

# Union Education for Workplace Diversity: a Case Study

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# ABSTRACT

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Canada's workplaces do not reflect the population's cultural diversity. Realizing this, a growing number of employers resort to remedial measures and diversity-sensitive policies. In Quebec, where nearly 45% of all workers are unionized, what roles do—and should—unions play in workplace diversity and, more precisely, in workplace diversification? How do unions promote more equal access to employment, considering that workplace diversity depends on it?

This case study explores the experiences of diversity training developers and facilitators in a labour union organisation. It also examines the role of union education in promoting workplace diversity and countering hiring discrimination against visible minorities.

Data presented are pulled from documents, interviews with diversity programme developers and facilitators, and observation of the first-ever diversity training session organised by the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ), Quebec's largest union federation. This research highlights the complexities associated with union-organised diversity training sessions. It underscores: (a) the need to measure outcomes and stop training blindly; (b) the need to leverage organisational capacity to include diversity training in long-term planning; (c) the difficulties of dealing with sensitive material and (d) the need to return to the legal definition of visible minorities.

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# INTRODUCTION

## Overview

Some well-known social researchers have shown that diversity in the workplace does not reflect Canada's social fabric. A number of studies, both quantitative and qualitative, have demonstrated that such a lack of diversity is the result of unequal access to employment. This inequality still persists for reasons related to objective criteria such as skills deficit or inadequate training, of course, but also for reasons that have little to do with an individual's incompatible credentials and more to do with systematic discriminatory hiring behaviour targeting some job-seekers (Eid et al., 2012; Hume, 2008; Margery, 1991). Many believe that Quebec is doing far worse in this area than other Canadian provinces, based on official unemployment rates, one of the very few measurements giving the magnitude of this phenomenon. According to Statistics Canada's 2006 Census, while the unemployment rate was at 6.9% for the overall active population, it rose to 13.4% among Blacks and hit 18.1% among Arabs—three times higher—for the Montreal Metropolitan Area. It has also been demonstrated that the education level of Black and Arab job-seekers was higher than that of the overall active population.

This situation, while being increasingly recognized as problematic, continues to be diminished by a dominant rhetoric that extols meritocratic ideals of tolerance, openness and justice for all—all who deserve it (Eid et al., 2012). Nonetheless, the need to raise awareness of the issue has prompted some organisations, including public bodies, to adopt various measures to promote diversity and equal opportunity. Quebec's



ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles (MICC) has released a five-year action plan as part of its Policy to Promote Participation of All in Quebec's Development. The government's intentions are clearly stated in its guiding principles:

*Equal opportunities and the fight against racism and discrimination require a comprehensive approach that covers education and awareness, prevention, redress of injury to rights, the mobilization of institutions and diversity management, support for victims, and measures to suppress racist violence.*

(Québec (Province). Direction des politiques et programmes d'intégration, 2008, p. 3)

A year later, Quebec's Human Rights Commission held a symposium on discrimination-free access to employment, which was the point of departure for this research. This major event on professional integration brought together delegates from all sectors, including union organisations. Academia, community-based organisations and private-sector businesses all shared their experience and visions of the issue through the voices of the panelists. Unions were surprisingly not among the subject matter experts. Worse, they were described by some as obstacles hampering the application of diversity management policies or as a nuisance voluntarily kept out of diversity management efforts. This was confirmed by a union representative at the symposium who stood up and publicly deplored the fact that unions were light-years away from initiatives to reduce hiring discrimination and promote diversity. I left the symposium puzzled by what I had heard. I could hardly believe that such major social contributors were really part of the problem, rather than the solution. Unions in Quebec are not negligible movements.

It has been documented that unionization rates have been decreasing steadily in all OECD countries over the last two decades of the twentieth century, except in Canada. This is partly because union membership is automatic and compulsory for all workers freshly hired in many Canadian organisations, including the public service. In Quebec alone, nearly 45% of all workers are unionized, the highest in Canada (Collombat et al., 2009), compared to the Canada-wide average of 33% (“Canadian Labour Congress,” n.d.), and the USA average of 12.4% (“U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics,” n.d.). The relative omnipresence of Quebec unions makes it impossible to avoid them when addressing issues of workplace diversity. How can the knowledge they produce not be of use in this context?

Many believe that unions produce a form of knowledge that allows individuals to unmask hegemonic power relations, question assumptions and recognize contradictions within a given structure, including union movements themselves. Unions play a key role in raising awareness and flagging commonly accepted constructs that keep alternatives, such as remedial action against hiring discrimination, in a blind spot of our collective consciousness. It is a type of critical knowledge that transforms, emancipates and drives to action for change. This is why union education is indispensable.

The essential role played by union education in Canada has been amply investigated by numerous scholars, including prominent figures like D’Arcy Martin, Peter Sawchuk and Jeffery Taylor, academics with one foot in research and the other in activism. According to them, union education “attracts more participants than does any other form of non-vocational adult education in developed countries and is one of the most important forms of traditional adult education available to working people”

(Spencer & Taylor, 2006, p. 208). If “theory and evidence suggest that unions have both the desire to take action against hiring discrimination and the power to do so” (Harcourt, M., Lam, H., & Harcourt, S.; 2005, p. 365) in other countries such as Australia, what is the situation here in Quebec when it comes to diversity-related issues such as hiring discrimination?

## **Rationale for the Study and Research Questions**

This qualitative study examines the role of union education in countering hiring discrimination and promoting workplace diversity. It will walk us through the development of the first-ever diversity training session to be put together by the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ), Quebec’s largest union organisation, representing over 600,000 workers. The main purpose of this study is to help fill the identified knowledge gap and, most importantly, to further our understanding as educators of issues involving union education and workplace diversity.

The main research question this inquiry poses is: **“What can be observed and inferred from the experiences of diversity training developers and facilitators in a labour union organisation?”**

The following sub-questions guided data collection to examine the main question:

1. What can be learned from documents, texts, non-educational activities or artefacts that have been produced by a union organisation on issues of diversity?
2. How does a union body organise educational activities on issues of diversity?
3. What organisational factors impact the outcome of such educational activities?

Chapter Two will present a review of the body of the literature to which this study hopes to make a contribution. Chapter Three presents the methodology of this research. Chapter Four will be devoted to presenting research data, and Chapter Five to the findings followed by concluding thoughts.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

As explained in the Introduction, Canadian workplaces do not reflect the cultural diversity of the country's population, partly because of unequal access to employment that penalises visible minority job seekers in particular. Such unfair treatment is, in a large proportion, attributed to hiring discrimination. This latter element is of central importance to this study because it is more than an issue that is simply related to diversity. It is a phenomenon that compromises workplace diversity, hence the prominence it receives in the following Literature Review. Another reason for this focus has to do with the lack of scientific literature on the topic.

Publications on workplace diversity and diversity training, either by unions, employers, or government bodies, are undoubtedly prolific here and abroad, but the literature reveals nearly no studies connecting union education, hiring discrimination and visible minorities. Research efforts do target one or two of these three topics, but practically never all three at once. For example, a search in major databases with keywords "union education", "hiring discrimination" and "visible minorities" entered simultaneously provided absolutely no results.<sup>1</sup> Quasi-synonyms such as "labor education", "labour education" did no better. To find relevant data, searches had to be performed on each topic separately or in pairs. Studies found focused on:

- 1) hiring discrimination against visible minorities, without looking at the role of unions or union education;

- 2) the role of unions in reducing hiring discrimination, without looking at possible relevant union-led educational activities;
- 3) the role of unions in reducing discrimination against visible minorities in the workplace, without looking at discriminatory hiring practices;
- 4) the role of educational activities in reducing hiring discrimination outside unionized settings.

The following literature review will explore all three topics in the following order: visible minorities, hiring discrimination and union education.

## **Visible Minorities**

The Canadian Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as “persons, other than aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour” (*Employment Equity Act*, n.d., Interpretation section). Simple and clear, at first glance. Québec’s Act Respecting an Equal Access to Employment to Public Bodies doesn’t explain the term any further, leaving it to the interpretation provided by the Federal act. According to the 2006 Canadian census, visible minorities made up around 16.2 % (*Statistics Canada*, n. d.) of the general population. Their number has grown steadily over the last 25 years and it is estimated that by 2017, one in every five people in Canada will be a member of a visible minority (“The Daily, Tuesday, March 22, 2005. Study: Canada’s visible minority population in 2017,” n.d.). Some even predict a “massive demographic change” (Friesen, 2010, p. A1) by 2031, while others consider such demographic evolution to be “slow, gradual, and largely inconsequential” (Friesen, 2010, p. A1).

Synnott and Howes (1996) traced the introduction of the concept of visible minority back to the 1970s. It was meant to replace terms like *non-whites* and *coloureds* considered pejorative, and so the purpose was to put the emphasis on the “common problems faced by all visible minorities, namely, white racism and the colour prejudices of the majority” (Synnott & Howes, 1996, p. 137). The concept rapidly spread and gained legal legitimacy by making its way into Canadian legislation documents such as the Employment Equity Act and the Multiculturalism Act, for example. However, the constitutional enshrinement of such a controversial concept let loose a mass of voracious critics who questioned, rejected or, in some cases, vilified it.

In the eyes of the authors cited above, the very concept of visible minorities is flawed because (a) there is a discrepancy between the concept and “the social reality it is supposed to designate”; (b) it was “not well formulated in the first place”; (c) it compromises the legislation using it, which is then seen as further exacerbating “differences by ‘racializing’ divisions” (Synnott & Howes, 1996, p. 138). These divisions are derived from social class and cultural beliefs rather than skin colour or visibility.

Others like Pendakur (2005) see the State-sanctioned definition of visible minorities as clunky and the term contentious, because, in attempting to address nonwhiteness, the term’s two components, i.e. *visible* and *minorities*, are misleading: the first one expresses a difference in skin complexion and the second, “a numerical smallness or weakness in power relations” (Pendakur et al., 2005, p. 2). And to the author, nothing is less certain than this statement when looking at the demographic evolution of Canada. The social construction of what is visible relies on our sense of differentness, which shifts over time and place to the point of making certain ethnic

groups less visible or even invisible. For example, in 1951, census codes categorized respondents by English, Irish, Scottish, etc., minority ethnicity. These classifications no longer shape our understanding of what constitutes a minority today, at least not in urban areas, home to most minorities. In such a context, they are not only invisible but in some cases constitute numeric majorities: 60% of the City of Vancouver is comprised of ethnic minorities; in Toronto, it is more than half (“Almost half the people in Toronto region are visible minorities: new census data,” 2008), compared to 16.5% in Montreal (“Statistics Canada,” n.d.). Synnott and Howes push it further by underscoring the absurdity and the narrowness of the concept, even to members of visible minorities themselves: “Should we not . . . have categories by shade? To have, for example, ‘visible minorities’, ‘more visible minorities’ and ‘still more visible minorities’” (Synnott & Howes, 1996, p. 142). The concept, they assert, is far too simplistic compared to the individuals it claims to categorize. Both Pendakur and Synnott & Howes argue that this highly polarized official definition cuts through the shades of grey, splitting them on either side of an irrelevant demarcation line. And things get even greyer as we go forward.

With the increase of Canadians identifying themselves with more than one origin, the concept of visible minorities loses more of its pertinence, and therefore needs to be updated. To address the many nuances flattened out by an operational categorisation, some researchers had to fine tune.

Tafarodi et al. (2002) talk about *bicultural visible minorities* and their *compensatory conformity* in reference to the dual cultural identities that some individuals possess and more importantly, the way they maneuver between these identities. The authors explain that their desire to fit in the majority group is sometimes compromised by



physical ethnifying obstacles to the point where they compensate by adopting an attitude that conforms to the majority's expectations, and they do so in proportion to the distinguishing traits that make them stand out. Others stress the country of origin when the context requires it and talk about *Canadian-born visible minorities* (Hou & Coutombe, 2010) as opposed to immigrant visible minorities whose life experiences are often far apart. In Quebec, Eid et al. (2012) extrapolate by making a distinction between *racialised minorities* and *non-racialised minorities*. The authors of a recent study on hiring discrimination produced for the *Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse* explain that the heavily loaded term racialised minorities<sup>2</sup> was deliberately chosen over that of visible minorities to provide a meaning that runs deeper into history and power relations. The term refers to members of minorities who, directly or through their ancestors, come from formerly colonised societies or were marked by slavery. The concept of racialization, they continue, frames race as a social construct established by the majority group and imposed upon minorities. Such categorisation is symbolically violent because it deprives the categorised individuals of a culture historically constructed and assign them an unchanging essence from which stems all the social, cultural and personal traits that become an overarching principle explaining their collective reality. Sen would certainly agree when he talks about a violent unique choiceless identity subjugated by systems of classifications (Sen, 2007). But, is it plausible to think that some of the unchanging essence assigned to visible minorities is, to a certain extent, self-induced? Yes and no.

Pendakur et al. (2005) further ask if visible minorities “*feel* like minorities in a sense of weak players in a power relation” (p. 6). The answer, which is very personal,

depends on how people classify themselves, how they define their own identity. As Sen posits (2007), although there is an overarching way of categorizing human beings either by ethnicity or religion, individual identity—and, more accurately, identities—are plural by nature and intersect, such as class, gender, profession, language, etc. (Sen, 2007). All these facets within the same person condition personal aspirations and goals, including professional preferences, that inevitably affect job market outcomes. Goals, aspirations and professional preferences are also shaped by the “cultural norms associated with our ethnic identity” (Pendakur et al., 2005, p. 7), in other words, social expectations that individuals, including visible minorities, fulfil. This explains why some job categories attract certain people and not others. In some cases, systemic unemployment among a given portion of the active population does not necessarily amount to discrimination, but may indicate a lack of interest or disposition for a professional sector or a profession that is deemed unattractive by members from the same minority group. Nonetheless, Pendakur warns, to view visible minorities’ job market performances as the sole result of a *free choice* (Pendakur et al., 2005) would be to approach to whole issue from a false premise.

For instance, when comparing education and unemployment rates among the Black population in Montreal alone, it has been found that “Black persons with a graduate degree had higher unemployment rates than the average of school drop-outs” (Torczyner, Springer, & Montreal Consortium for Human Rights Advocacy Training, 2010, p. 34). According to this study, the data highlights the same disparity, regardless of the education category: the unemployment of Blacks, with or without graduate degrees, is higher than that of non-Blacks (10.9%).

But regardless of the nuances and differences in definitions or in methodological treatment, when it comes to job market performance, the body of research invariably comes to the conclusion that “visible minorities . . . fare worse in Canada’s labour market than do similarly aged and educated white counterparts” (Pendakur et al., 2005, p. 4). As mentioned above, hiring discrimination is partly responsible for this.

## **Hiring Discrimination**

“No one may practise discrimination in respect of the hiring, apprenticeship, duration of the probationary period, vocational training, promotion, transfer, displacement, laying-off, suspension, dismissal or conditions of employment of a person or in the establishment of categories or classes of employment.”

Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms – Quebec, Chapter I.1, Article 16

For many, discrimination, including hiring discrimination, is by essence a loose concept, because it refers to a highly complex phenomenon in a social context with no “comprehensive theory of equality” (Hunter, 1992, p. iii) and “lack of uniform definition” (Tobler, 2005, p. 41). Worse, according to Hunter again, countries like the United States and Canada have adopted anti-discriminatory laws so vague that “relevant tribunals and courts are left with considerable scope to arrive at their own understandings of discrimination” (Hunter, 1992, p. 17). I will therefore start by exploring various definitions of the term discrimination for the purpose of this discussion.

In general terms, discrimination bears three conventional meanings. It may refer to “the process by which two stimuli differing in some aspect are responded to differently”, “the quality or power of finely distinguishing” or a “prejudice or prejudiced outlook, action or treatment” (“Merriam-Webster Dictionary,” n.d.). Of course, the latter

is the one referred to in the citation from the Charter and the meaning of interest here. It is also the meaning from which finer definitions, forms of discrimination, stem. By forms, I refer to the various grounds attached to the concept of discrimination, as defined in the Canadian Human Rights Act: gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc. For example, the United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination defines racial discrimination as a:

distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life. (United Nations. General Assembly, 1966, part I, article 1, para. 1)

This wide-ranging definition is meant to offer guidelines to national legislations. Its universal quality does not permit it to go into much further detail. It focuses on *what* is discrimination, with terms like distinction, exclusion, or restriction, in other words characteristics. It also focuses on the effects of such treatment, the inability of a person to fully exercise his or her rights, and, lastly, it delineates the various contexts in which these rights are to be respected. It leaves aside, for instance, *how* racial discrimination occurs, and on that issue, one needs to dig further into the fields of human relations and sociology.

The literature of these two fields seems to suggest a consensus on how discrimination manifests itself in the workplace. A vast majority of authors consider discrimination, whether racial or not, to occur in three different ways: directly (direct discrimination), indirectly (indirect discrimination), or systemically (systemic discrimination). Both direct and indirect discrimination have gained legal recognition

since 1965 (Hunter, 1992) and have been part of contemporary pieces of legislation, such as the ones cited above, ever since. This explains why a keyword search with “indirect discrimination” yields twice as many results than “systemic discrimination.” Systemic discrimination, as I will later discuss, has not yet gained such recognition or such focus.

For Craig (2007), direct discrimination occurs when “a person is treated less favorably than another is, has been or would be in a comparable situation” (p. 30). Indirect discrimination occurs when “an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice would put persons at a particular disadvantage compared with other persons” (p. 30), unless these provisions, criteria or practices are “objectively justified by a legitimate aim and the means for achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary” (p. 30). For Tobler (2005), who devoted a whole book to the subject matter, direct discrimination “is explicitly or obviously based on a prohibited ground”(p. 56). Indirect discrimination, as she puts it, “was intended to deal with seemingly neutral differentiation criteria with a disproportionate impact of effect upon a group (or object) that is protected by an explicit prohibition of discrimination” (p. 57). Tobler’s take in these last two definitions brings in a legal frame, as it incorporates the notion of grounds and protected groups. Nowadays, direct or indirect forms of discrimination in the workplace are rarely promoted by “formal policies blatantly designed” (Craig, 2007, p. 94), simply because they are easily proven by complaint-based approaches backed up by legal provisions. Evidence of indirect discrimination is even easier to claim because this form of discrimination “is not concerned with an employer’s intentions or motives for applying a particular policy, but only with the outcome of its application” (Hunter, 1992, p. 192). The challenge lies in

systemic discrimination, more of an elastic concept (Craig, 2007) than the other forms I've just discussed.

Carol Agoos (2002, 2004), a Canadian scholar, produced a recent body of work that focused on providing quantitative and qualitative evidence of systemic discrimination in the workplace. She defines the concept of systemic discrimination as “patterns of behaviour that are part of the social and administrative structures of the workplace” (Carol Agoos, 2004, p. 2). This pervasive form of discrimination, she argues, creates or maintains a status quo in favour of those who identify themselves to, or who are being identified to, a privileged group on the basis of gender, race, ethnic background, culture, religion, ability or combinations of these categories (Agoos, 2004), to the detriment of individuals belonging to disadvantage groups within organisations. Craig (2007) refers to them as subordinate groups, clearly outlining the power imbalance between the two. Systemic discrimination explains, for example, why some job applications are selected while some others are systematically and invariably tossed in the recycling bin with no official or clear rule requiring such behaviour. The volatile nature of systemic discrimination neutralizes diffuses any possible factual piece of evidence and delete it into oblivion to the point where members of the dominant group are not convinced of its occurrence (Lee-Gosselin, 2009). Variables are very hard to grasp and manipulate to prove the occurrence of such systemic discrimination, also referred to as institutional discrimination. To do so, some researchers had to observe indirect indicators and used what Lee-Gosselin calls a three-dimensional framework comprising quantitative and qualitative variables: (a) Unemployment rate among various groups and position distribution within company structures (quantitative); (b) Employment systems, such as

operating procedures, policies and decision-making processes (quantitative); (c) Company culture, in other words, patterns of organizational behaviour, social interactions, norms, value sets and assumptions, including employers' reaction to concerns about discrimination (qualitative). Essentially, to analyse the phenomenon, Agocs endorsed the use of social science approaches, because they are "broad and strategic" as they "encompass numbers, systems and cultures to advance [a] case law" (Agocs, 2004, p. 7). Complaint-based approaches suitable to the analysis of direct or indirect discrimination, as mentioned above, serve no purpose in attempting to understand systemic discrimination. In Canada, only 2% (Agocs, 2002) of all discrimination complaints to the Canadian Human Rights Commission make their way to tribunals, which, in turn, almost never attribute the cause of such discrimination to the workplace environment.<sup>3</sup> These approaches are too limited in their ability to produce organisational change that will prevent discrimination from occurring in the future (Agocs, 2002). Craig, whose work has also been informed by Agocs, is just as convinced: complaint-based approaches are too individual-focused and too micro-levelled to be able to "address discrimination linked to administrative structures and organisational culture" (Craig, 2007, p. 95). For him, framing the concept of systemic discrimination requires a company-wide vision and approach (Craig, 2007).

To others like Eid (2012), the analysis of unemployment rates and distribution rates belong to *residual-base statistics* methods that tend to inflate systemic discrimination because:

- 1) they compare job performance between racialised minorities and non-racialised minorities, and then infer that statistical gaps are a result of systemic discrimination
- 2) they succeed somewhat poorly at identifying all the factors that are likely to affect the job performance of racialised minorities and, as a consequence, cannot isolate the variables truly related to systemic discrimination
- 3) they are based on the false premise that all job-seekers apply for jobs suited to their qualifications (Eid et al., 2012).

These dead spots make the residual-based statistics methods incomplete because some factors are left out and too flawed, because the conclusions to which they lead rely on loose inferences.

