

**Practice Architecture in Community Development**  
**Mapping Traditions in Learning and Action**  
**Une étude de cas sur l'architecture de la pratique**  
**Apprentissage, réflexion et action dans le développement**  
**communautaire**

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Volume 35, numéro 2, décembre 2023

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1109305ar>  
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.56105/cjsae.v35i02.5672>

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Éditeur(s)

Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education / L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes

ISSN

0835-4944 (imprimé)  
1925-993X (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Bernhard, M. & Van Daele, C. (2023). Practice Architecture in Community Development: Mapping Traditions in Learning and Action. *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education / La revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes*, 35(2), 75–91. <https://doi.org/10.56105/cjsae.v35i02.5672>

Résumé de l'article

Cet article examine la trajectoire de 40 ans d'évolution de pratiques en développement communautaire local dans une organisation du sud-ouest de l'Ontario. Avec cet exemple, nous présentons de nouvelles perspectives sur les modes de savoir et de découvrir socialement transformateurs. Nous cherchons à élucider les traditions en éducation des adultes et en développement communautaire jusqu'alors peu étudiées. Notre analyse est fondée sur l'analyse qualitative de contenu de sources écrites. À partir d'une perspective de théorie de la pratique, nous explorons les architectures de la pratique comme agencements culturels-discursifs, matériels-économiques et socio-politiques facilitant ou limitant l'apprentissage de pratiques qui contribuent à l'innovation sociale, ainsi que la participation à celles-ci. Nos résultats suggèrent que l'application d'un cadre théorique de la pratique au travail complexe et souvent non articulé du développement communautaire aide à révéler les manières créatives dont les pratiques connexes émergent, sont façonnées et sont acquises. Nous estimons que les pratiques quotidiennes peuvent s'aligner sur des perspectives plus approfondies et adaptées aux conditions changeantes, au lieu d'être façonnées par une recherche restreinte visant les pratiques exemplaires.

Volume 35 Issue 2

cjsae

the canadian journal for the study of adult education

la revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes

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*The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/  
La revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes*  
Editors-in-Chief: J. Adam Perry and Robin Neustaeter  
French Language Editor: Jean-Pierre Mercier  
[www.cjsae-rceea.ca](http://www.cjsae-rceea.ca)

35,2 December/décembre 2023, 75–91  
ISSN1925-993X (online)

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L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes  
[www.casae-aceea.ca](http://www.casae-aceea.ca)

# PRACTICE ARCHITECTURE IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: MAPPING TRADITIONS IN LEARNING AND ACTION

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## Abstract

*This paper investigates a trajectory of 40 years of evolving practices in grassroots community development at an organization in southwestern Ontario. By drawing on this example, we present fresh perspectives in socially transformative ways of knowing and discovering. In doing so, we aim to elucidate traditions in adult education and community development that have flown under the radar. Our analysis is based on qualitative content analysis of written sources. Taking a practice theory perspective, we explore practice architectures as the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements that enable or constrain the learning of and participation in particular practices that contribute to social innovation. Our findings suggest that the application of a practice theory framework to the complex and often unarticulated work of community development aids in bringing to light the creative ways in which the associated practices emerge, get shaped, and get acquired. We posit that day-to-day practices can be aligned with deeper perspectives and adapted to changing conditions, rather than aligned with a narrow search for best practices.*

## Résumé

*Cet article examine la trajectoire de 40 ans d'évolution de pratiques en développement communautaire local dans une organisation du sud-ouest de l'Ontario. Avec cet exemple, nous présentons de nouvelles perspectives sur les modes de savoir et de découvrir socialement transformateurs. Nous cherchons à élucider les traditions en éducation des adultes et en développement communautaire jusqu'alors peu étudiées. Notre analyse est fondée sur l'analyse qualitative de contenu de sources écrites. À partir d'une perspective de théorie de la pratique, nous explorons les architectures de la pratique comme agencements culturels-discursifs, matériels-économiques et socio-politiques facilitant ou limitant l'apprentissage de pratiques qui contribuent à l'innovation sociale, ainsi que la participation à celles-ci. Nos résultats suggèrent que*

*The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/  
La revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes*

*35,2 December/décembre 2023, 75–17*

ISSN1925-993X (online)

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L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes

*l'application d'un cadre théorique de la pratique au travail complexe et souvent non articulé du développement communautaire aide à révéler les manières créatives dont les pratiques connexes émergent, sont façonnées et sont acquises. Nous estimons que les pratiques quotidiennes peuvent s'aligner sur des perspectives plus approfondies et adaptées aux conditions changeantes, au lieu d'être façonnées par une recherche restreinte visant les pratiques exemplaires.*

