to building confidence in my union activism through broadening my knowledge; experiencing others' experience; and, although this might seem a little superficial, cementing my 'standing' within the community with higher academic qualification. The Ruskin MA met all those needs. (Survey Respondent 12)

As a result of this outline, and the insight gained from narrative data like that above, we can come to appreciate the direct, causative relationship between the conscious, contextual approach of the MA, and the nature of narrative data commenting on the experience of the MA and thesis findings. This position is argued from the following perspective.

First, that the MA curriculum was positioned to enable students to critique the external causes of the crisis of trade unionism against the internal inability to respond. As a result, students were able to draw upon significant embodied experience gained over time and which, when combined with that taught on the MA, quickly positioned students as advanced activist scholars. It is through this contextual model that it is possible to foresee the role of sustained critical reflective practice enabling a critique of past and future selves within organised labour and enabling theories of *knowing* and *being* to be articulated through findings.

Second, that the MA's pedagogical strategy, as modelled in Figure 7 portrays clearly the way in which the MA drew upon traditions of radical pedagogy, for example in supporting students to relate activist experience and learning to dialectical materialist analysis. As is argued in Chapter Seven it is this relationship, amongst others, which supports the development of a theory of embodied activism (EA) as a result of the privileging of the relationship between activist experience, learning and knowledge production.

### Place and Space

The approach to modelling the MA's independence from the trade union movement was aided by its residential setting. Whilst Ruskin is felt 'owned' by the labour movement, in practice it is autonomous of it. As revealed extensively by narrative data this sense of independence, nurtured through a weekend residential setting

significantly enabled critical reflective practice upon the self in the context of the collective. Two comments from the survey help illustrate this point

Being with like-minded people was very energising and made the day to day activist work easier. (Survey Respondent 22)

Achieved space and impetus for broader thinking (i.e. about state of movement and TU renewal) rarely possible at work. (Survey Respondent 10)

In devising the MA Sue Ledwith sought to ground scholar activist-inspired theories of renewal in that knowledge gained from the students material concrete social relations as trade unionists. As Sue said,

So it was not just about the MA, it was about the body of knowledge in the field. Certainly that was part of my main motivation.

It is possible to locate this broad pedagogical approach, as depicted in the literature review, and as revealed by thesis findings, within a dialectical Marxist analysis. But I would contend also that it reveals primarily both a historical and contemporary contextual resonance with a form of independent working class education predicated upon a dialectical relationship between embodied experiential knowledge and group learning.

In this residential setting, trade unionists with differing personal histories and political trajectories networked and formed alliances in the space between fractious, competing movement contexts forging instead a community of practice. As findings reveal, for many it is through the MA that they first feel a common bond with others as trade unionists. As such, they felt able to apply Freire's 'pedagogy of question' to the inability of labour movements to overcome competing internal and external forces in the context of renewal.

Ledwith described the important of place and space, "It seemed to me that that was the key frankly in getting students", when considering the need for a residential setting in providing the necessary location to develop such critique.

#### Internal and External Oppositional Knowledge

In reflecting on her approach to conceptualising the MA, Ledwith was clear about the dominant strands, "So that whole sort of package: consciousness, development and praxis were essential constituent parts of the MA as they appeared in the original validation document".

Thus, at its simplest, the MA curriculum was designed to enable students to draw on their experiences of unionism and to examine the topic of renewal from both internal and external perspectives. In combining radical and feminist research approaches, students were tasked with applying materialist critiques to determine how and whether, through on-going relations of power, systems of oppression or exploitation were as prevalent within labour movements as without.

It is through that critical interrogation of social worlds that students were encouraged to pursue activist theories of renewal. They would produce what I would contend is a form of oppositional knowledge, enabling them to consider their own roles in deploying this through praxis, and in doing so develop Freire's discipline of conscientisation. It was through this process that the MA sought to create a new tier of activist scholars capable of generating new theory and practice to support renewal.

In order to provide weight and coherence to this knowledge the MA embedded a relationship with allied activist scholarship nationally and internationally. Students were strongly encouraged to utilise these relationships for networking, research presentations and publishing purposes. This national network comprised the Critical Labour Studies (CLS) collective; at a global level the MA was a sister programme to those MA's under the umbrella of the Global Labour University (GLU)<sup>35</sup>. These networks proved invaluable as a source of guest speakers, and dissertation supervisors also.

### Sites of Practice

Whilst already embedded in union and workplace structures, Ledwith foresaw the potential of MA students in altering gendered inequalities, alongside other deficits, to support renewal strategy through their respective locations.

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<sup>35</sup> [www.global-labour-university.org](http://www.global-labour-university.org)



So the aims of the MA were very specifically for developing individuals as entryist. I had always seen feminists in trade unions as entryist.

In articulating a longer-term renewal ambition of the MA, like Ledwith, I adopt Gramsci's approach to the war of position, with the role of alumni occupying differing forms of on-going organisational leadership in the workplace, particularly across organised labour. In this sense both the workplace and union organisation act as sites of social practice, thus enabling on-going forms of praxis through dialectical materialist analysis. Through this experiential proximity to attendant power relations, students acquire their conscious appreciation of strategies to challenge dominant, oppressive practice both within organised labour and the wider political economy.

#### **4.4 Critique**

##### Evaluating the Context and Practice of the MA

In the context of this thesis it is important to acknowledge that a form of critique of the programme existed, and that this helps inform overall the contextual positioning of the MA. Additionally, it helps shed light on the conventional sense of whether the MA was a 'success' or not.

We will examine here the perspective of two external examiners (EE) appointed by the OU to maintain quality assurance standards via a defined assessment process. In the context of this chapter this is relevant as the OU specifies that, "Your insight

into the programme is critical to the ongoing quality assurance of its academic standards” (2017:5).

Professor Carole Thornley<sup>36</sup> was EE during the period 2010-14 (her report is for 2011-12), and Professor Hazel Conley<sup>37</sup> from 2014 until 2017<sup>38</sup> (her report is for 2014-15).

In the first instance both EE’s alight on a similar contextual weakness. This is redolent of most post-graduate programmes where a proportion of students were without a first degree.

The one weakness I came across, common to mature students from ‘non-traditional’ educational backgrounds, is in relation to grammar and writing style. (2011-12:3)

Weaker students can tend to struggle with focus and theoretical linkage, but this is normal. There is an overuse by some of small subsections in dissertation work, and this was discussed at the exam board. (2014-15:3)

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<sup>36</sup> Now retired, of Keele University

<sup>37</sup> University of the West of England (UWE)

<sup>38</sup> Following the contentious dismissal of the ILTUS staff team in early 2017. The BA and MA ILTUS EE’s both stood down from their roles as part of an informal academic boycott of Ruskin College.

As recognised by both EEs, these weaknesses were addressed over time through a combination of student support services, tutorials and supervision, alongside significant peer support between students.

EE feedback was particularly strong in delineating a coherence between the purpose of the MA, and the academic standards of students' work in the context of 160union renewal:

I continue to be impressed by the maturity, experiential and reflective approach of Ruskin students on this course, along with the internationalism and broader purview of their chosen subject matters. This is reflected in both essay and dissertation work. Some of the best work reflects a genuine contribution to original theory and/or empirical academic work – and once again a number of the dissertations seen this time were outstanding – at least two of these clearly being of publishable standard. (2011-12:3)

The strengths of the students are many but perhaps the ability to grasp deeply complex and political issues, concepts and theories impressed me the most. Students had clearly been provided the support to stretch their intellectual engagement with the topic. Reading expectations were of a high standard. (2014-15:3)

As outlined in Chapter 7, whilst relatively new to post-graduate education, I had significant experience of teaching and learning with working class adults. As such, I

never doubted that a radical pedagogy, and attendant support measures, would enable those students without a first degree to draw upon their significant embodied knowledge and experience to generate that praxis through research recognised and acknowledged by the EEs.

## **Conclusion**

As the pre-cursor to the findings chapters, this chapter has clearly contextualised the ambition of the MA ILTUS programme as reflecting the thesis core narrative, that of positioning learning and knowledge as having a direct role to play in overcoming the contradictions between the sources of the crisis of trade unionism, and of on-going renewal strategy.

In doing so it has specified the wholly unique historical and contemporary role of Ruskin College as providing trade unions with the educational basis to tackle the prevailing 'conditions for change'. In the contemporary era of trade union renewal the chapter has spotlighted how key characteristics of the programme, for example its pedagogical and curricula framework, sought to equip students with the form of internal and external oppositional knowledge required to orient praxis both towards the institutional failings of organised labour, and those factors catalysing the decline of trade union power.

From this perspective we can grasp more easily the way in which the experience of the MA has generated such a rich, critically appreciative body of narrative data, and which thereafter has framed through the process of analysis and synthesis the corresponding original grounded theories of knowing, being and embodied activism (EA).

As we prepare to examine findings, it is important to locate and illuminate this chapter in reference to thesis research questions. The strength of this chapter is in informing research question two; what role can education play in trade union renewal? In devising the ILTUS pathway, with the MA at the pinnacle of this, Ruskin College sought to provide organised labour with a collaborative framework through which it could seek to restore power and influence through learning and knowledge production.

The next chapter, the first of three findings chapters, helps provide the first element of insight of evidence upon the MA's approach and of what can be discerned from the experience of learning at Ruskin College.

# Chapter Five: The Renewal Actor

## 5.1 Chapter Introduction

This is the first of three findings chapters which address the thesis research questions. A key focus of this chapter is to relate the process of data analysis through two cycles of coding and, as outlined in the Methodology Chapter, carefully depict how the relationship between these enabled the emergence of findings. It is this combination of insight it is argued that support the validity and reliability of findings. As a result of this insight findings can be clearly seen as theorised through those analytical frameworks outlined in the Methodology Chapter. A key aim of this chapter is to explore the ways in which findings support the Renewal Actor (RA) proposition, and in doing so, contributes an understanding of the relationship between learning and knowledge in the context of trade union renewal. In aiding this process the chapter clearly establishes the relationship between the methodology of data analysis outlined in Chapter Three which effectively supports the generation of grounded theory. This chapter directly addresses research question three.

The chapter is structured in the following way. It starts with a practical focus on the role of analytical memos (AM) as a dynamic tool in the process of data analysis. The chapter then moves forward to outline the process of generating grounded theory. As is detailed in Chapter Three, the iterative process of coding commencing with the interview code of validation, enables in this chapter an appreciation of the generation of original grounded theories of *knowing* and *being* as a means to theorise the RA. The emergence and development of these allied theories are subsequently detailed. The chapter concludes with a conceptual mapping of findings within the context of the thesis research themes. This approach also allows for a fluid introduction to the

original grounded theory of embodied activism (EA), detailed further in Chapter Six, as a supplementary means to theorise upon the RA through student and alumni experience of the MA ILTUS.

### The AM as Research Tool

As a feature of the introduction to the first findings chapter, and before moving forward to detail how data analysis emerging from the second cycle of coding helped generate theory to inform the RA proposition, it is valuable here to cite two critically important examples of the important role that AM played in shaping this process. In doing so it is argued it reveals the essential role this tool played in enabling grounded theories to be generated so clearly from findings.

### Embodied Activism Emerges

The detailed AM of 20/05/16 (Appendix Five) provides critically important insight on an unforeseen detour in thesis findings - the emergence of embodied activism (EA) as an allied theoretical description of findings. This occurred because the transcription of the interview with Sue Ledwith generated an interest in a literature that better describes the way in which activists, from trade unions or more broadly, learn through action, and thereafter produce and share knowledge. This literature (for example Ollis 2012) recognises the learning and knowledge production repertoires that takes place across social movements. As the process of data analysis continued it became clearer that I needed to contribute to the vacuum in

literature on pedagogy in trade union education, by drawing upon this rich source of material to aid the process of analysis and deepen the insight upon findings. As the AM states 'I am thinking of arguing a theory of 'embodied activism': a sense in which the MA enables – through praxis/critical reflection – the residual nature of activism to be regenerated and stylised to accommodate renewal tensions and perceive of alternatives'.

### Shop-Talking and Border Crossing

The AM dated 14/06/16 reveals a growing confidence that the manual coding and simultaneous transcription process 'feels real/organic and more reflective of the politics of what I am doing and [due to ethical concerns] because of how close I am to the MA'. This is a critically important positive, reflective comment at what is an early stage in the process of coding, transcription and data analysis.

This sense of data analysis feeling 'real/organic' could not have occurred, it is argued, without the adoption of the technique Saldana (2016) refers to a 'shop-talking'<sup>39</sup> during thesis fieldwork and data analysis stages with teaching colleagues at Ruskin College. Evidence of shop talk features in fieldwork notes (Appendix 6).

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<sup>39</sup> This includes discussions with teaching colleagues during MA residential workshops. It also includes discussion when I was teaching on the sister BA programme. More broadly it refers also to peer, reflective discussion during ILTUS tutor meetings throughout the period of fieldwork and data analysis.



Important also to acknowledge is that , as a group of radical adult educators, BA and MA ILTUS teaching staff were highly familiar with the importance of dialogue between themselves and students as a means to avoid what Freire (2005) refers to the student-teacher contradiction. It is of critical importance that the AM helps frame this appreciation, as its value is in stressing the ways in which findings depict the MA as enabling students to be seen as (and see themselves) as scholar-activists in their own right with valid, legitimate sources of knowledge and power.

In summary, it can be argued that the two-step process of data analysis as detailed in Chapter Three through coding, and the maintenance of AM, enabled a confident expression of findings at an early stage, which was subsequently refined. Whilst it can be said that the narrative data documenting the experience of the MA requires nuance, the common experience as expressed through the theme of validation illustrates a strong correlation between learning, knowledge, identity and consciousness.

## **5.2 Generating Grounded Theory**

The AM dated 21/06/16 is the most revealing in capturing the transition between initial coding and the profound, immersive period spent applying, and reflecting upon, the process of theoretical coding during the second cycle of coding. This AM is the most detailed set of notes written during the process of transcribing, coding and data analysis and evidences how careful, thorough and sensitive was this process to generate findings. As I reflect on the process of data analysis in re-reading the AM, I feel that this is *the* [my emphasis] critical juncture in generating findings. As Gordon-

Finlayson stresses, 'coding is simply a structure on which reflection (via memo writing) happens. *It is the memo writing that is the engine of grounded theory, not coding*' (2010:164) [emphasis in italics in original].

My approach, as outlined in the AM, was to interrogate and 'unwrap' the theme of validation. As is detailed in Chapter Three, this was because it contained a summative power to express the renewal actor (RA) proposition, and evidence to sustain an allied description of data analysis emerging as embodied activism (EA). As the AM states, 'the original theme of validation is, based on my analysis, speaking to a re-found sense of activism, but moreso, that the experience of research had generated a sense of: authority, legitimacy and validation'. A reading of the AM provides a real, live sense of how, over one day, findings cohere and take shape (Appendix 5).

The AM (once again) reveals a concern that in 'working backwards' from an early, initial confidence in the category of validation, and had encountered the unforeseen theory of EA, 'I was minimising or disrupting the codes/themes'. The AM reveals a nagging concern, posed as a question to myself: 'a real sense of, am I doing this right? Am I coding correctly, and categorising these correctly?' (Appendix 5).

This constant sense of uncertainty is unsurprising as my own lack of confidence as a student is revealed throughout the AM. In part this issue rested on an ethical concern around bias. Thus, and as discussed in the Methodology Chapter, the post-coding transitions exercise, was adopted, in part, as a technique to mitigate against any unconscious bias affecting any aspect of the thesis research process.

## Initial Insight upon Knowing and Being

As the AM states, the initial first-cycle coding family was categorised as authority, legitimacy and validation and could be deemed as interactive in assigning Glaser's (1978) theoretical framing concepts. This could, as discussed below, be theorised as responding to research questions two and three and informing the inter-relationship between the renewal actor and embodied activism.

Without doubt, and as discussed earlier, the primary theoretical findings of the thesis are ingrained in what was captured during the first-cycle coding process. Although refinement is distilled further as a result of the second-stage theoretical coding process, I would summarise findings as speaking to outcomes of an educational experience in epistemological and ontological terms. I argue that students and alumni reflect a sense of *knowing* [my emphasis] and understanding a change in epistemic cognition reflective both of Mezirow's theory of transformation broadly, but in a more politically renewal-oriented sense, of Freire's *conscientização*.