Residual-based statistics models, however, should not be completely discarded as they have generated scientific evidence on hiring discrimination, but in attempting to better isolate the causes of hiring discrimination, researchers resorted to the *correspondence testing method*, which some have dubbed real-world evidence (Rooth, 2007). According to Eid et al. (2012), who recently conducted research in Quebec using this method, testing was first used in Great Britain in the 1970s and later spread to other European countries, crossing over to the US in the 1980s and the 1990s. Eid et al. are among those who are convinced of its accuracy and its ability to pinpoint discriminatory occurrences in the hiring process. The methodology he used consisted of having one non-racialised candidate and another racialised candidate apply online for the same job a few moments apart. Both fake candidates used résumés that fit the job requirements equally. The only difference was their name: non-racialised candidates used name such as “Martin



Bélanger” and racialised candidates used names such as “Mohamed Nabil”, “Amadou Traoré” and “Carlos Salazar.” Candidate #1 applied using CV #1 half of the time and Candidate #2 did the same for half of the job posting targeted. Then, they swapped names on their respective CVs and applied for the other half of the job postings. The study confirms the occurrence of discriminatory hiring practices with a scope that varies depending on job fields, skill-level and sector (public, non-profit or private). Like all methods, limits are inevitable and the authors conceded that, due to a lack of resources, the model they used could not analyse discriminatory hiring on multiple grounds. A candidate may have been rejected for his/her age or gender for instance, and not for ethnicity-related reasons.

If unemployment rates, employment systems, and correspondence testing results are somewhat tangible variables in the unbalanced equation of systemic discrimination, company culture is the ultimate impalpable element. Because of its somewhat hidden and subtle character, company culture makes the diagnosis of systemic discrimination far more complex: a company’s cultural personality is deeply-rooted in its history, beliefs and attitudes, some of the most difficult attributes to change (Altaf, 2011). It is valued, celebrated, and shared to the point where it dilutes systemic discrimination, allowing it to go unnoticed and undetected, in other words, become normal. Gramsci’s foundational work on ideology and hegemony—or ideological hegemony—is of great help in understanding the “normalcy” of systemic discrimination and the process of its normalisation.

Gramsci’s beacon theory of ideological hegemony has gone beyond any previous Marxist theory (“Infed,” n.d.) to explain the social inertia of European populations after

World War I. Not only were these populations inert, they also accepted the ruling class and its ruling order. Such imposed balance, he found, was possible because those forming the privileged class were able to yield power by two means: coercion (through coercive structures such as the police, the military, political institutions, etc.) used as a last resort and, more importantly, hegemony. If ideology—a concept closely related to hegemony—can be defined as shared beliefs that legitimize the interests of dominant groups (Giddens & Sutton, 2009), hegemony, as Gramsci puts it, can be defined as *shared beliefs that legitimize the interests of dominant groups* and to which the dominated groups consent and accept as normal (“Infed,” n.d.). Hegemony then becomes an organizing principle that permeates all aspects of a given society, including belief and value systems, and maintains social power dynamics in favour of the privileged group. This principle goes even further and explains why unprivileged social groups are not only capable of accepting their disadvantaged position, but tacitly consent to perpetuating the privileges of the ruling class at their own expense. Carried over to a workplace environment, this concept of hegemony or ideological hegemony allows to unmask the mechanisms of systemic discrimination. It also helps explain, for instance, why human resource recruiters can penalize groups as women, Aboriginals and visible minorities by adopting subconscious behaviours: unfavourable attitudes towards applications regarded as being of lesser quality, putting perceptions of skills and profiles deemed unfit for the company at a disadvantage, or straight out ignorance of *some types* of résumés. Behaviours like these are instilled in an organisational culture that legitimizes the discriminatory interests of dominant groups. As Agocs (2002) contends, discrimination is perpetuated insofar as an employer fails to take the measures to improve a discriminatory environment, or fails

to support equity-oriented organisational change (Agocs, 2002). Systemic discrimination, alone, or in conjunction with the other variables, is capable of producing, contributing or promoting an “unjustifiable differential treatment, unjustifiable disproportionate impact or a hostile and poisonous work environment” (Craig, 2007, p. 116). For some, it even works as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Lee-Gosselin, 2009) or a vicious circle. Privileged groups may perceive the absence of members of disadvantaged groups as hard-core proof that visible minority applicants are not interested, their profiles are of little interest to organisations, or they are simply not part of relevant job-seeker pools. People are generally convinced that job opportunities are based on individual merit solely and that only deserving applicants naturally get selected (Brief, 2008; Brief et al., 2000). This reduces the chances of job postings reaching applicants outside traditional circles, which reinforces exclusion. In such context, one can understand that the slightest organizational culture shift to alter dynamics such as this requires great effort, an effort that goes far beyond the flashy equal-opportunity pledge employers have been very fond of showing off over the last few decades—“vacuous expressions of goodwill” (Bissoondath, 1994, p. 6).

Most authors understand this. Overcoming systemic discrimination, for Agocs (2002), needs to go through a process she describes as follows:

- 1) Workforce census: absence or significant under-representation of individuals from disadvantaged groups such as visible minorities, Aboriginals, etc.
- 2) Employment system review: analysis of the administrative framework (standard operating procedures, HR procedures, etc.)

- 3) Action plan carried out by management (organisational response) that holds all individuals accountable for progress towards goals, especially with measures to attract, retain and develop members of underrepresented groups (Agocs, 2002).

The active involvement and commitment of credible and legitimate (Lee-Gosselin, 2009) senior managers in all three areas across the organisation is indispensable. The reasons for this have been identified by Lee-Gosselin (2009), a scholar whose experience in the field of employment equity spans decades:

- 1) People in management positions have a practical first-hand knowledge of organizational practices, including those that may affect targeted groups. They are in better positions to help unearth systemic discrimination should it occur.
- 2) Applying measures such as those mentioned above will require human, budgetary and material resources to document, analyse, test, validate, educate, find alternatives and prove the usefulness and effectiveness (Lee-Gosselin, 2009) of whatever measures are suggested. The decision to allocate resources rests in the hands of executives whose responsibility it is to juggle budgets and set priorities/strategies.
- 3) Managers are in positions to act as persuasive driving forces within organizations. As the author puts it, they are in positions to convince members of the dominant groups that systemic discrimination exists: without the understanding that there is a problem to fix, measures will have little or no effect. Managers are in a position to help shoulder the efforts needed to produce change.

These efforts can be part of what are known as affirmative action programmes, equal-access programmes, employment equity plans, and so forth. These remedial measures all aim at preventing and curbing systemic discrimination without requiring the victims to go through a complaint- or litigation process themselves (Agocs, 2002). Many countries have rolled out policies and officially equipped their bureaucracies with such programmes, including Canada and the United States. In 2000, the province of Quebec passed its equal-access law,<sup>4</sup> (“National Assembly of Québec - Bill 143,” n.d.), targeting public organisations only.

Now, employment equity initiatives have had their fair share of criticism and negative publicity. The media abounds with examples of affirmative-action bashing or demeaning comments, and not necessarily from freshly laid-off workers and desperate job-seekers: “Employment equity is pernicious. It also does not work. Evidence from the U.S. makes it clear job quotas have not eliminated racism. If anything, they have heightened racial tension and hostility” (Martin, 1991, p. 2). Closer to home, the title of an article published in the Edmonton Journal says it all: “Affirmative reaction: ‘Angry white males’ are leading a revolt against preferential hiring policies” (Handelman, 1995, p. G.2). Also heard at the Canadian House of Commons before Parliament adopted the Employment Equity Act in 1995, from the mouth of British Columbia MP Chuck Strahl, also the Reform Party public service critic: “This encourages the victim mentality” (Jenkinson, 1995, para. 4). Some, like Grant Brown, a Lethbridge University lecturer specialised in employment equity, did not hesitate in calling it “unconstitutional” (Jenkinson, 1995, para. 16). Even best-selling authors like Bissoondath (1994) believe that ethnicity cannot serve as a ground of negative or positive discrimination, be it for

recognition, advancement, or opportunity. He compares ethnicity to walls that can be accepted by any given person or dismantled brick by brick. The sole permissible form of discrimination should be based on ability and knowledge. Giving victims an advantage over representatives of former torturers would allow the tortured to torture the torturer (Bissoondath, 1994). To the author, vengeance is socially deleterious, as one cannot let today's resentments to become tomorrow's upheaval. This is what we ought to avoid. Change comes through a slow process that grows "with experience from within" (Bissoondath, 1994, p. 187).

Nonetheless, if implemented realistically and effectively, Agocs asserts (2002), affirmative action programmes that are vigorously and continuously enforced by government authorities with mandatory targets bring about a substantial difference in results; the benefits, amply documented by a significant body of research, are economic and social (Brief, 2008). The data back it up in several countries, starting here in Canada, according to the author, who cites research carried out by Leck and Saunders in 1992. This research shows that organisations with the most formal and well designed programmes (Agocs, 2002) were the ones that made the most progress in improving the representation of women and visible minorities. Most authors believe that employment equity programmes cannot be left to organisations' willpower alone. They must be mandatory and legally binding, but under certain conditions. As Lee-Gosselin (2009) argues, they need to be enforced when there is documented evidence of a gap between the situation affecting visible minorities—in the organisation and on the job market—and the situation of individuals of the majority group with comparable characteristics. For her, successful implementation of an employment equity programme has to be supported by

four elements: (a) Moral values: it must give the assurance that all are treated fairly and equally; (b) Strategy: it allows employers to position themselves as leading sought-after organisations on the job market and to increase the pool of potential candidates; (c) Business: such programmes can be mandatory for companies doing business with government bodies as part of eligibility criteria; (d) Risk management: avoid the risk of being accused or sued by employees claiming discrimination.

All this helps provide the legitimacy and usefulness that such programmes need in order to gain the organisational support they require to be first, viable and second, efficient, especially for bringing about behavioural change. Because, after all, Dowd (2009) reminds us, employment equity programmes were essentially meant to correct a systemically discriminatory situation that has been disadvantaging groups like visible minorities. They are corrective measures that also aim at countering the under-representation of targeted groups over a determined period of time. Once representation is deemed balanced for a given job category, the programme no longer needs to be applied. He further adds that not only should management be actively involved in the implementation, but unions have to jump on board as well.

## **Union Education**

In Canada, where “most Canadians with an interest in adult learning don’t know much about [union] education, don’t care about it or ignore it” (Taylor, 2001, p 1), the work of Spencer and Taylor (2006) is foundational. Before the alleged lack of interest or plain indifference comes a scarcity of historical data on union education in our country: “labour historians have ignored education, while educational historians have ignored

labour-related learning” (Taylor, 2001, p. 2), a mutual blindness that the author’s work has attempted to correct. To both Spencer and Taylor, union education, as indicated in the introduction, is a form of education that “attracts more participants than does any other form of non-vocational adult education in developed countries and is one of the most important forms of traditional non-formal adult education available to working people” (Spencer & Taylor, 2006, p. 208). And so the ignorance these two authors highlight is surprising.

The literature refers mainly to union-related learning instances using the terms *labour education* or *union education*—and to a lesser degree, *workers’ education* and *labour studies*. Often used interchangeably, labour education and union education, Taylor (2001) explains, do slightly differ semantically: union education could be understood as education programmes provided exclusively by and for union members (unions, federations, congresses), whereas labour education refers to post-secondary courses and programmes on labour provided to union members by institutions, not by the unions themselves. Nonetheless, union education, described as the social purpose of adult education, endeavours to prepare and train union members to: (a) play an active role in unions (by driving the necessary volunteer member base); (b) educate activists and members about union policies, changes in the union environment (new management techniques) or labour laws; (c) develop union consciousness, build common goals and share organizing and campaigning experiences (Grace, 2006).

Structured educational practices fall under what the literature describes as core labour education: tools courses (grievance training, shop-steward training, health and safety, etc.), issues courses (sexual harassment, racism, globalization, etc.), and labour



studies (union context: history, economics, politics, etc.). These categories are not rigid and overlap when necessary. Other types of labour education courses also comprise union-run literacy courses or second-language courses (English or French as a second language).

Aside from core labour education, unions also run residential programmes that fall under the issues course and labour studies categories. They are meant to provide union executives with the tools to develop the union movement and to influence the course of political, economic, and social issues. Learning is strongly based on a problem-solving experiential approach (constructivism) as courses are delivered through workshops, which leaves enough breathing space for each participant to share experience and knowledge and explore various solutions. Participants are encouraged to question their assumptions rather than reinforce their convictions (critical learning).

For example, in Quebec, the Collège FTQ-Fonds has been offering a residential program since 2000. Typically, union leaders stay together at the Collège for 10 days (family week-end visits are welcome) and return home with an assignment to complete within 10 days. These assignments require the participants to carry out research and draft a report, since the Collège produces its own research material. Themes are left for participants to choose. Upon completion of the Collège programme, participants are granted university-equivalent credits.

Union leaders who graduate from labour colleges are then expected to return to their locals and share their knowledge and experience with members of their union. This

is one of the methods unions use to rethink their actions, propel the movement, and help overcome their many structural challenges.

Most authors, here and abroad, who wrote about union education agree with the indispensable role of union-produced knowledge to stimulate and catalyze critical awareness, raise consciousness around issues and bring about action. Fenwick (2008) and Sawchuk (2006) refer to *emancipatory learning* or learning as a project of liberation (Mojab, 2006)—not just from an organizational/political standpoint but also at an individual level. The literature abounds in ways of conceptualizing the types of knowledge unions ought to produce: critical knowledge, counter-knowledge, contrasting knowledge, alternative knowledge, resistance knowledge, emancipatory knowledge, transformative knowledge, and strategic knowledge. They all bring forth the purposeful bias of union education and starkly highlight the non-neutral attribute of knowledge, which is always located in time and space and emerges to address problems that are historically produced and conditioned (Novelli and Ferus-Comelo, 2009). What follows are a few perspectives on the focus and purpose of union education.

## The Focus and Purpose of Union Education: A Walk Through Various Perspectives

According to Spencer and Taylor (2006), the focus of union education is not so much on the individual (the corporate target) but on the community (union community), not so much on individual credentials, but on workplace and social change. It is no coincidence that both authors promote education for social change as they are both attached to Athabasca University (AU), an open university dedicated to removing

education barriers (*Athabasca University Work and Community Studies*, n.d.) by providing accessibility, affordability, flexibility and the possibility of challenge for credits through Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). AU proposes a humanistic focus to adult learning. Both scholars are active in AU's Centre for Work and Community Studies and Taylor coordinates the Labour Studies Program.

Union workers, they assert, learn on the job (informal learning or incidental learning). They learn more during negotiations, grievances, and disputes, but also from informal discussions, union publications and communications, meetings, conferences and conventions (socio-cultural approach to learning<sup>5</sup>). Union shop stewards, representatives, and leaders also learn through union educational programmes such as residential programmes (non-formal learning). They are meant to provide union leaders with the tools to think critically about the union movement and find solutions that ensure its vitality. Those leaders are then to share their knowledge with other members.

Spencer and Taylor (2006) suggest that labour education programmes should adopt, as much as possible, a popular education approach or a Freirian approach, which refers to *experiential learning* as opposed to *banking education*. I will later discuss the Freirian legacy.

For Tara Fenwick, who wrote about the learning of women working in the garment factories (Fenwick, 2008), union education is essential to generate critical learning. Fenwick's research report suggested that education's role, in a workplace with perhaps some of the worst working conditions in the country, reaches even beyond critical learning to tap into the emancipatory potential of each worker. She explains quite

eloquently that the labour market promotes conventional understandings of skills. These competences are attributed an economic value based on “perceptions of production priorities, cultural notions of useful work, and global market of supply and demand” (p. 113). Union education provides the means to challenge and fight these very understandings, and further helps build solidarity and sociality among workers. Sociality can be envisaged as a “site for solidaristic interconnections, identities, and spaces for creativity” (p. 116). In her particular case, unions provided learning to help workers gain control over work processes and better read their environment, in other words, grasp inequitable labour division, get a sense of workers’ rights and leverage opportunities to resist. Unions provided the capacity to question assumptions and unmask power relations. Fenwick views learning as a transformation and even an emancipation agent as framed by a socio-cultural conceptualization: learning is integrated into everyday practice and social relations. Others, like Peter Sawchuk (2006) have a like-minded view on various aspects of union education. Emancipatory learning, for instance, is one of them. So is artistic expression.

OISE’s Peter Sawchuk brings an unusual perspective to the discussion: art as an education tool intended for union members. Unlike many approaches in the field, his theoretical stance links artistic expression, and learning for the *left hand*, a loaded metaphor associated with passion, intuition, and art. The *right hand*, on the contrary, suggests rationality, order, and action. In his article, *Labor Education and Labor Art: The Hidden Potential of Knowing for the Left Hand*, Sawchuk (2006) argues that knowledge associated to the left hand fosters feelings of solidarity and passion for social justice, values not only broadly promoted by unions, but crucial to sustain unions with the drive

needed to keep members committed and involved. Art can expand union activism and contribute to efforts to “re-invigorate the imagination of labor researchers and practitioners” (p. 51). But how does art, largely ignored by labour movements for its lack of education value, achieve that exactly? Artistic expression and artefacts can produce an instantaneous *gut-level awareness* of complex social realities lacking in other means, or a host of feelings and experiences in a single stance of perception. Furthermore, artefacts surrounding us shape and mediate learning and trigger change by building knowledge for the left hand. This approach to learning belongs to the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), which stretches its horizons far beyond the classroom setting and takes into account all social dimensions. Sawchuk believes this theory to be one of the most powerful labour education theories, because it looks at learning not only as a mere cognitive process, but as a by-product and a currency. He also hopes that his contribution serves as a building block for research and application in the field. Such an approach contrasts with more traditional Marxist-inspired views of union education.

Scully-Russ (2006) suggests that the labour movement in the US needs to better organize workers in light of its recent restructuring: there have been major splits and mergers among US union centrals. In *Learning to Organize: US Unions, Work, and Learning* (2006), she further asserts that organizing workers represents a learning challenge that needs to be addressed in order to explore new forms of power. Like Fenwick, she believes critical learning and, moreover, critical dialogue, are essential tools to help union leaders fuel union engagement and reinvigorate the movement (Scully-Russ, 2006). She focuses on learning produced by vocational training. As it currently stands, vocational education only serves the individual in line with employers' needs, to

the point where it only provides workers with information so that the Taylorist production model works unquestioned. Workers increase their performance in accord with union leaders and management, who are then content. This tacit agreement between management and industrial unions resulted in joint educational programmes commonly referred to as negotiated vocational union education programmes, the predominant form of vocational training in the US. This educational structure is also perceived by union educators as building solidarity and union loyalty. Boosting production effectiveness is their sole objective. The problem with such vocational education, Scully-Russ argues, lies in the fact that it falls short when it comes to broadening learning perspectives, which is greatly needed by unions seeking to re-invent themselves. Union education ought to encourage a holistic approach that yields a more significant impetus for social change than a skills-oriented approach. Current understandings of solidarity are also problematic because they rely on a premise that hinders the critical thinking process. Solidarity and power are believed to arise out of density: more members, more solidarity, more power. The author suggests that power is generated by a collective consciousness that is learned and “the exercise of collective learning” (Scully-Russ, 2006, p. 531).

In Europe, Stuart and Wallis (2007), both with Leeds University Business School (UK), investigated partnership approaches to lifelong learning by comparing seven European countries. They explored the role of steel and metalwork unions in learning partnerships that can be broken down into three categories: the neo-corporatist approach (tripartite/multi-agency top-down structure that focuses on corporate interests), the micro-corporatist approach (follows a more flexible and proactive model in order to meet plant-specific needs), and the local trade union learning partnerships (bottom-top worker-

focused ad hoc structure that is reactive and seeking to equip displaced workers with transferable skills). It was found that partnerships, imbedded in European culture more than in individualistic North-America, proved to be more innovative when they originated from community involvement (local trade union learning partnerships). The neo-corporatist approach targets plant management, union workers, government bodies, education institutions, etc., and applies to long-term training strategies. These strategies often conflict with trade unions more interested in providing transferable skills to their workers (which is what the local trade union learning partnership offers). The latter model is referred to as the *inclusive model*, a broad-based skills model intended for all workers as opposed to the *skills-capture model* (Stuart & Wallis, 2007) which targets sector-specific skills. Both models are used by union education schemes. Stuart and Wallis also identified the conditions ensuring partnership success: participation of all stakeholders, benefits delivered to all stakeholders, and a pragmatic approach (share commitment to learning). A successful partnership gives unions the opportunity to increase their influence on workplace change and on innovation around learning.

Union education approaches, such as the ones mentioned above, often gravitate around what is known as critical pedagogy, “an extensive body of research” (“Henry Giroux: Figures in Critical Pedagogy - YouTube,” n.d.) fathered by Henry Giroux that emerged in the US the 1980s as a theoretical offshoot of Paolo Freire’s groundbreaking work. A theorist and educator, Giroux is “widely regarded as one of the leading figures in the area of critical pedagogy” (Mayo, 1998, p. 58). Critical pedagogy, along with its related concepts such as radical pedagogy or revolutionary pedagogy, is concerned with education for social transformation: “. . . radical pedagogical work proposes that

education is a form of political intervention in the world and is capable of creating the possibilities for social transformation” (Giroux & Giroux, 2001, p. xxvii). Teaching, Giroux continues, cannot be simplistically understood as a vacuous or sterile technical practice, but as an activity based on the assumption that learning actually transforms knowledge “as part of a more expansive struggle for individual rights and social justice” (Giroux & Giroux, 2001, p. xxvii). This understanding of adult education has provided union education with a number of conceptual tools of fundamental importance to the way its activities are carried out.

### The Legacy of Freirian Approaches

For Mayo, Paulo Freire’s work is grounded in “a critique of traditional educational methods” (Mayo, 1998, p. 58). In developing his radical pedagogy theory, Freire critiqued what he has dubbed the banking education (Freire, 2000), referring to the traditional process of learning where students are viewed as empty receptacles to be filled with knowledge narrated by a erudite teacher. As Freire explains, this knowledge acquisition process puts the teacher in the position of oppressor and the student in that of the oppressed. They mutually justify each other’s position by accepting that one is the opposite of the other: one filled with knowledge, and the other deprived and waiting to be gradually uplifted. The oppressive nature of banking education “is necrophilic . . . as it is nourished by the love of death, not life” (Freire, 2000, p. 77); it strips the learner of his creative power. To Freire, education should not be a practice of domination, but one of freedom. Learning should belong to a liberating education that is only possible through



conscientious cognition and problem-solving. This is how learners become critical thinkers.

