

April 16, 2018

Dear Professor Santoro,

Please accept my newly revised paper entitled, “Putting the People First: Exploring Accurate Advocacy for the People’s Voices in Educational Organizing”. This paper compares the principles of education and organizing. Through analyzing the way in which organizations function, with a focus on the role and selection of leadership, I explore the relationship and communication between leaders and members within organizations, as well as the role of education in effective community organizing.

On the basis of your and my peer reviewers’ astute and helpful recommendations, I have made the following changes to my piece:

First Edit:

- I have rephrased run-on sentences in order to improve overall flow of my paper.
- I added a brief introduction of Paulo Freire before discussing his quotes.
- I changed some word choices in areas that my peer reviewers flagged as repetitive.
- I have corrected all minor grammatical and punctuation-related errors.

Second Edit:

- I have rearranged my paper in order to clarify and consolidate my argument.
- As a result of rearranging and reorganizing, I have shifted the focus of my thesis as well as my concluding remarks.
- I have (hopefully) successfully cited my sources in APA style.

I look forward to your comments on the new version of this paper.

Sincerely,

Isabella M. Vakkur

Isabella Vakkur

April 16, 2018

Urban Education and Organizing

Professor Santoro

Putting the People First:

Exploring Accurate Advocacy for the People's Voices in Educational Organizing

In beginning the process of organizing, both educational and non-educational organizations must first identify issues they consider to be relevant and pressing. Based on these problems, they must then establish common goals, which in itself can be a very challenging processes. Whether or not these steps are done successfully, the next step of expanding the movement and amplifying its message is also a main challenge. In this step, without effective communication, the main mission or goals of an organization can be lost, making it difficult for leaders to spread an authentic representation of the organization in order to develop their movement. I will explore the ways in which organizations can set themselves up to be successful -- through these three steps, as well as in the establishment and selection of their leadership, the empowerment of the masses, and the critical communication pathway between these two groups within the organization.

The challenge of expanding and amplifying a movement's message arises due to the conflicting views of how one should go about organizing, which often stem from difference in

leadership preference. For example, former President of the United States, Barack Obama, argues that, "... a viable organization can only be achieved if a broadly based indigenous leadership -- and not one or two charismatic leaders -- can knit together the diverse interests of their local institutions" (Obama 2012, 29). Obama emphasizes the importance of a larger group of leaders as opposed to individuals, as well as the significance of the members of the leadership team being local community members, rather than outsiders. Ella Baker, a prominent African-American civil rights activist from the 1930s, held a similar view. She explained, "I have always felt it was a handicap for oppressed people to depend so largely on a leader, because unfortunately in our culture, the charismatic leader usually becomes a leader because he has found a spot in the public limelight. It usually means that the media made him, and the media may undo him" (Payne 1989, 351). In this quote, Baker highlights the fragility of the "charismatic leader" similar to the one Obama described, which draws attention to the importance of a leadership team rather than an individual, as multiple people would be more resistant to change or challenges (such as being "undone" by the media). In order for a movement, organization, or change to be lasting and impactful, it must be resilient and stronger than just a few leaders.

Beyond the distinction in leadership, Baker also stresses the importance of independence and power of the people within the organization. She argues to "[organize] people to be self-sufficient rather than to be dependent upon the charismatic leader ... People have to be made to understand that they cannot look for salvation anywhere but to themselves" (Payne 1989, 893). Baker understands that in order to effectively organize masses of people, and particularly

to keep the organization running and self-sustaining, it is the *people* who must feel empowered to identify problems, generate solutions, and put them into place. Without this vital empowerment, the organization will not be able to survive the many obstacles it must overcome in order to achieve its goals. Baker argues that an organization needs to be able to survive without the “charismatic leaders”. She is not alone in this opinion. Obama also explains, “the problems facing inner-city communities do not result from a lack of effective solutions, but from a lack of power to implement these solutions” (Obama 2012, 29). Thus, according to both Baker and Obama, if the people within an organization feel empowered, the organization should be successful in achieving its goals, with or without the leaders. As Ella Baker said, “strong people don’t need strong leaders” (Payne 1989, 893). Both Baker and Obama recognize the necessity of group empowerment, as well as the fact that it builds a significantly stronger foundation upon which organizations can build, helping improve its vitality and effectiveness.

Group empowerment can be achieved through effective education. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher, explains the role of education in organizing as, “development of sensibility, of the notion of risk, of confronting some tensions that you have to have in the process of mobilizing or organizing” (Horton and Freire 1990, 117). If all group members are educated on these aspects outlined by Freire, they will have a greater understanding and appreciation of the process of organizing. In achieving this, they will be more able to self-advocate and express their own concerns or ideas to the leadership team. This effective communication between group members and the leadership team will allow the leadership team to broadcast an accurate and authentic version of what the people in the organization want or

need. The collective education of the group enables them to self-advocate and fosters a more open channel of communication between the group members and leadership, as the group would better understand the leaders' roles as well as the steps necessary for organizing. With this gained understanding and knowledge, the group members would realize what changes are possible, allowing them to modify and shape their action plan to create feasible solutions that will ameliorate or solve the issues they identified. In this process, education and organization overlap greatly and one is not successful without the other. When the entire organization is educated, communicative, and aware, that is when it is able to function smoothly, guided by shared goals and solutions.

Education and organization share fundamental common threads, such as the necessity of effective communication and the emphasis on the importance of ideas. However, the approach and ideologies which drive educators and organizers to communicate and share ideas are very different. Myles Horton, an American educator, explains that educators aim to provide comprehensive information for people to make their own decisions. In exploring the difference between education and organizing, Horton and Freire discuss the opinions of Saul Alinsky, an American community organizer. Alinsky was often critiqued for arguing that the outside organizers are the experts who should assess issues within communities and suggest solutions, rather than treating the community members as experts and advocating for their own concerns or ideas. Freire explains, "Saul says that organizing educates. I said that education makes possible organization, but there's a different interest, different emphasis" (Horton and Freire 1990, 115). Freire later expands upon this difference in interest and emphasis, noting, "if there's a choice,

we'd sacrifice the goal of the organization for helping the people grow, because we think in the long run it's a bigger contribution" (Horton and Freire 1990, 116). Here Freire outlines what he believes to be the key difference between education and organization -- that while both can serve similar functions and it is often difficult to have one without the other, at the end of the day educators prioritize individual and group growth over the goal of the organization.

Education is the key to effective organizing, as it is necessary for an empowered group. Once the group of individuals within the organization are educated and empowered, they are able to efficiently communicate their identified problems and established goals to their leaders. As Baker and Obama noted, the selection of these leaders -- as well as the number of leaders and their roles within the organization -- affects the longevity of the organization and its effectiveness. When an organization has a larger leadership team comprised of local community members, an organization can be viable. With the open and functional communication pathway between the leaders and the group, the leaders are then able to accurately advocate for and broadcast the message of the group. Without carefully selected leaders, empowered and educated individuals, and open communication, effective community organizing is simply not possible.

Works Cited:

Horton, Myles & Freire, Paulo. (1990). *We Make the Road by Walking* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press).

Obama, B. (2012). “Why Organize? Promise and Problems in the Inner City” in *Community Organizing for Health and Welfare*, (New Brunswick,: Rutgers University Press).

Payne, C. (1989). Ella Baker and Models of Social Change. *Signs*, 14(4), 885-899. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press).