Additionally, the code mapping exercise of the first cycle (see Figure 5) revealed an altered sense of *being* [my emphasis] aligned to critiques of agency within the domain of critical realism (Hay, 2002; Bhaskar, 1978). I would further contend that in the context of radical pedagogy findings reference a heightened appreciation of self within core hegemonic trade union renewal strategy and practice. In practice this means a confidence in engaging with praxis-oriented educational processes.

## Unpacking Analysis

In this broad summary of findings I argue that students and alumni consciously infer that MA structures and practices are dominant to outcomes pursuant to *knowing* and *being*. Additionally, and as shown in Figures 5 and 6, research data clearly reflects both Foucault and Gramsci's appreciation for discursive power (1971) and a language of critique (1982) in the context of students and alumni critically interpreting their historical experiences as activists and re-imagining their future activist selves.

It is important to illustrate what is seen, and the insight gained, during the two-stage re-coding process in order to shed initial light on how theorising that generates *knowing* and *being* occurs. We undertake this first in Table 3 below. This is an illustration of the relationship between representative in-vivo codes arising from interview data, and the categories that these generated as depicted in Figure 6.

Table 3: Relationship between In-Vivo Codes and Category

In-Vivo Code	Category
Writing as treatment	Process/Stage of Learning
It has reminded me of how fundamentally I am a trade unionist	Consciousness
Alienated from knowledge	Self-perception
I am a different person	Action/Impact
Doing research is not for an elite	Research experience

The categories evidently summarise the broad concepts expressed by the code groups in a clear, direct way. For example, the simultaneous process of transcribing and coding interviews allows for what is a coherent, reliable relationship between codes and categories. What can be seen at this stage of re-coding is evidence both

of agency, aligned to the Action/Impact category, but also transformation, when interpreting those in-vivo codes that generate the categories of Consciousness and Research Experience.

The second approach to providing insight upon theorising is shown is seen as the categories as illustrating linear coherence. In describing the insight upon findings gained by examining categories as a linear process, I would argue that processes and stage of the MA programme enable heightened self-perception of conscious outcomes, and specifically of how these outcomes are impacting on notions of the activist self.

Whilst there is some merit to the conception of categories reflecting a linear flow to support theories of *knowing* and *being*, I contend later in this thesis that what we can derive more broadly from the experience of the MA is a distinct circulatory of learning and knowledge production, akin to that of activists in allied movements. This is of critical relevance also to the model of an education for renewal introduced in Chapter Seven.

This appreciation of circularity is of critical importance in articulating narrative data that depicted the MA experience as reflecting that central feature of activist knowledge production (Foley 1999) of continually acting upon theories, reflecting on this experience, and starting the cycle again.

We can appreciate the way in which narrative data reveals the presence of this cycle through this comment of Student Five who completed the MA in 2012-14 as a part-time student and FTO for the National Union of Teachers (NUT). By the time of his interview (January 2016) he was in the process of completing a PhD and employed as a policy officer at the Brussels-based European Trade Union Congress (ETUC).

Here he cites his poor experience of the UK's Organising Academy, a vehicle created specifically for to support the renewal strategies of UK trade unions, and counterposes this with what he perceives as a need for continual reflection on action arising from his MA experience.

One thing I should have mentioned from the first question is around my experience of the Organising Academy, and what helped me decide to enrol on the MA. I was very clear in my mind that the Organising Academy was very much training, and not education. And I want to return to the idea of a model that we just do. Often it's the right thing to do, and sometimes it's not, we just don't have the reflection, which of course was why the course [the MA] is so important. We don't have the reflection to think about whether this is the best thing. So I think there needs to be a better calibration of taking on a new idea, a new approach, which is what organising agenda was; how to arrest the decline because the previous organising model wasn't working. However, we need to ensure that we aren't so wedded to that new model, that if it fails also. We know that capitalism and neo-liberalism fails, with the idea being, it's OK, just a further dose will resolve this. It is the same formula with the [UK version] of the organising model.

At one level this statement supports the argument of renewal contradiction as advanced as an aspect of the literature review. More critically however, it evidences the way in which learning and knowledge predicated on critical reflective practice has

the capacity to sustain the radical imagination in ways typically not advanced in mainstream trade union educational practice.

Prior to moving into a more detailed insight upon theories of *knowing* and *being*, it is important to authenticate the approach to deriving findings as grounded theory. In establishing theoretical coherence in *knowing* and *being* as responses to the research questions, here we shall sharpen a sense of the 'power, purpose and pattern' as stressed by Charmaz (158:2006) that emerge from the themes derived from the second cycle of coding.

As an introduction to this we start with Table 4 below. What is shown are defining features of *knowing* and *being* as primary theorising upon the themes derived from the second cycle of coding. On the right are core descriptors for the properties for each theme. In turn, the middle column helps depict the way in which themes and descriptors cohere around *knowing* and *being* to commence theorization.

In broad terms what can be seen is the way in which *knowing* attributes critical, transformative outcomes to an experience of learning centred on renewal and which provides opportunities to generate counter-hegemonic theory. Allied to this, *being* can be described as a process of renewed identity as a trade unionist, and which is generated through the process of praxis.

Table 4: Properties of the themes conceptualised as *Knowing* and *Being*

Knowledge Production	K n o w i n g	Re-interpreting renewal for counter-hegemonic theory and practice
Attribution		Relating change in meaning /perspectives to educational experience
Experience of Learning		A centrality of shared educational experience enabling transformation of perspectives and meaning in the context of renewal
Agency	B e i n g	A renewal of trade union activist being and identity
Conscientization		Consciousness increases through praxis

Whilst Charmaz (2006) suggests it is categories, not themes, which are explored for their contingent relationship, Table 5 below examines the five themes generated by the second cycle of coding to maintain coherence with the approach to provide insight upon theorising. What is contended as most significant in the table below, is the power of the themes to generate *knowing* and *being* as theories reflecting profound transformation arising from the MA experience.

Table 5: Power, purpose and pattern inherent to the themes

Power	Purpose	Pattern
Insight on profound transformation of identity through processes of reflective practice and praxis.	Making material the capacity of the MA radical pedagogy to re-assert identity and generate renewal praxis.	Reinforcing, over-lapping coherence of a radical, transformative model of renewal education.

Finally, Table 6 below helps provide the pivotal shift in theorising upon *knowing* and



*being*. As can be seen, and highly reflective of narrative data, is the relationship between *knowing* and the profound shift in confidence. Similarly, *being* is tightly aligned to narrative data in theorising a distinct reassertion of trade union identity and consciousness. Both theories are distinctly rooted in a process of praxis centred upon renewal.

Table 6: Theorising Knowing and Being

<b>Knowing</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Over-coming a lack of intellectual confidence and capacity incurred through prior experience of trade union activism and/or employment.</li> <li>2. Solidifying renewal capability through active educational engagement, particularly through research and praxis.</li> <li>3. Sharing 'knowing' with others through dialogue and critique of others ideas/work.</li> </ol>
<b>Being</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understanding self in the context of national/global trade union renewal.</li> <li>2. Transforming and reasserting trade union identity and consciousness through radical education processes including critical reflective practice, research and praxis.</li> <li>3. Having time and space to share this experience in a residential setting.</li> </ol>

In summary, the insight gained from this section of the chapter helps reveal the careful, iterative stages of data analysis, the role of AM as part of this, and the shaping of theories of *knowing* and *being*. The tables above in particular reveal the way in which the original grounded theories reflect and depict the voice of students and alumni and their rich insight upon an educational journey. We now move to a more detailed description of theory.

This section of the chapter develops argument to support the theoretical definition of findings as *knowing* and *being* as a means to articulate the RA. The approach here is to examine the relationship between categories and themes to ensure rigour of grounded theory. *Knowing* shall be examined below in proximity to Mezirow (2000, 2009) as a feature of the RA framework and specifically centred on transformational MA impact. Conversely, *being*, will be examined in proximity to Hay (2002) so as to strive to sufficiently capture initial theoretical coherence, but also ground findings further around issues of agency and praxis.

In asserting *knowing* and *being* as original theories to define the RA, I have coined the allied phrase ‘the hidden injuries of renewal’. I do this to illustrate the central importance of the material experience of MA students and alumni as the critical basis for theorising upon findings. The phrase is not original. It reflects the focus of Sennett and Cobb’s book, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (1972). This sociological critique examines class through a lens of emotion and hurt, rather than economics. The relevance to thesis findings is in examining how trade union activism and employment can impact negatively upon aspects of emotion, confidence and esteem. Further, that learning and knowledge are relevant means to address the injurious experience of renewal.

Whilst theories of *knowing* and *being* are wholly relevant means to understand the general experience of trade union activism and/or employment in the UK, in the context of this thesis they are a central means to understand the relationship between learning and knowledge in the context of renewal.

In this long quote from a survey participant, reflecting on their original aims for MA enrolment and their overall educational experience, we gain a live, concrete sense of the nature of injury arising from the material experience of organised labour. We gain also however, a clear sense in which theories of *knowing* and *being* help articulate the RA framework and bring it to life.

My original aims were vague and undefined. Broadly, I wanted to reinvigorate my passion for the movement which, I hadn't realised, had been slowly asphyxiated by my employer [a trade union]. The MA helped me gain a wider perspective and a greater knowledge of the global attempts at union renewal. More than this however it forced me to begin asking questions of myself, my motivations and my career direction. This was a painful process as I did not like my answers. In many ways my research held a mirror up to my employer and in so doing, I saw an unintended and unwelcome reflection of myself. My research suggested that if you don't like what you see when you look in the mirror, you should change how you look and that, as detailed below, is what I have begun to do. Therefore, my description of the overall experience would be that I struggled with and even did not enjoy the nuts and bolts of the programme i.e. the reading, the assignments and the lectures. However, the end result, totally distinct from the output in wordage, is the impact the programme has had on my perspectives and organising practice. For this alone, my experience was outstanding. (Survey Respondent 47)

### 5.3 Knowing

A critical finding of this thesis is that, as evidenced in the literature review, trade union educational activity, and organising-specific initiatives of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, have had little or no relative impact of the co-ordinates of trade union power in the context of renewal. Perversely, the critical labour studies genre has also, I argue, paid insufficient attention to the capacity of education as a renewal remedy. Even where education has come under a spotlight in the literature, little analytical rigour has been applied to issues of epistemology, methodology or curriculum.

As such a key argument of this thesis is that trade union educational activity has been insufficiently pre-figured as a dominant feature of renewal practice.

Additionally, I argue that that no suitable pedagogical model has been realised and applied that, amongst others, is predicated upon an appreciation of why extant renewal strategy and practice fails. In effect, trade union educational activity, as portrayed in the literature review (Holford 1994), adopted a statist, economistic view of its purpose in the 1970s, and thereafter absorbed no dialectical theory of its own form and progress thereafter.

Correspondingly, I argue that the capacity of trade union activists and FTOs to contribute knowledge via educational activity to a renewed agenda of labour movement resurgence is hollowed out via a combination of factors. This includes traditional degrees of demotivation intrinsic to the early educational experience of working class women and men (Merrill, 2004; Kean, 1996). As findings reveal, this induces a lack of confidence upon the self, and capacity to overcome the

contradictions of renewal strategy and practice. Findings are heavily suggestive of factors including poor prior experience of trade union education and trade union culture and organisational practice as factors facilitating this lack of confidence.

As such, student narrative around incentives to enrol on the MA in the context of renewal, speak of a desire to reveal what is known and understood already. That is to draw upon degrees of knowledge, identity and consciousness gained through early embodied exposure to trade union activism. This element of findings is examined in Chapter 6 in outlining a supplementary theory of embodied activism (EA). Alongside this, narrative clearly reveals a desire to engage through praxis with what becomes known through the learning and knowledge gained through the MA experience. As argued above however, it is important to underline that a theory of *knowing*, rests centrally upon what is argued as the contradictions of trade unionism in the context of renewal.

Thus, it is unsurprising that the first cycle of coding yields a theorising of findings around the themes of validation, praxis and tensions as students and alumni come to interpret and codify the transition between altered states of *knowing* and *being*.

Evidence from narrative data to support this analysis includes the following snatches of voice:

I have views but I've never really trusted where they are coming from. I have always doubted that my experience is not valid and that my trade

union background isn't real, or legitimate in the sort of autonomous workers sense it drifts into anarchist organisational sense. (Student Six)

It is safe to work things through here [at Ruskin]. You can actually speak out loud as you are processing it. You don't have to sit there and think I can't say that because I don't really fully understand what I am saying. You can do that here. (Survey Respondent 16)

It has given me enormous self-confidence to be able to challenge, to be critical, to be political in my response not only to employers, but also within my own organisation [a trade union]. It makes me feel that I am able to confidently articulate those issues around Greece, the future of the Euro and have a sense that I can do more than just be a trade union official, and at some point I would like to do more. (Student Three)

Clearly, and evidently, as revealed by the above narrative and through Tables 4, 5 and 6 above, students and alumni centre their experience of learning to attribute re/new-found capacities to engage in learning and knowledge production in the context of renewal as a profound realisation of *knowing*.

When asked to rank their experience of the MA in the online survey three categories all garnered the same number (36) of positive responses: the opportunity to study issues of interest, standard of teaching, opportunity to conduct research.

When offered the self-defining choice the highest ranking was given to ‘the impact on my outlook and perspective’ (Appendix 5)

This, I argue, is a profound transformative, transitional stage beyond that defined by Mezirow’s context-less meaning and perspective transformation. It is much more attuned to emancipatory processes of conscientization achieved through educational activity bound by hegemonic constructs, specifically the trade union movement, bounded within the political economy of capitalism. Additionally, and as reflected dominantly in interview and survey narrative, it is engagement also in a contrary, radical form of renewal discourse and critique that is liberatory.

Thus, there is an acute sense across narratives in which trade union activism and employment has a corrosive, debilitating impact on both a capability to engage in renewal-oriented research and also prior trade union consciousness: the hidden injuries of trade union renewal. This insight, as depicted here by Student Ten, is rendered clearly across both interview and survey narrative.

And I think you have to remember Ian that I thought I could easily have failed. I always thought that it was more likely that I would fail. It was the support and help to turnaround at the end [of the MA] which was significant in me pulling through. (Student Ten)

As such findings reveal a confident, personal understanding and knowledge of having overcome hegemonic cultures and structures across the trade union movement in realising the relevance of praxis to materialise renewal. This, it is contended, is found on a radical pedagogic model of residential-based education. Interview and survey narrative supportive of this argument includes the following.

Gave me the space to stand back from casework and firefighting to take a wider view, improved my skills putting arguments and backing them up with evidence and confirmed I know a great deal. (Survey Respondent 22)

The MA has given me so much. I managed to learn about topics that really matter to me, especially about organising the unorganised, how unions need to better adapt to incorporate all workers, from the informal economy and those marginalised. (Student Seven)

The MA fundamentally challenged the traditional/conservative model of 'teachers' and 'students'. The relationships between the course leaders and cohort (as well as within the student group itself) was both inspiring and productive, I believe this was directly linked to the ethos of the college and the pedagogy established for the course. (Survey Respondent 31)

The sense of a dislocation from mainstream opportunities to inform renewal strategy and practice, but a realised capacity to inform this through MA-inspired praxis in part



speaks to Gramsci's 'war of position' (2003:168) and Schmidt's (2011) concept of 'discursive institutionalism'. My argument here is that activists and FTOs seek alternative sites and spaces within and outwith organised labour to maintain discussion and generate the ideas and networks required to sustain the production of knowledge. In effect to *unlearn* limitations of the self and knowledge, and *relearn* this capacity. This finding is enlivened through the following narrative in the survey, and its accent on transition and critical thought.

I decided to resign from my job, partly by the realisation that the world was a much wider, bigger place and my horizons were not limited as I previously may have self-limited. Realising my part in TU renewal was not dependent on where I was when I started. My academic skills are constantly developing and I have learned from mistakes, hopefully, and I feel capable of achieving a level of critical thinking; you might say I feel my brain has been rewired: indeed, the way I converse has changed and the way I support my arguments in conversation has. (Survey Respondent Eight)

### Communities of Practice

The above comment, '*realising my part in TU renewal was not dependant on where I was when I started*', underscores a theme dominant throughout narratives of students giving temporal and spatial specificity to the need to be physically and

psychologically outside of normative trade union domains in order to locate a sense of self in the collective in the context of renewal.