Freirian approaches in education rest, by essence, upon the notion of utopianism: critical education, as Giroux reports, is always directive and grounded in the “assumption that human life is conditioned rather than determined” (Giroux & Giroux, 2001, p. xx). This core notion of utopianism has also provided a central premise to fight various forms of pessimism that afflicted widespread educational narratives in the 1980s, regardless of ideological allegiances. It is a central premise that refuses to accept that education spaces, such as schools, are inevitably condemned to a future that repeats the present (Giroux & Giroux, 2001), incapable of connecting learning to social change. They exist as mere moral and ethical vehicles at the service of the State, or even impose a “deference to authority” (Mayo, 1998, p. 59). Rather, utopianism highlights the possibility for educators to shift their thinking and challenge mainstream assumptions. Giroux talks about the politics of hope to which this notion is intricately tied; a notion that has nothing to do with a vague, distant, vaporous utopia. Hope, Mayo (1998) has reported, is also “the message conveyed throughout Freire’s writings” (p. 61). Several other voices go in the same direction: “. . . hope is a significant sociological category which lies at the heart of projects in critical theory and critical pedagogy. [It is] the space of possibility between 'reason' and 'faith', contemplation and action, ideology and utopia” (Amsler, 2007, abstract). Giroux further refers to concrete utopianism that provides an ethical frame in which to ground not only critique itself but also the possibility of social transformation in a context that is current and real. Building on utopianism, critical pedagogy unveils the

discrepancy between how society *is* and how it *might be*, then creates spaces of agency, or conditions that foster agency. It does so through *praxis*.

Union education is not foreign to Freire's concept of praxis. He defined it as being a process of action and reflection (Mayo, 1998) to transform reality and the world. Freire (1970) further insists: "The action of men without objectives, whether the objectives are right or wrong, mythical or demythologized, naive or critical, is not praxis . . ." (p. 5). And if a given action is not praxis, it then becomes an action with no sense of its inner process or aim. Process and aim are both indispensable and inseparable elements of praxis, otherwise reduced, as Mayo puts it, to mindless activism or empty theorising. The process of praxis, far from any form of prescriptive pedagogy, is inherently dialogical and dialectical. It is dialogical as it relies, Freire (1970) asserts, on a genuine critical dialogue between the educator and the learners, who are all (including the educator) encouraged to challenge their understanding of the world and unmask social contradictions through an act of knowing. It is dialectical because it consists of a back-and-forth movement between reflection and action. In making such a movement, the learners engage in an abstraction process that allows them to reflect on forms of orientations in the world, in other words, how they orient themselves in a given social context. The various perspectives learners then consider become the objects of their critique. It is in that sense that the resulting pedagogy is critical.

Another major legacy belonging to the Freirian approaches was to bring forth the political nature of all adult education activity (Mayo, 1998) and therefore the non-neutrality of knowledge production. Today, no adult education theorists would, in all decency, question what has become an accepted undeniable reality: knowledge, as

Novelli & Ferus-Cormelo (2010) framed it, is always located in time and space and emerges to address contextualised problems. The political nature of union education leaves no doubt, as in all forms of adult education purposefully seeking social transformation, that there is a “strong relationship that exists in all contexts between education and power” (Mayo, 1998, p. 74). In the literature, ways of conceptualizing the empowering attribute of adult education proliferate. Our very own Department of Education devotes a focused attention to the interrelation between education and power with such courses as Social Movements and Learning, Minorities Status and Learning, or Politics and Education, for example (Concordia’s website). Countless authors link education, critical consciousness, empowerment, and social change. Theories do as well, starting with critical pedagogy and critical education: “In exploring life, learning, work and their possibilities, critical adult education asserts that knowledge is socially and historically constructed” and that critical adult education offers a way to “think about human interests in relation to the culture-language-knowledge-power nexus” (Grace, 2006, p. 134). Once again, Giroux sums it up powerfully in the introduction he wrote in Freire’s book *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation*:

Education represents in Freire’s view both a struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations. . . . Education is the terrain where power and politics are given a fundamental expression, since it is where meaning, desire, language, and values engage and respond to the deeper beliefs about the very nature of what it means to be human, to dream, and to name and struggle for a particular future and way of life. (Freire, 1985, p. xiii)

Aside from the Freirian approaches previously discussed, union education has also tapped into other approaches, theories, and pedagogical methods that provided principles assembled into alternative models that all too naturally attracted the union

movement, according to Dechamps & Désilets (2004). Experiential learning is one of these salient theories.

## Experiential Learning

Building on the work of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin and Jean Piaget, David A. Kolb produced a theoretical body of work in the 1970s that he called Experiential Learning Theory (ETL) (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001). According to the authors, ETL provided a “holistic model of the learning process and a multilinear model of adult development” (p. 227). Both models reflect what is known about the way people learn, grow, and develop. This theory defines learning as a process through which knowledge emanates from the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984). This knowledge results from the dialectical relationship between two modes: *grasping experience* and *transforming experience*. From these two modes, Kolb devised a four-stage learning cycle:

- 1) Concrete Experience—CE (grasping experience mode)
- 2) Abstract Conceptualisation—AC (grasping experience mode)
- 3) Reflective Observation—RO (transforming experience mode)
- 4) Active Experimentation AE (transforming experience mode)

The following figure 1 illustrates this cycle.

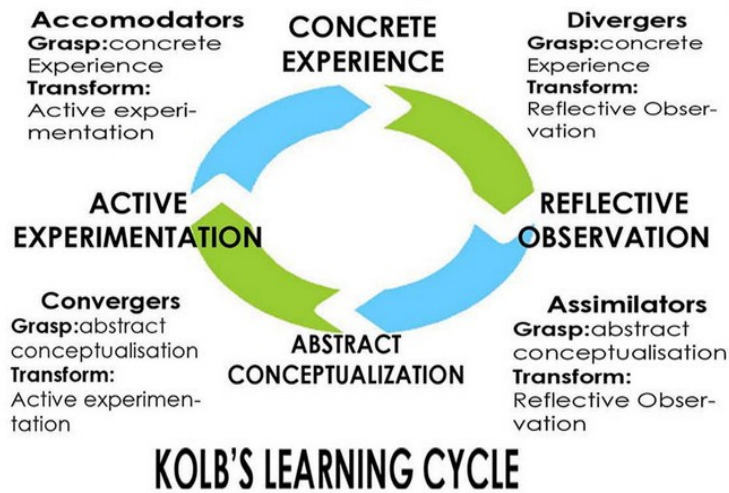


Figure 1.<sup>6</sup> Kolb's Learning Cycle

This Experience-Reflection-Conceptualisation-Test cycle also highlights the possible learning preferences or learning abilities chosen by the learner depending on the learning context. Each learner, the authors assert, grasps experience and transforms it in his own particular way. Some are better at conceptualising while others succeed best when they actively experiment. Each of us possesses what Kolb et al. (2001) called a *learning style*, which led Kolb to devise a Learning Style Inventory (LSI) in 1971. According to this inventory, without going in to great detail, learners are of four types:

- 1) Diverging: people whose main learning abilities are Concrete Experience and Reflective Observation
- 2) Assimilating: people whose main learning abilities are Abstract Conceptualisation and Reflective Observation
- 3) Converging: people whose main learning abilities are Abstract Conceptualisation and Active Experimentation
- 4) Accommodating: people whose main learning abilities are Concrete Experience and Active Experimentation

Together, ELT and LSI have since inspired numerous initiatives inside the education field and out. An example of this was the creation, in 1972, of the US-based Association for Experiential Education, an association that promotes and develops experiential education. The association defines experiential education as “a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities” (“Association for Experiential Education: A community of progressive educators and practitioners. - What is Experiential Education?,” n.d., para. 3). The association includes a Canadian Affiliation Group.

So far, I have discussed the purpose and the intended usefulness of union education by examining various approaches and linking them to a wider-encompassing body of theory, but how effective are union education issues courses really?

### Union Education and Diversity Training Effectiveness

As we have seen, union education researchers and practitioners agree on the ability of union education to create awareness and induce change in the workplace by using a critical approach to learning and experiential education methods. But, has such change been measured? Is union-led anti-discrimination training effective in changing behaviours? And how is effectiveness measured? Is it important to measure effectiveness?

The absence of data on union-led learning activities against hiring discrimination has already been stated at the beginning of this section; it is then no surprise that data on

the effectiveness of such educational activity is also lacking.<sup>7</sup> This forces us to broaden the search, first, to the effectiveness of union education in general, and, second, to the effectiveness of diversity training outside union settings, under which the issue of hiring discrimination falls.

For Nesbit (2003), a clear measure of the effectiveness of union education is what happens in practice afterwards. However, since most educational activities are very embryonic, results often take time to appear. To this, the author adds other factors: (a) a certain reluctance of unions to share the processes and pitfalls of organizational change, which suggests that we have to wait to witness more visible outcomes; (b) an insufficient recognition of the transformative power of labour education; (c) remarkably low participation in training activity intended for union staff members; (d) a state of crisis affecting the identity, direction and future of unions in Western countries. Indeed, some in the labour movement consider that they lack adequate means to evaluate the long-term impact of union education programmes in any depth (Burke, 2002). Because courses like diversity training are often given off-site, union educators are not the ones using the assessment indicators they are pushing for. In fact, Burke (2002) confesses that union educators often lack the human and material resources to maintaining the necessary follow-up infrastructure. The effectiveness of a given training session is measured through the eyes of union representatives once they have returned to their respective workplaces, and at their discretion.

As for diversity training in non-unionized settings, according to Kulik & Roberson (2008), the literature provides little research “assessing the effectiveness of diversity interventions or their results” (p. 267), but, at the same time, no empirical

evidence has proven the ineffectiveness of diversity training as a whole, as they put it. When looking at specific aspects of diversity training, though, some conclusions point to the contrary. Romanski-Livingston (1998) assessed the effectiveness of cultural diversity training specifically on Caucasian managers and found that results revealed that “behavioral outcomes indicated no significant change in managerial behaviors and that the training was not an effective intervention” (abstract) at the time of measurement.

Kulik & Roberson (2008) have suggested that diversity training is used in organisations to either disseminate information such as company-wide strategy, programmes and incentives, etc., or to create behavioural change. Diversity learning initiatives limited to information dissemination have proven to achieve their goals and are, in that strict sense, effective. But when diversity training aims to change behaviours, as is the case for 95% of diversity trainers (Kulik & Roberson, 2008), results depend on the focus of such diversity training, more specifically whether we are talking about skills training or awareness training. Skills training, according to the authors, refers to communication skills, conflict resolution skills, etc. Awareness training aims to change behaviours by increasing awareness of the “cognitive process that may lead to discrimination and differential treatment” (p. 282). They have concluded that skills training sessions achieve some of their goals. Results depend on the accuracy of the prior needs assessment, among other factors. Awareness training, according to Kulik & Robertson’s own literature review, tends not to be able to raise awareness among learners. When used to reduce discriminatory behaviours, its effectiveness is even more unlikely. But, they conclude, diversity training is most probably here to stay. It just needs



to be better grounded in theories such as the *self-efficacy theory* and *theory of planned behaviour*.

To sum up, the literature review highlighted the fact that the concept of visible minorities introduced in the 1970s in an effort to replace terms like coloureds, deemed derogatory, is still controversial. Its legal definition is also contested by a number of researchers who believe it is absurd, flattening, and ill adapted to the reality it tries to designate. Some are calling for more nuances and have recently adopted such terms as racialised minorities, a concept that brings a meaning that runs deeper into history and power relations and frames race as a social construct. Regardless of the divergences of definitions, when it comes to job market performance, researchers seem to speak with one voice: visible minority job-seekers are worse off in Canada's labour market than similarly aged and educated non-minority counterparts. This is largely explained by hiring discrimination, a concept also considered complex at the least, if not somewhat ambiguous.

Hiring discrimination is a phenomenon that falls under systemic discrimination, the most pervasive, intangible and undetectable form of discrimination, even to the very people perpetuating it. It informs workplace culture and maintains a status quo in favour of those identified to a privileged group, based on ethnic background or race, for example, to the detriment of individuals who belong to subordinate groups. Because of its volatile nature, systemic discrimination is very difficult to prove. Most researchers chose to infer its incidence by observing indirect indicators (unemployment rates, distribution rates, company culture). A few opted for the testing method, a type of study that is considered better suited to pinpoint hiring discrimination. Both methods are grounded in

the premise that hiring discrimination does exist; they simply differ on procedural characteristics and suggest that remedial measures are needed. Union education is believed to be helpful in advocating for corrective measures, creating awareness and promoting workplace diversity.

The nature, purpose, and potential of union education were explored in this literature review as well. Most authors in Canada and abroad who wrote about union education agree to its indispensable role in producing critical knowledge, raising consciousness, and bringing about action in the workplace. To achieve this, union education taps into Freirian approaches and principles such as critical education, utopianism, and praxis, as well as in experiential learning methods. However, the literature cannot confirm the effectiveness of union issues courses on diversity. At the same time, other studies conclude, no demonstration of the ineffectiveness of diversity training has ever been established either.

Let us now look at the experiences of diversity training developers and facilitators in putting together FTQ's first-ever diversity training session, starting with the methodology.

# METHODOLOGY

This section presents the methodology used in the context of my research, including data gathering, participant sampling, and analysis.

## Qualitative Approach and a Blend of Methods

Diversity, hiring discrimination and visible minorities are best understood in their natural environment (Anderson, 1998) through a qualitative research form of inquiry. Few education research theorists would disagree on the fact that, broadly, qualitative forms of inquiry focus on the *how* and *why* and leave to quantitative inquiries the *what*, *when* and *where*. According to Anderson (1998) again, qualitative research accepts that individuals know themselves best and are able to describe, interpret, and talk about their environment. If qualitative research accepts that individuals are in the best positions to know and interpret their environments, it also accepts that the researcher is the main data collection instrument, whose opinions, attitudes and viewpoints on a phenomenon are shaped and informed by his or her personal baggage. It focuses on providing an understanding of the political, social, psychological, economic, and cultural context.

Of course, all forms of inquiry have their limitations. Some scholars, like Feuer et al. (2002) and Slavin (2002), report that qualitative educational research has crucial defects: theories of questionable validity, anecdote-ridden evidence, little political relevance, absence of agreement on common metrics, etc. Whether proven or alleged, some feel that these flaws have fuelled a generalized lack of respect towards qualitative educational investigations in the broader field of social science, and consequently sent

education research back to the bench, waiting for funding. Others even point out that the extraordinary wealth of perspectives attributed to qualitative research is also its biggest drawback. Such richness of perceptions and views are methodological obstacles standing in the way of replicability, generalization, and consensus.

While being valid to some extent and not necessarily valuable, given the context of this particular research, these critics highlight the schism among educational—and social science—researchers over the intrinsic scientific attribute of research. Some believe qualitative inquiries to be, by their very essence, unworthy of science while others, such as myself, who disagree with that position, believe that no quantitative research is as well-suited to deal with causal processes and mechanisms requiring close attention to contextual factors (Feuer, Towne, & Shavelson, 2002). The question and research context drive the methods. And in this case, I have used three research methods: phenomenological research, ethnographic research, and the case study approach

## Phenomenological Research

According to Wagner (1983), phenomenology is a “system of interpretation that helps us perceive and conceive ourselves, our contacts and interchanges with others, and everything else in the realm of our experience” (p. 21). Phenomenological approaches focus on the specific nature of a phenomenon through the eyes of the actors in a situation (Wagner, 1983; Lester, 1999). They are interested in the investigation of experiences from the perspective of the individual, “bracketing taken-for-granted assumptions and usual ways of perceiving” (Lester, 1999, p. 1). They promote description rather than explanation, and suggest a perspective free of hypotheses and preconceptions. This is

absolutely salient to this research, as the goal was to provide an understanding of a specific phenomenon by describing its occurrence. The point was not about testing an existing theory, an impossible objective: no link previously existed between hiring discrimination, diversity (visible minorities) and union education, and no theory was ever developed on the relationship between these three elements.

Phenomenological research is compatible with ethnographic approaches and case studies (Lester, 1999) and puts the emphasis on personal subjectivity and interpretation, allowing insight into an individual's motivations and actions. This is in line with a research sampling made up of a limited number of participants. Indeed, there were three active participants whom I interviewed directly and thirteen indirect participants whom I observed. It is worth mentioning that one of the difficulties with which I had to come to terms was the enormous amount of data one collects through this approach. Interview recordings, fieldwork notes, and documents of all sorts significantly inflate the task of analyzing an impressive quantity of data. Analysis themes were chosen to organize data interpretation in the most effective way.

## Ethnographic Research

As mentioned above, this research focuses on acquiring a better understanding of a diversity training session in a union setting—and all of its “cultural” parameters. Ethnographic research is quite well suited to help capture that understanding, especially as I had access to a limited number of participants, but over a long period of time.

According to Van Maanen (1988), ethnographies are the accounts through which culture becomes visible, because no fieldworker is able to acknowledge culture's

presence by observing, but only by inferences, conjectures and “a great deal of faith” (p. 3). He further assimilated the rendering of culture to *portraits of diversity*. These portraits provide the complex ways individuals understand, accommodate, and resist a presumably shared order. They emerge from global contrasts among nations, societies, language groups, gender, occupation, etc. The very concept of culture is so intangible, slippery and loose that it can only be expressed and crystallized through a lexical arrangement that rests on the writer’s highly personal practice and represents the culture of a group through the analytic eyes of a single member of that same group. Because such a practice remains personal, it is partly shaped by the writer’s voice, in other words, the author’s narrative style. This style incorporates literary representational forms that blur traditional demarcation lines between literature and science.

### The Case Study: FTQ’s Diversity Training Development

According to Anderson (1998), a case study is “an investigation defined by an interest in a specific phenomenon” (p. 121). It is suited, Baxter and Jack (2008) argued, to inquiries focusing on answering *how* and *why* research questions in a context where it is impossible to “manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study” (p. 545). It is also a research method particularly adapted to research dealing with a complex phenomenon that needs to be fragmented into smaller research units (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The case study of this inquiry merges the *descriptive* and *explanatory* types. Descriptive case studies, quite straightforwardly, focus on describing a phenomenon in its context while explanatory case studies seek to answer questions to explain a presumed causal link.

I was not yet looking for a particular case when I came across the FTQ (Fédération des travailleurs du Québec), Quebec's largest union federation, for the first time. As I will explain in the following chapter, coincidence brought me to the FTQ, after I had undertaken a preliminary comparative analysis of educational activities carried out by various unions and union federations in the province. Among the union organisations mapped, the FTQ clearly emerged for the lead it had taken on various social issues. To a certain extent, the FTQ was even believed to be ahead on the issue of diversity: they had appointed a co-ordinator for all matters pertaining to integration of immigrant workers in the workplace, held full-day discussion sessions, and put together the first-ever workshop on diversity management for union executives.

The large scale of a union federation like the FTQ was undoubtedly an advantage for this investigation. It was not only outdistancing other unions in diversity-related activities, but its educational activities focused specifically on executive union members, people who shape the power dynamics in their workplaces and are in legitimate positions to influence company culture and practices. This allowed me to explore the more political facet of diversity management training, as training would be carried out by a federation rather than a local entity. A provincial union body like the FTQ not only oversees workers rights, but is actively involved in social struggles, basic human rights campaigns and political advocacy.

## **Purposeful Participant Sampling**

Context dictated the sampling method. It is what the literature refers to as convenience, accidental or opportunity sampling, meaning that participants for research are chosen on the basis of practical availability during the data collection period. In my

case, not only was the sampling convenient, but it was, above all, the most relevant as well. I am referring to the coordinator for the integration of immigrant workers, who had been the most interviewed participant and whom I met by pure chance. The other two participants I interviewed were introduced to me by the coordinator. The remaining participants were those I observed and who took part in the diversity training session held at FTQ headquarters.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collection started in February 2010 and ended in December 2012. Interviews were conducted from September 2010 to May 2011, and observation was carried out in January 2011. Document analysis spanned the whole data collection period. Data were collected through the following methods:

- Document Analysis
- Artefact Analysis (videos, promotional brochures, etc.)
- Face-to-face semi-directed interviews with:
  - a) Carlos, FTQ coordinator for the integration of immigrant workers into the workplace department, diversity training designer, and facilitator
  - b) Renée, FTQ head of the francization department and diversity training designer
  - c) Beth, diversity training designer and facilitator employed by a FTQ affiliated union
- Observation of diversity training with 12 union executives and 3 observers



- Participant demographics questionnaire distributed at the diversity training session to gather quantitative and basic data such as demographics, number of years in the union, role within union, age group, ethnicity, etc.

The raw data collected amounted to a total of 700 minutes of workshop observation recordings, 214 minutes of interview recordings and roughly around 500 pages of documents consulted. Interview recordings were transcribed and translated into English almost systematically, whereas only relevant sections of the training observation recordings were retained. Interviews were semi-directed, too loosely directed to be more specific. This allowed for more flexibility within the limits of the topic introduced by the questions, in most cases. In other cases, because I encouraged interviewed participants to speak as freely as they could while answering questions, the resulting data sometimes went in surprising directions. I obtained rich and copious data, which justifies the theme-structure chosen for the data analysis. This was not only meant to make data collection easier but also to configure data analysis in a clear manner. The themes, as one could expect, changed numerous times before and during the interviews only to be defined conclusively at the reporting stage.

All participants signed research consent forms provided as per Concordia's Research Ethics Protocol. Participants' real names have not been disclosed as stated on the consent forms.

# DATA

This section presents the data collected in accordance with the methodology described above, starting with background information on the case and the history and development of the first-ever diversity workshop organized by FTQ. It also presents the data collected from face-to-face interviews with individuals involved in developing and delivering the diversity training.

Some data from the massive quantity collected were omitted. Those retained for this research were chosen for their pertinence.

## Documents and Artefacts

In this section, I present the data gathered from various documents and videos, i.e., reports, promotional brochures, symposium booklets and advertising material, whether online or in hard copy.