This discussion throws a spotlight on an experiment in adult education and community development in a setting called The Working Centre (TWC). As Teitelbaum (2009) observed, the field of critical education has many pasts, often forgotten, and the restoration of collective memory in grassroots efforts draws on multiple traditions of resistance to the dominant social order. Similarly, Mayo (2009) and Choudry and Kapoor (2010) asserted that there is a body of grassroots adult education practices often overlooked and in need of further scholarly exploration. Aiming to address this gap, we map and document ways in which a particular organization tapped methods and inspirations from an ambitious range of historical sources. In our investigation, we ask: How do practices in grassroots community development get shaped, shared, and transformed? In pursuing this question, we explore the mutual concerns that connect present-day adult education and community development disciplines. According to Sousa (2021), these connections have seldom been formally explored. In addition to general misunderstandings, such as the notion that adult education practices are associated only with institutions, there is generally little understanding that a much wider consideration of everyday learning is at the core of much adult education scholarship and practice—learning also being an intrinsic part of community development (p. 29). Thus, the purpose of this paper is to provide insights into the evolution of community development practices at this intersection of adult education and community development.

We deploy a text-based qualitative content analysis method to engage with selective aspects of TWC's history and achievements. Our discussion proposes that the ways of knowing and approaches to discovery in 1982 anticipated developments in adult education that can be illuminated from a *practice architecture* (Kemmis, 2019) perspective. This perspective focuses on the arrangements that enable and constrain the doings, sayings, and relating that together constitute practices. Practice theory mends the customary divide between theory and action and provides a lens that turns toward the "intricate details of practical enactment in the social world" (Grootenboer et al., 2017, p. 2). Both education and work are dimensions of human experience in which our social practices are habituated. Therefore, both are phenomena that lend themselves to study from a practice theory perspective. By selecting this lens, we show that the innovations credited to this community project are tied to forms of critical pedagogy absorbed from both local and global cultures.

### **Introducing The Working Centre**

Our investigation focuses on TWC, which was founded in 1982 by Joe and Stephanie Mancini as a response to unemployment and poverty in downtown Kitchener, Ontario (The Working Centre [TWC], 2022). The centre resists definition and its many undertakings occupy a dozen and counting buildings in downtown Kitchener. These include indoor spaces for housing scattered through the downtown area, public cafés where people mingle,

a thrift shop, kitchens that supply food, gardens where food is grown, medical offices, craft and study spaces, and other spaces that serve multiple functions for work and living. TWC's main projects give people access to tools to create their own work combined with continuous ways of learning and co-operating. The concept of tools is explored in the discussion below and is central to the practices of TWC's many community projects. TWC organizes its projects into six areas: the Job Search Resource Centre, St. John's Kitchen, Community Tools, Access to Technology, Affordable Supportive Housing, and the Waterloo School for Community Development (TWC, 2022).

Writing about the purpose of TWC, Mancini and Mancini (2015) stated that they "started thinking about 'work'...[and that] it would be a centre that reflected and acted upon the meaning of human labour" (p. 19). Westhues (1995) compiled a collection of insights and case studies called *The Working Centre: Experiment in Social Change*. This publication flagged significant historical influences such as Hull House, the Catholic Worker Movement, and Moses Coady's work in adult education in Antigonish. *Experiment in Social Change* voiced an important range of issues relevant to the limitations of a confined academic sociology at the time. It presented TWC's founders as two young people escaping formulas of any kind, forging forward with a quest to base their observations and actions on "the impressions, the feelings, the lived experience of the people in the target community" (Westhues, 1995, p. 17). The initial hope among the founders of TWC was to reject "any model that would define them as expert service-providers and the unemployed as clients" (p. 19). The founders questioned the Canadian government's standard slant on unemployment, sharply aware that 1982 was the year that blue-collar jobs were being eroded in a rapidly changing world. Instead, from the start, they gravitated to a higher-order analysis. The founders and their affiliates set up a learning sequence with those who had been laid off from the full-time wage economy, introducing specific dialogue tools for discussion.

The naming of what people were seeing around them, the hardships they were experiencing in their lives and homes, was introduced as a key dialogue strategy. Inspirations for this kind of methodology had numerous cultural antecedents in the world of the founders and their friends; they were familiar with the pastoral circle, a specific tool of analysis drawn from traditions they had experienced in both global and local contexts. At the same time, the open-ended goals they were pursuing were not boxed; they "did not claim to have data-based any more than faith-based truth" (Westhues, 1995, p. 18). Today, the nuanced developments that continue to shape TWC's imaginative community remain complex to summarize. Most important from our perspective is the founding group's zest for forming and sustaining a democratic, shared commitment to layered learning strategies—always in the affectionate climate of friendship and trust.

This article continues with a review of literature on community development practices and adult learning from the perspective of restoring memory. Second, we will share the theoretical framework of this investigation as practice architecture, and third, outline the methodological approach of qualitative content analysis that we have taken. Fourth, we will present our findings on the shaping and learning of community development practices at this organization. Finally, we will discuss our findings, point to implications for adult education practice, and identify areas for further research.