Thus, as described in Chapter Four, the residential nature of a space and site simultaneously within and without organised labour, provides for the setting for the MA as an invariable community of practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1998). Corresponding to the conceptualising of a CoP combining the domain, the community and the practice it is argued that the location of Ruskin College for the MA ILTUS programme, and evidence of student narrative for the period 2006-16, comprise a highly unique form of CoP in the context of renewal.

Here, insight from interview narrative portrays a seamless, clear sense of the relationship between domain, community and practice.

It was only coming here, this place, has a sense of eat, sleep, learn together. And because of the Freirean pedagogy there is never the banking system going on. You never tell us how it is, ever, what you do is introduce us to what other people think, and then create these spaces for us to talk about it, to critique. That's been massively important to me because, you don't go into the staffroom without knocking, you created the space to knock on the staffroom door if I can use that metaphor. In fact, what you were saying was, you are in the staffroom as soon as you come to Ruskin. We are all in exactly the same position. (Student Six)

In summary, whilst a theory of *knowing* is rooted in transformational cognitive change and new-found capacities for knowledge production on the part of the students and alumni, the physical and material featuring of Ruskin College in student narrative is an intrinsic means of analysing their experience. As we move to explore *being* as the corresponding theoretical interpretation of findings we can acknowledge the ontological orientation of this, but, as outlined below, must prefigure contiguity with cultural and structural features of trade unionism also in appreciating agential outcomes.

#### **5.4 Being**

A key reason to relate the emergence of validation in the Methodology Chapter as a dominant, early theme arising from coding, to this chapter was to evidence that which Charmaz (2006:133, 137) refers to as processual analysis and analytic momentum. From this perspective we can better appreciate the way that this theme transfigured through successive formative stages, and specifically here, to explore its manifestation in the form of *being*.

Here, again, findings require an appreciation of a prior MA state in which students and alumni had a contested relationship with their identity and place as activists and employees of trade unions. Thus *being* sits on a continuum, as illustrated through interview narratives below which explores issues of identity, purpose and meaning.

I have always felt outside the labour movement. I suddenly realised that if what we were being challenged to do was work out the renewal strategies and contribute to that debate then we are going to have to draw on our experience, not just say what we think, we have to challenge where we are coming from. (Student Six)

So that [capacity for analysis] makes more me effective as an activist. Before, it was just [Student One] who sits on the first floor handing leaflets out and tries to get us to attend various things. Well now it's [Student One] who has been involved with this, she's done some research on that and yeah we need to listen to her. I've had quite a lot of discussions and debates in the tearoom with people who've then gone away and spoken to other people. It's about changing the way that people are starting to think and having debates in the workplace. (Student One)

Further to that I have a heightened sense of belonging to the labour movement. I feel that I should contribute to the labour movement, I feel I should contribute to trade union aims. I got this from a programme [the MA] with an emphasis on trade union internationalism. (Student Seven)

As argued in the context of *knowing*, Tables 4, 5 and 6 above centre student and alumni experience of learning as the pivot upon which a heightened sense of agency is a pathway to conscientization in interpreting an altered sense of *being*. As stated by Student One above, agency rests upon 'changing the way that people start to think'.

## Being and Agency

As outlined in the methodology chapter Hay (1995) provides the primary structural means of defining agency as a feature of the RA theoretical framework, and particularly in framing the relationship between strategic action and learning in an activist context.

Thus it is argued that research data, and subsequent analysis, captures a clear sense of which students and alumni acquire a conscious appreciation for the differing ways in which an educational experience enables a transition between that which can be described as essentialist performativity as activists and employees, to a stage of heightened consciousness of themselves as agents in the context of renewal praxis, and which can be applied across movement ecologies.

Here, survey evidence portrays this sense of transition in *being*, and thus agency, when asked to reflect on the impact of the MA.

I feel I have seen a lot that doesn't work, and opened my mind to the examples of better praxis. I have become a convinced anti-bureaucrat while working within a bureaucratic union structure and recognise the mild absurdity inherent in that. We need to be creative and learn to critically examine ourselves. (Survey Respondent Eight)

For me, much of my intention related to building confidence in my union activism through broadening my knowledge; experiencing others' experience; and, although this might seem a little superficial, cementing my 'standing' within the community with higher academic qualification. The Ruskin MA met all those needs. (Survey Respondent Twelve)

I'd love trade union renewal if it means the power for workers to seek and exact justice. Right now the battle for the working class is in communities. It's the only place workers can win consistently and even then wins are hard to come by. I see my efforts in community rather than workplace struggle. (Survey Respondent Three)

Hay's deployment of critical realism (CR) within the structure-agency debate aids an appreciation of the dichotomous perspectives encountered in research data: of resurgent activist identities *despite* respective locations in national and international labour movements. Bhaskar's (1978, 1998, 1991) ontological realist stance within CR aids an analysis of the tensions inherent to an expression of agential *being within* the structure, and of what it means also for this resurgence to be coupled to praxis.

This sense of tension is captured clearly with this comment by Student Three. Here, the accent is upon overcoming a clear impediment to valuing knowledge and experience gained through practice.

Seriously, there is a view that you don't really need to spend time thinking about the job reflecting about it either, you just need to get on with. We are asked to prioritise on issues that are relevant, but if the issues of my research are not relevant, god knows what is. Nobody in UNISON champions this kind of experience and seeks to explore the findings. Given that I had put my heart and soul into the dissertation I would have hoped for better, although I wasn't expecting it. (Student Three)

As a feature of the renewal debate, the quote above reflects the position of Moore (2011), and Stewart & Martinez Lucio (2011) as outlined in the literature review. In summary their argument as structured depicts trade union cultures as being informed by the very managerial practices catalysing a crisis of trade unionism and inimical to an interest in the collective educational needs of activists and employees.

The critical tensions that sit within social movements around knowledge production and theory have been outlined in the literature. This is however under-explored in the densely structured, culturally specific framework of social power exerted by trade unions as civil society actors. This matter is returned to in Chapter 7 where it is argued that a comprehension of this vacuum is required across the UK trade union movement and carefully responded to as a means of reassessing pathways to renewal.

As evidenced by thesis findings for *knowing*, and specifically for *being*, there is a need to attend to internal trade union measures that allow for theorising upon the

lived, embodied, experience of activists and employees to enable the radical imagination. The implications for an enhanced sense of agency allied to a theory of being in the context of renewal is addressed by Allman (2010).

Critical revolutionary praxis develops through and within the struggles for reform, whether these pertain to issues emanating from the shop floor, the community, the environment or any other site where the ramifications of capitalism are experienced. These struggles are some of the most important sites in which critical education can and must take place. Moreover, if this critical education takes place within changed relations, people will be transforming not only their consciousnesses but their subjectivity and sensibility as well. (2010:128)

The capacity to spend time away from the frontline of trade union activism and employment, to reflect critically upon what has been learnt informally and formally, and to theorise upon this through praxis is a dominant means by which student and alumni narrative cohere findings in the form of *being*. In a practical sense their respective positions within organised labour do not formally call upon them to engage in such activity, thus catering for the body of narrative on disinterest in MA activity and outcomes amongst trade union peers. From a more debilitating perspective however, is that greater body of data confirming a perspective that they should not, or cannot, produce knowledge to aid renewal.

**This attendant tension is rendered starkly in narrative data like that below.**



But managerially the organisation [a trade union] had no interest at all. They were almost nervous I think by being challenged by some of what I had found. I remember one or two people saying that they were going to leave my dissertation on one or two people's desks but they didn't want to know, they were not interested. It was disappointing, although not surprising, but disappointing. (Student Four)

That's because you've had years of conditioning telling you that you can't. And that's the thing, that's what makes Ruskin unique in that it allows people who've had that experience to come in and enjoy a completely different experience. When you've gone through a formal education and it didn't quite work right for you straight away you think, I can't do that. And you know, any idea of doing anything academic is out of the window. In a workplace quite often because of various restrictions – a part-time worker, a woman with family commitments, you are not going to progress, you'll not move forward for promotion or training and you are put on the sidelines there. All of a sudden – and you get used to it, it becomes part of who you are. You don't even realise that you have taken that on-board. And then you come here, and then all of a sudden it's like oh actually yes, tell me what you think. You are valued, and we will encourage you to explore those further. That is quite unique, you don't get that anywhere else. (Student Eight)

Can I say Ian, as I feel really passionate about this? It is going to have to take the leadership of unions to respect staff like me for who their own personal reasons, and are passionate about the trade union movement, it is going to take the leadership to say that we want to share knowledge and engage with it. (Student Three)

Taken together, this data depicts a clear, specific sense in which *being* reflects a distinct transition in overcoming bias and barriers to learning within labour movements. Such understanding is essential to appreciating narrative which locates a lack of confidence and capability as arising from an experience of trade unionism in the era of renewal, and of learning and knowledge production as a means to overcome this.

## **Conclusion**

As revealed in this chapter, the inductive, constructivist research design of the thesis has enabled a richer, deeper sense of findings than those assumed in initially shaping the theoretical framework of the RA. Supporting this outcome was the decision to pre-figure findings by unpicking in the Methodology Chapter the defined, methodological approach to coding and data analysis framed around the interview code of validation, which so authoritatively coheres in this chapter into original grounded theories of knowing and being.

In relating this grounded theory to the core thesis narrative, a theory of *knowing* explains the experience of the MA as yielding an understanding of having overcome hegemonic cultures and structures across the trade union movement in realising the relevance of praxis to materialise renewal. Further, *being*, affords insight upon confidence in engaging with praxis-oriented educational processes.

Taken together, *knowing* and *being* theorise the original RA framework, but with a clearer, illuminative role in capturing the degrees of transformative, agential outcomes from an experience of learning. Thus, we are left with a much more confident sense of the role of learning and knowledge production to aid processes of trade union renewal. Additionally, findings can inform the vacuum identified in the literature review of such understanding.

In relating findings to research question three, it is of critical importance that trade union educationists acknowledge this new theory in the context of the 'hidden injuries of trade union renewal' so powerfully portrayed through narrative data. In this sense, it calls for on-going attention to the relevance of education in the context of renewal. This is explored further in Chapter Seven. Before this, the next findings chapter, Chapter Six, explores an unforeseen dimension of findings, and without which, theories of *knowing* and *being* cannot be fully appreciated.

## **Chapter Six: Embodied Activism**

### 6.1 Chapter Introduction

The emergence of a grounded theory of embodied activism (EA) started with a simple, personal observation whilst running the MA programme. This was that students were engaging in a phenomena beyond a mere academic experience in enrolling onto the programme. A survey participant helps illustrate this point when reflecting on the personal impact of the MA.

Prior to the MA, I enjoyed a meteoric rise in my union career. When I began to apply the critical thinking I developed through the MA to issues within my own workplace, my management colleagues began to treat me like an outsider. This was compounded by an unexpected phenomena whereby non-management colleagues increasingly saw me as some sort of people's champion. Despite my role as a senior paid official, increasingly my day to day activities looked more like those of a frontline activist. (Survey Respondent 47)

This body of narrative infused my anecdotal experience at an early stage of data analysis. It was suggesting that beyond evidence of agency and transformation, findings spoke of a clash between residual forms of trade union identity and consciousness and organisational dynamics. Thus, the solidarity and friendship across cohorts since 2006 masked what can now be discerned through EA, and expressed via narratives, as 'hidden injuries' otherwise obscured in the context of

trade union renewal. In this sense, this chapter responds directly to research question three, and helps inform question two.

Saldana (2016:277) suggests that theory in the social sciences should contain four characteristics. The first is that it predicts and controls action through an if-then/when-then/since-that's why logic. The second is that it accounts for variation in the empirical observation. The third is that it explains how and or why something happens by stating its cause(s) and outcome(s). The fourth is that it provides insights and guidance for improving social life.

This chapter structure and focus will seek to respond to Saldana in the following way. First, as with the renewal actor (RA), we shall explore the nature of EA as a grounded theory through its evolution in the simultaneous process of coding and transcribing interview and survey data, and commencing with the root code of 'redundant knowledge'. We then clarify the theoretical definition of EA returning to the original framework as outlined in the literature review and methodology chapters.

We then move on to deepen our understanding of EA by relating findings to an appreciation of how trade union activist knowledge is produced as a result of the multiple ways of learning and knowing through social action. A further, final perspective upon EA is established through association with allied theory in the field of adult pedagogy. This includes Polanyi's approach to tacit knowledge (1967:4) and Schon's (1983, 1987) notion of 'thinking on our feet' as a form of critical reflection in and on action.

## 6.2 Redundant Knowledge: The Emergence of Embodied Activism

As illustrative of the benefits of co-construction in research design, it was suggested by students during an MA residential weekend that thesis interview and survey questions should seek to identify ways in which learning and knowledge generated from the programme was sustained following graduation. Thus, interview question 7 was, *how would you describe (even theorise) the impact of the MA on you personally, and in your on-going trade union activity*, and survey question 15 was, *what changes or developments may be linked to your MA experience? For example, in terms of your trade union/activist role, academic skills or wider outlook on trade union renewal?*

When asked this question in her interview Student Three helped kick-start the emergence of embodied activism by responding in this way.

It has been very difficult to maintain the level of engagement I generated whilst I was on the MA. Unless I get the chance to read similar material I do feel that my knowledge is slipping. People are unlikely to want to discuss the issues of my research anyway, regardless of the general air of lack of critical engagement with the issues. And also when I have broached some of the issues in my research a particular response is that it is not relevant to whatever the situation is. And my concern is that the particular knowledge I have gained has become redundant.

At an anecdotal level I was always aware that MA alumni struggled to maintain an active interest in their preferred areas of research on leaving the programme. For example, it was anticipated, and realised, that the combination of a coalition

government from 2010, austerity measures driven by the financial crisis of 2008, and the Trade Union Act 2016 would have multiple, over-lapping effects exacerbating activist and FTO workloads. Thus there were diminishing capacities for alumni to, for example, build upon that body of knowledge and research generated during the period of phrase. As such the phrase 'redundant knowledge' expresses this frustration, and acknowledged also organisational tensions emanating from active engagement with learning and knowledge production.

As discussed in the last chapter, the AM of 20<sup>th</sup> May 2016 captures that early, initial sense that the student narrative was telling me more than that I was initially seeking in generating a theory of the RA. The emergence of EA, as supplementary to the RA, is, I argue, evidence of what Charmaz refers to as 'analytic momentum' (2016:137) arising from rigorous, iterative methods of processual analysis. The EA 'lightbulb moment' during the process of transcription and coding was articulated in the four comments in the AM as I reflected on findings.

These notes (See Appendix 5 for 20<sup>th</sup> May 2016) provided an early definition of EA during the data analysis process, with reflective commentary including the following.

EA accounts for the early, initial ways in which trade union identity and consciousness accrue through in/non/formal learning and knowledge production processes engendering a habitus of practice. It acknowledges also that forms of praxis occur as a matter of learning through social action. (Appendix 5)

Thus the notes lay an early benchmark foundation as EA representing the way in which trade unionist activists and FTOs are required to embody the movement, and

through this social action learn and produce knowledge. It is through these processes of socialisation that identity and consciousness is formed through space and time. It is within the context of thesis findings however, that these notes also recognise the corrosive outcomes of failed renewal strategy and practice, accounting for 'hidden injuries' which arguably impair that which has been gained through early stages and processes of socialisation.

As the process of data analysis moved forward from May 2016, the EA conception became clearer, although, as discussed in the next part of the chapter, it traversed through important analytical stages before acquiring theoretical rigour.

### **6.3 Exploring the Grounded Theory of Embodied Activism**

As outlined in the literature review and methodology chapters the theoretical framework of EA drew significantly on the literature of Ollis (2012), Choudry (2015) and Foley (1999) supplemented by others including Russell (2011) and Isin (2009). In this part of the chapter we explore further how the grounded theory of EA emerged during coding processes, and the way in which findings both cohere around the initial theoretical model, but develops also as a result of insights gained during the process of writing-up, not least around an understanding of tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1967).

