



WORKER EDUCATION DEFINITION POLICY

Purpose

The primary focus of the Workers' College is "the practice of accredited worker education and training, skills development, trade union practice and community development." As such to improve on the quality of the practice of Worker Education within the Workers' College specifically and the provincial and national practice more generally it is necessary to have a policy that makes explicit the institutional understanding of Worker Education. This understanding must inform all aspects of the educational practice from needs assessment through access, RPL curriculum development, assessment, moderation evaluation and monitoring, and contextualise the operational practices and policies of the organisation more broadly.

Scope

The policy defines the institutional understanding of Worker Education and should be consulted as a starting point for external policy engagement and support along with the development and practice of educational programmes.

Principles

In a Capitalist mode of production Vocational and Occupational education take on a particular market orientation and tends to view the workers as a commodity or production input and the purpose of education as the maximisation of the accumulation of profit. This tends then to set up a natural contestation or oppositional conception between different elements of worker education seen as having contradictory purposes or intended outcomes.

This is apparent in the framework of worker education developed by the National Human Resource Development Council of South Africa (HRDCSA) Technical Task Team on Worker Education (WETTT) which correctly recognises this tension and the broad accommodation of it as a necessary compromise for building an integrated policy environment. As such the Framework envisages three pillars of worker empowerment, vocational education and joint management worker education.

The model intends to Develop a policy framework, within which the competing interpretations and purposes of worker education can be accommodated on a sustainable basis. The term "integrated" should be understood in the same sense; it refers to the policy level rather than the level of content (though, as will be suggested below, this does not exclude points of mutual support between different forms of worker education.

This approach is premised on the world of work and a definition of a worker that is more linked to employment rather than citizenship. Pursuant to the purpose of worker education as responsible Citizen one should understand an individual who can be analytic of his or her environment draws from his past experiences and ideology training and functional experience He or she has a full understanding of class analysis and class struggle. Worker education has at its core the development of the responsible citizen.

This model is useful in the current social and economic realities of South Africa but also provides a consistent path of development describing a vision for Socialist Worker Education.

At the Workers' College we believe that class analysis and class struggle are at the centre of any class conscious education that seeks to transform society by revealing the unequal nature of all social, political and economic relations in society that give rise to the hegemonic ideas in society. As such class consciousness is integral to our approach.

We perceive working class education as the process of providing the space, opportunity and resources for working class people to develop and validate the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to allow for people centered, self and collective-directed development at home, in the workplace and in society as a whole.

The aim of providing worker education to workers is;

- To develop a sound theoretical and ideological knowledge that allows them to critically analyse their role in society and relate it to their everyday struggles as a productive force;
- To enhance their understanding of their role in society as part of the working class;
- To develop their skills, competencies and abilities both at an intellectual and practical level in order to contribute efficiently and effectively in shaping and changing their working environment and communities;
- To realise the value in making use of their prior-learning, experiences and skills acquired in the course of their daily struggles in their communities, organisations, and working environment;
- To operate as agents of change in society and to make an effective contribution for the collective good;
- To be able to advocate for their rights and interests both at the individual and collective level;
- To contribute in developing organisations that represent their interests.
- To acquire the necessary skills to productively contribute towards society and the economy.
- To escape the traps of poverty.
- To use education to build self image and self directed development.

Within the framework of Worker Education, The Workers' College approach to union and community education is premised on an understanding of unions as democratic and worker controlled organisations dependent on collective action towards the protection of rights and the advancement of interests of workers as members of an organisation but also as part of the working class as a whole. As such the development and delivery of education with workers and unions attempt to foster the democratic organisational aspirations always acknowledging the role of a worker and member in determining the direction of that organisation. This is captured in the concept of the three contracts of union education

expressed by Newman (1993). The workers College uses the same approach to community development that sees the learner as an active leader of the community or civil society organisation and again emphasises the notion of democratic accountability. This approach can be represented as follows and is seen as distinct from the practice of vocational training in a capitalist framework which is hierarchical in nature.

Workers' education pedagogy and epistemology draws significantly from worker struggles and experiences accumulated in the course of their daily interaction with reality to make its content relevant and up to date.

The education programmes of the Workers' College are designed to build and develop the capacities of workers and community activists, their representatives, office bearers and staff of their organisations, namely, trade unions and community organisations, so that they can effectively bring about the changes in their workplaces, communities and broader society for the purpose of eradication of poverty and inequality.

These are extensions of the goal of basic education as a process, a continuation of lifelong learning aiming at building the capacity of the trade union members and community activists by improving their knowledge, skill, and attitude.

In support of these working class ideals and the organisations within it the workers College intends to develop an expanding set of holistic and integrated course offerings that move across the pillars of Workers Education and also encompass the breadth of educational levels envisaged in the National Qualifications Framework. In constructing these it will be critical to remain true to the democratic practice of union and community education whilst maximizing the potential for the articulation of qualifications, the portability of skills and the accreditation of these. It must also develop a broad practice of the recognition of prior learning that moves from critical pedagogy and negotiated curriculum through assessment and certification to access of the highest levels of learning in post graduate studies.

References:

Workers Education Task Team, National Human Resources Development Council (2015) Workers Education report.

Newman, Michael, (1993) The Third Contract. Stewart Victor publishing; Sydney.