

CAUT Equity Forum: Recasting Equity February 6-8, 2009 at the Delta Chelsea Hotel in Toronto

Report by Kaili Beck

Friday, February 6, 2009

The opening event of the conference was a short play performed by Kristine Nutting and Courtney Lohnes which depicted many of the acts of inequity experienced and created within academia on an everyday basis. The play was written by actors with their director Piet Defraeye. In the discussion after the performance, led by Defraeye with Rinaldo Walcott, many of the attendees noted they were struck by the violence of the play. Another theme of the discussion was how we must face our discomfort in recognizing that we are complicit and involved in these violent acts of oppression in our own institutions. Walcott asked us to think about the meaning of equity, which to him has, as a word, lost its power through politics. He asked us instead think about what we want. Then we broke and went for a drink at the reception across the hall.

Saturday, February 7, 2009

This very long day began with the telling of a Nuuchahnulth origin story presented by Richard Atleo. Within the story he emphasized a number of enlightening points. First, traditional culture involves the right to speak, the right to be heard and a third right which is often absent in Western culture, the right to be understood. Second, he noted that the relationship in this story between a man and a bear became one of sharing. Without a respect of one another's needs neither man nor bear would survive. Atleo elaborated by discussing the theme of balance and harmony in the stories from Nuuchahnulth people. Third, he discussed the meanings of equity and difference, and the freedom to be one's self.

The first panel of the day was titled "Recasting Equity". It began with Audrey Kobayashi who asked if we could transcend equality before we reach it. A lot of the policies we have put into place in our workplaces have focused on equity in the hiring process and after hiring, but we rarely think about pre-employment issues like education, issues like childcare and other policies (or lack of policies) that create barriers for academics and students. She described equity as a way of being and knowing, and suggested we look at changing the structure in relations to allow for the transformation.

Piet Defraeye spoke next in this panel. He spoke directly about the closing of the Office of Human Rights at the University of Alberta. The office was closed overnight with virtually no warning. Two days after the closure a press release stated the office would reopen as the Office of Internal Audit. No one knows why the office was closed. One theory is that perhaps the Administration was not too keen on the awareness initiatives (e.g. workshops) beginning offered by the office. Another theory is that there could have been collusion between the Administration and an association who was not happy

with the work of the office. No matter the reasoning, the staff was fired and the Administration does not seem to be concerned with representation in hiring committees, or other work that was once done by the Office of Human Rights. Defraeye describes the situation as one of “ungrievable loss”.

Yasmin Jiwani spoke about the defining of equality and equity. She stated that although the terms are often used synonymously they are not the same. Equality refers to being the same as, where equity refers to the equitable distribution of resources. In our universities the politics of identity are very much accepted, whereas the equitable distribution of resources is not. She noted that we are fragmenting difference into ‘edible’ bites and gave the example of how elite racism has been setting the tone for ambient racism. The Status of Women committee at Concordia had been arguing for the banning of the hijab in Quebec schools as a women’s issue while being blind to religious and cultural oppression. Unless we start to see the whole picture and stop fragmenting oppression we will not succeed as activists.

Richard Atleo spoke again as part of this panel. He stated that universities are institutions that encourage survival of fittest and corporatism, which is reflective of our society. This is model which is failing. He then discussed a positive story, the success of the Native Studies program at Vancouver Island University. He ended by saying there is an economic benefit to equality and equity, in human, physical and financial resources.

We then broke into groups to talk about certain issues which would be summarized at a plenary session later that day. Then we had lunch.

When we returned we heard from a panel entitled “Tensions and Complements”. The first speaker of this panel was Mark Neufeld. He told his story of struggle at Trent when his mental health prevented him from doing his work. He suffers from serious Seasonal Affective Disorder and conventional treatments have had no effect on him. He took a leave from work and was invited during this leave to travel to Mexico with a colleague who was doing research there and felt it might help Mark’s condition. He informed his department of this and told him he would be in contacted via email on a daily basis; however his department no longer contacted him after this. Upon his return he was thrown out of his department and banned from campus. His illness was portrayed as non-authentic and he was portrayed as a dangerous individual. With assistance from the CAUT he was able to fight to be reinstated. A resolution has been reached and although it is not perfect, they are trying to make it work.

Bonita Lawrence spoke about the Indigenous institutions in Canada. There are a variety of institutions that are Native-run and they offer a huge variety of programs, but they often must partner with provincial institutions to be able to provide their graduates with degrees or diplomas. This creates some conflict due to the colonial nature of the relationship.

Next up was Rinaldo Walcott who began by asking the question “how do you make an institution equitable when its foundation is inequity?” He then gave the example of how the University of Toronto has hired many professors from equity seeking groups, but they often don’t get tenure, (on a side note, when I was speaking with Sue from Trent she said she had five tenure denial grievances this year and many of the denied professors were from equity seeking groups). Walcott feels that we need to keep our language unfamiliar and switch it up to avoid it being institutionalized and becoming

ineffective. In his view CAUT needs to play a larger role and make equity its number one issue, which should be reflected in all areas.

Enakshi Dua spoke about research done on university anti-racist policies across the country, but focuses in-depth on ten institutions. Most of the schools have a policy but most are limited in their scope and effectiveness. A key limit to effectiveness was the attitudes of senior administration. The policies are created but then not enforced with any effort, and the language is spoken, but without meaning. As long as administration continues to deny there is racism in our universities, nothing effective will happen. It only allows our faculty, staff and students to continue on the charade of our institutions being enlightened environments of learning rather than addressing the ugly truth that not everyone is included in these utopias of learning.