As understood in the depiction of validation as the source for a grounded theory of the RA in the preceding chapter, the initial interview code of 'redundant knowledge' triggered an early, allied sense of grievance linked to learning and knowledge in the



context of renewal. As with the RA, this sense of grievance was complex, and at an early stage it appeared attributable to FTOs solely, although subsequent analysis proved otherwise. This early, complex sense of a predicament faced by FTOs was stark, and the confusion of the EA orientation was understandable however, as in part it spoke to the multifaceted challenges of working within trade union hierarchies and gaining a renewed educational and activist consciousness and status as a result of the MA experience.

### Embodied Activism Emerges

Although the AM notes above reveal an early depiction of EA, it is important to note here that, despite a sense of EA emerging through first cycle code maps and allied AM notes, I was still very much focused on the grounded theory approach of processual analysis. As a result, although I ultimately arrived at a grounded theory of EA, this was not a linear process. Thus, I outline here what I perceived through these spreadsheets and why this explanation is important in arriving at an original grounded theory of EA.

Although EA was as yet conceptually unformed in mid-June 2016 it is noticeable that a dominant first cycle of coding theme was 'renewal contradictions' from interview coding, and 'renewal tensions' from the survey. Thus, what I was seeing through narrative data at this first stage of analysis is evidence of a fundamental tension between what is clearly a deeply held set of values intrinsic to students and alumni, set against what they see as the very real failures of renewal strategy and practice often materialised through organisational and cultural weaknesses.

This initial conclusion is not surprising. For example, in the spreadsheet for the online survey, codes equating to a search for renewal options are the highest proportion (19) with issues related to confidence (16) the second. Thus, what we see evidence of at this early stage of analysis is a conscious lack of confidence arising from a poor experience of renewal, and a consequent desire to explore renewal alternatives as means to reacquire agency.

On further analysis however, the narrative was speaking of something more essential, about something intrinsic to being, and about the way in which learning and knowledge can be harnessed for the purposes of renewal. In response to Q15 in the survey one participant helps illustrate this point as follows. This is a lengthy quote, but important to cite unedited.

There are several changes in my practice as union official. At some point during the MA I ceased to be a bureaucrat, managing decline, ever with an eye on the balance sheet. I turned my time and energies, and that of my team, into much more proactive union work. The results were invigorating, activist engagement went up, team morale went up, recruitment went up. My approach, in part informed by the MA, was to trial innovation, take more risks and to facilitate activists rather than seek organise despite them. The only results that matter were phenomenal however, the same results ostracised me further from UNISON management and contributed to my demise. I have recently taken another union job at the ATL, the role is a pure organising role as opposed to an industrial role. I don't believe I

would have taken this job before experiencing the MA. My jaded outlook on renewal has been replaced by a genuine motivation to organise in a true sense and contribute in my small way to wider renewal. I may downplay my academic development, I am no doubt better than when I started however, it is not something that I am either confident or comfortable with. If I ever submit my research I will welcome the sense of completion and the academic accolade. No doubt the new skills impact positively on a number of aspects of my life. Neither of these however come close to the development of my own critical thinking, renewed vigour and wider perspective on the global union movement. (Survey Respondent Forty Seven)

This quote provides clear insight upon the extent to which the transformative impact of the MA creates an exposure to exclusion given the contested nature of learning and knowledge within organised labour, but that students and alumni champion the way in which a renewed capacity for critical thinking.

It is this deep, rich, purposeful narrative that drew my eye in the AM of 20<sup>th</sup> May<sup>40</sup> and, whilst a grounded theory method would require further stages of coding, it was my own personal enquiry also that needed answers to profound questions occasioned by the narrative. It is at this stage of data analysis that I was asking, what is it that fires the radical imagination, and how has that imagination been informed over time by the multiple ways of learning and knowing through activism?

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<sup>4040</sup> It is this AM which charts the emergence of EA during the process of data analysis.

## EA Consolidates: The Pathway from Self-Perception to Attribution

As outlined in Chapter 5 the urge to genuinely ground emergent analysis in the data led from a first cycle of coding to a two-stage coding transition phase. The decision was taken to re-code interview data alone. On reflection this may have been a mistake in weakening methodological rigour, however at the time it felt that this data represented a consistent, coherent, holistic whole of emergent findings.

My AM of 21<sup>st</sup> June provides additional insight on the processes and outcomes of the two-stage coding transition phase. The first note made in this AM informs the way in which the process of re-coding grounds insight further and states, 'the category of 'self-perception' grew from early codes on the lack of confidence to become something much greater. It was always perceptible/definite/ strong, but now it is a key way of examining a reflection on the difference between expectations/ assumptions of MA learning and what alumni/students realised as a result of the MA experience' (Appendix Five).

This is a critically important transitional phase defined in the process of moving from a concept of EA to a grounded theory. The key shift is the generation of *self-perception* as a dominant new category in the final stage of the second cycle of coding. Here, I moved beyond a naïve initial view of a basic tension felt by students/alumni bound by organisational frailty, to a clearer theoretical logic of the basis for this tension.

In effect, and as revealed by Table 7 below, data reflects an acute awareness of the self in the context of renewal heightened as a result of the MA experience. More specifically, the data informs us that a diminished sense of self is attributed to detriment arising from a poor experience within organised labour, and not least a sense of alienation.

Narrative data routinely exemplifies this critically important finding.

I saw myself for the first time as part of a global union movement and began to recognise the corruption in my own union. This informed my research which concerns the corporatisation and corruption in the UK movement. Though my employer took steps to suppress my findings and make my working life increasingly difficult, the personal journey of learning/discovery was profound. (Survey Respondent 47)

I am a bit sceptical about trade union renewal. I think our biggest enemy is from within. Corruption, compliance with corporations, politician careerists and so on hinder unions' ability to do what they are supposed to do. I think that being more knowledgeable has made me more sceptical I but this also give me a better reason to fight for the most vulnerable workers. For me trade union renewal can only start from a bottom up approach. (Survey Respondent 44)

In moving forward to explicate the relationship between the category of 'self-perception' and the theme of 'attribution', we now add definition to those categories

which emerged from the first stage of the two-stage second cycle of coding (see Table 8 below). As is expected in re-coding data, I was looking anew at codes from the perspective of resultant categories, and asking how and whether this process refines prior understanding, or shifts attention in new, exciting ways. As such a key outcome of the second cycle of coding is seen in the way that the definitions below help accentuate a strong self-perception of how confidence is undermined, and is allied to a sense of how this lack of confidence is overcome through the MA's impact on agency through engagement with praxis.

Table 7: Categories generated at first stage of the two-stage coding transition phase

Self-Perception	A transformation from a lack of confidence to a knowledge of the root source of this reflection, and in particular how this is attributable to prior and existing activist/FTO experience.
Action/Impact	The value of a residentially-based radical pedagogy to re-generate agency and enthusiasm for the renewal project.
Research Experience	The emergence of activist scholars through a process of praxis.

As undertaken in Chapter 5 in order to provide specificity in theorising upon *knowing* and *being*, here I adopt a similar approach around ways to conceptualise what Charmaz (2006:158) refers to as the 'power, purpose and pattern' of themes as they cohere to

provide theoretical definition to a grounded theory of EA. We start first by identifying the properties of those themes which construe to generate a theory of EA.

Whilst, broadly speaking, definitions reflect those shown in Figure 4, naturally, the supplementary dimension of EA is reflected below in Table 8 in the way that properties are defined. In doing so we can identify, for example, the way in which the theme of ‘attribution’, arising from the category of ‘self-perception’, becomes a central theoretical dimension of EA. Specifically, the theme of attribution characterises a profound transformational, attitudinal shift initiated through an educational experience. Similarly, the theme of agency helps frame the relationship between the MA experience and the renewal of activity identity and consciousness. The theme of knowledge production acts as a bond between all three themes as it solidifies an appreciation of active engagement in counter-hegemonic knowledge production reflective of Freire’s (1976) and hooks (1993) focus on education as the practice of freedom.

Table 8: Properties of the themes theorising EA

Agency	A renewal of embodied activist being and identity in the context of trade union organisational and cultural hegemony
Attribution	Attributing change in meaning /perspectives to an educational experience which enables a critique of self in the context of organised labour
Knowledge Production	Re-interpreting renewal for counter-hegemonic theory and practice within and outwith organised labour

As we move forward from examining the properties of the themes, and focus on

the power, purpose and pattern of the themes in Table 9 below several outcomes are identified which are important in asserting a theory of EA. The first, power, is a pragmatic realisation, explored further in the following chapter, that radical pedagogy has the potential both to reassert and maintain embodied activism, but also contribute to trade union renewal.

The second, purpose, is to shed material insight upon the multiple means of learning through social action, and how this knowledge construes as embodied activism. The third, pattern, helps frame a relationship between understanding the source of a lack of confidence, with the renewal of agency in the context of renewal asserted through praxis. In summary, what we see in Table 9 below is an appreciation of radical pedagogy to reassert and sustain EA, overcoming an experience within organised labour in the era of renewal which has tended to diminish confidence, identity and consciousness.

Table 9: Power, purpose and pattern inherent to the themes

Power	Purpose	Pattern
How embodied activist identity and consciousness can be re-generated and sustained through radical pedagogy, and the role this may contribute to trade union renewal.	Material insight upon a coherence between in/non/formal activist cognitive and embodied education.	Insight upon the injurious nature of trade unionism, and the role of cognitive and embodied education to remedy this and create a humane pedagogy.



Thus, a grounded theory of EA is, I argue, an understanding of the ways in which a prior store of knowledge and capacity of trade unionists is hollowed-out through their experiences under and within organised labour. It speaks to the power of a critical pedagogy to renew embodied identity, consciousness and knowledge and frame on-going praxis. My reasoning here rests in part on a notion of the hidden injuries of trade union renewal, but primarily in the way that narrative underscores the liberatory means of realising embodied identity, consciousness and knowledge through critical pedagogy. Ultimately, I support this argument by revealing the grounded nature of EA through rigorous processes of coding and data analysis, and referencing the supplementary way in which it supports a theory of *knowing* and *being*, as depicted in Table 10 below.

Table 10: Depicting EA as supplementary to knowing and being

<i>knowing</i>	<i>being</i>
Embodied Activism	

In summary, EA is, I contend, a theoretical explication of a basic social process. How we come into conscious appreciation of knowledge, and how that relates to who we are, is bounded by the way in which we learn through social experience. As such EA represents not just a form of analytic momentum in investigating further an unforeseen dimension of findings, but an expression also of theoretical logic. In the

context of thesis research questions, the generation of the original grounded theory of EA provides a lucid response to all three.

#### **6.4 The Multiple Ways of Knowing & Learning Through Activism**

In this section of the chapter we shall focus on relating findings to the theoretical framework for EA as outlined in the literature review and methodology chapters. Whilst I follow the established tradition of relating findings to extant theory, I argue that findings are sufficiently robust to establish theoretical coherence for EA to stand as substantive grounded theory in its own right.

Further to this argument, additional rigour may be applied to what is an original theory in the context of trade union education, by relating this to allied understandings of the intellectual and educational work of social movements and activism more broadly. Additionally, and as argued in the following and concluding chapters, a genuine realisation of trade union renewal, and the role of learning and knowledge production as a feature of this, can only be achieved when undertaken across a common platform of radical social change with allied social movements.

#### **Embodied Learning**

As outlined previously, embodied learning, and thereafter EA, was, unforeseen as a feature initially conceptualising this thesis. My original focus on cognitive outcomes alone of the MA experience reflects the literature on embodied learning. In this literature tensions are explored between the value of somatic learning and

normative, Western assumptions that deductive, rational, positivist learning is the prefigurative form in the development of knowledge and human consciousness (Brookfield, 1985; Hunter, 2004; O'Loughlin, 2006).

Amongst others, it is Merleau-Ponty's (1962) existential phenomenology which aids an appreciation that a combination of cognition, emotion and bodily experience inform the accrual of knowledge through differing forms of learning. Further to this, is an appreciation that we become who we are through an exposure to language, habits, social structures and, in the context of this thesis, the day-to-day struggle for social justice. A conscious appreciation of who we are, and why we do what we do, is essential in the context of social movement activism, because, as Ollis states, 'these activists believe they are meant to be there' (2012:164).

It is upon this phenomenological basis that I assert identity, consciousness and knowledge accrue through forms of embodied activism, but that is impaired subsequently through the work of trade unionism. This injurious impairment can be renewed and transformed through an exposure to learning and knowledge production that rests upon radical pedagogy. Thus a theory of *knowing* and *being* supports this assertion, and acknowledges that EA can also provide an on-going means to maintain activist-scholarship through praxis.

Narrative data speaks to this sense of reflecting back to an initial sense of *being*, and the way in which trade union activity impairs a conscious sense of agency. However, the MA is demonstrated as having transformed on-going and future means of maintaining that sense of *knowing* through EA. In simple terms, the MA realises an

opportunity to *unlearn* limitations of the self and knowledge, and *relearn* this capacity. This finding can be evidenced throughout narrative, as is exemplified in this survey comment reflecting on the long-term impact of the MA.

I was pleased to be encouraged to pursue the links between my academic interests and my work experience. Combining abstract theoretical models and everyday practice (as a trade union official) helped me to increase the depth of my analysis and reflection. The resources and teaching provided a structured and robust interrogation of a range of common sense assumptions. For example, I appreciated the recognition, as part of the course, that the history of trade unions had not been egalitarian. Being part of the Ruskin community made me feel connected to past struggles and I know there are colleagues, in different trade unions, who are prepared to continue fighting for equality and diversity within our movement. (Survey Respondent 31)

This quote is of intrinsic importance in supporting a theory of EA. Here, struggle is seen as a continuum. The MA provides the theoretical means of enabling a connection with past struggle, and of developing the capacity to reflect upon and analyse the learning gained from these in determining an interrogation of the contemporary dilemmas of renewal.

This capacity to critique the continuum of struggle is a defining feature of a theory of EA. It frames a key means of learning from the past in order to support the present, but assists students and alumni also to maintain a realised sense

of *knowing* and *being* through on-going EA. Thus a key finding of this thesis asks that, in supporting renewal efforts, trade union education embeds a greater, conscious appreciation of the multiple ways in which learning and knowledge are generated and sustained throughout an activist's lifetime.

### A Habitus of Practice

Bourdieu's (1977) theory of habitus is adopted by Ollis to acknowledge the way in which embodied learning reflects a process of activist critique and dialogue through socialisation with one another. Reflecting thesis narrative data and findings, Ollis writes that 'they develop a habitus of practice and, through time, space, and the opportunity to practice they become experts at what they do' (2012:11).

A theory of EA posits that there is insufficient understanding within current trade union education methodologies to either appreciate habitus occurring informally through embodied learning, nor how to sustain this. Similarly, and as I argue in the literature review, nor do current educational approaches treat this form of education as redolent of capital, instead focusing on that learning that is formal, instrumental, accredited and measured upon the attainment of the 'skills' required for representatives, as opposed to activists (Holford 1994).

Without such an appreciation of the relationship between practice and EA it is difficult to comprehend of that narrative data which speaks of profound change occurring as a result of the MA. This is, I argue, because a critical pedagogy has re-engaged with a form of habitus established through prior EA. Narrative data drawn from the online survey supporting this claim includes the following.

At a time in my life when I was very down and cynical about the possibilities of TU renewal, I learned and experienced the solidarity and optimism that we can organise and prevail. (Survey Respondent 8)

I enrolled to fill a gap in my life, but found myself re-engaged in a movement I had lost faith in. (Survey Respondent 9)

One of the main changes from my MA experience is the way I see the overall picture whatever project I am involved with. I liaise a lot with other organisations, unions from the UK and other countries as well as International confederations to find out information and share good practices. I also use analytical tools, statistics, survey and trending reports. I am not sure that the work I do is making much of a contribution to trade union renewal. Some of the work I am the most proud of is to try to get workers organised in the workplace and make sure they understand that they have the power to make that change...not me. (Survey Respondent 44)

Whilst understanding that such narrative helps illustrate those aspects of the MA which inform theories of *knowing*, *being* and EA, the residential component of the programme must be seen as a key component also. This, at its simplest, provided respite from the frontline of trade unionism. In practice findings reveal that a key strength was a space that enabled dialogue and critical reflective practice, those feature of praxis that Freire argued was a pivotal component.