## Unions Basics

A union is an association of workers seeking common goals. A product of the capitalist industrial expansion, they appeared in Canada around the 1840s as sporadic movements unable to withstand massive repression from the political and private establishment. In 1872, unions gained some legitimacy with the adoption of the Trade Unions Act, but were still kept under tight control, even when the Canadian Labour Union (CLU) was created a year later. This was the first attempt to bring together unions from across the country under a central organization. Times were not favourable for

discussions with management back then. CLU fully supported its radical stance and quite understandably urged unions to use strikes instead of arbitration: working conditions were atrociously brutal. Unions were calling for shorter working hours, an end to employing children under ten years of age, and the enforcement of minimum standards of factory sanitary facilities and ventilation. And unions were already calling, at this early stage, for publicly funded education.

In the 1940s, the movement expanded dramatically because of industrial development spurred by war industries and postwar boom in addition to legislation forcing employers to accept collective bargaining with employee representatives. Twenty years later, the government allowed public-sector employees to be unionized. As indicated in the introduction, the last two decades of the twentieth century saw a decrease in the unionization rate in all OECD countries except for Canada, because union dues are deducted from pay cheques systematically and because almost all public-sector employees are unionized. Recent figures show that around 33% of all Canadian workers are union members (“Canadian Labour Congress,” n.d.). In the province of Quebec, the percentage leaps up to 45% (“Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ),” n.d.). The FTQ accounts for the majority of unionized workers in Quebec.

### Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ)

The Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ), referred to as “the Federation”, is Quebec’s largest union federation with close to 600,000 members from about 40 affiliated unions, 17 regional councils and 5,000 local units in North America and abroad. Its members come from practically all sectors, including private and

public organizations, both provincial and federal. Affiliation is voluntary and, since January 1, 2012, costs \$1.40 per member per month. The Federation's main source of financing comes from dues paid by affiliated unions on behalf of their members. Other sources include dues paid by Regional Councils, and government funding for special projects/programmes.

As officially stated in its Statutes, the Federation's mission includes:

- Promoting the professional interests of its members as well as workers' social, economic, cultural, and political development
- Practicing a trade unionism fully in line with Quebec's distinctiveness and workers' aspirations
- Encouraging member participation in all forms of political life and ensuring a significant presence everywhere decisions are made in their name
- Fighting against all forms of discrimination on the grounds of race, skin colour, gender, pregnancy, sexual orientation, marital status, and age, except where otherwise provided for by law, religion, political beliefs, language, ethnic or national origin, social status, or handicap or any means to palliate a handicap

Since its inception, FTQ's political engagement is to extend rights and privileges to as many individuals as possible and have these rights protected by laws. Social justice, individual dignity, and democratic freedom belong to the organization's overarching vision. It is also part of its "electoral mission" to support political parties, and it has done so by vouching for the NDP, the Bloc Québécois and the Parti Québécois in the past. Such support, the organization guarantees, does not compromise the critical distance the organization keeps between elections, nor does it restrict the Federation's political

autonomy. For example, before the 1976 election that brought the Parti Québécois into power, the FTQ maintained a confrontational position with the government. It condemned some of Jean Charest “anti-democratic” decision in 2003. It also supported the sovereignty project and defended it in two referendums (1995 and 1980).

### **Historical Snapshot**

The FTQ was founded in 1957, created by the merger of the Fédération provinciale du travail du Québec (FPTQ) and the Fédération des unions industrielles du Québec (FUIQ), two very old organizations. At the time, legally speaking, it consisted of a geographic entity that was part of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), Canada’s country-wide union confederation of over 3 million members. In the 1960s, the FTQ judged its autonomy too limited. Thus, its executive leaders embarked on a legal battle to obtain all the powers worthy of a true central labour union. About 15 years later, the Canadian Labour Congress transferred full responsibility in all matters pertaining to labour union education and co-ordination of relevant regional councils to the FTQ. In 1993, the CLC and the FTQ reached a historic agreement: The two had officially established a sovereignty-association relationship, an unprecedented collaborative model in the Canadian union movement. Today, the FTQ holds full jurisdiction over representation and co-ordination of Quebec-based CLC-affiliated members and is the only CLC member federation to carry out its own international activities freely.

## FTQ's Governing Structure

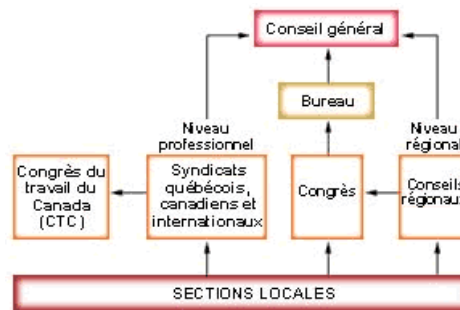


Figure 2. FTQ's Governing Structure

The FTQ relies on three main bodies: congress (Congrès), general council (Conseil général), and head office (Bureau). All major orientations are voted at the Federation's congress held once every three years. The most recent was held in December 2010. It is the highest authority of the FTQ, where affiliated local union members are represented by delegations comprising the number of people proportionate to the member union's size. In between congresses, the Federation is governed by a general council. Its members meet regularly, at least three times a year, and have the responsibility of following up on the directions established by the congress, guiding the Federation, assessing head office recommendations, and overseeing the head office's routine business. The Council is made up of about 150 people. The head office comprises 19 people, all elected at the congress, who meet at least once a month. The head office's routine business includes creating whatever committees it deems necessary, establishing Regional Councils, approving their statutes, and establishing their geographic territories. These Regional Councils represent the FTQ throughout the province of Quebec.

## FTQ's Internal Administrative Structure

The FTQ is managed by its president, Michel Arsenault, who was elected at the 2007 congress (See Appendix D). He is assisted by secretary general Daniel Boyer, and

Johanne Deschamps, political adviser. They are in charge of overseeing the material, financial and human resources mobilized to fulfill the Federation's mission. The Federation is staffed by a little over 60 people. Together they provide or augment various services to affiliated unions. These services are offered through the FTQ's headquarters and regional offices scattered throughout the province. They are co-ordinated by a number of departments such as the:

- Media Department that runs all FTQ-produced publications, including the website
- Occupational health department,
- Research department that explores various issues,
- Francization department
- Women's affairs department that focuses on pay equity, equal access to employment, work-life balance, etc.
- Education department that develops and delivers specialised and general training in collaboration with affiliated unions.

The education department also runs a trainer training program, and oversees the work of the union lifestyle issues counsellors who help people with personal difficulties.

### **Integration of Immigrant Workers: Emergence of a Focus Area**

As reported below by one of the interviewees, and according to various FTQ archive documents, the integration of immigrant workers has been an area of focus for the FTQ since the 1970s. The issue of discrimination against immigrant workers was included in the 1977 congress agenda, and two years later a symposium of 600 union representatives was held on the issue. A few recommendations were adopted and the Federation made public its official position on the matter. It declared that all workers,

whether immigrant or not, had equal rights and status and shared common interests. In the 1980s, very little was achieved in this area because of an economic recession that saw immigration numbers decrease. In 1991, the province of Quebec and the government of Canada signed the McDougall-Gagnon-Tremblay Agreement, which gave Quebec not only most of its current immigration powers but the financial means to carry out its immigration policies and measures. Quebec is now responsible for welcoming immigrants and for their linguistic, economic, and social integration. Shortly after this agreement, the FTQ became more active in a number of ways because unions were charged with the task of ensuring francization efforts were effectively carried out within companies of over 100 employees.

On the political front, for example, the Federation presented a brief in 1991 to the Parliamentary Committee for the Immigration and Integration Policy Framework. In the brief, the Federation reiterated its position and challenged equal access programmes promoted as a way to fight discrimination against women, ethnic and racial minorities, and Aboriginals and handicapped persons. It asserted that such programmes had not proven their effectiveness for women and that questions should be raised about their effectiveness for immigrant workers. It also stated that FTQ was supporting basic and professional training to all workers for a better integration.

FTQ later started putting together an increasing number of publications to raise awareness on the integration of immigrant workers among its affiliated unions. In 1993, for example, it released a brochure entitled “Les relations interculturelles et l’action syndicale”.



Through its research department, the federation also carries out research activities on cultural diversity, integration, and related issues.

### **Integration, an Organizational Priority**

In 2002, the Federation struck a committee for the integration of immigrant workers. It comprises 19 individuals drawn from FTQ personnel and affiliated unions. The committee gained the status of standing committee by a resolution adopted at the 2004 FTQ congress. It drafted a policy statement on the integration of immigrant workers that was submitted to that same congress. In this policy statement addressing, for instance, integration into the job market, francization, prior learning assessment, and recognition, it devoted a section to prejudice, racism, and discrimination in the workplace. It recognized the higher unemployment rate affecting visible minorities compared to that of the general active population, and the difficulties workers belonging to visible minority groups experienced. It further stated:

[TRANSLATION] *THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the FTQ and affiliated unions make better use of existing means, notably awareness raising and training, to fight prejudice, racism and discrimination in the workplace* (Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec. Congrès, 2004, p. 6).

And further:

[TRANSLATION] *THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 27th congress requests the government undertake an awareness raising and education campaign targeting employers and provide union centrals with the budgets required to train employees on intercultural issues.* (Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec. Congrès, 2004, p. 6)

Integration of immigrant workers has also been the theme of discussion sessions. These have been organized every year or every other year for the last decade or so. For instance, the discussion session held in 2010 brought together about 80 participants to get first-hand opinions on current Federation actions and future action at local and organizational levels.

At the time of my data collection, the integration of immigrant workers department stood alone and was separate from the francization department. Since December 2012, integration of immigrant workers is now under the francization department.

### **Union Education, an Indispensable Tool**

In the 2004 policy statement on the integration of immigrant workers, the FTQ highlighted the indispensable role union education has played since the 1977 congress when the Federation adopted a policy statement to develop a union education model. In the 1970s, the Federation needed to train affiliate workers on basics such as negotiating, collective agreement application, occupational health, etc. The Federation also understood that union education was indispensable to the democratic nature of the organization and society at large. One of union education goal's, it states, is also to make citizens more critical about issues affecting them:

[TRANSLATION] *THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the FTQ carries out training and co-ordinating efforts for all who represent the Federation and continues to develop training programmes that provide an overall understanding of union and social issues affecting us all* (Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec. Congrès, 2004, p. 20).

The Collège FTQ-Fonds, created in 1999, is FTQ's permanent residential programme entity. The college is one of the prerogatives granted to the FTQ by the Canadian Labour Congress. As part of their agreement, the college develops, coordinates, and delivers union education programmes to union leaders. As mentioned in Chapter One, these programmes typically last 10 days and require participants to retreat to an isolated venue. This provides an opportunity to take a step back and reflect thoroughly on issues of the participants choosing. Participants are then required to submit a final research paper, after which they receive a graduation certificate. Diversity was the theme of residential programme training sessions in 2007, 2008, and 2009.

Aside from these in-depth programmes, the Federation has sporadically carried out interactive training sessions.

After having established the standing committee for the integration of immigrant workers, submitted a policy statement to various congresses, organized discussion sessions, and published informative and promotion material on the issue, the Federation decided to put together a training session entirely devoted to diversity and integration. The next section explores the development of this educational activity.

## **Interviews and Observations**

The following interviews dealing with organization of the diversity training session are in most cases presented in the chronological sequence they were conducted in an attempt to follow the natural development process of the workshop. As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, all interview transcripts have been translated from French. Aside from introduction emails to set up interview appointments and information

provided on the consent form, interviewees did not receive any preparation prior to the interviews.

## Carlos

Co-ordinator of the integration of immigrants into the workplace from October 2009 to November 2012.

I met Carlos at a discussion session organized by the FTQ on February 26, 2010 at its Montreal headquarters. This gathering was meant to pick the brains of about 80 people drawn from various local unions across the province of Quebec on issues related to the integration of immigrants into the workplace. I had heard about it a few weeks earlier through a colleague who had gracefully passed on the information. As a non-unionized and non-unionist student-researcher, I was given special permission to attend by the organizers. At check-in on the day of the seminar, I was informed that my name was unfortunately nowhere on the list of attendees. A few minutes later, after taking matters into hand, the organizers told me that all had been fixed, and that a chair was waiting for me at one of the round tables along with everyone else. During the opening remarks, one of the union federation's high-ranking executives attending announced the appointment of a new immigrant integration advisor for the province of Quebec. In response to this announcement, Carlos, who was sitting opposite me, stood up to a wave of applause. This was quite bewildering coincidence, given the size of an organization like the FTQ. The chances of everything working out right the first time are rare. At break time, I approached Carlos and presented my research project to him. He offered his business card and his help. He has been indispensable to this research for three reasons:

- 1) The access he gave me to various aspects of his work within such an enormous structure, a role of direct relevance to this research: He had just been introduced

as the person directly and officially overseeing the Federation's efforts for integrating immigrant workers, including the development of diversity-related educational activities

- 2) The access he gave me to other FTQ staff involved in the these educational activities
- 3) The access he gave me to support staff such as the FTQ document centre archivist. This may seem anecdotal, but this serendipitous encounter literally unlocked this research project.

I interviewed Carlos five times in total from September 3, 2010 to May 19, 2011, which makes him the most-interviewed participant of this research.

### **Taking Up Office and Personal Motives**

I started off the series of interviews by asking Carlos to explain the purpose of his joining the FTQ in his current capacity:

*I arrived while there was already a project being carried out in collaboration with the Ministry of Immigration [of Quebec] since March 2009. The project aimed to improve the integration of immigrants into the workplace . . . The way I interpret this is that in the workplace, diversity hasn't always been something that companies were comfortable with. This may lead to some frictions and even to conflicts, and this obviously implies that every conflict always end up by categorizing, racism, and signs of discrimination. So, to improve this, or, at least, to make it easier for immigrants to be welcomed in the workplace, and, ultimately, this is obvious, to encourage employers to hire immigrants and to make them aware, through union representatives, of the need to*

*hire either immigrants or people from different cultural backgrounds... So, this the context in which I arrived in October.*

To Carlos, taking on his new role was just a natural way to continue along the same lines of what he has been holding dear ever since he joined a union many years ago: to advocate for workers. An immigrant himself, he wishes to make it easier for others to better integrate their work environment and to avoid the pitfalls that had paved his own way.

*. . . I am an immigrant, I am a product of immigration . . . and because I've lived it, I feel concerned, I feel concerned. So, I wish that these newly arrived people go through something different than what I've experienced. My desire is that others don't go through the bad experiences I've had.*

He possesses a strong belief in a necessary social cohesion both in and outside of the workplace and the union movement. This social cohesion can only exist if we, as a society, create a common space of social exchange.

*If this immigration doesn't find its place, if we can't reach a social cohesion, we will all loose out socially. And such cohesion starts in the workplace. So, I think that for the well-being of us all, be it immigrant or not, of the whole population . . . it is in our interest to find a common meaning and a common language for everyone. . . . Since September 11, immigration, not only in Quebec, but also in industrialised countries, especially immigration from North Africa . . . it has been suffering, it has been suffering from a whole slew of ideologies, and a slew of disinformation. And we, as [union] members, do not gain any benefit from maintaining this social division, nor do we gain*

*any benefit from maintaining this social division among our members. So, [what I do] is also meant to counter disinformation, if you will.*

Carlos also seems to be moved by a higher purpose, the quest and promotion of social harmony. I asked him what his perception was on this and if he thought it was too utopian for the context of his work and the task that lay ahead.

*One of the things that makes Quebec attractive [is the fact] that it is a place where people respect others. Regardless of differences in terms of culture, religion, etc. life here is possible with relative security and stability for all. And this cannot be achieved without harmony . . . First of all, to me, harmony is the possibility of cohabitating despite our differences, no matter how polarised they may be . . . And it isn't that utopian. Whatever the agreement, some ideas will always diverge and collide, but it's nothing to make things go out of hand. Can we not aspire to a social peace? It isn't that utopian because our society already works this way. The interests, views, and customs of employees may differ from that of the employer whose objectives and needs are different. Nonetheless, we have a reference we call a collective agreement, in which we establish rules and procedures. It's a reference. Some education and training work needs to be done. If we want to preserve the society we currently have, there is no other way . . . there are no other means. If we stay polarised, we might go through what France or California in the 1990s went through. Every society has a natural tendency towards a certain harmony.*

### **Cultural Diversity: Education, the Crux of the Matter**



Since his appointment, Carlos has been working to expand the notion of diversity at the FTQ. Largely understood as the effect of immigration, the notion, he explains, encompasses more.

*If we look at the history of the FTQ . . . in fact, it is obvious that the first [source] of cultural diversity can be attributed to immigration. Is not the only one, but immigration holds a great part in this diversity . . . I try to give a different meaning to diversity, a notion that is not only limited to newcomers . . . The goal is to be as inclusive as possible [...] [and include] people who are newly arrived as well as people with different social markers, like culture, ethnic belonging, religion, etc.*

He further explains that with cultural diversity come new challenges and new realities for the union movement.

*To a certain extent, it has to do with the identity of our members. We no longer represent the people we used to 50 years ago. Workplaces have changed. We are spokespersons of people working in these environments. We need to know each other. Immigrants need to know the union movement, who we are, what we do, how we operate just as we need to know who we represent and whom we advocate for.*

This more inclusive and nuanced meaning of diversity that Carlos has been advocating has been progressively and generally accepted by fellow workers, but not without overcoming some reluctance since, as he puts it, “Instinctively, we all sit on what we already know.” This proves to be the case when one has to define what an immigrant is, for example.

I then asked Carlos if he felt he was able to make a difference in diversity-related issues at the FTQ. Education, he asserts, is the crux of the matter.

Yes. [laugh] *I think we all have a narcissistic side that makes us say that we have the skills and the capacity to change things. But, at the same time, I realize that, for the field I am working in, it is mostly about changing mentalities. It is above all a question of education and all this takes time. So for me to say that my goal is to change the mentalities of over 500,000 members we represent in six months would be wishful thinking. Even with the best arguments, even if the people in front of me at a training session I am facilitating recognize or give credibility to the message I convey, it takes time for people to internalise it. So this evolution, is not going to happen short term, but I believe that I have the capacity to change things. I sure hope so, otherwise, all this will be in vain, but I think I do.*

### **Diversity Training: The Genesis of Training Content and Material**

One of Carlos's main tasks was to put together a training session on diversity, the first-ever in-house workshop devoted to this subject matter. The training session was tested on January 19 and 20, 2011. Two "real" training sessions were carried out in February and May 2011. Drafting a 113-page trainer training guide had started a few months before I began gathering data at the FTQ.

*In developing the document, the first step was to analyse the results of the needs assessment we had conducted with local unions. In fact, from November 2009 to February 26, 2010, I undertook a series of semi-directed interviews with local union representatives. These interviews lasted about an hour and a half and we used a questionnaire of about 30 questions, from what I recall. Some questions were very down-to-earth but there was also the whole dynamic, as in all semi-directed interviews, that was not in the questions. . . . Sometimes, during these interviews, I caught some*

*interesting contradictions... I don't remember the local union, but when I asked 'How many members are there?' they answered 'Some 300 to 350 members.' I then asked 'How many of that total are immigrants?' and they fired back 'Well, you should be asking how many Québécois are we... and we are about forty!' So there was a large number of immigrants. I then asked 'How many of them sit on the union executive committee?' and they responded 'None.' [silence] 'So, are you experiencing any problems?' to which they answered 'No, we have no problems, they just need to do the same as we do!' . . . But who's "we"? [laughs] There is a need for awareness and training and the Vice-President of the union of that local... who was aware of the workplace dynamics after a massive influx of immigrants... had told me to let him know as soon as the training was developed because he said we needed to 'train our people'.*

Among all the local union representatives interviewed, Carlos recalls only one who said his local union had created an on-boarding procedure for immigrant newcomers. None of the other local unions had any such mechanism, or any awareness of such mechanisms.

From the interviews, Carlos explained, two themes emerged: first, reasonable accommodation, clearly expressed by the interviewees, and second, the perception of immigration. The second theme was inferred from interviewees' remarks and the dynamics observed by the interviewers.

*What came out of the needs assessment was that immigration was perceived as a not-so necessary evil, and often damaging. So, what do you do in such a case? You need to make adjustments. And this is, to me, what was relevant to do, because if we are to ask people to get involved with immigrants whom they consider a nuisance, we'll never get*

*them on board... So, before telling someone to get involved, we have to tell them why and what they will gain out of this involvement, you know... This document is maybe too dense for a first training session, but I felt it was pertinent to say where we stand... what type of immigration we have in Quebec, why are immigrants here and why we need them [...] and that we aren't [accepting them] out of charity. The recent [Angus Ried] August poll confirms what I thought of some union leaders who think immigration is a social nuisance.*

I then asked Carlos how interviewees felt about being polled on issues related to diversity, considering some were immigrants.

*Well, [the answers] varied among one another. Some were expecting a magic bullet... You know, an immigrant, here's how you take it, here's what he'll do and you'll get that result. Others, from personal experience, had an idea of what was needed and of the difficulties, just taking the issue of reasonable accommodations, a very delicate subject. I think people lack the tools to understand this. Some fear it, some have extremist positions on it. I think the media fuels this greatly . . . And, this is an element that creates negative and fearful behaviours towards immigrant workers . . . Because, first, if an immigrant is perceived as a nuisance, and on top of it, there are problems arising from reasonable accommodations, this makes the integration of immigrants workers even more difficult.*

The training guide was the result of a collective effort. An advisory committee was created comprising two people from the Comité permanent des personnes immigrantes (FTQ's standing committee for the integration of immigrant workers), including Carlos, one person from FTQ's research department, who provided the

Federation's historical track record on all related issues, one person from FTQ's education department, who provided the pedagogical insight, and one person from the Syndicat des Métallos education department, for her experience in cultural diversity training. All these people, in their own capacity, played a role throughout the training development process.

### **FTQ-Organized Focus Group**

In addition to the series of interviews conducted with union representatives, a full-day session with a focus group was held in December 2010. It was meant to help Carlos and his team validate the training content and orientation by getting people to share their personal experiences and express their views on issues related to integration in the workplace.