### Literature Review: Restoring Memory and Mapping Vibrant Traditions

Mayo (2009) identified a body of adult education practices dedicated to social transformation that—scattered all over the world—“fly under the radar,” are loosely defined, and reflect an “alternative vision of society” (p. 269). In Canada, Welton (1995c) has pointed to the need for a courageous discourse that helps adult educators confront “an increasingly disenchanting world bleached of spirituality” (p. 11). Collins (1995) reviewed ways in which adult educators can return to a sense of relevance by connecting their discipline to “the notion of adult education as a social movement with an emancipatory intent” (p. 93), pointing out that such connection requires ongoing attention to diverse sites of collective knowledge production (p. 97). Similarly, Choudry and Kapoor (2010) asserted that it is “incumbent upon movement and scholar actors to pay closer attention to the specifics of knowledge and learning emergent in and from particular movement contexts,” stating that energetic efforts must be made to build bridges (p. 3). In particular, a global perspective that emphasizes the “richness of knowledge production” within activist contexts is often overlooked (pp. 1–3). In asking how this situation can be improved, Choudry and Kapoor affirmed a growing recognition that academics with expertise and diverse community stakeholders involved on the ground can best work closely together for fruitful results. Our discussion is aligned with the concerns of Mayo, Welton, Collins, Choudry, and Kapoor.

Welton’s body of work (1995a, 1995c, 2013) has drawn significant attention to the social justice roots of adult education in Canada and the role of social agencies and social movements as a place for informal learning. He asserts that instrumentalized learning driven by business demand needs to be countered with a broader, emancipatory view on the needs of the marginalized, working toward a *just learning society*. Researchers, according to Welton (2013), are challenged to build on historical analysis and conduct further research in the field. Similarly, English and Mayo (2012) pointed to the connection between adult education and community development, rooted in a critical just orientation of adult educators. These ties between adult education and community development, however, may be masked through the preference for terms such as *social movement*, *community action*, or *community-based education* (Sousa, 2021, p. 40).

Individuals engaging in community development and shaping those spaces for informal learning can be seen at once as professionals and radicals. Collins (1995) presented a sense of the robust role that adult educators can offer as a persuasive moral force rather than as disengaged facilitators who neglect to engage in specific social contexts. Similarly, Ardle (2021) pointed to the radical nature of this work and defined “radical community workers [as] grounded individuals, anchored by a clear analysis and value base and a strong connection to the communities with which they work” (p. 731). Westley (2015) stated that resilient and innovative communities feature ongoing learning among participants. They honour values of equality, less rigid hierarchies, and respectful attention to the “wisdom of elders” (p. x) as having salience for the contemporary challenges of society.

Studies demonstrate the potential for adult learning in activism and social movements (Drew, 2015; Hall & Turray, 2006), through intergenerational communities of practice (Snow & Tulk, 2020), in co-operatives (Sumner & Wever, 2017), and in community housing projects (Foroughi, 2013). Although this body of research indicates ways in which learning may take place in community development contexts, the heterogeneity of grassroots organizations results in a need to better document how practices evolve, get shaped, and get

shared. There is evidence that the sharing of valuable insights of community development efforts is typically restricted by the time limitations of community workers (Ardle, 2021; Brann-Barrett & Timm-Bottos, 2017), even when such community projects can find links to adult educators in universities through fruitful partnerships. The intersection of these concerns is where our research aims to contribute. We will next share the theoretical perspective from which we have conducted our investigation.

### Theoretical Framework: Practice Architecture

To better understand how practices in grassroots community development have been shaped, shared, and transformed at TWC, we draw on practice theory with an emphasis on practice architecture. According to Nicolini (2012), the practice lens aids in “explaining social phenomena in a processual way without losing touch with the mundane reality of everyday life and the concrete and material nature of the activities with which we are all involved” (p. 9). Such a perspective shifts beyond the intentionality of actors, and instead takes the social practices as the “nexus of doings and sayings” (Schatzki, 1996, p. 89) as the starting point of analysis. Through the lens of practice theory, we see learning processes as situated; they are not simply psychological or cognitive processes going on within individuals’ heads, nor are they concerned with deposits of knowledge in people’s heads (Kemmis et al., 2017, p. 57). Instead, practice theory orients the focus to the gradual shift in activities and practices that newcomers to a situation exhibit as they are oriented to new practices in a given situation (Lave, 2019).

To understand how practices are shaped and participated in, we draw on the concept of *practice architecture*, which consists of a semantic space (language, *sayings*), a physical space (activity, work, *doings*), and a social space (power, solidarity, *relatings*) (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 32). In this view, practices are enabled, shaped, and constrained by the cultural-discursive arrangements, material-economic arrangements, and social-political arrangements. Correspondingly, learning is marked by the ability to participate in practice:

Learning is *always* and *only* a process of being stirred in to practices, even when a learner is learning alone or from participation with others in shared activities. We learn not only knowledge, embodied in our minds, bodies and feelings, but how to interact with others and the world; our learning is not only epistemologically secured (as cognitive knowledge) but also *interactionally* secured in sayings, doings and relatings that take place amid the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements that pertain in the settings we inhabit. Our learning is bigger than us; it always positions and orients us in a shared, three-dimensional—semantic, material and social—world. (Kemmis et al., 2014, pp. 59–60)