It is in the context of residential space that findings support a coherent relationship between habitus and the student experience construing a form of community of practice (Wenger 1998). As discussed in the literature review, residential learning cannot cater for all adult learners, however, its role in the theory and practice in transformative learning is well-established (Cohen & Piper, 2000; WIER, 2016).

Given that students were encouraged to reveal personal perspectives on the relative failures of renewal, amongst other things, to aid learning and inform research, the residential component of the programme was, in the words of Sue Ledwith in designing the programme ‘the key frankly in getting students’. The depth to which this key approach was appreciated by students is acknowledged throughout narrative data, and is evoked clearly with this interview comment.

And because I was so emotionally aware – I can’t express how much I would look forward to coming down every Thursday – and it was partly to see the gang – I used to look forward to it so much – but not really think why. And then the residentials are something. It is impossible to explain it.

Just magical, and also being here this weekend, even though I have finished. It feels like a family. (Student Six)

This quote, and others like it, alludes to the MA as reflective of Freire's attention to a shared pedagogy of hope, love and 'the culture of resistance' (2009).

Although evidence for this is not formally sought as a feature of thesis findings, such a pedagogy may account for such deep and expressive narrative which informs a theory of *knowing* and *being* and is captured also in the following narratives taken from both survey and interview data.

The teaching standards at the residential workshops was excellent, and I really enjoyed both the academic and social camaraderie of our cohort.  
(Student Nine)

All the tutors/speakers were well informed in their own areas, but were also happy to learn from the students themselves, so the normal teacher/student relationship was more fluid. (Survey Respondent 41)

The thing that jumps at me straight away is the fact that the teaching staff themselves are also trade unionists. This was hugely significant and the reason for that is, having already said that there was a huge amount of experience on the side of the students, I feel that if you'd had the kind of traditional, academic teaching approach, you'd possibly not have the right combination of experience to draw out the experience and knowledge of those in the room. If you are going to have a room of people with all of that



experience, you'd be totally missing out on how to exploit and explore that experience, if you didn't have a similar perspective. (Student Five)

Clearly a culture was generated across cohorts that sustained an intrinsic habitus of trade union practice, and MA pedagogic practice was essential to this. As such it is important, to move on and examine how such practice, within a theory of EA, is sustained through social action.

### **6.5 Learning through Social Action**

As detailed in the literature review, a critically important literature exists, including Foley (1999), Chase (2000) and Jesson and Newman (2004), which helps construct a concrete sense of how MA students and alumni as social actors come to know through action.

Particularly relevant to supporting a theory of EA is Jesson and Newman's approach to defining three domains of activist learning as instrumental, interpretive and critical. This helps cater for that initial, formal, instrumental trade union education which is attitudinally and politically for the role of workplace 'representative' rather than 'activist'. Further, and as argued in the literature review, this representative role is structured upon a dominant sense of trade unionism as intrinsic to capitalism and predicated upon an economic perception of their role in the workplace (Holford, 1994; Holgate 2018). It is thus arguably the case, drawing on thesis findings, that the arguably interpretive and critical dimensions of embodied learning gained through

social action, conflict with this instrumental learning and has a detrimental impact on activist identity and consciousness.

This in part occurs, and as is discussed in the following chapter, because UK trade union activists have few, if any, independent educational spheres in which to share and develop learning and knowledge gained critically and interpretively via EA. The literature demonstrates that these independent spheres have existed historically and been arguably relevant to renewal in differing historical periods (Croucher 2017). Thus in part then, the MA becomes a way in which to re-engage with prior, sedimented identify, consciousness and knowledge in an independent sphere, and through on-going EA may provide the vehicle to maintain praxis as students and alumni continue to learn through social action.

In this lengthy comment taken from the online survey we gain a critically important perspective on the way in which engagement with trade union activity significantly damages any sense in which mainstream approaches to renewal are effective. Instead, however, we gain insight upon the way in which the MA provides a framework through EA to foster agency/*being* in an independent sphere but also provides a long-term means to maintain and direct on-going praxis/*knowing*.

I don't do a great deal in the trade union movement now, mainly as I haven't been employed. I hate personal casework with a passion and tend to think now that union action should focus on the collective whenever possible - individual casework is a neoliberal disaster for us. However I have done a couple of cases for the IWW where I've managed to secure

thousands of pounds for teachers in English schools in London. I enjoyed turning up to non-unionised workplaces and scaring the shit out of the managers. Stuff collective bargaining agreements - I want to go in, make demands, threaten the [school] employer and then leave with a win. Cut the endless, joyless bullshit chit-chat. This has been accompanied by a renewed love of direct action via the stuff I've done with Class War. It's actually you Ian that prompted me to do a PhD on the group (I don't think you know this!). You asked innocently if anyone had ever done an ethnographic study of Class War. Nope - well they have now! Me. I don't think you expected me to go away and turn it into a PhD idea. Actually I approached your doctoral supervisor Cilla first. Her help was instrumental too. I've taken the research skills I put to use in the MA to a higher level. I've pretty much made up a style of participant observation (or Observing participant as we anarchists subvert it) on observing a group via Facebook. This is on top of interviews and some thematic analysis. I've used Facebook as a traditional ethnographer might have used a market place to record the group's behaviour. I couldn't have done this without the MA. (Survey Respondent 3)

The sense here is that the MA catalyses a sense of needing to return to 'grassroots' activism outwith mainstream organised labour, applying the tools gained from the programme to do so. It is clear also however from this quote that there is a search for a continuity of both EA and *knowing* and *being*, which can be sustained through allied movements.

Student Six was a full-time student amongst the 2014-16 cohort. Here he discusses his own shaping of activist identity, consciousness and knowledge as instrumental to Gramsci's stance on the pre-conditional knowledge required to challenge hegemony. This offers a differing perspective on the acquisition of EA from an MA student through the establishment of a social/political club in Bradford and thus independent from mainstream organised labour.

Where do you develop a sense of confidence in the world in being different? If there isn't some organisation that nurtures that. This was the whole Gramscian thing about, I think the word was pre-cursive. With pre-cursive organisations if you want to run the world in a different way you have to learn somewhere else how to do it, because that will give you the confidence that it's possible. And I found it brilliant, because unions could be that, they could be the new world in the shadow of the old. And that was something that I was rooted in through this 1-in-12 club in Bradford which was a politicised, cultural project which had been going when I came here for 25-26 years. But I have always seen that as my practice and we'd always had this thing amongst club people since when I got involved: if we cannot organise our own club, clean the toilets, open up on time, run the bar, pay the bills we have no right, at all, to suggest that we could run the world. (Student Six)

The critical relevance of the perspective of Student Six is that it provides a better appreciation of how trade unionists initially accrue EA through ontological and epistemological positioning prior to corrosive renewal tensions diminishing their sense of confidence and capability. It also helps explain why and how students and

alumni find their re-connection with EA via the MA pedagogy so rewarding. Finally, and as explored in the next chapter, it helps develop a response to research question two, in defining how an 'education for renewal' may generate a more durable, material form of labour movement transformation.

## 6.6 Praxis: A Whole

The quotes above from the online survey and Student Six, and those like them, reference a sense in which, through praxis, students arrive at a more stable sense of being able to think and act as a whole. By this I mean that students adopt a dialectical materialist approach to understanding existence and consciousness. As such these trade unionists, through their EA, draw upon their store of material experience and adopt a Marxist theory of praxis that relates, through *knowing* and *being*, an inseparable unity of thought, action and social relations.

The MA pedagogy, in keeping with Ruskin's ethos of politicised adult education, was predicated upon providing to adult learners an alternative, supportive space separate from their location of struggle and the material conditions upon which this was located. This pedagogical approach sought to frame and authenticate the knowledge they produced as a result of that experience and distinguish this as politically and academic valid (Kean, 1996: Hughes, 2000: Thompson, 2007).

The outcomes from this pedagogical approach are seen here, in an online survey response to Q.15, and with specific reference to gender.

I have become a more confident person. I have also become more critical about what I read and more critical about my own union. The international comparison was something that was extremely beneficial. At the beginning of the course I really did only know my own union. In particular women in trade unions has now become a subject that I am very interested in. Organising women and promoting them within the union is something that I am now very involved in - helping to organise women only conferences and other events/education. Having had my own awareness raised, I want to do that for other women. (Survey Respondent 41)

Thus from a Gramscian perspective the MA arguably provided the framework for a 'school of labour' in which student learning around the critical dimension of gender could be perceived as allied to others (the historical bloc) as part of an emancipatory struggle in, and sometimes against, labour movements and of actors in the political economy of work. Thus I argue in Chapter Seven that the pedagogical model of an *education for renewal* affords trade union educationists with a powerful model for critique and theorisation centred on gender as a critical dimension of both crisis and renewal.

## We Know More Than We Can Tell

This penultimate section of this chapter relates to EA but does not appear in earlier chapters forming the theoretical framework. The material cited was discovered during the process of writing-up findings, and is considered relevant to grounded theory as a research method, and politically applicable also in the context of critical

pedagogy. In our focus on those factors which facilitate the 'whole' activist, we draw here upon that prior understanding of tacit knowledge, and critical reflective practice, which contribute inescapable dimensions of EA.

Michael Polanyi's *Knowing and Being* (1969) was treated as seminal upon its publication in challenging the dominant, positivist assumptions regarding the value-free nature of science and knowledge. Polanyi demanded a change to normative epistemological assumptions around the total objectivity in scientific knowledge, and the need to cater for more reasoned and critical interrogation centred on the mind, body and tacit ways of knowing when moving between internal cues and external evidence as an act of discovery. For Polanyi tacit knowledge comprised a range of sensory and conceptual information that is routinely drawn up intellectually to inform decision making. This store, growing through material experience over time, led Polanyi to coin the phrase 'we know more than we can tell' in *The Tacit Dimension* (1967:4)

To hold such knowledge is an act deeply committed to the conviction that there is something there to be discovered. It is personal, in the sense of involving the personality of him who holds it, and also in the sense of being, as a rule, solitary; but there is no trace in it of self-indulgence. The discoverer is filled with a compelling sense of responsibility for the pursuit of a hidden truth, which demands his services for revealing it. His act of knowing exercises a personal judgement in relating evidence to an external reality, an aspect of which he is seeking to apprehend. (1967:24-5)

Griff Foley also acknowledges the role of tacit knowledge accruing from that which is learnt through struggle.

While systematic education does occur in some social movement sites and action, learning in such situations is largely informal and often incidental – it is tacit, embedded in action and is often not recognised as learning. The learning is there often potential, or only half-realised (1999:3)

Findings reveal routinely that tacit knowledge, as a critical component of EA, is reflected across students and alumni. Typically however, there was an inhibition in treating this knowledge as valid. As reflected by Student Six below, the MA experience enabled an exposure of the tacit knowledge gained as a result of learning through struggle, an interrogation of this, and confirmation of its validity.

And this was the bit that was really blowing my head away. This understanding of how you can work out if something is valid, and do it to yourself. And then realise that your experience, and your commentary is valid. It gives you a confidence to put it out there and it allows you to feel strong enough to robustly defend it. That is something that I have never understood. I've got a hostility towards public school people because they seemed to have this confidence to say rubbish and I assumed that it was just something to do with their family and their sense of entitlement.



I don't think that it is only to do with that. I think that it is – well, I don't want to comment on where they get it from – but what I realised was that I could get that confidence. But the way to get it was about some internal change.

This quote helps understand thesis findings, and most notably that, whilst our being is often static, there is a profound capacity for human understanding, imagination and development as a result of experience incurred through space and time. The quote acknowledges also however, that this tacit knowledge is challenged and contested, depleting a confidence in it.

As such it is important to supplement Polanyi in the context of EA with Schon (1983, 1987) and his appreciation for recurrent practitioner reflection in and on action, Without such an appreciation it is argued that there cannot be a full appreciation for the ways in which trade unionists develop discrete repertoires over time to cater for the myriad challenges of day-to-day struggle.

Smith (1994) helpfully attunes Schon to the typical 'firefighting' nature of day-to-day trade unionism, and the inability sometimes to resolve that which cannot be altered. Nonetheless, in supporting the role of reflective practice, Smith supports that model, akin to the MA, of providing necessary space and time separate from the time and location of struggle.

We have to take certain things as read. We have to fall back on routines in which previous thought and sentiment has been sedimented. It is here that the full importance of reflection-on-action becomes revealed. As we think

and act, questions arise that cannot be answered in the present. The space afforded by recording, supervision and conversation with our peers allows us to approach these. Reflection requires space in the present and the promise of space in the future. (Smith 1994: 150)

Findings depict abundant evidence of the way in which exposure to critical reflective practice enables engagement with the form of tacit knowledge which comprises EA, and bolsters confidence in the interpretation and application of this. Here, Student Four provides acute insight on the personal outcomes of this process.

I suppose a useful starting point to say is that my partner says that I am a totally different person from the one who started on the MA in 2006. And when I say what do you mean by that, good or bad and he says good, and I ask him to quantify it he says that I've become much more of a critical thinker. So less accepting of certain ideas. The topics we explored around hegemony and bureaucracy have made me less accepting of 'oh well, this is how it is, and this is how it happens, and this is how trade unions operate'. I feel that I have much more agency to make a difference. To challenge, to change. Through activism, but also through teaching. It's certainly given me the confidence, although I still don't feel very confident, to be able to come and teach the subject.

This quote is valuable in reflecting that thesis findings support the relationship between EA and tacit knowledge. Evidently, the MA experience enables critical reflective practice through praxis, with critically important outcomes for theories of

*knowing* and *being*, enabling MA alumni to claim 'I have much more agency to make a difference'.

However, in the context of renewal, we must ask, what do we lose by not affording trade unionists the time and space to engage in critical reflective practice upon knowledge gained through EA more broadly, and to do so with activists of allied movements? We shall attend to this question in the following chapter.

## **Conclusion**

In reflecting the approach adopted in framing Chapter Five, and remaining with the political tradition intrinsic to grounded theory, it was imperative to follow the non-linear trajectory of the coded phrase 'redundant knowledge' providing detailed commentary as it traversed toward the theme of attribution, and coalesced accompanying themes to create a grounded theory of EA.

Thus, a grounded theory of EA is, I argue, an understanding of the ways in which a prior store of knowledge and capacity of trade unionists is hollowed-out through their experiences under and within organised labour. It speaks to the power of a critical pedagogy to renew embodied identity, consciousness and knowledge and frame on-going praxis. In a practical sense the MA, enabled trade unionists access to a space for critical reflective practice which helped realign a sense of self within the collective in the context of renewal, accordingly crafting a habitus of practice. As a result, and as argued within this chapter, the theory of EA is entirely complementary to theories of *knowing* and *being*.

Through this theoretical understanding the reader can grasp the central relevance of EA within the core narrative of the thesis, appreciating that the learning and knowledge required to assist renewal strategy, is acquired through multiple, embodied means. Such an understanding better relates the tacit, informal means by which activists accrue knowledge with that of allied social actors, allowing thesis findings to be situated alongside the broader literature of the intellectual traditions of activism. As such, the appreciation of dialectical materialism which informs a theory EA is a prerequisite in crafting a shared approach to learning and knowledge production bringing labour and allied movements into a coherent set of relations.

As such, and in responding to research question three, a theory of EA makes central demands of trade union educationists. In examining the generalisability of findings the theory asks, for example, how educationists may reflect and support EA in their approach to pedagogy and curriculum, appreciating also that knowledge which is tacit and acquired informally?

In order to aid an appreciation of how this, and allied questions, may be addressed we move forward to the final findings chapters, which generates from findings the pedagogical model of an *education for renewal*.

# Chapter Seven: An Education for Trade Union Renewal

## 7.1 Introduction

The pedagogic and political philosophy of Myles Horton, founder of the Highlander Folk School, invokes a constant challenge for the need to stand back from progressive educational practice, and ask, *what are we trying to achieve, and, is it making a difference to people's lives?* In the chapter, *Ideas that have withstood the test time*, in *The Myles Horton Reader* (2003) he chastises left-learning organisations and movements for forgetting the role of trust and reciprocity in working towards social change with working class people and communities.