At the plenary which followed this last panel of the day we heard from each of the breakout groups:

- Equity within associations: felt associations didn't serve issues of equity, lack of representation, other commitments limit the ability to attract active members, there is a need to break cliques and interrupt power in our associations
- Collective bargaining: felt there are a large number of areas we need better language (tenure, hiring, workload), more expansive definition of equity and more effective language, need to educate our members, often find a hierarchy of concerns and equity and contract academic staff concerns are at the bottom, acknowledgement that the grievance process is violent in nature, need to collective stories and narratives to learn about how other associations have dealt with problems, more resources need
- Retention and tenure: stunning repetition of experience, questions about the wording of ads, where they are posted, hiring committees, arbitrary ways of exclusion (e.g. collegiality), what 'service' counts, expanding the definition of scholarly activity, mentoring, audit universities based on equity, make equity top priority for next five years
- Transforming teaching and research: what do we research? how do we do this, and who? teach to transform even when difficult and uncomfortable for us and students, how do we support the marginalized in the classroom?

Sunday, February 8, 2009

We started the day with a panel called "Strategies and Tactics". I really enjoyed hearing actions being taken at other universities. Roseanna Carreon talked about her experiences at the University of Manitoba and University of Ottawa, emphasizing the importance of resources available to the people in charge of equity issues. With more resources Equity Officers and the like are able to do more outreach and work on changing the culture of the institution rather than just deal with problems as they arise. However, these offices need to be visible, accessible and accountable to the stakeholders in the university.

Malinda Smith began by stating that talk alone will not create change and asked "can we transform the academy if we do not transform ourselves?" We are implicated by nature of being part of the system. Often she has found equity to be boiled down to white women equity in practice, which

excludes many other marginalized groups. We must dismantle the Other, rather than reproducing the stratified system. This work needs to be done collectively and we need to stop fragmenting the movement. When she spoke about the segregation of space and how it leads to abstract solidarity, it made me think of our own Native Studies and Native Social Services departments and how many of us are disconnected with what is going on there. She went on to state that our challenge is to understand racism without racists, which refers to how if we ask our staff, faculty and students if they are racist they will most likely state they are not, yet we have racist institutions. There are a number of types of racism that she identified: colourblind racism refers to ignoring the structural reproduction of racism, cultural racism refers to a lack of analysis of the effects of our actions, and minimization refers to how we explain away racism. She then left us with the thought, "what does it mean to act in an anti-racist way?"

Doreen Fumia spoke about the taskforce that has been established at Ryerson. She raised concerns that it could become institutionalized and not effective, but hopes that will not be the case. The university has had a number of serious problems over the past few years, specifically, which begins with the Summerville affair and is followed by a long list of sexist, racist, and heterosexist events instigated by students, faculty, staff and administration. The problem was extreme and the taskforce is only one way in which the problems are being addressed. New administration is in places who are addressing racism, sexism and heterosexism with much stronger opposition, and more students from marginalized groups are being admitted.

David Newhouse discussed the concerns relating to First Nations faculty members. He noted that equity needs to be more than numerical, but quality must be in there too. He stated that knowledge equity would include knowledge based on experience as well as indigenous knowledges. This requires an environment of respect, dignity and honour. Of particular concern is that many Deans do not recognize Elders and do not accept their credentials as legitimate. Being expected to speak the language of administration and the academy only continues on the traditions of the education of assimilation.

Ruthann Dyer gave us all useful information about how her association has dealt with equity issues via different paths to get quick results, especially when their language was weaker around accommodation. One example included a new worker who was had mobility issues and was given an inappropriate chair for her office. She was told by the physical plant that there was no language in the Collective Agreement that required them to accommodate her needs. She then emailed the Administration a selection from the Occupational Health and Safety Act that requires them to provide workers with a safe and healthy workplace. By the next morning she had an appropriate chair. A second example involved a faculty member who was unable to use their upper body for an extended period of time which made marking essays quite challenging. They requested a marker to assist them and we denied. The Administration then recommended they switch their evaluation to multiple choice which could be electronically graded. At this point the faculty member was able to argue that this infringed on their academic freedom. Dyer recommends using all available means to achieve your ends. In a discussion I had with her later, she also recommended including Human Rights language along with Health and Safety language in the collective agreement because it makes it easier to resolve problems relating to them as most arbitrators won't touch Human Rights unless they are in the Agreement.

In the final plenary of the conference we heard back from the discussion groups. A lot of ideas were presented, and quickly so please excuse my rapid-fire notes.

- Issues of disabilities are essentially receiving lipservice and not being integrated into what we do, individuals can be lost or silenced in struggles so the collective needs to speak with them, we need to make equity essential work, marginalized groups need to be represented particularly in decisions around the distribution of resources and power, funding needs to be in place to assist equity projects
- Our representatives are overworked and stressed, not everyone needing help is coming to them, CAUT could help by taking initiative to create and give workshops on equity issues to our members, more CAUT model clauses and statements would help, address the casualization of employment (there is a relationship here between who is CAS v. tenure-track)
- What counts as research, teaching as relationship building, recognize the limits of our knowledge, mentoring should be encouraged, curriculum could be shared across university communities, stories make an impact

In closing, I want to thank LUFA for sending me to this conference. It was enlightening and really made sense of some of the issues we have here on campus. If you have any questions about the events or my notes, feel free to ask me and I will do my best to answer you.

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