*It allowed us to make the training we are developing more relevant. It was for fine-tuning. There was nothing to make us start all over from scratch. It gave us tentative solutions, like the information [unions provide]... the way to think of methods, ways to bridge immigrant workers and unions... in both ways. We are talking about integration, and it's a two-way thing... it can't be assimilation, but integration. As a participant said 'It's all fine and well to blend in, but I remain who I am as an individual.'*

It brought together 18 people, although 21 participants were targeted, Carlos explained. Efforts were made to balance gender and ethnic background. Participants were also pulled from various unions and labour sectors.

*We didn't achieve the group composition we wanted originally [because] we wanted more participants who have been established here less than 5 or 7 years ago and got a lot of people who have been here for quite a long period of time . . . even some for*

*over 20 years. But we also managed to have people who immigrated here less than 5 months ago . . . I made sure all participated by telling them that they didn't just have a right to talk, but an obligation to talk [laughs]. It was really pleasing to see how everything went. Even the ones who had a harder time expressing their views talked.*

Participants were split into two different groups, and Carlos acted as a one of the two facilitators. The focus group started at 8:30 a.m. and finished at 5 o'clock p.m., non-stop. The session kicked off with the usual introductions and the presentation of objectives and expectations. Then followed a 30-minute overview of the union movement in Quebec to make sure everyone started off with an equal minimal knowledge: "We wanted to make sure everyone understood why the union federation needed their input," Carlos explained. Then, the first half of the day focused on the difficulties experienced by participants while the second half, on possible solutions.

At a certain point, I asked Carlos if he thought that participants were able to go beyond good intentions and dig under the often-thick surface of the expected answer, given the delicate subject.

*We explained the purpose of their presence. In fact, we explained, among other things, that the integration into the labour market was more difficult here in Quebec than in the other provinces in Canada. We explained that there were frictions even between newcomers and non-immigrants, etc. and that the goal was to provide union leaders with the tools to increase their awareness on this and for mechanisms to be put in place . . . for them to become facilitators . . . I do hope that, in those moments, people were expressing their views, not to say how life was beautiful, but to really say*

*what could make things easier for them individually. The questions were straightforward enough for that . . . I think they answered from their very own life experience.*

The fact that Carlos belonged to a cultural minority himself may have helped to certain point.

*When I threw a question that I felt participants were uncomfortable with, I used examples from my own personal experience to answer the question. I'd open up the discussion this way. I believe it made people talk more. I had Caucasian participants too . . . I think it had an impact, but I cannot say to what extent.*

Overall, both facilitators were satisfied with the group discussion. They were particularly pleased with the group dynamic and participation.

*People enjoyed the discussions. They took part in the debates and shared their reflections and observation with pleasure. If I had to do it again, I'd split the participants into four groups... first in halves and then I'd separate men from women, because women brought up interesting points that were diluted into the concerns of the rest of the group . . . For instance work-life balance is something that women expressed more than men. Likewise, power relations or confrontational dynamics were subjects that men brought up and not women. That's why I would have liked to see what it would have been like to separate men from women.*

### **Expected Outcomes**

The training session was intended for about 18 to 20 participants. What were the expected results?

[Silence] *Good question.* [Silence] *There is always this idea of... a part of hope... First, we hope that there will be an interest. As interesting or well done as the course*

*may be, if no one knows about it, the results are nil. So, yes, the first thing is to make the course appealing. Second, for the participants, we hope [the course] will make a real difference . . . A difference in their own work environment, hoping that it snowballs afterwards. On a practical level, it will take more than a couple months for a difference to be visible.*

I asked him if he had examples of such a difference.

*If it could only be the perception of immigration, this would be a good start. If we succeed in making union leaders realize that (a) immigration is here to stay, (b) it won't fade away and (c) it is not a nuisance, but the contrary... [immigrants] come with something that helps preserve our social gains. That alone will make the rest of the work easier at all levels. So, perception would be the first thing, in my view, that we need to change. The second element would be the whole religious issue.*

### **Promoting the Training Session**

Close to a month before the trial training session in January 2011, I asked Carlos how the promotional campaign was going. Very little could tell, but Carlos' determination was still intact.

*Quite frankly, we'll see the results in January and February. But we benefited from the exposure we got at our congress where the assembly adopted two resolutions: (a) to promote the francization of immigrants in the workplace and (b) to improve the integration of immigrants in the workplace and in unions. So, the mere fact of talking about the issue obviously opens up the debate on it. Also, we had set up a stand for half a day where we provided information to people who came to us. For example, two of them told us the difficulties they were facing in terms of integration . . . We know that the first*



*training sessions will have a snowball effect. A lot of people left with a subscription form for the February training. Only time will ultimately tell.*

## Renée

Diversity training developer, head of the francization department, Carlos's immediate supervisor, and head of the integration of immigrant workers department before 2009 and after 2012.

I was introduced to Renée by Carlos in October 2010. She was acting as Carlos's immediate supervisor and before this, was in charge of the integration of immigrants into the workplace at the FTQ. More importantly she was part of the diversity training development committee. She has been working for the FTQ for over 15 years. I interviewed her once, a few days after having been introduced to her.

### **Diversity and Integration: Emergence in the 1970s and Current Meaning**

I started by asking her what diversity meant for her, and the importance she believes it has for the FTQ.

*To me, diversity... well if I put it simply or simplistically... it's everything different from, what I am used to see . . . so, when new things come and come in large numbers... well here you have diversity... This forces us to change the way we view our environment. Currently, here in Quebec, we live in an era of diversity. The province of Quebec is no longer like it used to be not too long ago. People from all over came to live with us . . . Now, we live with this diversity, but we have to manage it properly . . . Above all, as union members, we must fight so that the citizens we welcome here become fully-fledged citizens. And here, at the FTQ, we have realized this for quite a while.*

She further explained that in 1978, the FTQ was already organizing a symposium that largely focused on the integration of immigrants.

*Even at that time, it had become apparent in our society that our workplaces were about to change. It will no longer be the same . . . After Expo '67, it started to become colorful [laughs], and whether you want it or not, there is always some racism, I think, and latent discrimination in every individual. It began to come out and to change our society . . . What do we do with all this, and how do we deal with this in workplace? . . . This is how, in 1978 with our symposium, we realized that we had to intervene in the workplace. Our first intervention coincides with the enforcement of Bill 101 a year after.*

Bill 101, Renée continued, has been extraordinarily well received by the union movement. Finally, a legal instrument was at their disposal. And through it came a concern for integration.

*. . . and in regards to this law, workers and workplaces were given a big importance. We, at the FTQ, are omnipresent... well maybe it's a big word, but we are very present in the private sector, compared to the CSN that is rather present in public organizations. So, very early on, we started working with francization committees to increase the use of French in workplaces. Francizing workplaces meant to focus not only on the organization, but also on the people who work in them. And though it rose our concern for the integration of immigrant workers... The integration of immigration goes beyond language issues. For us, a workplace with a common language means that a worker is able to understand the language spoken to protect his rights as a citizen.*

I then asked her if she felt that the notion of diversity had evolved since its emergence in the 1970s and what form she thought it had nowadays.

*Yes, it has evolved. [it depends] on the type of business, there are some where close to no immigrants work... where there is close to no diversity . If we take the aerospace sector, it is still very Québécois . . . . If we look at the manufacturing sector, a real one, this is where you see diversity. And also, the FTQ changed its approach when it comes to the services it provides to unions, local unions I should say, in terms of training and information made available. We've adjusted ourselves, for instance, to find ways to encourage immigrants to take on union executive positions so that people can be represented by people who look like them, because in some workplaces, they form a majority. You can count Québécois' [on your fingers].*

How would you describe the way it is perceived at the FTQ today?

*At the FTQ, I'd say [silence] I'd say we have a good approach. In a sense that we are heading towards it... the fundamental rights we are reclaiming, the protection of rights... and giving each individual its real value... fighting discrimination, racism, inequalities, that's what motivates us... When we talk about the integration of immigrants, it isn't just about saying 'look, we have a little training project, here's what you should do'. We need to go beyond this . . . because, I would say, the majority of union leaders are still Québécois, although they represent sometimes 50, 60 or even 200 immigrant workers. So we have to tell them that 'it's not enough to simply francize them and let them know that you've put together a little course'. Everyday, people in all workplaces need to fight discrimination and prejudice. Sometimes it might mean to stand up against employers that deliberately put sand in the wheel of hiring. It's about putting the human first . . . . That's what it is.*

## Trial Training Observation: Diversity in Unionized Workplaces

In this section, I present the data collected from my observations and from the socio-demographic questionnaire I distributed to training participants. Of course, as I have already mentioned, a two-day training session generates an amount of data far too large for the scope of this research. Two training sections of no relevance to this research have been omitted, i.e. the section on learning French and the one on reasonable accommodation. Consequently, the priorities were the section addressing prejudices and discrimination and the section on the impact of immigration in Quebec.

The trial training I observed took place, as planned, on January 19 and 20, 2011 at the FTQ. About a month beforehand, all participants received their formal invitation to attend. Actually, an invitation was sent to all affiliated unions. A couple of days later, they receive a second email informing them of my presence and purpose. I was introduced as an observer from Concordia University conducting research. The email clearly stated that my research project had absolutely no impact on any of the attendees and that their participation in my research was not mandatory. It also provided my contact details in case anyone wished to opt out or wanted more information. A question was subsequently sent to me four days before training day. A participant wanted to know what I expected from them, to which I responded by email. Then came the training day.

### **Schedule**

The sessions ran from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., with two typical 15-minute breaks, one in the morning and the other one in the afternoon. People left the training room only if they wanted to, since refreshments and food were served on the spot.

The two-day session was divided as followed:

Day 1

- 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.: Presentation, introductions, expectations  
Immigration in Quebec  
The impact of immigration in Quebec
- 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.: Adapting to and integrating into a new living environment  
French Learning  
Prejudices and discrimination

## Day 2

- 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.: Reasonable accommodation  
Integrating a new work environment
- 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.: Union action  
Evaluation

## **Room layout**

The training session room was comfortable enough for the group of 10 participants, 2 facilitators, and 3 observers that we formed. Participants were seated at tables of two that were lined up in a U-shape. The three observers, including myself, sat at a table at the far back of the room facing the board. We were not to interfere with the group dynamic.

## **Group Composition**

The group of 10 participants was made up mostly of people belonging to an FTQ-affiliated union (80%), with an average of 13 years of work experience individually. Thirty percent of them fell in the category of 18- to 35-year-olds, 40% were between 36 and 50 years old, and 30% between 51 and 65 years old, which made it an age-balanced

group. Half of the participants identified themselves as belonging to a visible minority group (three Blacks and two Arabs). Seven out of ten participants were men.

Renée from the francization department was among the observers, and the other was the head of the education department. The session was facilitated by Carlos, whom I had interviewed previously, and Beth. All of them were part of the training development committee.

### **Group Dynamics**

Given the number of years of experience as either FTQ staff members or affiliated union representatives, most participants: (a) had already attended quite a number of training sessions on an array of topics, as one participant underlined, and (b) were used to speaking in front of other people, if not in public. So, in general, not only did participants feel comfortable enough to speak their minds, but to most of them took their space naturally. One of them felt so at ease that he brought his laptop and took the liberty of getting some important work done while attending the session. A true multi-tasker, he could type, listen, check his phone and talk at the same time. He was also one of the most vocal participants, who seemed to have a very high opinion of himself and did not hesitate to voice his criticisms when he pleased. At some point, he asked Beth what her experience in dealing with integration of immigrants was, as to suggest that her credentials may be insufficient for the task. His attitude alone overshadowed the others at times, killed the overall mood, and made the facilitators struggle to keep their composure and move on following some of his remarks. As a high-ranking union representative, a veteran and well known to other people in the room, including the facilitators and observers, his excessive confidence was often excused or ignored by other

participants. He was somewhat of an opinion leader in the group, like 60–70% of the other participants.

That, however, did not seem to take away other people's assurance. They seemed fully aware of their right to express their views freely, and did so. The challenge for the facilitators lay rather in staying on subject and limiting speaking time, as most participants were generally keen to talk. As the session progressed, the atmosphere became increasingly casual and often light.

I noted that Beth, unlike Carlos, had a hard time establishing her credibility and herself and she later confirmed this in her interview. The session schedule did not help. Aside from her introduction at the beginning of the session, she had not said a word before the activity she was facilitating in the afternoon. A participant even said as a joke: "She can talk!"

### **Training Activities and Tools**

To cover the impressive amount of content, the facilitators used the following set of activities: formal presentation, teamwork exercises, individual exercises, round-tables, role-playing, video, and plenary discussions.

Typically, each section would start with an activity, generally in small groups or in pairs, followed by general discussion where teams would share their thoughts and discuss with the large group.

Tools used were kept to a minimum and included the participant guide, a flipchart, white board, and video projector.

### **Introductions and Expectations**

Carlos and Beth greeted each participant as they entered the training room and invited them to take a seat. As Carlos and I had previously agreed, I introduced myself before the opening remarks and explained, once again, the purpose of my attendance. I then distributed the consent forms along with the socio-demographic questionnaire. I asked if anyone wanted to opt out: no one did. I had everybody fill out the consent forms and questionnaires. Once I got them back, I informed the participants that the training session would be tape recorded and mentioned that anyone, at any given time, had the possibility to opt out. Carlos took over right afterwards.

The facilitators made sure they started off with a thorough introduction of themselves, and gave each participant ample time to do the same. This was designed to get everyone feeling familiar with each other and also to set the tone and create a welcoming and open space conducive to discussion and teamwork. About 20 minutes were devoted to going around the table for introductions. Then followed discussions in pairs on participants' expectations, and facilitators went around tables again for all to express their expectations. Overall, it took about an hour and a half to cover this part of the training.

### **Immigration: the Origin of Diversity**

Carlos facilitated this section and started off by introducing the topic and asking the group what they thought the immigration sources were after 1867. Participants shouted out answers and Carlos provided clarification and went over the evolution of immigration in Canada. The point was to make people realize that "immigration is not something new, that it goes way back and that it is an integral part of the 400 years of our history," as Carlos explained. Then followed a few animated discussions over who from



the Federal or the Quebec government had jurisdiction in matters of immigrant selection. Some participants argued that Canada had more responsibility, if not the sole responsibility, whereas others asserted that Quebec had the final say. The most emotionally involved participants were also the ones speaking from personal experience. Sensing that the debate could still go on, given the opposing views among participants, Carlos wrapped it up by driving home his point: it was shared jurisdiction between the two governments.

There were other spirited discussions, some predictable because of the controversial nature of the topic, while others were triggered by participants' reactions to various subjects. This was the case when Carlos addressed the issue of the minimal fertility rate required to maintain the population of Quebec. A participant stopped Carlos in the middle of his presentation and asked, "If two immigrants have children, are these children immigrants too?" To that, he pointed to another participant whose parents had immigrated to Quebec, to give an example. That question alone fired off another wave of reactions on the essence of what defined an immigrant. "She is an immigrant on paper only," shouted a participant. "Yes, I am a Quebecer!" answered the somewhat offended young lady under the spotlight. "I think you remain an immigrant as long as you decide to . . . until you decide to fit in and consider yourself as a Quebecer." said another one. Carlos then asked the question directly: "Who is an immigrant?" Another participant said: "I am an immigrant and will always be an immigrant because it is a fact, but that doesn't mean that I am not integrated." Other people reacted to that and Carlos concluded that segment by asking the group if everyone agreed with the definition of an immigrant

as being “simply someone born abroad.” Although no one objected overtly, judging from their body language, many repressed the urge to say more on the subject.

Demographics was key. This was the point Carlos was trying to make. In the context of an aging population and a decreasing fertility rate, the impact of a demographic decrease are serious: “labour shortage, capital flight, increased retirement ages, tax hikes for everyone, decreased active population . . . diminished political clout.” Building on that last element, Carlos reminded participants that we are in a federation and that Quebec’s political clout—such as the number of seats at the House of Commons, for instance—could consequently be affected. Our collectively contested social gains could be affected as well. To preserve them, there needs to be a demographic increase, he continued.

Carlos then asked participants to work in groups of three, and referred them to the participant guide to answer five questions on immigration. Then the participants discussed their results for the remaining 45 minutes. Carlos supplemented his answers with the necessary theoretical content.

Beth concluded this section by reminding participants of the training session’s purpose and the point of having all these discussions about immigration. She added that, from her observation point, trying to define an “immigrant” and addressing the issue is conceptually challenging: “I notice people feeling somewhat uncomfortable, even people who are very aware of the issue.” She mentioned that union representatives and workers will have to work with cultural diversity, but “we are not too sure of how to do things. We are not comfortable with the term *Québécois de souche*,<sup>8</sup> but if we say Quebecer, it is not clear who we are referring to. But, knowing this has to do with identity, we’re afraid

to dig any further.” She stressed that the objective was to help people understand what they are talking about when it comes to diversity, immigration, and identity. The whole morning had been theoretical, but later there would be more about how each participant deals personally with these issues: “Even the term ‘immigrant’ labels someone, and this training is mainly about getting rid of these labels, you’ll see . . . Do we really need to classify people? I encourage you to see someone else as a person first, not as an immigrant, father, worker, brother, etc. Keep that in mind.” Lunch break followed.

### **Cultural Diversity and Integration**

Beth facilitated most of the afternoon section on adapting to and integrating into a new life situation, which included the segments on cultural diversity and integration. The cultural diversity segment was introduced while recapping a small-group activity on adapting to new living environments. Participants had to answer three questions: (a) Name two or three characteristics associated with their original cultural environment; (b) Name two or three characteristics associated with their current cultural environment; (c) Name two or three characteristics from their original cultural environment they have kept and carried over into their current cultural environment. The answers varied quite extensively as they were very individual, except for the last question. Food and music were characteristics people said they kept the most. While Beth was wrapping up that activity, she explained that the variety of cultural or personal characteristics they named make up diversity: “There’s even been a debate between two participants who were disagreeing on a point. That is diversity. We often ask ourselves ‘How could we manage diversity in our workplaces? What tools should we use to deal with this diversity? What are the behaviours we should adopt?’ Well, we just did it right here.” At that specific

moment, participants were at their most attentive. Of course, she went on, they had worked on basic issues. But these behaviours were exactly the ones participants should look to replicate in their own workplaces and in society: “You saw diversity. You welcomed it. You listen to what other people had to say. You dealt with it. You voiced your opinion, whether others agreed with it or not. You have just experienced diversity. So, how do we manage diversity? Exactly the way we just did it!”

This, she concluded, was the objective of this activity: “We wanted you to go beyond saying ‘Well, we all have commonalities! We should love each other and things like that . . . Managing diversity can be done with basic tools we all have already.’”

Beth moved on to the segment on integration, but instead of starting with a small-group activity as planned, she chose rather a plenary discussion on the topic. As she said aloud, large-group discussions were going very well. She started with the question:

“What is integration?” Reactions flew one after the other:

– “It’s about accepting a model of society.”

– “Integration is when I don’t ask myself any more questions.”

– “Integration is sharing values and getting others to accept them. But where does integration start and end?”

– “When we talk about values, we need to know what we’re talking about. To me, the first step towards integration is language.”

– “To me integration is about compromise and relativity.”

Right from the start, participants demonstrated an emotional intensity unseen so far in the training. The remarks were lively. People were not afraid to jump in and express their views. Beth had to point out to participants that they had to be careful about

ranking values: “Who’s right, who’s wrong? Who are we to say that this value is more important than that one?” she said. A participant in stark opposition responded that not having a list of values made no sense: “There is a list of Quebec values like the equality between men and women. That’s an important value.” Beth had to further explain her point, with her normally controlled and inviting tone growing firm and slightly impatient. The same participant fired back: “Quebec society has its own values, and it doesn’t have to adapt itself to the values of every newcomer. Newcomers also have to adapt to the values of the society they have chosen to live in. I can’t walk into your home and start telling you what to do based on my own values.”

The discussion went on for a few minutes and Beth, who had been writing down the answers on the flipchart the whole time, summed up, with tact, the thoughts participants had expressed and verified if her summary was accurate.

Beth then continued the discussion by asking participants when someone could be considered integrated and why should anyone be integrated. Most of the time, Beth probed for more from each participant by systematically asking “Why?” until they could get to the core of their thoughts. At a certain point, Beth was talking about Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs to explain how all human beings had the same social needs and the same desire to fit in, when a participant, interrupting her presentation, raised a point: “You know, what we are experiencing is an ideal situation. Everything’s cool, we smile at each other, we’re having fun, but at work, in real life, things aren’t that beautiful. Do you have an idea of how it works?” The question was directed at Beth, who did not even have to time answer. Another participant immediately answered saying that participating in such training was necessary because unions needed a lot of education and training.

Beth wrapped the segment by recognizing there was a lot of work to be done with unions and segued to the next segment: “What vested interest would unions have in getting involved in the process of integration?”

A few answers were given and a participant suggested that the facilitators spend more time on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs because it was key to understanding the integration process of an individual and to eventually help that person. Beth rephrased that last comment to make sure it was clear, then stopped. She seemed somewhat abashed and to have lost her train of thought.

Carlos jumped in right away: “Let’s agree on the fact that integration is when a group of people fit into an environment . . . a social group always tends to improve with time. Of course, this is not just because of how we are brilliant locally only, but because ideas also come from elsewhere. So, integration is a process that is mutually enriching.” Then, he went over the explanation of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs highlighting that a person’s integration stage depends on what type of needs are fulfilled, and ended by saying that integration can only be successful if members of a same group have similar needs in Maslow’s Hierarchy. “This tool can certainly help people in the field,” concluded the participant who had earlier asked to spend more time on that. Break time. Greatly needed.

### **Prejudice and Discrimination**

This section followed the morning recap Carlos did of what had been discussed the day before. It was facilitated by both Beth and Carlos who, rather than taking turns a section after the other, worked more in tandem.