From this perspective, *practice* is the unit of analysis at the nexus of doings, sayings, and relatings. *Praxis*, in turn, has the broader meaning of collective social action. Praxis can be understood as the “contingent *unfolding* of events, whereas ‘practice’ refers to typified and socially intelligible bundles of verbal and non-verbal activities” (Alkemeyer & Buschmann, 2017, p. 22). In the context of education, praxis can be understood “first, as *educational* action that is morally committed and informed by traditions in a field (‘right conduct’), and second,

as ‘history-making *educational* action’” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 26). This broader meaning of *praxis*—as the antonym of *theory*—can also be found in many uses of *practice*, such as “radical adult education practice” (Mayo, 2009, p. 270). The practice theory perspective then permits investigations into the praxis of the liberation tradition of adult education, shedding light on other (non)human participants in practices. Put differently, this perspective provides a lens through which emancipatory action can be studied in their physical (doings), semantic (sayings), and social (relatings) dimensions. Our goal in this paper is to investigate the praxis of community development at a particular organization, using this practice theory lens.

### **Method: Qualitative Content Analysis**

In our analysis, we followed the approach of a qualitative content analysis (Kracauer, 1952; Krippendorff, 2019). Introducing this term to complement quantitative content analysis, Kracauer (1952) drew attention to latent meanings of text, which “may strongly resist quantification, and occasionally the quantification is actually foregone” (p. 634). In our analysis we focused on this latent content, its interpretation in context, and explanatory meanings as proposed by ethnographic content analysis (Grbich, 2013, p. 195). While not a strictly hermeneutic method, “qualitative content analysis is a procedure into which the principles of hermeneutics have been incorporated and used in its practice” (Kuckartz, 2019, p. 14).

Our data corpus consisted primarily of a book published in 2015 by the founders of the organization called *Transition to Common Work* (Mancini & Mancini, 2015). It is a biography, communal memoir, and social history through an era of rapid social and economic transformations. We deemed this text relevant as it offers insights into informal learning practices in adult education and community development. The text can be seen as a document in the lifeworld and of the lifeworld (Welton, 1995b), akin to the autobiographical notes of Addams (1910/2016), the *Easy Essays* of Maurin (2020), or the reflections of Day (2008). Second, we included in our search TWC’s quarterly publication *Good Work News*, issued since 2005. Third, we included a collection of insights and case studies called *The Working Centre: Experiment in Social Change* (Westhues, 1995).

We first located documents relevant for our purpose. In a second step we coded the texts with the categories derived from our heuristic lens of practice architecture: the doings, sayings, and relatings. We then interpreted these code segments within context and culture, working toward intersubjective agreement on the interpretation. While we pursued this interpretation against the backdrop of our combined 20-year experience of past involvement in this organization, we did not conduct direct observation for this study. Such an ethnographic approach would be fruitful in further research.

### **Findings: Understanding Practices in a Learning Organization**

Tapping into the narrated stories of the founders and extrapolating from reconstructions of their history, this paper offers three lines of inquiry and analysis. First, we trace the evolution and praxis of TWC from a practice theory perspective (Hui et al., 2017; Kemmis, 2019; Schatzki et al., 2001) and aim to show that the founders and their community collaborators had radically anticipated the focus on the sayings, doings, and relatings in the early days of TWC from 1982 onward. Identifying in their own narrated accounts some of the key



elements that mark the practice turn as understood today, we claim that the founders in the start-up years proceeded with practices as the unit of analysis that guided their actions. Studying the statements and the life history accounts of their own narratives, we present core concepts of practice theory, demonstrating that the group of founders moved forward with their own version of practice architecture (Kemmis, 2019) as they generated a rich and building stream of reflection on practice. Their highly self-aware evolution of fresh practices thus stepped decisively away from service provision concepts, bureaucratic organizational habits, and other commonly held ways of structuring employment help in existing agency cultures at the time.

Second, our analysis presents a close look at how the use of verb forms in the language of the organization's culture helps to reveal essential customs and patterns of practice. In the retrospective accounts of the founders, what terms to describe organizational rationale and structure are avoided? What terms are generously employed? We maintain that the widespread use of the gerund throughout the growing culture of the centre, as reflected explicitly in the founders' own retrospective accounts, can be helpfully absorbed through today's practice theory lens. At the same time, the text's energetic focus on language use provides the observer with an organic feel for the emerging philosophy of TWC. The language of the text reveals close relational proximities between states of human joy, service, and striving.

Finally, we trace the philosophical roots of TWC's practices in terms of the ethics and conduct of a community, focusing on the influence of Ivan Illich on the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements of TWC. The organization's evolution cannot be understood without its emphasis on virtues and habits. How does this emphasis work in everyday practices? And how does it connect to the tools and approaches developed? Following the neo-Aristotelian tradition in the study of practice, we understand "praxis as an action that is intended to be good" (Kemmis, 2019, p. 95) and look for the moral underpinnings of practices at TWC.