Most organisations are based on the theory that people are so stupid that they have to win everything or the people will lose interest. That's more the mentality of the organisers than it is of the rank and file. They think that people are a reflection of them, but this is not true at all. They are much more cautious and less imaginative than the people. We tried to get the people to use their own resources and to do their own thinking. (2003 45-46)

In introducing the three-fold purpose, and structure, of this chapter we can employ Horton's perspective here. First, to ask what was it about the pedagogical practice of the MA ILTUS programme between 2006-16 that aided the generation of findings leading to a grounded theory of *knowing, being* and embodied activism (EA). Was this, for example, aiding a transition from Horton's admonishment of inherent caution in workers' movements, to one where a radical imagination could be realised?

Second, to draw from that understanding a generalisable pedagogical framework for an education for renewal. This is a framework grounded in love and hope and which

captures a sense of how learning and knowledge production through social action can maintain agency and the intellectual work of the movement. Third, to locate the framework as a place from which a pragmatic, material shared conception of inter-movement counter-hegemonic practice can be generated.

Horton is invoked because, as the book chapter title alludes, I want to make the simple argument that progressive movements have historically rooted social change in learning and knowledge, and can do so again. As outlined in the literature review, the movement for working class social and political emancipation was as much an educational as a political project and proved unstoppable throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The demise of organised labour requires that we look afresh at the role of learning and knowledge to realise a radical, re-purposed labour movement.

This chapter is structured in the following way. Our initial focus is upon issues of purpose and instinct. We start by introducing my own politicised pedagogy, one fashioned over time as an adult and worker's educator since 1992. This is so that, in the critically reflective context of a DProf thesis focusing on trade union education, I can answer the question, *what did I think I was doing and what impact did I feel was occurring to people's lives?*

From this initial focus on purpose and instinct we then move forward to draw out the central pedagogic features of the MA asking: *what was it about the methodologies and practices employed, combined with the intellectual attributes of students and alumni, that enables theories of knowing, being and EA?* Here we must also draw out deficits in the programme. From there we move forward to structure a more generalisable pedagogical framework for an education for renewal. In doing so, this chapter directly addresses research question two.

The critical, informal orientation of such a framework is one which should overlay formal trade union teaching strategies. We then shift focus to reflect back and project forward on how movements for independent working class education have been realised historically. Here attention is upon what we can learn from past endeavours upon strategies to create ideational and discursive capacity amongst social actors, and how this may be re-made in a profoundly different educational and political landscape.

This appreciation is considered of vital importance for the penultimate section of this chapter. Here, a framework of an education for renewal is stated and synthesised within a broader appreciation for strategies to generate and sustain ideational and discursive capacities through independent networks of social actors.

In this sense the concluding section of the chapter helps frame this practical outcome, and is shaped by the political purpose of making learning and culture ordinary. Thus our endeavour is to re-engage with that radical tradition of making learning for social purpose lifelong, life-wide and life-deep.

## 7.2 A Personal and Political Pedagogy

### Starting Out

I was first employed as a sessional teacher by the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) in the West Midlands from April 1993 to work upon, amongst other things, the Return to Learn (R2L) programme of UNISON. This was just before completing the MA in comparative labour studies at the University of Warwick (1991-93) but following completion of the Diploma in labour studies at Ruskin College (1989-1991)

I never imagined that teaching was going to be such hard work. I was often pushing against a resistance to appreciate learning as ordinary, and as much the right of poor working class women, who predominated teaching groups, (and their families and communities beyond them) as anyone else. On reflection I now understand that a personal pedagogy emerged from this work, and that it was drawing upon Freire's pedagogy of hope.

One of the tasks of the progressive educator, through a serious, correct political analysis, is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be. After all, without hope there is little else we can do.

(Freire 1992:3)

On looking back at this instructive, first body of work I can remember that the approach I fashioned was to enable R2L students to focus on a different future, even if that was a different future for their children, grandchildren or others. Often I could relocate the absence of individual agency, and realise this through kinship or friendship, into others. You could explore what the role of the student was in enabling the change they wanted to see in and for others. It was a simple technique. It was about hope and the future, and you could construct through this a linear



pathway that moved backward and forward reinforcing how the student's expectations and values could inform the lives of others whether in the workplace, home or community. As with all forms of pedagogy my approach didn't always work. But it was a personal pedagogy fashioned through a sincere, genuine commitment to work alongside others in constructing change that they wanted to see in the world.

### Critical Reflection on Pedagogy

In July 2007 I started a blog<sup>41</sup>. The intention was to reflect and write-up thoughts on teaching (and allied issues). From 2010 onwards it was re-shaped (particularly through links to resources and book reviews etc.) as a resource for MA students. The blog has also proved useful as a place to write-up reflective comments on the long, steady process of completing this thesis.

On scrolling through the blog in preparing for this chapter I came across a post which helps to construct an accurate description of my teaching methodology and practice. This blog post<sup>42</sup> was written on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2016 and titled, *Trade union learning: What I have learnt*. The core element of the post (reproduced below) summarises what I consider to be my overriding pedagogical approach when teaching trade unionists.

*So, what am I trying to achieve with trade union learners?*

*Primarily to build confidence in themselves and their capacity to engage with the myriad challenges they face in the workplace and wider society. Confidence, I feel, comes through a combination of self-esteem and the idea that agency/action reflects*

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<sup>41</sup> <http://ianmanborde.blogspot.com/>

<sup>42</sup> <https://ianmanborde.blogspot.com/2016/05/trade-union-learning-what-ive-learnt.html>

*the power/influence of the activist and members. This means that I focus on validating the experience of activists. Stressing that their knowledge and experience has value to others.*

*Remember, and cite repeatedly, student names, workplaces, case studies of experience. Using colleague's names from the outset means that we create a dynamic, engaged learning environment: a community of practice. Remembering workplaces and experience not also evidences respect but allows us to build a sense of common experience and capacity to critique this and develop common solutions.*

In summary, and at its simplest, my approach to pedagogy rests on an approach where learning takes place between peers in an environment of trust and respect. You will never know how and where knowledge gained will be applied by trade unionists, so it is important to make an experience of education enjoyable and thus memorable. You can strive to achieve this by ensuring that critical dialogue centres on exploring common knowledge and experience to generate shared meaning, understanding and hope.

### Reflecting on the MA Experience

I didn't know I could teach on a post-graduate programme for trade unionists until I started doing so in 2006. Four years of working alongside Sue (one of many mentors) before taking over the role of programme co-ordinator in 2010 ensured that I felt ready to manage the programme. It was clear during those four years that Sue had created a durable, sophisticated programme which really challenged students to

craft, through praxis, radical, alternative means of renewal. A significant boost in recruitment for the first cohort I would manage (2010-12) underlined the exciting challenge ahead. Enrolling on the DProf in 2011 made me feel even more confident that all would be OK.

Students enrolled on the MA knowing that they wanted to learn more of the reasons for a crisis of trade unionism, and to engage in practical and academic responses to the call for renewal. Of course, as a trade unionist, I sought this also. Thus critical reflective dialogue through the practice of teaching was essential to acknowledging our collective, shared experience of the relative failures of renewal practice to-date.

Often, students did not have a precise definition for enrolling on the MA didn't arise until a period following immersion in the programme. But in the main students and alumni were sure that their instinct for enrolment was correct. Here two survey participants reflect on Q14 *Reflecting on your original aims or enrolling on the MA, how would you describe your overall experience of the programme?*

I wanted to do the MA to push myself and learn about International Labour and trade unions. I also wanted to work for an international organisation and this particular MA was a good start to get the knowledge I needed but also the connections. Reflecting on my original aims, I am still pursuing them. My overall experience of the programme is really positive. I have learnt far more than I expected and this is because of the interactions with my fellow students and the wide knowledge of the teachers as well as the speakers. (Survey Respondent 44)

I felt when I think of the experience from the MA, it has given me the confidence to go for areas outside of my comfort zone which ordinarily I wouldn't have. I find I apply the studies when writing with a lot more analytically and confidence in writing reports, feedback. I am able to articulate in a more positive and organised way. I have gained more experience in thinking about taking on senior roles. It has been an invaluable life skill experience and has contributed to my personal development immensely. (Survey Respondent 27)

These quotes, and those like them for Q14, are unsurprising. First, they speak further to that theoretical sense of *knowing* and *being*. Second, and as outlined in Chapter Four, the MA was focused on the nature of the self in the collective, focusing on issues of agency, leadership and praxis.

On reflection my pedagogy sought to relate to students and alumni as peers. As someone with a material base in pursuing renewal, but not just by running an MA, I drew heavily on trade union and academic contacts to construct a programme that was live and relevant. I also wanted the programme to be warm, engaging, fun, and as relaxed as possible. Aside from minor personal disputes, the friction and factionalism redolent in trade unionism made no appearance. The MA had to be a safe space within and outwith organised labour. The personal pedagogy as outlined above was, I found, as relevant to the MA as it had been across my experience of working with trade union members, activists and FTOs.

In the context of the MA I now know, having spent so long pondering over interview and survey data, and rigorously generating grounded meaning from it, that my pedagogy was founded on hope. I wanted to work closely with students and alumni to 'prove' through their praxis, and in the form of presentations, assignments and dissertations, that they had valid ideas for renewal also.

During a focus group interview with the full-time MA cohort (14/05/2015) on helping to co-construct the thesis research design Student Six talks about what he hoped the MA would be, and I feel this helps substantiate my reflective sense of personal pedagogy.

Part of coming onto the course and leaving work was about wanting to make an intervention. I was so, so frustrated with how certain things are, and wanted the space to figure out what that might be. And I think the research project that has emerged, which was certainly not one I suggested I might do at the interview as it hadn't occurred to me, and was a lot to do with not valuing my own experiences. It hadn't occurred to me that my own work experience, and the things that I thought about where I worked were of any particular interest. I don't want to be an academic. I want to be able to research things. I want to be able to generate knowledge.

The phrase, 'I want to be able to generate knowledge' encapsulates the essence of the MA (and validates findings) as a programme of learning that supported trade unionists to engage with prior, embodied experience, and provided that space for

constructing a coherent body of praxis-informed renewal research in the context of a neo-liberal globalisation. My personal pedagogy enabled, I believe, the capacity to relate lived trade union experience in the personal sphere through an axis of collective struggle outward and upward to the lives of others in fostering a shared sense of, and hope for, renewal.

### **7.3 The Central Pedagogic Features of the MA**

The MA curriculum and pedagogical approach centred on critical reflection upon the role of the individual within the collective, as illustrated in Figure 7 below. The programme consciously sought to generate a new layer of activist-scholars willing, in the Gramscian war of position (1982), to take on notional and literal roles of leadership across the labour movement and civil society. Although placed in an academic setting, the MA was focused on a lived, shared sense of trade union crisis, and attention to praxis in generating from this research and understanding to aid renewal.

As stated in the student handbook the MA had a broad political mission:

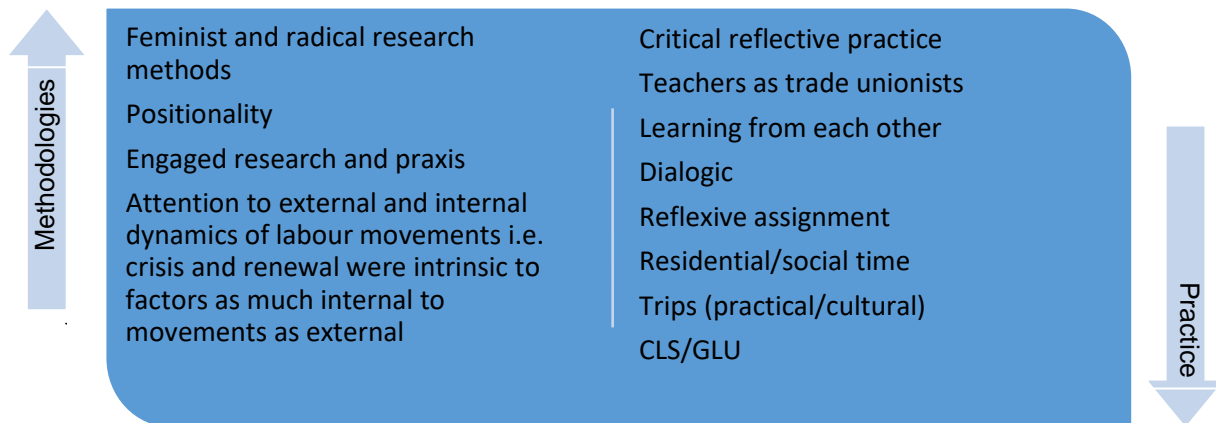
The education and development of individuals as practitioners, leaders and specialists in international labour and trade unions, and thus improve the quality of leadership and innovative and strategic thinking in labour movement, and allied organisations. (2014:5)

In outlining what attracted him to the MA Student Nine, a full-time student 2008-09 and working for the Philippines TUC at the time, was drawn to a programme unique in its highly gendered sense of the international dilemma of labour movements, and framed from a leadership perspective.

Most of the leadership programmes that we were doing did not have these gender dimensions. And at the same time getting exposed to those UK unions who were assisting trade unions in developing countries. Getting that exposure, interviewing people that mattered in the national centre of the union who were offering capacity building support to unions in developing countries. And I thought this is a very good example of globalised unionisation. It's like really about the term globalising solidarity. And here I could see that it was not just the struggle of the unions at the country level but here is one UK union providing solidarity support to unions struggling in developing countries.

This quote helps relate thesis findings to the pedagogical model of the MA and supports argumentation that, the outcomes and success of the programme rested on a coherent relationship between pedagogy, lived experience, intellectual abilities and enthusiasm of those who enrolled on the MA. In this sense, MA learners were encouraged to develop a confident sense of their positionality in the context of organised labour, and how this framed on-going praxis.

Figure 7: The Pedagogical Methodologies and Practices of the MA ILTUS



Thus, as illustrated in Figure 7 above, teaching methodology drew heavily on positionality as a feature of feminist research method practice. Correspondingly, teaching practice accented the dynamic of critical reflective practice as a core feature of praxis.

As illustrative of the outcomes of this approach here, Student One, part-time student of the 2014-16 cohort, relates the importance for her of critical reflective practice upon lived, activist experience and its formation in embodied activism. We can grasp here an acute sense of the coherence between MA methodological structure, embodiment, and how this coheres with a grounded theory of *knowing* and *being*.

Yes, it reminded me of where I had come from, and how far I had come, because unless you take stock you are on that bus and racing along somewhere. And it was time out which I don't think I had actually done before. I do tend to be quite reflective by nature, and I hadn't taken time out to reflect on this particular aspect before. Yes, when I sat down and



started thinking about and analysing the roots of what had brought me on to the MA some of it was a surprise to be perfectly honest. Again, I think it is that the MA has given me the tools to be able to articulate some of things I had experienced. I was aware of them, I could feel them. I was living them. But I couldn't put them together in terms of the bigger picture and what was going off in the world. I am more able to do that now.

Student One's sense of values embodied in her activism are clear, '*I was aware of them, I could feel them. I was living them*'. As such the pedagogical framework of the MA sought to draw this out by privileging such experience and enabling her, and others, to shape praxis through iterative stages of research and dialogue in a residential setting.

A strength of the MA, and a means to realise *knowing* and *being* through a resurgent EA, was the reflexive assignment. This was a central means by which the methodological and practical dimensions outlined above cohered. Students were expected to chart personal and academic growth applying theories from the MA (e.g. group formation, leadership) etc., but place this in the broader context of their past and future contribution to organised labour through praxis. Thus, coming to understand positionality through personal and academic epistemological and ontological coherence makes a grounded theory of *knowing*, *being* and EA a form of rational logic arising from findings.

A clear illustration of the relevance and impact of the approach is outlined by Student Three, a part-time student of the 2012-12 cohort, who focuses on the relevance of this practice to herself<sup>43</sup>.

It was about coming back to understand the kind of work I was doing. I certainly read the reflexive and I am asking myself, why am I a trade unionist? I first looked at the pictures I used in the reflexive. They reminded me of what it was like getting back into education, and being a student, and managing this all with my day job. I certainly know that I am hugely confident in any aspect of my work. I feel that the MA has given a huge amount of confidence, that if people challenge me on a daily basis in my work or other aspects of my life I am far more likely to challenge them than I was before I started the MA.

The relevance of critical reflective practice in examining the role of students in the context of renewal is highlighted clearly with the comment, 'I am asking myself, why am I a trade unionist?' On reflection, I remember that students found the reflexive assignment one of the most challenging aspects of the programme, and by asking such questions of themselves it is possible to understand why that was the case.