Beth first explained that they were about to role-play and needed three volunteers, whom they found after some convincing. Two were to play the role of recruiters and the third, the candidate being interviewed for a job. The two recruiters left the training room with Beth. Carlos remained in the training room and explained to the participant playing the role of the candidate what he had to do with the rest of the group listening. The candidate was the single father of a child with a serious health problem. Practically all his money went into medical treatment. He showed up late at his interview and later answered a phone call from his anxious child in the middle of the interview. He was the best-suited candidate for the job, given his work experience. The recruiters who had left the training room with Beth were told that in their roles, they were well aware that the candidate they were interviewing was the best fit for the job. They were to make sure that the candidate would look after the interests of the company in the best possible way. After discussing the candidate's profile, they were to reject his candidacy.

After the role-playing exercise, Beth asked the candidate and the recruiters how they felt during the interview, and wrote the answers on the flipchart board. She then broke the role-playing into four different parts using a tool she developed herself: the SPEC.<sup>9</sup> The interview, she went on, was the "situation." What the recruiters thought about the candidate was the "perception." The reaction following the perception is categorized as an "emotion," and that leads to a "behaviour." Beth explained that the SPEC can be used as a tool to get a snapshot of context. It is a tool that can help them look at a person as a person, not as an individual with a label. While interpreting the role-playing, the rest of the group, she continued, jumped to conclusions and developed theories on why the candidate didn't get the job: "When we do this, we judge before the

fact and we extrapolate. It becomes prejudice. To deconstruct such prejudice, all we need to do is to work on one of the components of the SPEC model.” She asked the group to name which of the components needed more focus, and a participant mentioned “perception.” Another participant mentioned “emotions.” Beth asked again what other component could be worked on, to which people mentioned “behaviour.” Beth then explained that there was no specific order in which the components should be addressed: “There is no strict procedure to follow. What you choose to work on depends on your background, your skills, and the knowledge you have. There is no single measure that solves it all. This is mostly a tool that can help break a situation down into its components and isolate the source of discrimination.” SPEC could also be used to prevent discrimination and redress a discriminatory prejudice: It was, she said, no magic formula, but meant to help understand a given situation. Participants made a few comments about what Beth had just said, and a video was then shown on the forms of prejudice and discrimination and the consequences.

The video showed a little girl playing in a park, running while holding a string tied up to a balloon. It was a beautiful bright sunny day, but the wind had blown her balloon away and a tall Black man was approaching the little girl giving her the balloon. The mother, seeing the man approaching, panicked and whisked the child away. The video faded out on the sad-looking man getting back home and putting the balloon in a room along with all the other balloons he had collected and could never give back to anyone.

Beth then asked how participants felt about what they saw, and answers varied. She analyzed the child’s, mother’s, and man’s behaviour using the SPEC tool.



Participants gave their opinion on what they thought had happened in the mind of the three different characters in the video. Beth then asked whether participants thought that the mother in the video woke up that morning thinking that she would deliberately do something discriminatory. Not at all, she answered. The point was that nobody is exempt from discrimination. The discussion went on until break time.

Once everyone had returned, Beth explained the next activity: teams had to participate in a contest called “The king/queen of discrimination.” Teams were asked to develop a strategy to become the best discriminator. The winning team would be the one with the most subtle and efficient means of discrimination. At that point, a participant asked what the benefit was of such an exercise, and suggested that it was close to useless. Another participant answered that he wished this type of exercise had been given to people in his workplace. About 30 minutes were allocated for that exercise. Participants were then asked to share their answers. Beth then methodically analyzed each answer asking what the strategy was and what the impact was. The answers lead to an animated debate on what is discrimination and how to overcome it. Participants had mixed feelings on this exercise. Clearly, a lot were uncomfortable with it. The most creative discriminators, who enjoyed the exercise, were for the most part visible minorities. Carlos then took over for reasonable accommodation.

## Post-Training: Beth and Carlos

### Training Facilitators

I interview Beth and Carlos four months after the trial training and almost a week after the second diversity training session they both facilitated. Unlike all the other interviews, this last one was conducted outside the FTQ, at the union headquarters where

Beth worked. I had met Beth in February 2010 at the discussion session on the integration of immigrant workers where I had met also Carlos. Both had also met that same year at a training-for-trainers session at the FTQ. Beth was involved in developing the training and provided very useful input, given her hands-on experience in diversity training. I interviewed them together because not only they had facilitated all the training sessions together, but also for logistical reasons, as we all had hectic schedules. This content-loaded interview lasted about 86 minutes, the longest of all. It covered not only the trial training I observed, but also the two real training sessions that followed.

Carlos had never facilitated any diversity- or employment-related workshops. His experience in facilitating was somewhat “short,” as he puts it. It consisted of briefing sessions with co-workers where he passed on information. He attended a week-long training session (where he met Beth) offered by the FTQ on the basics of workshop facilitation and pedagogical tools and approaches. This training session had nothing to do with diversity. As for Beth, she explained that she trained around 700 unionized and non-unionized workers on diversity-related issues in a large government organization. This was a couple years before the FTQ diversity training.

Both showed an unexpected and appreciated volubility. I had planned on a 30- to 45-minute interview and walked out with nearly twice as much. Thus the following data will be divided into three parts: the first on the training sessions themselves, the facilitators’ experience in the training room; the second part on the context outside the training room that impacted the training itself; and a third part on the facilitators’ assessment of their work and the future of the training.

### **Part 1: In the Training Room**

### ***Expectations about participants and harshness at first***

After talking about their respective background, I asked them what they were expecting from the participants, given the outcome of the trial training.

[Carlos] ... *In fact . . . I was hoping that, at the end, people would look at diversity differently and question their own perception of it. It may be ambitious, but the idea was to develop some critical thinking on a subject like immigration. That is the ambitious side, but on a more down-to-earth level, I wanted at least for people to leave with some real piece of information on immigration rather than relying on prejudices or myths or all kinds of perceptions, and misconceptions.*

[Beth] *Well, I don't remember my ambitions back in 2008, when I started facilitating, but my ambitions today were simply that people learn to see the human being beneath the labels, because I believe, and that's my own opinion, that when you look at someone else as a person, the process of how we rationalize and reflect on the way we all live together just happens almost on its own. So to be able to see the human being, that was one of my main goals, and also, to make them understand that accepting one another is about being able to work together without necessarily having to apply this in our personal lives or without backing up everything someone else says, believes or goes through. So it is about making them realize that they don't have to agree with everything, to approve everything, to judge everyone nor integrate everybody, they don't have to change... but they need to accept others, live with others and work with others.*

The trial training, they explained, did not come anywhere near to meeting their expectations. This session has been hard for both facilitators regardless of their training

experience (Beth) or knowledge of the field (Carlos). There was a lot to handle, starting with content delivery.

[Carlos] *I can say that the first one [laughs] was harsh [laughs] because we had, if I can put this way, a very special group and a group not necessarily at the same level of the other groups we had afterwards . . . Some of the things that were obvious for me while developing the training weren't that obvious in the training room. One example of that would be the immigration overview section . . . Besides, one of the things we changed in this training, was precisely this section. We now have someone from the outside to improve the content and make it as credible as possible. It's someone from the ministère de l'Immigration et des Communauté culturelles . . . She is very familiar with all this and we developed with her input a 20- to 40-minute module, so that changed the training all together.*

After that section was adjusted, results exceeded the facilitators' expectations. The difference was night and day: They realized that participants did not necessarily have what they felt was a common and sufficient understanding of the issue of immigration to start the session. Once this notion was adequately covered, participants become more accepting of the remaining content. Beth highlighted the difficulties arising from group dynamics and group composition. I then asked how they felt about having to deal with diverse opinions and reconciling perceptions and reactions on such a delicate subject.

[Beth] *The trial training you attended had been particularly difficult. I was used to dealing with floor workers within the same line of work or workplace. I ended up with union leaders, and union leaders who have been working for their organizations for a very long time. They are not necessarily on the floor . . . I ended up in front of a group*

*that was unreflective of the workers, but reflective of the union organizations their worked for. So, I had a hard time staying on tops of things because I couldn't have an idea of their level, and also, it was my first experience facilitating at the FTQ. Expectations and methods are different compared to what we do in a union... Some of what participants said was hard. I had a hard time creating my own space because of the way we had divided the session and, because this was a trial training, the sections were long and we didn't realize I was not saying a word before the afternoon. So when it was time for me to jump in, because I had played so far a mere supporting role, it was difficult to gain some credibility from the participants. And, most of all, I have no status at the FTQ whereas they [the participants] had one. I'm a union employee, so from a hierarchical perspective, I was not at the same level as them. I think this had an impact on my interventions . . . It was difficult to manage because you have to cover a content that may be at times disturbing, because I think that when you talk about diversity and you want it to be useful, you have to let go of... decorum, of what you are supposed to say and what is politically correct. And that's difficult to achieve when you haven't build a relationship with the group . . . So managing all that has been difficult for me.*

Interactions later greatly improved along with subsequent sessions they facilitated. Not only did they re-work overall training flow and content, but participants directly contributed the other element of improvement. As Beth explained, they were no longer union executives disconnected from on-the-floor realities. They were workers and *real* union leaders, people close to their members. They got to talk about their real-life experiences and report what was going on in their workplaces. The interaction came with more ease.

***The topic of integration, a wall of uneasiness to breach***

Both Carlos and Beth agreed that integration and diversity are difficult topics to address. This also holds true for the training section focusing on integration per se. Beth confesses that the trial training was so challenging it gave her chills and hot flashes.

*All these concepts about integration into the Quebec society and reasonable accommodations are linked to the Quebec identity and I am realizing that this is not well defined for them, and even for me. I have the impression that we [collectively] tell people “do as you please, do what you want”. . . while telling them to do things the way they should, but we never define what we are talking about, so no one knows. And at the same time, who’s to know? I have no idea. But addressing these topics are challenging because participants’ aren’t necessarily wrong and I’m not necessarily right either. And the point of view we are promoting in our training sessions is not the only one. Then again, it is also about making them realize that all these different points of view can coexist. We can all give them some credit without diminish them, and that’s a difficult thing to do.*

As a matter of fact, I wanted to know how they felt about bringing participants over this wall of uneasiness I observed most of the time delicate issues had to be addressed.

[Beth] *I think we succeeded some times, but not on every topic. When participants say they feel lost, they don’t what to do and start naming the labels... “this group, this type of people”, then prejudices start coming out. When they feel comfortable saying things . . . like “should we say an immigrant, an immigrant person, an imported [laughs], a foreigner...” People don’t know how to name them. When people are able to voice their*

*discomfort, I think we are beyond this political correctness. They no longer pretend, and that's fine.*

Encouraging participants to speak their minds as freely as they can, Carlos adds, is about building trust.

*And building trust takes time . . . We see it progressively, especially with the last session we had. It was rather a large group, so the larger the group the longer it takes to knit closer ties... but you see the progression from the first day where there is a certain distance to the second day where even the most resistant participants towards diversity open up . . . They feel that they will not be misjudged and that they will be supported even.*

### ***Usefulness of pedagogical tools***

The various tools used in the training were the outcome of a co-operative effort. Beth felt particularly fortunate to have been offered the opportunity to provide her input.

[Beth] *For sure, the tools that I have developed myself are the ones that I use best, that I know best because I've tried them out often . . . The traditional tools, like individual work, plenary discussions, team work, role plays, are good tools. They are useful in their own way, but come short when addressing diversity and human relationships.*

### ***Content makeover***

The trial training allowed the team to see what areas needed improvement, which was one of its purposes. I asked them what had changed since.

[Beth] *Ah! Everything! The sequence, the structure... we changed the logical framework. Now we have three major themes. One is immigration, where we present an overview of immigration. Then there is integration . . . Lastly, there's diversity*

*management. Then, in each of them, we go over the what, the how, and the consequences. This is the logic behind the three modules.*

[Carlos] *We didn't want the training to be too theoretical, too disconnected, but we wanted it to be hands-on and easily put in practice. We wanted people to be able to start putting things into practice or at least reflect on ways to put them into practice, right upon returning in their work environments . . . This was important . . . Even if it simply means saying hello to everyone tomorrow, that's enough, you know [laughs], but so long as he or she can do it.*

## **Part 2: Outside the Training Room**

### ***Internal friction: Diverging views on training content and pedagogical approach***

What follows was not triggered by a direct question of mine, but was expressed first by Carlos, who segued from a topic Beth brought up. A lot came out of it, which actually makes up more than half the interview time and data.

[Carlos] *In fact... I am going to tell you something. This training was developed by two individuals who believe in it and by two other people who were not that convinced about it all. So, among the four team members, Beth and I viewed things the same way [silence], meaning that if we want people's perceptions to change, we need to let them express their emotions. We have to be able to jump over this wall of political correctness for people to open up, and once they've opened up, we can adjust things. Even if it means letting it all out in a clumsy way, we'll straighten things up . . . but we have to go beyond political correctness. However, the other people we work with are not convinced about this method. They especially don't want any rhetoric to slip outside any political correctness, you understand? They're afraid to jump off of sinking boat.*



I asked him what could explain this.

*. . . ignorance, even on our side [FTQ], on the issue of immigration. Because, well, I don't want to speak for them or judge them, but from what I observe, they are in the same position as the participants who attend our training sessions... the only difference is that... in front of our participants, what we say has a legitimacy. In front of our so-called colleagues, we don't have this legitimacy because in terms of hierarchy, historical background, seniority, age, in everything, we are regarded as being in a position of inferiority.*

This is why, Carlos further explains, the content alone was the result of a compromise that was at times hard to swallow. For instance, even though it was not in line with their approach, Beth and he accepted to leave the section on language (which was imposed by their colleagues) mostly unchanged and used it as a bargaining chip that allowed them to address other topics, such as integration, the way they saw fit. The problem with the compromises they had to make was that, because of competing approaches, opposing messages were sent to participants.

*[Carlos] So I am to encourage people not to be afraid to lay themselves bare when talking about integration, and moments later, tell them to close up and be hard-nosed on language issues! So, in the same session we'd give two [opposing] messages. That's a compromise. It is a compromise. And perhaps stubbornness, too, especially in my case because Beth doesn't work in-house, so she doesn't deal with this subordination relationship. I started off in this organization . . . I did compromise, but only up to a certain limit . . . otherwise the content I wish would be banalized. So the first thing we did*

*to overcome this obstacle was to accept to put together an imperfect training, but at the same time believing in it as much as we could.*

Beth jumped in stressing that while the union movement claims that it is going through changes, the people working within it, despite their extensive experience, despite how well they know the movement, are trailing behind. To that, she adds a major gap in the approach to cultural diversity, and consequently, the pedagogical tools put to use.

[Beth] *Today's reality is different . . . new workers, new representatives, be it young people or people of different ethnic backgrounds may have different perceptions and may want to bring the movement elsewhere, and that will be reflected both in the content and the pedagogical tools we use . . . What was important, really important for us, and what we debated over with people who worked with us, was the necessity to address diversity through the promotion of it and not through an inter-cultural conflict prevention. And that to me was crucial. I utterly wanted the training the show participants how diversity is a fact, is a good thing, that we already have what it takes to manage it... that diversity is not problematic, that it is a situation and phenomenon. So it was a bit of a headache to find ways to use proven [conventional] techniques and tools and to tweak them the way we wanted, because, at the same time, we can't just wake up one day and invent twenty pedagogical tools that work. And it is difficult to link conventional tools to these experiences because we really want to start with people's life experiences, but I think it works out quite nicely now.*

Carlos expressed a reservation: tools worked as well as they did because it was he and Beth using them. Things might be more difficult if two other facilitators had to give the same training, he says. The difference lies in their personal background in diversity

and the way he and Beth believe in what they do, something their fellow workers were not used to seeing.

[Carlos] *In fact, we have to manage the doubts and fears of others. That's mainly what we do in this session. And to do that, you need to come across as comforting; you cannot look unsure [laughs]. You need to be convinced about what you want, and about the message you are conveying. And here at the FTQ, they are not used to that.*

*So, we cannot just hand over the experiential-approach training on two preassembled rails to someone else. Rather, it's like going fishing. When you ask people to open up, you don't know what you'll get, and, believe me, it's different story every time [laughs] Sometimes it makes your life easier, sometimes it can be damn disturbing [laughs]! You have to go with the flow.*

He further adds that digging into the uncertainty of people's raw emotions was something that was not well received by colleagues, who even resented such an approach.

[Carlos] *When you deal with emotions, few people are ready skate on that ice. So, the fact that we said we're ready to skate, people say "don't go there, there is no ice" [laughs]. So we had to convince all the people who were involved in developing this training by telling them "it's fine, let us break our neck! We'll put on a helmet. We love this!" So, they let go of us. They were a real bundle of nerves. [Beth] Maybe, they thought we'd surrender and adopt their point of view.*

### **Part 3: Assessment and Future**

#### ***Post-Trial Training Debriefing***

The post-mortem meeting the team had after the trial training had been explosive. As Carlos reports, things got out of control and nasty. People just let it all out blatantly.

[Carlos] *Ah! [long laughs, silence] One of the two observers called me to apologize, after the post-mortem meeting we had after [the trial training] because it was so nasty, nasty as hell. They were disappointed and expressed it bluntly, very bluntly. As Beth said, they have a lot of experience, impressive credentials, and believe that their vision is the ONLY one acceptable... and here came two "little snots" who do the contrary of what they say and who don't screw up.*

[Beth] *It's as if they said "let them fall flat on their faces, they'll eventually understand what they need to do." That's how I read it, and that's what happened, we fell flat on our faces. At the session you observed... some things went really wrong. And things were difficult because we had to focus on the content we had to handle, and we also made basic pedagogical mistakes, like not asking participants to go back to their places after group work. That killed us. And there were other stuff too.*

[Carlos] *. . . knowing we were being assessed added to the pressure in deed. The fact that the person acting as the assessor even intervened did not help! It, it added to the stress and shook things up a lot. But, yes, this one went bad. I think the only reason we still facilitate this training is because they said we were incorrigible [laughs]! Really "there's nothing we can do with these two." You know, we didn't get a lot of applause, let's put it this way [laughs].*

### ***A tour de force***

Given the context of the training, Carlos and Beth consider that the sheer existence of a diversity training session generally in line their view is a victory in and of itself.

[Carlos] *Well, for having put maybe not a foot in the door, but let's say a shoelace, we succeeded. We won the wager and I would say even more. People talk about the training outside. I was invited at a union meeting in the food and retail sector. They called me up after saying that we wanted to hold a session this fall and asked me if I could send them the materiel. So, for them to take ownership of this training is, in and of itself, a sign of success . . . The fact of that we got off the beaten track, and impose a way of doing things that is different from theirs . . . choosing to go with a value-shattering content, to say the least, I think that, yes, we succeeded. Maybe not as much as we wanted, I am talking for myself. I was expecting people to want more and more of it, but that's not the case . . . But, at least, there are no more spanners in the works, and I no longer get clubbed on the head [laughs]. There has been a point of no return. You know, there has been obstacles, obstacles and obstacles.... posting the course description on-line... spanners in the works repeatedly. Then, the trial training... spanners in the works again... After the second real training session, it's as if we'd gone past the point of no return. The point of rupture...*

[Beth] *There were a lot of frictions in deed with the FTQ when we developed the training, but we managed to still work together, even if things have been tough after the trial training. We managed to put ourselves back at work and together we changed the training and gave it the orientation we wanted to give it. I don't know if we reached an agreement or if they capitulated, but everybody was there and gave their approval, although we didn't give them any choice . . . So, it was difficult, but at the same time, they know change is necessary. And change is always difficult. The union movement is changing, the message has to change, and that's no easy business.*

### ***The Future: Hopes and Fears***

The future holds a lot of uncertainties for Carlos and Beth, the first being the fear that training will disappear if they themselves had to leave the organization.

[Carlos] *If I walk out the door I think someone will blow the candle out. Maybe I'm self-absorbed [laughs]!*

[Beth] *No, I agree with you [with Carlos] . . . In my experience, I was lucky to have had a more open-minded structure, where I work. I am not talking about the FTQ, but my own union. I even had a lot of support from employers and that was hard for the union to take. My union was reluctant towards the training, but the employers whom I presented the training to were highly interested and spread the word about it among them. This forced the union to believe in it too, because if it is good for employers, it must be good for unions too. What we do here at the FTQ is more thorough than what I do at my union. So, it is a victory, in my opinion, because whether unions or employers use [the training], the important thing is that it benefits the workers.*

*Another element of success has been the work of one participant in particular who, after the trial training, literally embarked on a promotion spree and spread the word in various unions affiliated with FTQ, so much that "the FTQ would be in no position to pull the plug," at least not for the remainder of my contract. It took us a year; it was a good challenge when you look at it all.*

Both said they were satisfied with the end results while fearing that it would prematurely come to an end. They realized that this historical training was a major first step, and that a lot more has yet to be done for the slightest difference to be visible and lasting. "Training is good, but a lot more is needed," Beth argues.



## FINDINGS

The main purpose of this research was to find out what could be observed and inferred from the experiences of diversity training developers and facilitators in a union organization. This study was also concerned with the role of union education in countering discriminatory hiring practices against visible minorities and promoting diversity. To do so, I first wanted to determine if there was an awareness of diversity-related issues at the FTQ and if so, how was that awareness expressed. The task of looking for signs of such awareness in FTQ-produced documents, artefacts and other activities had been quite effortless. My very first contact with the Federation occurred, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, at a discussion session on the integration of immigrant workers. Judging from the opening remarks of this discussion session, which had not been the first on the issue, awareness seemed to be more than just filler in the Federation's agenda and a notion confined to isolated local union members. As it was presented, it seemed to have been rather a high-level organization-wide preoccupation voiced and supported by FTQ's executive managers, as it has been on a number of occasions since the 1970s. From this higher orientation stemmed various educational activities on diversity over the years.

Thus the second element was to look at the organizing of a particular educational activity on the issue of hiring discrimination or workplace diversity. Again, shortly after that discussion session on the integration of immigrant workers, I was informed that the FTQ was putting together the first-ever training session on diversity in unionized workplaces. I collected my data throughout the development of this training session and



stopped shortly after three sessions (one trial session and two real sessions) had been given.