In the following sections, we will examine the three dimensions of practice architecture in the informal learning site of TWC. How do the semantic, material, and social dimensions of coming to participate in practices coalesce in a thriving community centre?

### ***Practice Architecture at The Working Centre***

*Transition to Common Work: Building Community at The Working Centre* (Mancini & Mancini, 2015) is a text that is offered as a relatively free-form memoir. The reminiscences of Joe and Stephanie Mancini reflect broadly on how things came to be. As they reflect and offer their sense of the logic of the community's unfolding, they share perspectives, asides, and hopes. They offer core values and philosophies. As authors, they make the odd declarative statement, pulling out thematic threads that seem to require reiteration or emphasis, assigning dates and developments for logical coherence. They also leave spaces in the narrative for the reader to pause, to wonder, and to reflect. Opinion is offered here and there, pulling up insights and summary statements for renewed examination. The dominant style in the book, however, is a shuttling back and forth between practical remembrances and the sharing of ideals and influences that emerged at various historical developments in the story. It cannot be said that the discourse is polemical. Instead, the messages and

ideals for societal and personal transformation, along with the personal effort required to get there, are understated and indirect.

Of value to the practice theorist is the examination of this style of narrative from the point of view of practice architecture. The Mancinis' own account of the origins of TWC swims with the current of specific community practices that they have been able to retrieve from past documents or to affirm while (inter)acting. It can be said that the narrative overflows with philosophy, but also with enactments. In this stream of memory and reminiscence, what is foregrounded is the fertile common ground of all the interesting ways in which participants have influenced each other. The Mancinis seem to be discussing embedded community practices—community practices recalled and honoured as one whole, connected fabric of a dynamic organization. They state that pulling out strand by strand of something so tightly woven is an exhaustive task (Mancini & Mancini, 2015, pp. 3–4, 187–190).

In fact, much of the conceptual work of reconstructing complex life worlds for the reader in a practice theory approach can be suggested only in snippets or small slices of the practice plenum. The effect is like painting on a moving canvas, but frame by frame. Good practice theory “is inclusive of the complex multidimensionality and dynamism of being in and participating in the social world” (Grootenboer et al., p. 3). That dynamic participation in multiply experienced dimensions is what we are reading about in the authors' reminiscences. The flavours of the social world offered on the book's pages, in effect, form the understory of the life world the founders put into motion in the early founding days of 1982. Kemmis's (2019) invitation to immerse in a practice sensibility is an appealing channel for engaging directly with the world of TWC. The authors invite the reader to feel “the vibrancy of its places and spaces, watching how ideas and practices live” (Mancini & Mancini, 2015, p. 4). The founders of this community want us, as it were, to lose ourselves in the onrushing flow of what we read about. The things we are reading about are, in effect, the deeds done in various sites of practice.

### *Doings, Sayings, and Relatings at The Working Centre*

Learning, according to Kemmis, can be understood as being “stirred in to practices” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 59) and “learning how to go on in practice” (Kemmis, 2019, p. 125). As discussed above, when persons learn together, or, in the language of TWC, are naturally engaged in forms of *shadowing*, newcomers are initiated into the flow of social and cultural practices; they pick up the intricacies of what they need to know. The flow of practices is characterized by doings, sayings, and relatings that, like the situations themselves, are nested together (Kemmis et al., 2014, pp. 52–53). Everyday conduct in everyday social practices have common ways of expression attached. This means that we say one thing and not another in a cluster of practices to share information, or to express common ways of reasoning, joking, or sharing human frustrations as we engage in our customary flow of practices. Thus, practice theory deliberately highlights a focus on verb forms, specifically the gerund, to render this reality. For instance, Wilkinson and Kemmis (2015) drew on the word *leading* as they researched educator practices, rather than the word *leadership*. This noteworthy emphasis on the gerund *leading* shifts sharply away from a fixed role of the leader that is characteristic of much traditional organizational philosophy. Instead, it

focuses on the “practices that constitute leading” and thereby supports the engagement with practices of leading (p. 5).

*Transition to Common Work* features a gerund in its subtitle: *Building Community at The Working Centre*. The authors load their text with verb forms as they reconstruct the social history of TWC. The opening pages urge us, first of all, to experience TWC “with your feet on the ground, *feeling* the vibrancy of its spaces and places, *watching* how ideas and practices live in the midst of a community *doing* its work” (Mancini & Mancini, 2015, p. 4, emphases added). The buoyant push of the prose travels forward as well as back in time throughout the various recollections. Very few pages are devoted to setting up or recalling lists of mission statements, discussion of roles or positions, or specific ideologies of practice. Instead, what is emphasized is the persistence of hearing, listening, watching, and learning in relational clusters and groupings, all dynamic activities that take part in a socially and materially grounded setting. The historically rooted aphorism from Peter Maurin “to make the kind of society where it is easier to be good” (Maurin, n.d., as cited in Day, 2008, p. 427) is commonly referenced at TWC. This expression also made tangible an atmosphere of the use of good words, good actions, and constructive interpersonal relations. The apt phrasing of the words making it easier, as we can see, is concisely yet non-prescriptively expressed as a cue or a signal, a verb suggesting movement in a direction of practice.