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<sup>43</sup> As stated in the methodology chapter, alumni were sent a copy of their reflexive assignment in preparation for their interview. As a primary personal statement of MA impact it was seen as essential that alumni had the chance to read this in advance of the interview.

Thinking back now on thesis findings I wonder if students were reflecting here an essential tension. A tension between drawing upon legitimate learning and knowledge represented through EA, and overcoming a residual lack of confidence borne, in part, as a result of the harm incurred through trade unionism.

A frank, challenging quote was given in the survey in response to Q17, asking for final insight on the impact of the MA, helps illustrate this tension from a differing perspective.

Praxis: I found that my research was irrelevant to the people I was researching. It contained what I thought were exceedingly useful information to the rank and file in PCS. Their inability to understand academic research coupled with their hatred for it meant that it was largely ignored at a time when the leadership were even cancelling elections and clinging on to power illegitimately. The idea that the MA ILTUS leads to praxis in any meaningful sense is bollocks. Forget it. There is no meaningful link between the academy and shop floor. A dozen or so activists returning to workplace after studying this stuff for two years isn't going to achieve a massive change. You're lucky if you can get your supervisor to give the dissertation a decent amount of attention, don't expect anyone else to read it!

In offering respect to this perspective, it is important to respond to it. It is true to state that there is insufficient evidence of a direct impact of the MA in the broader context of workplace trade unionism, and trade union members. The

focus here instead is upon the direct impact of the MA experience to students and alumni. In this context I would argue that thesis findings directly contradict the assertion that there is no meaningful link between the academy and workplace. Clearly, there is evidence of a transformation of agency, with narrative data speaking of a radical transformation in trade union practice. The literature also (for example Choudry and Kapoor 2010) documents significant evidence of the relationship between theory, practice, the workplace and other social settings.

This was the only statement of its kind gained during the data gathering process. Whilst this statement does not diminish theories of *knowing*, *being* and EA, it is important to acknowledge that, as in any other form of social struggle, knowledge gained will be informed by such praxis above – through good experience and bad – and I argue categorically that no experience of learning through action is ever irrelevant.

Thus, we are encouraged to explore now thesis findings in devising a generalisable education for renewal for trade unionists, and asking how this may provide the platform to create a shared set of relations with allied movements for learning and knowledge production. As part of this we must acknowledge also that this work is not new. It has been realised before, and can be made material again.

## 7.4 An Education for Renewal: Making the Model

As established in the literature review, the UK form of state-aided trade union education, and the member-focused skills-based provision created under New Labour, has provided no material evidence of generating, or providing supplementary assistance to, sustainable forms of trade union renewal. This is represented through a variety of measures of trade union power, including density (ONS 2016).

There was some hope (Forrester 2004) that a resurgent body of educational practice construing lifelong learning in the 2000s may have aided this. However, as state aid withered, so did employer and trade union interest (Ross 2011). Additionally, since 2010, there has been a steep rise in fees for adult, continuing and higher education leading to the most significant decline in adult engagement in post-16 education in the post-war era (Callender, 2018; Tuckett, 2018; Martin, 2017). The role of declining wages, precarious work and new technologies are also critical factors, amongst others, in this deeply worrying trend.

Separately, there is critique (McIlroy and Daniels 2011) which has argued in any case that New Labour's skills agenda was inimical to trade unionism itself, let alone renewal, and that the inability, or unwillingness, of movement leadership to grasp this understanding was the failure of renewal writ large. In any case, and as lucidly argued by Simms (2012), the UK labour movement exited 13 years under an ostensibly pro-trade union New Labour era in a situation where, by every measure of trade union power, for example workplace density, it was left diminished.

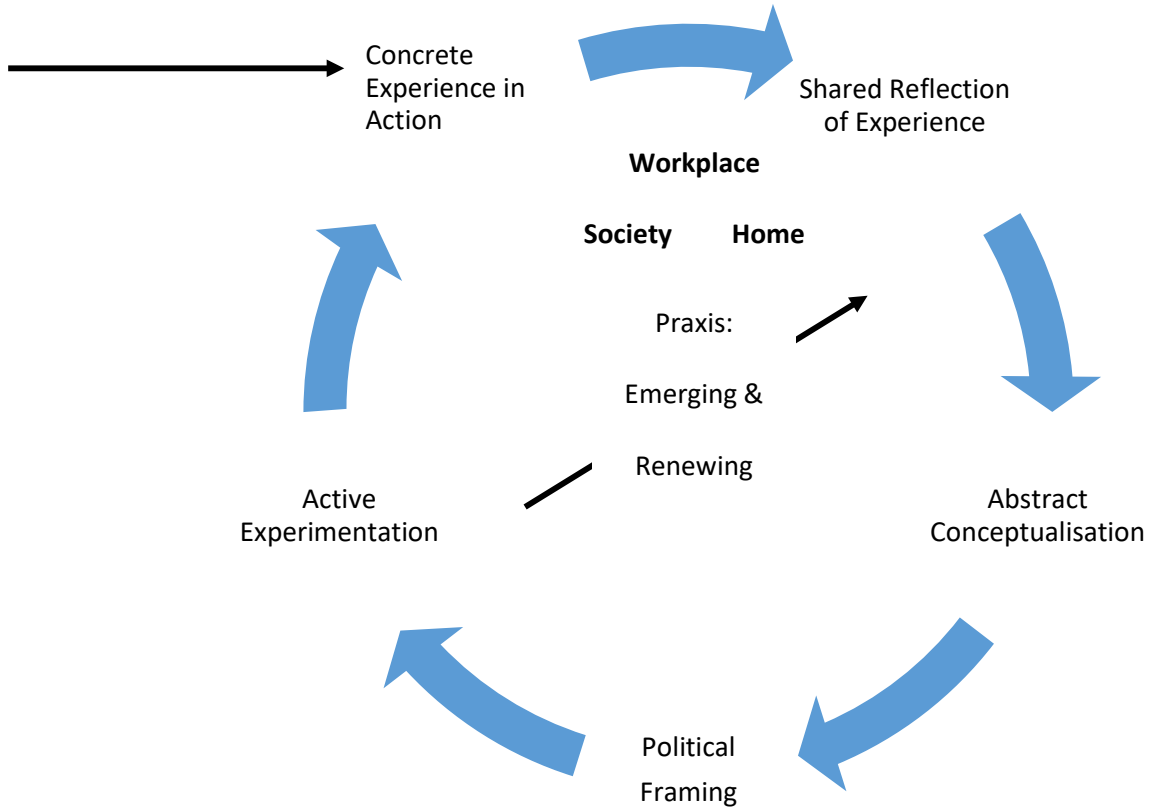
Despite this, there is, I contend, opportunities to generate a sustainable means of renewal in alliance with actors committed to radical social change and in the context of learning and knowledge production. We must first ask however how a model for an education for trade union renewal might draw upon strands of the critical pedagogy of the MA. In the spirit also of ultimately finding commonality with sister movements, this modelling should be framed by mainstream approaches to a conscious appreciation for the role of informal learning in the intellectual development of activists.

The approach, see Figure 8 below, is to overlay MA pedagogic features as outlined earlier upon what is acknowledged to be the exemplar model for explicating the process by which we can root material informal experience in the process of learning and knowledge production. This is David Kolb's (1984) learning cycle. As such, it is important to state clearly that, whilst originality is claimed for theory arising from findings in the context of trade union renewal, what is presented here is drawn from what is commonly known and understood as the dominant features of radical, critical pedagogy (McClaren 2009).

The depiction below is that of an education for renewal in graphical form. This model adopts dominant strands of MA pedagogy, for example, shared reflection upon experience, and political framing of this. More broadly speaking however, its primary feature, for both educators and activists alike, is that it can be adopted across diverse learning arenas alike to encourage critical reflection and theorising upon any form of concrete experience of social action. Whilst the depiction below represents

the model of an education for renewal in graphical form, Figure 9 on the following page provides further insight on the strategic application of the model in respect of its methodology and practice.

Figure 8: Modelling an Education for Renewal



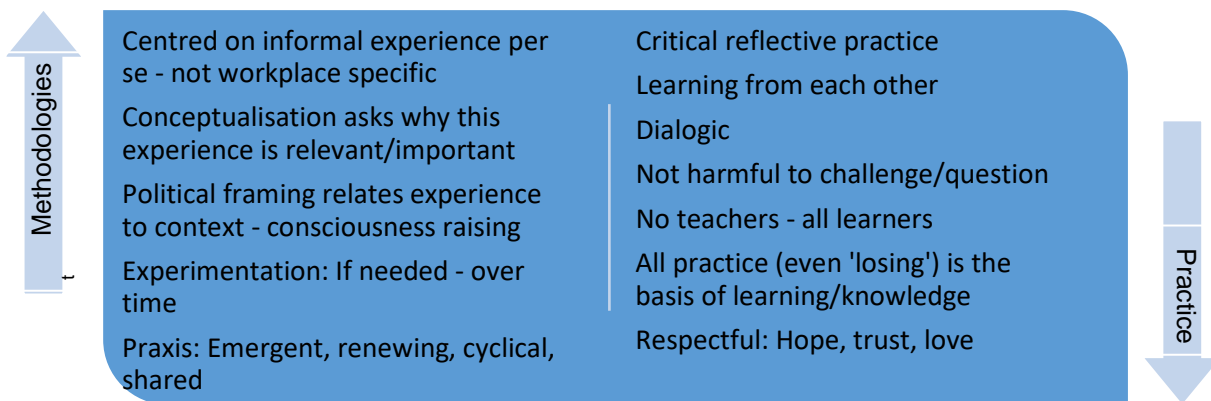


Figure 9: Pedagogical Methodologies and Practice of an Education for Renewal

Figure 9 above outlines a strategic approach for applying methodological and practice features of an education for renewal. As stressed in Chapter Six, the model is predicated upon Kolb (1984), Foley (1989) and Freire (1970) in acknowledging the circularity of praxis which rests on the basis of experiential learning through social action. The model reflects thesis findings in privileging embodied activism (EA) as the basis for conceptualising and thereafter theorising upon experience.

As shown above, the primary features of methodology and practice assume the model can shift fluidly between a range of social settings and examination of activist practice, requiring no educators as such, but with a focus on reciprocity and that all experience and practice is the basis for learning. As such, learning is normal, as is the culture emanating from it. From this position, the model is the basis for learning between actors engaged in social action in different spheres but sharing common underpinning political values. On this basis, learning is seen as a transgressive act, as it rejects both formalisation (e.g. accreditation) and commodification.



## Ideational and Discursive Capacity

A key way in which thesis findings, the literature on activist learning and knowledge, and the model of an education for renewal cohere, is the opportunities for ideational and discursive capacity.

Croucher and Wood (2017) deploy a sophisticated argument to suggest that, although political and contextual forces construct marked differences, an analysis of the resurgence and renewal of trade unionism in the 1930s following the Great Depression, reveals a means by which a modern-day form of resurgence may be imagined and thereafter realised.

Their analysis supports many of the key arguments made in this thesis. Notably, that current trade union education appears incapable of generating a resurgence and, as a result, there is a need to focus on the ways in which activists in the 1930s developed discursive and ideational capacity to generate renewal through an engagement with a broad pro-worker social movement. Specifically, this movement comprised a range of formal and informal means whereby activists could learn and generate knowledge via networks within and outwith organised labour utilising tools such as the model of an education for renewal to enable praxis through critically reflective dialogue.

They argue that such understanding is intrinsic to modern-day renewal.

A key feature of the 1930s educational institutions was their *independence* as well as their reach; contemporary activists need equivalent sites where their background ideational capacities may be developed and, crucially, where collective interests may also be freely defined by participants, and appropriate action planned. There is, in short, a need to revive independent workers' education. (2017:1018)

Without doubt the 1930s network reflected the radical, autodidactic, self-improvement basis of earlier intellectual and educational traditions forged through multiple, overlapping movements, for political and social emancipation across the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in the UK. As such, these movements and traditions reflect the epistemological and ontological basis of a grounded theory of *knowing* and *being*, and are entirely synchronous also with the supplementary theory of EA.

Further, the generalisable model for an education for renewal, as a practical outcome of thesis findings, seeks to craft a means by which informal learning (supplemented by formal) can provide ideational and discursive capacities to explore renewal options. Similarly, and as argued below, the capacity for independence (i.e. through networks) is restored, in part at least, through greater and coherent relations with allied social movements.

As such, these networks would provide a form of connective node through which informal learning through trade union struggle, connects with other movement learning and practice in complementary sites to generate a more unified, common

form of praxis, around, for example, the intersectional dimensions of labour, race and gender.

Here, Student Nine (full-time student from the Philippines TUC 2008-09) discusses the profound importance of gender and race as key factors to renewal, within a broader interest around equality and inclusion per se.

I think due to the amount of readings that were required relating to gender on the MA that really did help. Women and issues of structures looking at gender in the union. I thought that all of that really helped in us better understanding and applying it to where we are. And also that equality cannot be looked at solely in terms of gender but also around race, around culture because at the time we were also given material around race, and organising around race. And also of organising for migrant workers. I hadn't heard of the Justice for Janitors campaign until I came across it during the MA. I was struck also by the stories of how Polish construction workers were being organised by UK unions. These readings really helped broaden our understanding around the issues of gender AND [his emphasis] and equality.

The emphasis on gender here is important to underline as it acknowledged the conscious effort, as outlined in Chapter Four, to locate gender as a central, critical illustration of the contradiction in dominant renewal strategy. As such, and as argued further below, there is a specific need for trade union educationists to locate gender as a central means of theorising upon renewal.

In an allied reflective statement Student Seven (full-time student Zambian educator 2014-15) talks of the MA enabling the capacity of seeing beyond current movement structures to organise domestic workers in Zambia to engage with the larger number who remained unorganised, and in less secure (e.g. domestic) spheres of the economy.

Yes, it changed my perceptions really about the Zambian trade union movement, and the labour movement in general. But my main interest was around the main union for domestic workers in Zambia. Because for that union their main membership was for workers who were employed by the government, workers who were in in safe employment. I was concerned about domestics themselves as part of the MA, and how this linked to trade union renewal, and that we need to do something different, something that is attainable. Something that we have not been able to do in the past, but that is attainable, and supports trade union renewal. Now I was familiar with unions that first started as an association and later became a trade union. These unions have been able to learn the law of the land and win many cases for their members. And so that is the impact of the MA. I have been able to engage with the leadership of the Zambian Union of Domestic Workers, and looking at programmes that enhance their leadership skills. In particular, to enhance their knowledge of labour laws.

It's important to draw out Student Seven's emphasis here on learning and knowledge to achieve '*Something that we have not been able to do in the past, but that is attainable, and supports trade union renewal*' as this, at its simplest, is an outcome of the process inherent in a model for an education for renewal. In particular this comment helps spotlight a transformed capacity to predict a model of renewal through praxis.

The focus of this narrative data is valuable in so many ways in this section of the thesis. First, it reflects the historical importance of processes of learning and knowledge production as central to praxis in imagining new strategies to achieve radical social change. It supports also the practical argument of placing learning and knowledge as central to the project for renewal. Second, in championing that argument, it reveals so clearly the importance of enabling trade unionists to perceive of new ideas and way of re-building organised labour.

Last, in moving to the next section of the chapter, it underscores the importance of that political knowledge which can challenge prevailing trade union practice and cultures which are argued as central to maintaining the semi-permanence of trade union crisis. In particular the narrative above speaks directly to, amongst others, the hegemony of masculinity which lies at the heart of power relations across the global labour movement and which are reflective also of the historical materialist factors framing gender relations in domestic, social and occupational spheres.

In her doctoral thesis Sue Ledwith (2016) explores this correlation.

The joint hegemonies of patriarchal, globalised capitalism and masculinity remain strong in trade unions steeped in labour traditions whereby masculine identity and work are synonymous. Such traditions are hard to discard, provoking strong resistance to challenges from women and from more recent minority identity group representation of ethnic and racial difference, spectrums of sexual identity, and new patterns of age and class. These challenges, especially women's; the longest revolution (Mitchell 1966), parallel Gramsci's war of position, his long ideological struggle. (2016:22)

Thus labour movement renewal centred on learning and knowledge must examine how it can overcome cultural and structural deficits in movement practice through alliances rooted in, for example, feminist and / or environmental movements. Without such an alliance, the independent intellectual tradition which was the vanguard in building organised labour in the UK historically, is incapable of being realised for the purpose of renewing organised labour in the modern era.