The last element of this research was to look at the organizational factors that impact the outcomes of such diversity training.

To better highlight the relationships between these three points, the following discussion will be divided into four themes: 1) the need to measure outcomes and stop training blindly; 2) the need to leverage organizational capacity to include diversity training in long-term planning; 3) the difficulties of dealing with sensitive material and 4) the need to return to the legal definition of visible minorities. These themes were chosen because they reflect the salience of the issues highlighted during my data collection. I will also link these elements of analysis with various concepts and perspectives from the Literature Review.

## **Theme 1: The Need to Measure Outcomes and Stop Training Blindly**

As described in the Literature Review, diversity training belongs to the category of issues courses, a form of educational activity often regarded as second-class or, even, as an intellectual luxury, as opposed to core courses on grievance techniques or occupational health, for example. Issues courses tend to follow the logic of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: They sit somewhere at the top of the pyramid along with priorities of lesser priority. Unions generally focus their educational efforts on core courses, as their mobilizing capacity, collective organizing, and very existence depend on it. For FTQ's education department, diversity training was presented in the official 2011-2012 brochure

under the category of specialised training, perhaps too specialised to attract enough interest, funding, means and/or participants. Because, as it stands, the last training sessions scheduled in November and December 2012 were cancelled, FTQ's department for the integration of immigrant workers merged with the francization department from which it was originally an offshoot, and the three-year funding agreement with the MICC (ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles) was not renewed. I'll come back to that, but for the time being, let us turn to the means, and more specifically assessment means, because they are fundamental in answering the question, "How does training change perception and practice?"

Hopes, aspirations and faith, while being positive, are the only answers to this question for a number of reasons. I've identified four of them based on the data:

- 1) Imbalance between pre- and post-training resource allocation
- 2) Short-sighted planning due to the newness of the training and the ephemeral quality of the organizational structure managing the training
- 3) Problematic feasibility
- 4) Internal politics

First, the imbalance between pre- and post-training resource allocation: Typically, and understandably, the training development and delivery stages draw most of the human, financial and material resources, which leaves post-training assessment with few, or close to no, resources if planning was not done appropriately. The diversity training put together at the FTQ was no exception, especially since it had never been given before. Everything about the training had to be devised from the ground up, therefore a

great deal of resources went into developing the training content and material: interviews with local union representative, focus groups with unionized workers, regular committee meetings, trainer training, promotional documentation, in-class observation, etc. A three-month needs assessment was carried out by Carlos and his team to gain a better understanding of the issues to be addressed and the perspective to favour. They conducted one-on-one interviews with local union representatives from various unions across the province. An advisory committee was created to guide content production. Later, a focus group was held with the objective of validating the training content and orientation. At the trial training session, two people from that same advisory committee acted as observers who then had to debrief the facilitators. These were all measures meant to assess the work being done in great part by Carlos and Beth. Not to assess the training outcomes per se.

Second, short-sighted planning due the newness of the training and ephemeral quality of the organizational structure managing it: Incomplete planning was not deliberate, but was rather an indirect consequence of the novelty of the whole training development process. As I mentioned, this type of training had never been developed or presented before. No one had experience with such an educational endeavour. Expectations, as Carlos had stressed, were modest, knowing it was a first and that the task that lay ahead was enormous: changing perceptions would not happen overnight. This suggested that post-training assessment might have been premature at the time and consequently it was put aside. Modest expectations also meant, as Carlos pointed out, that because this training was a first, it had to be accepted at the start with all its imperfections. In addition to the newness of the training itself, was the newness of the

organizational unit that had just been created to produce and later manage all diversity-training matters. The focus for Carlos, who had been appointed to co-ordinate the department for the integration of immigrant workers, was to convince people around him of the legitimate purpose of both his presence and the existence of the Department. And to sustain that legitimacy, tangible proof and action were needed. So, putting the training together and making sure it existed was far more important than the outcome assessment that might follow. Not only was the department, including Carlos' position, freshly created, but funding was ephemeral, which further intensified his survival mode and made any form of outcome assessment look even more superfluous. This was expressed by the two facilitators who feared that once they left, training would die on its own or someone would "pull the plug."

Third, the problematic feasibility of outcome assessment: Even if the organizational structure remained unchanged—if the department still existed as a separate entity—the feasibility of outcome assessment would remain quite a logistical challenge that would require extensive planning. This is inherent in the training design. It targeted union representatives pulled from FTQ-affiliated unions scattered across the province. In such a context, whoever was conducting the outcome assessment would need to cover a sufficient number of workplaces to collect meaningful data. While being far from impossible, this would mean mobilizing additional budgetary, material and human resources, depending on the type of assessment chosen. What assessment method would be used to measure perception and behavioural change in multiple workplaces? Would interviewers travel to various workplaces, or would questionnaires sent out to participants suffice? Would participants go to regional offices for interviews? These are examples of

methodological and logistical factors that make outcome assessment far more complex for the FTQ, even laborious for some who raised valid points questioning its relevance. As Carlos mentioned, results would take time to become visible, so one would have to wait before being able to assess any outcome, postponing any effort or reflection on assessment to a future undetermined date.

The last, but certainly not the least, element that has impacted, or even overshadowed, any possible outcome assessment has to do with internal politics. By this, I am referring to the incessant interpersonal struggle and friction among committee members. It has left the facilitators who shouldered this training gasping for air after having spent so much energy on simply making it happen. This was stressed on many occasions at the last interview alone. Carlos and Beth were up against the other members of the advisory committee. One of them was Carlos' immediate supervisor and the other, head the education department, two rather esteemed figures with long-established reputations in the fields of francization and union education that shone within and beyond the Federation. And of the two facilitators, Carlos, as the person responsible for developing the training, was always on the frontline, unlike Beth, "an outsider." She was not directly a FTQ staff member and was, as she said, perceived as a second-class committee member. This last element alone highlights how rigid and the hermetic the FTQ hierarchical structure is: People know their own place and are expected to stay there. If expressed by people in higher authority, mere opinions and viewpoints, not even formal instruction, were to be followed and applied. Because of their experience and position compared to that of Carlos and Beth, these senior committee members felt they were the sole guardians and righteous holders of THE educational vision. This vision

dominated all educational matters, especially in the areas of training content and pedagogical approach, the two main bones of contention. The facilitators' responded to the veterans' unyielding positions with stubborn determination, and they did so, as they asserted, at the risk of falling flat on their faces. This demonstrates the war-like atmosphere experienced by the people who were charged with developing this diversity training. The confrontational nature of what became, over time, a forced group effort produced a number of casualties, and outcome assessment was among that number.

There is no doubt that a clear measure of the success of any union educational training is what happens in practice afterwards. Everything mentioned previously underscores the need to devise indicators that can generate some measure of that success: The existence and future of diversity training depend on it. The usefulness, legitimacy and funding (whatever the source) of training all depend on it. Diversity training needs a track record in order to be perpetuated; otherwise any justification of its usefulness will inevitably rest on shaky impressions or unconvincing appraisals—especially for programme funders. Beyond a minimal level of conceptual coherence, legitimate indicators might include participants' and trainers' subjective perceptions, a post-training survey of participants after they have returned to work for a number of months or years, and pre-test and post-test of non-aware, non-participants to estimate whether any changes have occurred within the target organizations. Burke (2002) believed that many unions were lacking adequate means to evaluate the long-term impact of union education programmes. It is a political issue before being a funding issue. Outcome assessment will only help diversity training gain organizational support and

recognition, because the post-training evaluation form filled out by participants is, of course, just a beginning.

## **Theme 2: Leveraging the Organizational Capacity to Plan for the Long Run**

As crucial as outcome assessment may be, it needs to be integrated into a broader planning framework. The capacity and the resources to achieve this are not out of the FTQ's reach. Indeed, the Federation has demonstrated over the years that it can create space within its organizational structure for diversity and integration. Of course, the shape and scope of this space has changed over time and will certainly change again, but it will remain. This gives an indication of the Federation's intention to make this issue a permanent area of focus. An example of this is the integration of immigrant workers administrative unit that went from an entity under the francization department to a full separate department for three years, then back under francization. Another example would be the committee entirely devoted to integration that was officially given permanent status in 2004 by a resolution of the congress, FTQ's highest governing structure. This structural and regulatory framework has allowed the organization to carry out various projects either to raise awareness or change perceptions and behaviours on integration. Since the 1990s, the Federation has produced an increasing number of publications on integration, presented briefs to provincial parliamentary committees, and put together educational activities culminating with the diversity training examined in this paper. This shows that the FTQ is endowed with the organizational capacity to develop educational activities as it has in the past, but now needs to build on what it has achieved and look towards the future.

One of the important lessons that can be derived from this experience is that programme planning should be done with some kind of vision for the long-term transfer of awareness, skills and competencies. It is only too easy to forget that most organizational and social development programmes are not usually a perennial feature of the landscape. They inevitably come to an end when funding expires. It is also very easy for awareness, skills and competencies to simply evaporate if no sustained outcomes are pursued. Diversity training targets only a small number of union representatives immersed in work environments with counter-emancipatory dynamics: staff turnover that makes awareness a constant rebuilding exercise, typical resistance to change, and the resilience of organizational culture, as reported in the Literature Review, that is usually very difficult to change. Hence, the importance for social development programmes like diversity training to focus on the endurance of training outcomes in workplaces.

In this perspective, it would be useful for program planners to consider some existing models, such as the Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) *Results-Based Management Approach*. This approach has been used in various forms at CIDA for over 30 years. It "integrates strategy, people, resources, process and measurement to improve decision making, transparency and accountability." ("Results-Based Management Tools at CIDA: A How-to Guide," n.d., para. 1). The approach focuses on achieving outcomes/results and implementing performance indicators. It was put in place by the Agency because, after spending money on activities and documenting outcomes, organizations were unable to tell whether progress had been made. They had no clear knowledge of the results attributed to their activities. The whole idea behind the results-based management approach is to link intention with purpose. It does so by



providing programme developers with a tool that allows them to: (a) define clear and realistic results based on adequate analysis; (b) monitor progress towards desired results with adequate indicators; (c) identify and manage risk; (d) increase knowledge by integrating lessons learned into the decision-making process; (e) report on these results.

This easily transferable approach relies on a results chain model (See Appendix E) divided into six levels: inputs, activities, outputs, immediate outcomes, intermediate outcomes and ultimate outcomes. Together, these levels follow the causal logic of a programme, i.e. how the programme is implemented (input, activities, outputs) and what changes occurred after the implementation of the programme (immediate, intermediate and ultimate outcomes). Whether immediate, intermediate or ultimate, these outcomes represent the results associated with the programme and must be measurable with quantitative or qualitative indicators. The strength of the results chain model lies in its simplicity and focus on realistic, achievable, and relevant results.

### **Theme 3: Overcoming the Difficulties of Dealing with Disconcerting Material**

Even with no real measurement of general diversity-training effectiveness, it is commonly believed, as mentioned in the Literature Review, that changing behaviours is an ambitious objective. As both facilitators underscored, diversity training needs to bring people into uncomfortable emotional and conceptual spaces to start being effective in any way. Participants must cross the line of political correctness and drop their senses of decorum and dogma, which stand in the way of critical and transformative learning. Diversity training deals with sensitive and disquieting material and for most, accepting to

explore these spaces of uneasiness is not only challenging but painful. The ability to overcome this difficulty is indispensable first, to raise awareness and second, to change perceptions and behaviours, the objective of FTQ's diversity training. Failing to achieve this minimally could leave such educational endeavours not only ineffective but even damaging (Day, 1995). Topics of general interest were not an issue. The sensitive material I am referring to involves each individual personally and directly on issues like identity, integration, and discrimination.

The interviews and observation allowed me to identify two major difficulties associated with the diversity training material: the boomerang effect of the material itself and the reactions it triggers. The material is troubling because of the mirroring effect it has on everyone. When dealing with collective identity, integration, and discrimination in the workplace, what really surfaces is everyone's own complicated relationship with these concepts and realities. It puts them in the situation of having to face their own biases and prejudices. These difficulties apply to participants, programme developers and facilitators alike—not to mention the researcher.

In most cases, it was twice as hard for participants, mainly because they were not only facing themselves, but also the judgement of others. This made them resort to a number of protective measures at various moments. The most common, as I mentioned, was to play it safe by adopting a politically correct posture, saving face and allowing them to gauge other participants. When addressing issues related discrimination in the workplace for instance, the first reaction was to condemn it publicly—as most people would do. Then, reactions varied according to the participants' ethnicity. Most participants from non-minority groups either claimed the inexistence of a problem or

dissociated themselves from an existing problem—and their official role as union representatives made it easier for them seek some sort of exoneration. Some hid behind their positions to distance themselves personally from the discriminatory practices they were denouncing: they were here to find tools to help the other marginalized few who needed it, not themselves. The same reserve was observed among participants from minority groups, but to a lesser degree. Whether such reluctance to open up could be attributed to the disillusion and cynicism of another bound-to-fail attempt is not proven, but could be a possibility. Some participants' sighs were revealing in that sense. Nonetheless, some were more prone to disclose personal experiences and perceptions and talk about problems their fellow workers faced. The ones speaking the most spontaneously about discrimination issues were often the ones who presented themselves as one-time victims. But, regardless of ethnicity, not wishing to admit to personal biases and prejudices, or even projecting discriminatory behaviours onto others, is a common reaction. Programme developers and facilitators were no exception.

Renée, one of the programme developers and head of the francization department, offered a number of colloquialisms, eloquent silences, and generalities that translated her uneasiness when answering questions on identity and diversity. As Beth stressed, even for people with a certain experience in dealing with such issues, discomfort sometimes barely subsides. Renée was not only experienced in dealing with issues of integration, she seemed convinced of the necessity to fight discrimination and advocate for better integration. Yet she was, along with the head of the education department, fiercely against any approach venturing “outside any political correctness” on hot topics. Somehow, she wanted the training cleared of any controversial or disturbing approaches.

The training, in her view, had to remain silent on delicate issues. Her opposing views led to an open battle with Carlos and Beth, the “two young snots,” to use Carlos’ own words. Was this clash the result of a generational or hierarchical gap? I have no certainty of this, but the choice of walking the thin line of an uneasy route has certainly been challenging for programme developers planning training, but even more challenging for the facilitators directly involved.

The ability to deal with disturbing material depends on the facilitators’ skills and approach. As one of them said, once participants are encouraged to open up and speak freely about a given delicate or controversial topic, anything can emerge. The way to present the content, keep interaction going, create space out of raw emotion for critical thinking, and most of all build trust among participants/facilitators will determine overall training effectiveness. This, in itself, is where the difficulty lies. Participants walk into these types of training seeking answers and practical ready-to-use tools. Union representatives accustomed to basic courses on bargaining skills, for example, are expecting black and white procedures to follow. Even after the facilitators clearly explained that concepts such as integration and discrimination are complex and floating, the lack of clear cut answers raised questions on the purpose and usefulness of the training in some participants’ minds. Some participants left the training session with more questions than before. This makes the facilitators’ task even more demanding. Especially since, as Beth highlighted, even facilitators often have the same questions, insecurities, and biases as the participants, and have to admit to them publicly.

In such a context, the important thing is to set everyone straight on the objectives. FTQ’s diversity training started off with the usual opening remarks and introductions,

then the listing of everyone's expectations. The objectives had not been communicated to the participants at that point, an unfortunate choice. It would have helped participants to know the focus and aim of such training right from the start. Later, before the lunch break, sensing that some participants were growing impatient, objectives had to be communicated to clear misunderstandings and justify the possible and expected coexistence of differing viewpoints in the class... and at work. The purpose of any diversity training focusing on behavioural change was, as Beth explained, to make people realize that they do not have to agree on everything. They do not have to approve of everything. They can keep their prejudices and biases unchanged, but what they need to do is to accept others and work with them in a respectful manner. Anything else is futile if that fundamental objective is not stated and targeted.

It is worth mentioning that if the training objectives came late in the process, a laudable effort was made to adapt the training tools, exercises, and conceptual approaches to address delicate topics like discrimination in depth. This was the case with the SPEC tool used to analyze and help redress discriminatory situations. This tool was not only original for its analytical characteristics but also for its direct and universal application. The King of Discrimination Competition exercise was also highly efficient in eliciting genuine reactions from each participant although set in the fictive and unlikely situation of having to find the most subtle and efficient discriminatory behaviours. These, as we have seen, served as discussion triggers on the topic itself and on ways to overcome discrimination in the workplace. Although the facilitators spent little time explaining the theories and concepts informing their positions, choice of tools, and corrective measures,

they did provide a case in the participant guide. The theoretical frameworks retained by the programme developers were:

- 1) the social identity theory of intergroup relations, which suggests that relationships increase mutual knowledge among individuals and help them develop less negative behaviours towards one another
- 2) common predicament and cooperation, which argues that intergroup cooperation among individuals successfully reaching a common goal helps alleviate prejudices and discrimination
- 3) a sociological approach that offers three models capable of reducing intergroup prejudices and hostility—deategorization, recategorization and mutual differentiation
- 4) the role of emotions, in other words, the ability for someone to use empathy to better understand another individual or group of individuals' perspective

According to Miffen and Miffen (1982), there are at least four approaches to diversity education: 1) acknowledgement of diversity; 2) celebrating the difference; 3) discrimination awareness; 4) pro-active anti-racist education. At the very least, diversity training programmes must have an explicit focus when it comes to its goals. It must situate itself somewhere along the continuum of radical activism, hopefully somewhere at the high end of the scale.

## **Theme 4: Visible Minorities, a Concept with a Truncated Meaning**

Diversity-related issues are not simply uncomfortable to deal with, but some of the concepts to which they are attached also seem to be hard to delineate. Unlike integration and discrimination, *visible minorities* is clearly the most problematic concept to fully grasp. This concept is central because the scope of its definition determines the orientations and the range of the actions carried out by the FTQ, including union educational activities. It further shapes the other two concepts of integration and diversity, also foundational to the Federation's efforts on these issues. It poses the essential question of *Who?* When the Federation, through the voice of its coordinators and managers, expresses the desire to better “manage diversity,” who is targeted? Who is included? Who are *they*?

As stated in the Literature Review, the Government of Canada defines visible minorities as “persons, other than aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour” (*Employment Equity Act*, n.d., Interpretation section). This legal definition may be of questionable validity or “ill-adapted”, “too simplistic”, “too flattening,” or too “wide-encompassing” for numerous reasons put forth by its detractors, but it remains clear for the most part and operational. It is also the definition that was used by FTQ's programme developers. As clear as this definition may be, as accepted as it was conceptually, the reality to which it is linked is often fraught with confusion and semantic narrowness.

Regardless of position, ethnic background or ethnic sensitivity, and experience and involvement with diversity issues, all participants of this research inevitably referred, at some point, to visible minorities as *immigrants* and vice versa. These terms often seem to have synonymic values in the minds of those who use them. Among the abundant examples, here are a few: Carlos, who pushed for a more inclusive notion of diversity, one that includes “all people with different social markers, like culture, ethnic belonging, religion, etc.” almost exclusively talked about immigrants and immigrant workers and made practically no reference to visible minorities. He further mentioned that one of the training goals was to change the perception of immigration. Renée never referred to anything else but immigrant workers. There was certainly an animated debate among training participants on the signification of terms like immigrant and identity, but the focus was rarely put on *non-immigrant* visible minorities. And Beth, as often as she could, referred to individuals without labelling them, preferring to insist on the common and intrinsic human characteristics they shared. However, while she was explaining that they made a point of reminding participants of the importance of blurring the line between *us* and *them*, she let slip, “but they need to get involved with their unions.” She was referring to “immigrant workers” . . . with no clear labels.

This highlights the transitional state in which the Federation seems to find itself when it comes to defining what constitutes diversity. There is a claim to address diversity in a holistic way, yet old limiting reflexes are persistently shrinking the meaning of visible minorities to one of its simplest facets: immigrants. Historical reasons can explain it. As was mentioned, workplace diversity and integration as areas of focus first arose through the francization of immigrant workers. Cultural otherness was expressed and understood



almost exclusively through the presence of immigrant workers. For over 30 years, diversity-related narratives have been reducing this phenomenon to a by-product of immigration. Of course, this framing also explains why diversity management falls under the integration of immigrant workers at the FTQ. Addressing diversity through the perspective of immigration is not entirely wrong. No one would honestly question the fact that the influx of people coming from various parts of the world has diversified Quebec's social fabric and workplaces. However, diversity cannot be limited to that alone.

Cultural diversity also results from the presence of individuals belonging to visible minorities who have not immigrated to Quebec. And what this research has highlighted is precisely the need to expand the meaning of visible minorities to non-immigrants. Their experiences and aspirations are not those of immigrant workers, yet they face similar professional integration difficulties as a result, for example, of hiring discrimination. Statistically, it has even been shown that, among Montreal's Black population, "second-generation immigrant," as they are paradoxically referred to in the literature, are burdened with an unemployment rate higher than that of Black immigrants (Torczyner et al., 2010). This stems from a difference in both personal expectations and social categorization. Having spent their entire lives in Quebec, they share with the invisible majority a set of similar cultural traits and experiences that puts them on equal footing in terms of the expectations they have for themselves. Because of this, they will not settle for less than what they feel entitled to. They are not immigrants, just as immigrants do not automatically belong to visible minorities. As it stands, the interpretation of *visible minority* is impoverished by the systematic exclusion of these perspectives. The term

*visible minority* simply needs to recover its legal meaning so that no one is unnecessarily overlooked. For now, the definition provided in the Employment Equity Act seems to be the most appropriate for the purpose of defining the groups of individuals targeted by diversity management efforts.