As past observers of the culture of TWC, we can attest to the remarkable emancipatory power of gerunds and their intentional yet delicate use in the everyday life worlds of the various sites of TWC. At St John’s Kitchen, at Queen Street Commons Cafe, at the Employment Centre, and in other specific project sites, our habitual practice was to use the phrase *walking with* (Van Daele, 2010). This phrase conveyed the quality and scope of our daily actions and intentions with those in need who visited our various urban locations. The phrase deepened considerably in meaning for a newcomer over a span of years as a newcomer grew incrementally into the texture and tone of common practices. We all recognized the verb phrase *walking with* as freighted and significant, yet also one used commonly in everyday conversation and in larger retreats and meetings. It both enacted the philosophy for old-timers and newcomers and signalled a set of behavioural cues for the manner of being with, striving to support, and sustaining that we engaged through our helping practices. In other words, as an example of doings and sayings at TWC, we understand walking with to be core to the layered practices of the organization. Here, the organization’s ethics, habits, and opportunities for helping are woven with its philosophical ideals for a generous community life. Other verb forms that evolved may have been more specific to sites of practice.  *Holding* and  *following* are two commonly used in the employment part of the centre. These two words also feature meanings of sticking with, sustaining, tracking; they were specifically useful in conveying the longer, more complex time spans involved in carrying out certain project practices that involved the challenge of administrative or conceptual labour of co-ordinated schemes and plans.

It appears that a unified fabric of tone and meaning, yet specific idiomatic variations in specific urban building and project sites, carried the music between the words as contributors learn to engage—by watching, doing, listening, speaking—with existing concrete practices in the culture. This is the semantic, social, and material world that steadily breathes life into spirited practices. “Changing the language is one aspect of developing different ways of acting,” stated the authors (Mancini & Mancini, 2015, p. 107). A warm, inclusive language, as one contributor to TWC famously quipped, is “the clue to the glue” (S. O’Seasnáin, personal

communication). Joe and Stephanie Mancini noted in many passages in the text that such inclusive collaboration involves the sharing of power and creation of open learning spaces as much as possible.

In a community such as TWC, which places much attention to existing, emerging, and evolving practices, and to a welcoming posture for newcomers, the flourishing web of practices in the organization's everyday social life can be understood as an intentional space of learning. Here, newcomers not only learn the existing ways of doing, saying, and relating, but also shape and change practices through their active participation. In such interaction between the person and the world, learning flourishes; it becomes an integral part of life. As Lave (2019) put it, "Everyday life and learning both make and are made in the medium of participants' partial participation in ongoing, changing social practice" (p. 129). However, while practices in a given cultural or social situation are ongoing and pre-existing, there is also an open space for the individual's agency (Kemmis, 2019, p. 99; see also Alkemeyer & Buschmann, 2017). The contribution of active, creative agents in the lens of practice theory is noteworthy and will be returned to in our discussion, as this feature of practice theory links constructively to the liberating aspects of perspective transformation.

### ***Social and Material Worlds: The Contribution of Illich to Working Centre Culture***

Grootenboer et al. (2017, p. 15) outlined all of the ways, dating back to Aristotle, that practices flow from virtuous moral choices. The Mancinis' text underlines this point. In their narrative's recounting, a clear thesis emerges: the open space must first be conceptualized morally before it can be manifested in the social and material world as everyday practice. If practices are warmly hospitable, involving the conscious sharing of power, and pursue the expression of virtue whenever possible, how exactly did the founders wrestle with issues of "structure and anti-structure that create space for people to involve themselves" (Mancini & Mancini, 2015, p. 106)? How does virtue rather than a reliance on institutional values find concrete channels of expression in such a fluid culture?

As the organization matured and as volunteers in project sites multiplied, the founders more formally articulated their ethics of community, immersing especially in the thought of Ivan Illich to build an expanded sense of possibility for mapping living structures rather than the stunted social practices of traditional service organizations. The turn toward Illich's *Tools for Conviviality* (1973) in the 1990s was significant for the culture, helping to further align its norms of inclusion and generosity with firm principles for radical social analysis. Illich's (1980) emphasis on the vernacular, the decommodified "homegrown," took TWC's practices into several important directions, shifting the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements.

In his critique of the more pernicious effects of institutions on society, Illich (1973) argued that expanding centralized bureaucracies with their regulations reduced the warmth, spontaneity, and authenticity involved in genuine human learning, human self-help, human capacity for innovation, and natural altruistic impulses to help the other. Further, such encroaching expansions dislocated human persons from their innate capacity to flourish in productive economic networks, instead turning them into passive consumers of goods made by distant persons in distant countries who are paid little, and by complex technologies.