In reflecting upon thesis findings we have seen not only evidence of hegemonic practice and the particular effects on women members and activists, but also evidence of resurgent agency amongst women MA students and alumni. Thus, as argued repeatedly throughout the thesis, the model of an *education for renewal*, affords educationists with a critical to locate gender as a source of trade union crisis, but a means also of renewal.

With similar reflection upon the thesis research questions, it is the case that the literature review definitively made the case for a refreshed approach to trade union renewal strategy and practice in addressing question one. Subsequent chapters enabled the focus to combine a response to both questions two and three, arriving at a commonsense appreciation of how an experience of learning at Ruskin College informs, in a powerful, sustainable, a means of placing learning and knowledge at the centre of trade union renewal.

## Conclusion

The specific purpose of this chapter has been to cohere thesis findings in order to develop a generalisable *education for renewal*. In doing so it has elevated the core narrative of the thesis, in relating learning and knowledge to the project of trade union renewal, and generated a pedagogical form. As a result, and in responding to research question two, the pedagogical and curricula approach of this model provides critically important insight upon the future role that learning and knowledge can play as a dynamic, constitutive feature of renewal strategy.

In addressing the research question the chapter has focused significantly on synthesising the primary findings in Chapters five and six, relating this also to essential historical narrative within the literature review. As such we can discern the response to research question two from three, overlapping perspectives.

First, the pedagogical model enables a lucid engagement with theories of *knowing*, *being* and EA, and provides the basis for their continuity. In doing so it consciously acknowledges and privileges the learning that arises from the day-to-day practice of

trade union struggle. At a more pragmatic level it generates and engages with that learning and knowledge needed to infuse a material re-shaping of renewal, allowing for fluid, organic attention to gender as a source of the crisis of organised labour, as well as a critical means to theorise upon renewal.

Second, it encourages a re-engagement with the practical and political purpose of those 20<sup>th</sup> century movements for workers and working class education which were rooted in organised labour (Hughes, 1984; Holford 1994; Croucher and Wood 2017). This includes, for example, didactic and autodidactic traditions centred upon self-improvement and placing learning and knowledge at the centre of emancipatory struggle (Foley, 1999; Rose, 2002; Brookfield, 2005). The relation to capitalist political economy in shaping the future of organised labour was as relevant then as now, as is the learning from struggles within it and to overcome it.

Third, the routinised, holistic ambition of an education for renewal, is premised on a broader engagement with allied social justice actors. As such it enables a profound attitudinal shift and orientation towards an explicitly counter-hegemonic culture and pedagogy. One where a 'just transition' between capitalist nihilism and ecological sustainability provides the political and pedagogic basis for a coherent set of cross-movement relations.

The final thesis chapter outlines the challenges and opportunities posed in adopting the model, as well as presenting a broad, unified reflexive summary of thesis findings.



## Chapter Eight: Conclusion

### 8.1 Introduction

I think I have developed as a 'thinker'. I am more likely now to dig down into issues that interest me. I want to know more. The experience has made me more curious. I have a specific interest in young people and education around trade unions that I would like to take further and that is something I could see being a development for the future. (Survey Respondent 12)

This reflective comment from the survey captures and reflects the core narrative of this thesis, as well as its findings. Taken together, this means that the thesis has shed significant, original authoritative insight upon the role of trade union learning and knowledge production in supporting renewal. It addresses a significant vacuum in contemporary literature as well as contributing to a means of addressing the contradictions within current renewal strategy and policy.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a reflexive summary of thesis findings, with a focus upon their originality in addressing the research questions. In supporting the generalisability of findings an express aim of this chapter is to draw out the relevance of the study for those engaged in the practice of trade union education. At the same time it will highlight the known challenges of implementing radical, progressive pedagogy which accents independence of consciousness and agency in the context of organised labour.

Given this orientation the chapter is structured in the following way. The chapter will address research questions 1, 3 and 2 in that order, as this best reflects the coherence of findings as they emerged from the process of analysis. This focus allows for reflexive dialogue that genuinely asks how and whether each has been addressed, and what the practical and generalisable implications are and particularly for trade union educators. As such specific attention is paid to the practical contribution of an *education for renewal* in supporting the political project of cross-movement learning and knowledge production as a feature of wider, broader project for trade union renewal. The final summary section of this chapter provides an overarching synthesis of thesis findings.

## **8.2 Research Question 1: What does trade union renewal mean?**

This research question affords trade union educators the opportunity, as I have done, to reflect critically on past experience, and to examine the relevance of critical, engaged learning as part of a broader framework to support renewal.

From my perspective as a highly experience trade union educator, I was keen to address two concerns in structuring the thesis in the way it addressed this question.

The first was that in my experience, and perhaps that of other educators, mainstream models of trade union education, and particularly that of the TUC, were simply inefficient in supporting renewal as a radical political agenda.

The second was a profound absence in educational provision calling for wider, social alliances as an aid to renewal. This was in contrast to a personal perspective, drawn from historical reference points, that broad, strategic alliances had achieved renewal historically. On the basis of challenging or affirming these concerns, I sought to address research question one principally through the thesis literature review.

### The Literature Review

The means by which we can come to respond to the research question can be addressed in part through McGuire's (2014) four-fold typology of trade union power. The typology coalesces around the themes of associative, structural, institutional and discursive power. This helps discern how trade union power accrues in classic context, and provides educators with a robust framework to interpret the contemporary loss of power of influence catalysing a crisis and generating a call for renewal.

This crisis is a complex and multi-faceted dilemma, thus requiring an equally sophisticated renewal agenda (Fairbrother and Yates 2003; Gall 2009) necessitating for example, conscious consideration of the role of gender as a dynamic feature of labour markets and union membership. The inherent complexity of the crisis has invariably yielded contested notions of what 'renewal' means in practice across international and national labour movements (Hyman 1999).

As such I argue in the literature review, that the renewal agenda (and notably in the UK) has largely resulted in the maintenance of the status quo, particularly in maintaining traditional gendered cultural, structural and organisational features of trade unions (Herod, 2011; Ledwith and Hansen, 2012; Holgate, 2018). Thus in the literature review I refer to current renewal strategy and practice as generating contradictions and tensions.

This sense of tension can, I argue, be posited as one of circular dilemma between the inability of trade unions to address both *external* factors (the global economy, labour markets, legal regulation etc.) and *internal* challenges (leadership, ageing and shrinking membership, cultures and structures inimical to changing structures and identities represented in the labour market etc.).

The outcome then, I argue, is not just that the decline in trade union power has been rapid and profound, but moreso, that Hyman's (1999) notion of imagined solidarities allows us to appreciate that the trade union movement in the UK has been unable to reimagine new forms of solidarity that better reflect and articulate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workers' interests and from this new sources of power.

This analysis of a response to research question one poses both opportunities and dilemmas for the educator. In particular I would contend that a prevailing consensus around what Mcilroy (1996) asserts of a view of trade union education as politically neutral is that which mitigates against, for example, a fluid deployment of McGuire's typology to critically interrogate those internal factors impeding renewal. I would argue further that such analysis, and the knowledge arising from it, is that which

Choudry (2015) depicts as resulting in the tension within movements around the ownership and deployment of such understanding.

Nevertheless, findings reveal that trade unionists have a form of this knowledge, and understand the resultant tensions, in any case. To ignore this as educators is to ignore the primary findings of this thesis in enabling 'redundant knowledge'. This would maintain a neglect of embodied knowledge, and inability to fashion praxis from this; a primary means by which confidence, consciousness and identity as trade unionists is diminished. As argued through findings, and further below, the pedagogic model of an *education for renewal* affords educators with a means by which they may avoid this failure, and maintain their own embodied forms of practitioner knowledge.

### **8.3 Research Question 3: What can trade union educationists learn from the experiences of Ruskin's MA ILTUS programme and student experiences?**

Grounded theories of *knowing, being* and EA breathe life and shape into the theoretical framework of the renewal actor in ways I had not initially foreseen. Thus, whilst findings in Chapters 5 and 6 address research question two through wholly original means, the corresponding challenge for the broader field of educators is in asking how findings inform their practice.

Thesis findings provide exceptional, original insight for educators on the renewal experience of an international body of trade unionists before, during and following their experience of learning. Findings speak of the power and capacity of a radical

pedagogy to reframe a sense of the self in the collective and to enable ontological and epistemological coherence to embodied activism. Findings uncover how these trade unionists unlearn their limited roles as prescribed in the current modality of renewal, and relearn through praxis resurgent forms of agency, identity and consciousness.

Critical to findings was a sense in which a radical pedagogy could be conceptualised through findings as consolidating their sense of validation. Here then we have one, direct expression of the renewal experience of students and alumni. In a phrase reflective of the pedagogy of both bell hooks and Paulo Freire, my findings speak to education as the practice of freedom (Freire 1976; hooks 1993). Such an appreciation is a dominant theme of narrative data, as here with Student One.

I think it is that the MA has given me the tools to be able to articulate some of things I had experienced. I was aware of them, I could feel them. I was living them. But I couldn't put them together in terms of the bigger picture and what was going on in the world. I am more able to do that now.

(Student One)

### Maintaining Embodied Activism

Whilst findings unequivocally shed light upon the analytical process by which grounded theories emerge and consolidate, a principal challenge for educators is in enabling access to radical pedagogy as a means to maintain the status of knowing and being through EA. As evidenced through narrative data, engagement with

radical pedagogy is critical to the radical imagination in so many ways. As argued by Griff Foley (1999), and articulated by Student Six, this pedagogy is essential to providing shape and coherence to the multiple ways of learning, *knowing* and *being* through day-to-day activism.

You never tell us how it is, ever, what you do is introduce us to what other people think, and then create these spaces for us to talk about it, to critique. (Student Six)

Findings reveal also however, that dominant challenges for educators arise in maintaining EA through an appreciation of the inability of alumni to build on their knowledge through their activism and/or employment within trade unions, and the highly limited way in which they maintained activist scholar networks. The phrase 'redundant knowledge', which inspired the theory of EA, was deployed in this specific context.

Whilst the model of an *education for renewal* offers a pathway to maintain EA, constraints posed on educators typically limit the prescribed educational offer. Any autonomy around pedagogical practice does, however, afford educators an opportunity to reflect upon, for example, how critical, engaged dialogue with students around situated and experiential learning enables a privileging of that learning gained day-to-day activism.

This approach, arguably, fosters also a greater cohesion, and likelihood of networking, between activists as they perceive of their knowledge as grounded in

common practice, and through a form of habitus. Thus, whilst cultural practice within trade unions may continue to exert a reflex tension against critical, organic knowledge, it is arguably the role of educators to mitigate against this and assert, for example, that radical critique of renewal strategy is an intrinsic dimension of activist learning. As illustrated by Survey Respondent 29, an attention to habitus can not only aid EA, but facilitate powerful outcomes from a shared experience of learning.

I was energised by the whole experience - this can be attributed to the delivery, the subjects and the research, but primarily because it was a shared experience with like-minded people.

#### **8.4 Research Question 2: What role can education play in trade union renewal?**

Research question two is addressed directly in Chapter 7 and in two ways. The first occurs through the modelling of an *education for renewal*. This draws on thesis findings and fuses with Kolb (1984), Foley (1989) and Freire (1970) offering a framework for trade union educators that reflects the differing ways in which learning and knowledge accrue through material social action. The second is its relevance to renewal in acknowledging that activist learning and knowledge production are primary means to theorise upon renewal, and that this can be bolstered through joint exchange with allied social actors.

From the perspective of educators the importance of this model, as well its allied methodological and practical approach, is that it enables attention to those deficits



occasioning the arguable contradictions of contemporary renewal strategy, and notably that around gender.

In her interview, and reflecting on learning and knowledge gained through a survey of women union representatives, Student One wants to know why these women are not moving into greater positions of authority in the union structures.

Without exception, everybody had said that it was that their confidence had stopped them progressing. So I think that was the first thing I realised, that if we wanted some form of trade union renewal, and as the majority of trade union members are women, we need to be engaging with these women and encouraging them to come forward.

A particular concern for educators should be that, amongst the primary contradictions of renewal a critical dimension is gender, and the allied perverse outcome of movement culture and practice that somehow denudes a critical component of its membership with sense of agency. A commitment to deploy a simple radical pedagogic framework to consciously interrogate this contradiction is, I argue, and based on thesis findings, part of the answer in asking how education can play a part in trade union renewal.

Additionally, it is arguably incumbent upon educators to ensure that the gender dimension of renewal is not ignored or obscured, and acknowledge that, as with the MA, a conscious effort to privilege an accent upon this is as an essential feature of mainstream curriculum with or without the influence of an *education for renewal*.

Whilst it is acknowledged that educators do not always have the opportunity to inform recruitment practice for their programmes, it is of critical importance, as with

the MA, to seek to achieve a 50:50 female/male ratio in recruitment, as well as developing courses open only to women members and activists.

The central importance of the attention to gender is that it consciously acknowledges that the nature of contestation in the context of renewal requires wider, broader dialogue with allied social actors. Such an approach enables, for example, greater attention to theorization upon the means to overcome such contestation from critically important external perspectives.

I have argued that environmental sustainability is an exemplar of such practice (for example citing the literature of Novelli and Ferus-Comelo (2010), Ollis (2012) and Choudry (2015)) and has the potential, for example, of supporting organised labour to think through its dependency upon and proximity to, capitalist political economy.

Thus, the proposal of an *education for renewal* has positive, vicarious implications for the renewal agenda, but is moreso about the significant role that organised labour can play as part of a mass-movement for radical social change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is here, I argue based on findings, that we can appreciate best a coherent relationship between the whole trade unionist and the whole worker. In this sense, for example, trade unionists can come to appreciate why and how other forms of workers' organisations in the UK are making gains where conventional trade unions are not (Ness 2014)<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/jul/01/union-beating-gig-economy-giants-iwgb-zero-hours-workers> and <https://tinyurl.com/y6uyrgn4>

As such the proposal of the model can be seen as a form of popular education, reflective of the ambition of Raymond Williams (McIlroy and Westwood 1993) for a permanent, public pedagogy.

A central dimension critical to this proposal is the need to develop and maintain informal networks across social movements that are independent of control and oversight by formal elements of the labour movement. A movement that does not fear learning and knowledge is, I contend, based on thesis findings, one more capable of benefitting from education as a contribution to renewal.

Ultimately, and as thesis findings reveal, a more conscious appreciation of the power of learning and knowledge, can only enhance a refreshed approach to renewal.

#### In Summary

First, we have come to understand unequivocally through the literature, and supplemented by narrative data, that trade union renewal is a response to a global restructuring of capital. Moreover, the literature helps an appreciation of the need to search for alternative approaches of renewal, as current strategy and policy has been unable to renew trade union power.

Second, in examining the role of education in renewal, thesis findings have helped generate a model of an education for renewal. This seeks to re-model traditional approaches to trade union education through a re-consideration of the way in which learning and knowledge accrue through social action. The model supports activist

theorising through critical reflective practice and encourages engagement with other social actors in praxis for radical social change. The model reflects the way in which thesis findings have generated an original grounded theory of embodied activism (EA). A theory of EA accounts for the way in which trade union identity, consciousness and knowledge is formed. The model of an education for renewal enables the continuity of EA and the maintenance of *knowing* and *being*.

Third, in examining what educationists can discern from the MA experience, thesis findings informed and moved beyond the original theoretical framework of the renewal actor (RA). Instead, findings were of such profound significance that these generated original grounded theories of *knowing* and *being*. These theories reflect the acute epistemological and ontological understanding of research participants as a result of their MA experience. EA provides the vital, supplementary means to root *knowing* and *being* in the learning and knowledge produced as a result of the material experience of trade unionists in their struggle for workers' social justice.

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## **Appendices**

### Interviews

1. Information and consent forms
2. Interview schedule and questions
3. Transcription of interview with full-time student (focus group)

### Survey

4. Survey Monkey survey data

### Supplementary Sources of Data

5. Analytic memos generated whilst coding
6. Sample pages from fieldwork journal