The importance of expanding the meaning of the concept of visible minorities beyond the reductive semantic boundaries in which it is trapped at the FTQ has practical implications for such an organization, as I mentioned above. It has an impact on the number of individuals targeted by programmes and training, on the union action strategy developed to reach them, and on the resources mobilized. The Federation would only gain in consistency by realigning workplace integration strategies and actions to include all visible minorities, as the organization stated that it strives to fight “against all forms of discrimination on the grounds of race, skin colour, gender . . . ethnic or national origin . . .” (“Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ),” n.d.). The premise suggesting that diversity is the result of something mostly foreign will become, over time, increasingly erroneous; a lot of it is proudly and locally produced.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The experiences reported by participants and my observation of the diversity trial training session leave no doubt on the capacity for union organizations to produce critical knowledge and raise awareness of diversity-related issues. The case of the FTQ demonstrated that capacity. This research particularly leaves no doubt on the complexity of producing such knowledge for reasons first related to the organization itself, in other words reasons of a managerial, structural and political nature; then, for reasons pertaining to training design and delivery, especially when dealing with sensitive or even disturbing material.

By managerial, structural, and political complexities, I am referring to the difficulties that arise from the organizational environment in which diversity training is developed. Managerial complexities include not only the decision to devise an educational activity on diversity, but also the decision to ensure its legitimacy and sustainability. In the case of the FTQ, top management backup was not the problem, at least not officially. The rather common difficulty, as Parris et al. (2006) summed up, had to do with the gap between the official, amply publicized pledge and the means or resources made available. Intentions look good in programme brochures, in opening remarks and on websites. Even with a relatively moral binding quality, as these intentions relay orientations endorsed by the FTQ's congress, a supreme governing assembly, they still offer no guarantee on the transfer to sustained action. Parris et al. (2006), whose analysis focused on Canadian organizations at large, came to a similar conclusion: "Canadian organizations say they value diversity but have not yet fully committed their

policies, practices, and resources to driving diversity to the core of their operations” (p. i). Structural complexities are related to the organization’s administrative entity overseeing training development and delivery. Structural changes often compromise continuity. FTQ saw its integration of immigrant workers department stripped of its co-ordinator and administrative independence when funding came to an end. Diversity training is now managed by people whose main occupation it is to promote the French language and francization in the workplace. Complexities of a political nature result from the turbulence produced by clashing power relations and hostile dynamics that affect everything about the training. The full-out battles over training content and pedagogical approaches between the belligerent members of the training development advisory committee had obvious implications for training already considered incidental from an organization-wide perspective.

As I also pointed out, producing critical knowledge on diversity issues means coping with complexities related to content development and delivery, because this content is, by nature, controversial and disturbing. In addition to that discomfort, it deals with realities that hardly fit into conceptual boxes that one manipulates to find solutions. Discrimination, diversity management, integration, and visible minorities are ambiguous and tricky concepts, because they appear somewhat consensual and logical from a distance. However, up close, they can easily disintegrate and lose their inner coherence after being filtered through personal life experience, social interactions, and individual aspirations. These concepts are porous abstractions that vary in time and space, even for a single individual.

Whether managerial, structural, or pedagogical, all these complexities overlap, but none of them are insurmountable.

If this research has left no doubt on the capacity for unions to put together diversity training sessions, it has offered no certainty on the ability for the training sessions to change perceptions and behaviours for two reasons: first because, as shown in the Findings and Literature Review sections, these changes are hard to measure and second, because no data was collected on training effectiveness. This was beyond the parameters of this research. The first reason above is convergent with the conclusions numerous authors have drawn on training effectiveness. If most agree on the role and usefulness of union education in inducing change in the workplace, they also equally agree with the fact that such conclusions do not rest on a systematic measured assessment, but rather on loosely documented appraisals of too little scientific rigor. The need for research endeavours that will focus on training outcome assessment is only too obvious.

## **Limitations, Recommendations and Thoughts for the Future**

This research was also concerned with the role of union education as one of many means to counter hiring discrimination against visible minorities, as this phenomenon jeopardises workplace diversity. In all modesty, it has somewhat succeeded in providing an insight into the development process of an unprecedented training activity devoted to diversity. However, I was unable to put as much emphasis on hiring discrimination as I had originally planned. This is explained by the fact that it is an issue somewhere outside

the periphery of concerns in which unions invest their efforts. Understandably, unions look after their members' interests, workers with full employee status and pay cheques from which union dues are deducted. Hiring discrimination introduces this idea of dealing with individuals with no employee status, who are not union members, and, given the circumstances, have a lesser chance of becoming members. Therefore, from a strictly mercantile perspective, it would seem as if unions use the money collected from members in good standing to cater to the needs of people who have fewer chances of ever joining the union. Some could argue that this would be the same as throwing money out the window, a rather inaccurate shortcut of course. Union organizations like the FTQ situate their actions in a sort of universality. Ideas of solidarity, social justice, and equity transcend member status and are meant for all. So their mission statements declare. So their past struggles testify, as well. Unions have played an essential role in reducing gender-based wage gaps among workers, in bettering the working conditions of temporary migrant workers, and, certainly not the least, in embracing the cause of women's rights.

That being said, union-developed diversity training is embryonic, so is workplace discrimination as a training topic. It is consequently understandable that hiring discrimination, with even more distant ties to union realities, attracts less attention. Research, not surprisingly, is just as embryonic on the subject matter. Future inquiries may find it relevant to focus more specifically on the phenomenon of hiring discrimination itself.

Although data collection spanned a year, this research remains modest in scope. I interviewed two participants once and one participant five times, and observed thirteen at

the trial training. There is ample room for improvement, not only in regards to the number of interviews conducted, but also in the type of participants interviewed and the type of training observed. I did not have the opportunity to interact with trial-training participants to get an account of their opinions on the usefulness of the training they attended, for example. Doing so would have had to be planned and organized, if not included in a completely different research project. I also did not have the opportunity to attend one of the training sessions after the trial session, mainly because of incompatible schedules. Although the number of participants sufficed for this research design, other educational researchers may want to increase the number of participants in their study, especially if outcome assessment is the focus. Training effectiveness depends on it, as I have stressed and explained in the previous chapter.

If demographic projections prove to be on target, we are presently upstream of important social diversification that will change the faces of our workplaces. Staffing needs will force recruiters to challenge discriminatory assumptions. This is good news, but we would collectively be well advised to plan rather than having to resort to remedial strategies after the fact. The better workplaces are be prepared to facilitate the integration of workers of all backgrounds, including those belonging to visible minority groups, the smoother the transition will be when it will matter most. Organizations that have the ability and resources to plan should not wait to be constrained by socio-economic imperatives to fix things when it is too late. Even a full employment context forcing people to work side by side might not be enough.

I started this research project with a number of biases and basic assumptions about union education's transformative quality. I was convinced that union-led learning

initiatives had the ability to create anti-hegemonic and anti-discrimination learning spaces that promote diversity. I believed unions held great potential for triggering and bringing about social change, as their defining feature and their mission are grounded in values such as justice and equity. The legitimacy they need to take action based on these values is intrinsic to their structure. They simply need to leverage these fundamental values. Unlike non-unionized organizations that are rather likely to be trapped in a commodification logic that reifies diversity and reduces it to a mere competitive edge, unionized organizations are better equipped to look at diversity as a social enrichment that benefits society as a whole, including businesses focused on profit making. The nature of unions makes it possible for them to spark some real change.

Another part of my initial bias was the strong belief that unions in Quebec have not only the opportunity but the moral duty—because of their importance and their *raison d'être*—to advocate for healthier workplace diversity and better hiring practices: They are social stakeholders with an incredible mobilizing capacity, thanks to a member base of close to 600,000 individuals. This starts with awareness through education.

I still have these biases and basic assumptions about union education. They gladly found a legitimate justification in this research, even with all of its limits and flaws, even with no solid data on diversity training effectiveness. It has helped get a foot in the door of diversity training in union organizations. I truly hope that other research endeavours, whatever their purpose, will further expand the understanding we have of the transformative capacity of union education, for the sake of a certain category of job-seekers being systemically cast out for reasons we cannot afford economically or socially.



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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Proquest Dissertation and Theses: no results; Academic Search Complete: no results; CBCA Education: 7,365 results none of which are relevant; ERIC: no results; Google Scholar (even!): no results.

<sup>2</sup> “Minorités racisées” in French and not “minorités racialisées”

<sup>3</sup> The literature refers to one litigated case of systemic discrimination that made it to the Supreme Court of Canada: Action Travail des Femmes vs. Canadian National Railway in 1987.

<sup>4</sup> Act respecting equal access to employment in public bodies and amending the Charter of human rights and freedoms

<sup>5</sup> Learning as process of participation in communities of practice (Blaka & Filstad, 2007)

<sup>6</sup> Source: (“Regis University - The Kolb Model,” n.d.)

<sup>7</sup> Keyword searches performed: “union education and hiring discrimination”: 2 results in ERIC, none related; 31 results in CBCA Education, none related; with keywords “labor education and hiring discrimination”: 89 results in ERIC, none related; 79 results in CBCA Education, none related; with keywords “formation syndicale and discrimination à l’embauche”: 78 results in ERUDIT, none related and, finally, as a last resort, with all the above keywords in Google: 1 related result, but not specifically on hiring discrimination, but in discrimination in general.

<sup>8</sup> Old-stock Quebecer

<sup>9</sup> SPEC: Situation, perception, émotion (emotion), comportement (behaviour)

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# APPENDICES

# Appendix A: Demographics Questionnaire



## QUESTIONNAIRE—SOCIODÉMOGRAPHIQUE

1. À quel groupe appartenez-vous à la FTQ (encerclez) ?
  - a. Membre d'un syndicat affilié
  - b. Membre du personnel de la FTQ
  - c. Autre, précisez : \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Depuis combien de temps êtes-vous affilié à la FTQ ou à l'emploi de celle-ci?  
  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Sexe (encerclez) :
  - a. Homme
  - b. Femme
  
4. À quel groupe d'âge appartenez-vous (encerclez)?
  - a. 18-35 ans
  - b. 36-50 ans
  - c. 51-65 ans
  - d. 66 ans et plus
  
5. Vous considérez-vous appartenir à un groupe minoritaire visible\*?
  - a. Oui (question 6)
  - b. Non

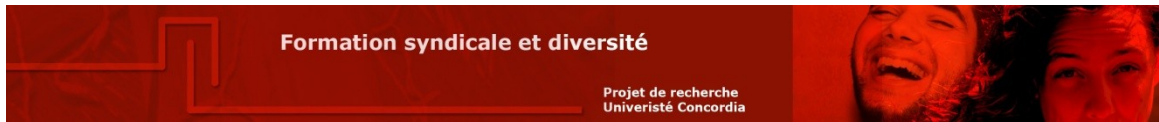
<input type="checkbox"/> Asiatique	<input type="checkbox"/> Latino
------------------------------------	---------------------------------



<input type="checkbox"/> Noir	<input type="checkbox"/> Autre (précisez) :
<input type="checkbox"/> Arabe	<input type="checkbox"/>

\*Selon la Loi sur l'équité en matière d'emploi du gouvernement fédéral, on entend par minorités visibles, « les personnes, autres que les Autochtones, qui ne sont pas de race blanche ou qui n'ont pas la peau blanche ». Il s'agit principalement des groupes suivants : Chinois, Sud-Asiatique, Noir, Arabe, Asiatique occidental, Philippin, Asiatique du Sud-Est, Latino-Américain, Japonais et Coréen. Dans le cadre de la présente recherche, les Autochtones seront inclus comme groupe minoritaire visible.

## Appendix B: Consent Form



### Formulaire de consentement de participation à une recherche

Par la présente, je déclare consentir à participer à un programme de recherche mené par M. Dominic Briere du *Département des sciences de l'éducation* de l'Université Concordia, située au 1455, boul. de Maisonneuve Ouest, Montréal (Québec) H3G 1M8.

#### A. BUT DE LA RECHERCHE

On m'a informé du but de la recherche, qui consiste à acquérir une meilleure compréhension des activités de nature éducatives qui abordent les enjeux liés à la diversité à la Fédération des travailleurs du Québec (FTQ).

#### B. PROCÉDURES

*Les travaux de recherches seront réalisés aux locaux de la Fédération des travailleurs du Québec sur une période s'échelonnant de juillet 2010 à mars 2011. Afin de mener à bien les travaux de la présente recherche, vous serez sollicité pour participer à des entrevues individuelles ou remplir des questionnaires de recherche. Vous pourriez également être appelé à prendre part à la présente recherche comme participant à une activité de formation mise sur pied par la FTQ.*

*Quelle que soit la participation, le responsable du projet de recherche s'engage à minimiser la probabilité de tout risque ou gêne associés et à prendre toute mesure spéciale de précaution pour assurer le caractère confidentiel de la recherche ou le bien-être du participant.*

#### C. CONDITIONS DE PARTICIPATION

- Je comprends que je puis retirer mon consentement et interrompre ma participation à tout moment, sans conséquences négatives.
- Je comprends que ma participation à cette étude est CONFIDENTIELLE (c.-à-d. le chercheur connaît mon identité, mais ne la révélera pas).
- Je comprends que les données de cette étude puissent être publiées.
- Je comprends le but de la présente étude; je sais qu'elle ne comporte pas de motifs cachés dont je n'aurais pas été informé.

J'AI LU ATTENTIVEMENT CE QUI PRÉCÈDE ET JE COMPRENDS LA NATURE DE L'ENTENTE. JE CONSENS LIBREMENT ET VOLONTAIREMENT À PARTICIPER À CETTE RECHERCHE.

NOM (caractères d'imprimerie) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

Merci d'avoir accepté de participer.

Si vous avez des questions concernant le **fonctionnement** de l'étude, S.V.P contacter Dominic Brierre, le responsable du projet, par téléphone au 514 655-6756 ou par courriel à [dbrierre@gmail.com](mailto:dbrierre@gmail.com).

Si vous avez des questions concernant vos **droits** en tant que participants à l'étude, S.V.P. contactez Brigitte Des Rosier PhD, conseillère en éthique de la recherche, Université Concordia, au 514 848-2424, poste 7481, ou par courriel au [bdesrosi@alcor.concordia.ca](mailto:bdesrosi@alcor.concordia.ca).

Cordialement,

Dominic Brierre

Responsable du projet de recherche Formation syndicale et diversité

Université Concordia

# Appendix C: Emails Sent to Participants

## Invitation Email from the FTQ

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13, décembre 2010  
Bonjour,

Selon le Plan d'action du Comité pour l'intégration des personnes immigrantes, le **Service de l'intégration des personnes immigrantes** a le mandat de développer des outils à l'intention des dirigeants locaux et des dirigeantes locales afin de faciliter l'intégration des personnes immigrantes dans nos milieux de travail et nos rangs.

Une formation de deux jours intitulée *La diversité dans le contexte syndical* a été développée. Les thèmes abordés dans cette formation sont :

- L'immigration au Québec;
- Les impacts de l'immigration au Québec;
- L'adaptation et l'intégration à un nouveau milieu de vie;
- L'apprentissage du français;
- Les préjugés et la discrimination;
- L'accommodement raisonnable;
- L'intégration à un nouveau milieu de travail;
- Le développement de l'action syndicale.

***Une première formation test aura lieu le :***

**19 et 20 janvier 2011**

**9 h à 17 h**

**Salle Marie-Pinsonneault**

**Tour FTQ, 2<sup>e</sup> étage**

**565, boulevard Crémazie Est**

**Montréal (Québec) H2M 2W3**

Votre participation, ainsi que celle de vos formateurs et de vos formatrices, serait fort appréciée; vous contribueriez ainsi à perfectionner la formation que nos membres recevront. **Nous vous demandons de confirmer votre présence avant le 12 janvier 2011 en répondant à ce courriel.**

*Un buffet sera servi sur place.*

Syndicalement,

## **Email sent by the FTQ to participants informing them of my research**

---

14 janvier 2011

Bonjour,

Les 19 et 20 janvier prochains, vous prendrez part à la formation-test intitulée « *La diversité dans le contexte syndical* ».

Nous souhaitons vous informer de la présence d'un observateur qui mène un projet de recherche portant sur la diversité et la formation syndicale (mémoire de maîtrise—Université Concordia). L'observation vise à recueillir des informations sur le contenu présenté et les réactions des participants.

Ce projet de recherche ne change en rien votre participation à l'atelier. **Votre identité demeurera confidentielle.**

Si vous ne souhaitez pas faire partie de ce projet de recherche, veuillez m'en informer par courriel ou par téléphone. Votre refus de participer au projet de recherche ne vous empêche nullement de prendre part à la formation à laquelle vous êtes inscrit, et ce, sans engendrer aucune conséquence non plus.

Pour toute information supplémentaire concernant le projet de recherche, vous pouvez communiquer avec Dominic Brierre, responsable de ce projet, par courriel à [dbrierre@gmail.com](mailto:dbrierre@gmail.com) ou par téléphone au [514 655-6756](tel:514-655-6756).

Merci de votre collaboration.

Conseiller

Service de l'Intégration de personnes immigrantes

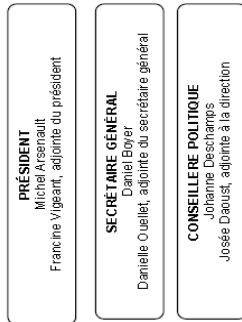
Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ)

565, boulevard Crémazie Est bureau 12100, (Québec) H2M 2W3

# Appendix D: FTQ's Organizational Chart



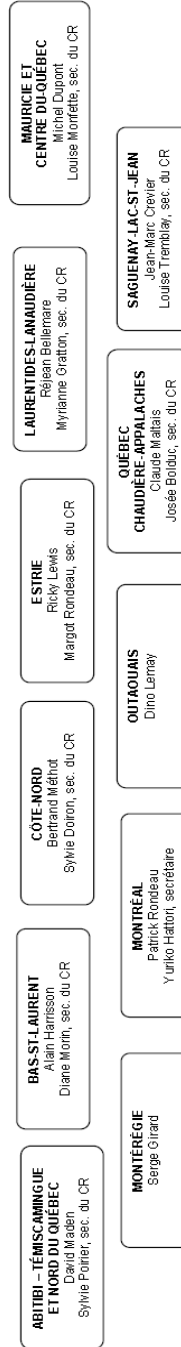
## La direction



## Les services

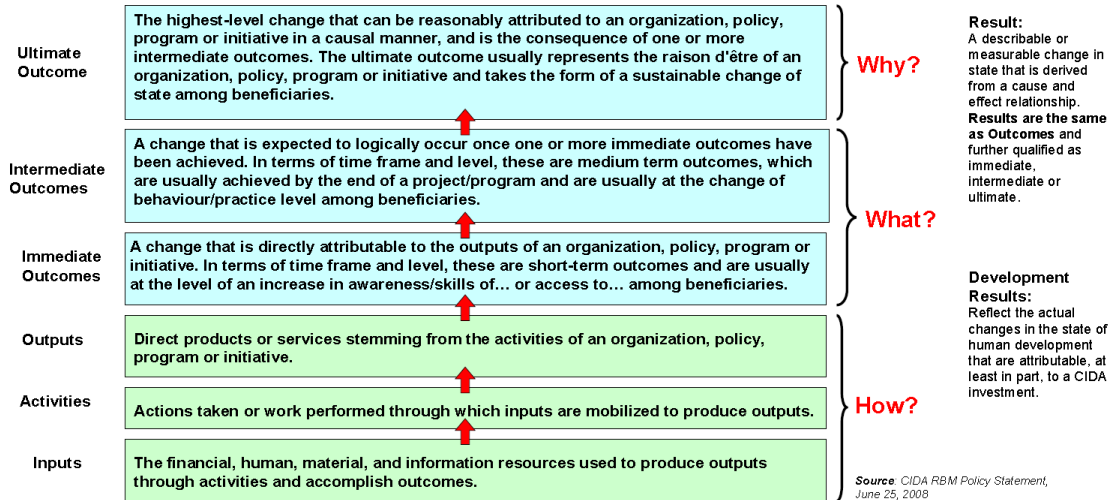


## Les bureaux en région



# Appendix E: Results-Based Management Chart

## Logic Model – Terms and Definitions



Fillable form.

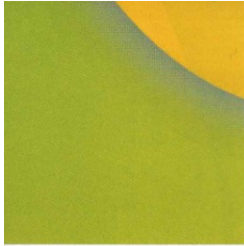


Canadian International  
Development Agency

Agence canadienne de  
développement international

Canada

# Appendix F: Diversity Training Description in FTQ's 2010-2011 Educational Programme Brochure



## Personnes immigrantes

RESPONSABLE DE LA FILIÈRE : DAVID MADEN 514 383-8047

### S – DIVERSITÉ CULTURELLE DANS LES MILIEUX DE TRAVAIL

Le vieillissement de la population et le faible taux de natalité exposent le Québec comme la majorité des pays industrialisés à des défis liés aux remplacements de la main-d'œuvre. Ainsi, le nombre de personnes immigrantes issues d'origines diverses que le Québec accueille pour combler ses besoins de main-d'œuvre est en hausse constante. Bon nombre de nouveaux arrivants, une fois établis au Québec, intègrent nos rangs. Cependant, leurs us et coutumes peuvent être différents de leur milieu de travail. Donc, les milieux syndiqués sont exposés à des situations nouvelles auxquelles ils n'ont jamais eu à faire face.

Cette formation s'adresse aux représentants et aux représentantes, aux dirigeants et aux dirigeantes ainsi qu'à ceux et à celles qui sont en charge de divers aspects liés au déroulement du quotidien ou aux dynamiques de travail. Les participants et les participantes seront en mesure de mieux comprendre le contexte actuel de la diversité culturelle et ses enjeux. La discrimination, les préjugés, la francisation et les demandes d'accommodements sont quelques-uns des sujets abordés dans le cadre de cette formation.

La formation permet aussi d'élaborer des stratégies syndicales pour l'accueil et l'intégration des personnes immigrantes.

Pour plus d'informations, contactez le Service de l'intégration de personnes immigrantes au 514 383-8047.

#### RESPONSABLE

David Maden

#### DATES

7 octobre 2010



# Appendix G: Diversity Training Evaluation Filled Out by Participants

## I. ÉVALUATION

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### TRAVAIL INDIVIDUEL

Est-ce que vos objectifs sont atteints?

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Voyez-vous autrement vos interventions ou votre rôle dans votre syndicat? Si oui, de quelle façon?

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Avez-vous des commentaires généraux à faire sur le cours?

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