Drawing on Illich's critique, TWC shaped a practice architecture designed to reduce the numbing effects of a consumer culture where few persons can make things that they as citizens need. The idea was that tools—the useful things, like simple tools, machines, or more complex technologies, that we need to make things—could be adapted productively for people's use and happiness. Tools, introduced thoughtfully with a larger flow of practices in mind, could be used with the aim to expand rather than stunt human capabilities. The Mancinis studied Illich for several years, absorbing his observations bit by bit, and trickled them down into the soil of what we have been calling the semantic, social, and material worlds of the organization's practice architecture.

For example, staff and directors are paid very similar wages, offering new ways of practising and understanding material and economic arrangements; patronizing language such as *client* or *mental health consumer* is stepped away from, avoiding the language of diagnostically oriented officialdom in terms of semantic and discursive practices. The material arrangements of furniture and workspaces in general are adapted frequently to eradicate status, as well as to innovate convivial spaces where persons of different vocational, class, and ethnic backgrounds could freely mingle. All these considerations around practices grew in time. As such, tools as adapted from the thought of Illich were fresh participants in practices designed to support a more flourishing sense of communal effort: the efforts of crafting, making, repairing, building, repurposing, and cooking, all activities that TWC carries out every day.

### Discussion and Conclusion

How can we benefit from a significant opus of work where the character of radical community transformation is so obliquely manifested that an entire experiment remains cloaked in unassuming simplicity? Several authors argue that adult educators and community activists can benefit from nourishing access to a broad range of contexts in the emancipatory tradition (Collins, 1995; Teitelbaum, 2009; Welton, 2013). Our finding in this study is that the founders' awareness of historically situated pedagogies of transformation and resistance formed a key factor in the evolution of TWC as a dynamic site of practice.

We conclude that the founders' acts of resistance sprang from a creative nexus of doings, sayings, and relatings that were already nested in traditions that they selected, studied, and affirmed, such as Illich, Addams, Day, Maurin, and Coady. We consider this dynamic process to be a cycle of community building, as well as a cycle of meaning making, as Mezirow (1995, p. 39) would put it. As such, the cycle of commitment to learning articulated in the text of *Transition to Common Work* involves "processes of scanning, construal, imaginative insight, and interpretation, directed by a line of intentional action and preconditioned by the structures of meaning" (1995, p. 39). These traditions transpire in the everyday practices of learning and in the production of knowledge, as we will discuss next.

#### *Everyday Practices in a Learning Community*

The courage to forge ahead in the liberatory framework that Teitelbaum (2009), Welton (1995b), Ardlie (2021), and Westley (2015) referred to could thus be said to flow at least partially from a chosen proximity to the borrowed traditions. These proximities are also embodied as practices. Such proximities are translated into practices of communication and working with others not only in the realm of theory and ethics, but in the everyday

lifeworld. A parallel conclusion we may draw from our analysis of TWC's emergence as an enduring activist learning community is the emphasis its founders placed on collaboration with others, friendship in collective life versus confrontation, the norms of generosity, and a dedication to the tireless work of holding onto ideals of others over self. As this study has suggested, such norms are not easily upheld. Our discussion demonstrates that these norms were actively incubated over time, in the cycles of the meaning-making scans and construals that we have outlined. It must also be emphasized that this activist community has not developed a model of conflict or confrontation, although the ideals everywhere spelled out in the text are the challenging norms of resistance in difficult and marginalized circumstances.

A conclusion that can be drawn from the expression of such ideals and norms can be further interpreted in the framework of practices. The organization's focus on shaping a practice architecture that "makes it easier to be good" appears to nurture welcoming spaces that de-emphasize class divides or ideologies and help to make visible the participants in practices. This focus promotes the common good, animates social life, and provides a down-to-earth culture for learning new skills. Ardle's (2021) radical community workers learned over time to persist in their activism by cultivating nuanced identities and perspectives, thus allowing the workers to simultaneously assume both the necessary perspectives of state-funded professional objectives and their own preferred positionings of critical discourse. Similarly, the founders and the workers of TWC's projects are individuals who move forward with complex identities. We note an embracing of paradox in these practices. There exists an atmosphere of intentionally deprofessionalized works of service within a radically flat and frugal wage structure: paying a highly educated worker the same income as a lower-educated worker is an emancipatory practice that allows persons of different levels of education and class to work together. Persons who are "fed up with climbing the consumption ladder and choose instead to find meaning in work" (Westhues, 2015, p. xiv) thus surrender the claims of privilege. As Ardle (2021) observed in her study, community workers who positioned themselves in both the professional world of funded agencies and the world of emancipatory frameworks competently moved between those two worlds.

In our terms, the doings, sayings, and relatings of these workers effectively engaged these levels of flexible discourse as needed in their vocations. The formation of identities in such community settings involves complex and imaginative meaning-making processes in vocational choices (Ardle, 2021; Chi, 2021; Van Daele, 2016). Mezirow's (1995) vision for "the education of hope" in society pictures the transformative adult educator's role as a fluid go-between between the goals and strategies of social movements and the more established political and economic institutions (p. 64). Our study of TWC's text suggests that this fluidity is indeed possible in critically self-aware and other-aware settings. A hopeful outlook, together with the necessary reflective skills and the steadying virtues required to manage constant acts of mediation in the world as we find it, can be cultivated in settings that aim to nurture specific practices of congeniality, trust, and equality.

### ***Knowledge Production in Community Development***

Finally, our study has spotlighted issues of a generative approach to knowledge production in community-based and social movement education projects. Our analysis of the text of *Transition to Common Work* offers stirring evidence that connects the field of transformative learning practices in adult education with a promising body of knowledge emerging in mature community development practices. With Nicolini (2017), we anticipate that spotlighting practices of the everyday may help encourage practitioners to talk about their own daily practical concerns, moving away from the abstract to what is on the ground (p. 113). It appears that Joe and Stephanie Mancini produced their text with this goal in mind. Their multiple acknowledgements of the many contributors to the setting over a 40-year period make visible a teeming network of persons who poured energy into daily practical action for the common good, not into theoretical discussion (Mancini & Mancini, 2015, p. 187).

Our inquiry gives voice to this hope. Among other encouraging paths of discovery, we have found that the worker-scholar tradition adopted by Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day in an era of extreme social crisis was reshaped into practices at TWC, leading to a permanently transformed stance of enthusiasm in practitioners. We find ourselves in an age of multiple crises, a world that Illich anticipated 50 years ago (Illich, 1973). TWC's emphasis on study groups, book clubs, retreats, common café spaces for discussion, publication of a quarterly newspaper, sales of books, and hundreds of articles archived in a website first appeared as exciting yet modest alternative knowledge-sharing practices four decades ago. These strategies of inclusion, at once intellectually original and deeply affiliative in intent, were incubated under the radar in 1982, when the founders were in their 20s, meeting with friends and fellow activists for the first time in a pastoral circle of inquiry. Forty years later, this study has outlined the dynamics and practices of human bridge-building steps in a spiritually alive culture of hopeful social change.

### ***Implications for Adult Education Practice***

Our findings suggest that practices in adult education and community development must be aligned with deeper perspectives, deeper callings, and richer visions to remain intentionally open. They must be freshly adapted to changing needs, capable of acting on a world of changing conditions. The sustained and confident emphasis on practices by TWC's founders also involved them in an ambitious parallel search for broader historical contexts, meanings, and ways of being. Rather than a limiting narrow search for best practices commonly summarized in the 1980s and 1990s in the professional handbooks of social workers and educators, the group of founding collaborators turned consciously to a broad range of social, economic, and historically rich role models, framers of alternative cultures or economies. It is the attention to the doings, sayings, and relating in the day-to-day work that, in our view, supports practitioners in this endeavour and shifts language to what is on the ground.

### ***Limitations and Further Research***

This study focused on the community development practices at one organization. While we are confident that the insights gained are also valuable for other organizations, we recognize that contexts differ and thus limit generalizability. We did not undertake direct observation of practices and instead relied on written accounts interpreted against the backdrop of

our past involvement in the organization. Further research could employ ethnographic approaches to address this limitation.

Practice theory decentres the subject and brings into view other (non)human participants of the doings, sayings, and relating. Yet, the position and agency of the subject remains contested among practice theoretical standpoints and warrants further exploration. Further research could build on the relational notion of acquiring play-ability, which aims to avoid the dualism of "either attributing deterministic power to practices over the activities of participants or presupposing fully formed actors who are ready for action" (Alkemeyer & Buschmann, 2017, p. 9). From this standpoint, a case can also be made to further study the affective dimensions of participating in community development practices (Reckwitz, 2017) and to build on previous work in this regard (Chi, 2021).

Our study suggests that the focus on practices has allowed the organization to make available a remarkable multitude of creative non-sectarian routes for participation. The finding that diverse individuals can be drawn into socially useful activity is promising. We therefore posit that the practices we have presented around the use of community tools warrants further study and may inform community development and adult education praxis in an increasingly diverse society.

The social-political arrangements that form part of the practice architecture (Kemmis et al., 2014) can be studied at a micro or organizational level as we have done here, but also with focus on a larger scale (Nicolini, 2017). Further research efforts might explore how an organization such as TWC mediates between practices of providing highly personal supports to individuals in the reality of larger-scale bureaucratic phenomena, such as funding bodies, political climate, and discourses.

Throughout this study, we have aimed to explore how practices in grassroots community development get shaped, shared, and transformed. Using the heuristic lens of practice architecture, we have shown that the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements of TWC nurture everyday practices of a learning community contributing to habits of sustained knowledge production. We have pointed to revitalized traditions in learning, and in action, bringing a few of them out from under the radar. We propose that much work remains in exploring the collective memory of grassroots adult education practices. In our view, such energetic investigation appears important not only to map the past, but also to gain fresh perspectives on socially transformative ways of learning.

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