

Education Circle of Change Report from a Participant



Most Attendees from the Circle of Change Gathering

Education Circle of Change

by Isaac Graves from Education Revolution (Alternative Education Resource Organization)

I recently returned from a very interesting gathering called, *Education Circle of Change*. “The *Education Circle of Change* is an initiative to advance existing movement building in education and to bring different elements of the movement together.” The venue was the Children’s Defense Fund’s stunning Haley Farm in Clinton, Tennessee, thirty miles northwest of Knoxville. The gathering brought together organizers and activists from a wide variety of backgrounds representing a great diversity of educational work and thought. The premise of the gathering was “the belief that high quality learning opportunities can be created for everyone that embody and advance the values of democracy, justice and equity and that are holistic in approach and humanizing in practice.” As an educator and representative of AERO, the drive to attend this gathering came out of its simple, yet powerful goal: “...to seed and cultivate a vibrant, vision-based network for educational transformation.”

I arrived a day late, but had an incredible experience. The event was organized by Spirit in Action, which specializes in facilitating and supporting movement building. In their own words, Spirit in Action works “...to create effective, sustainable movement networks anchored in the principles of diversity of voices, healing divisions, building connections and using our hearts and vision to create deep and lasting change.” I credit much of the event’s overall success to the interactive, movement-filled facilitation which seemed grounded in community and interpersonal connection. Facilitators included Linda Stout from Spirit in Action and Shilpa Jain, from YES! and Shikshantar.



Shilpa, Khalif, Kim, and Laura, Photo by Jayeesha Dutta

In Shilpa's words, "YES! is an organization that focuses on the intersection of self-change, interpersonal change, and systemic change. It tries to give those involved in social change key skills, community, and reflective space to be able to be more effective and sustainable in their lives and work. The organization hosts week long gathering called Jams, which bring together thirty people or so committed to sharing space."

She went on to explain that, "Shikshantar is a movement dedicated to eliminating the monopoly of schooling as a primary or only means of learning in society. [It is also dedicated to] creating multiple diverse spaces and opportunities to take learning into their own hands. [It is] really an invitation to people to collectively and personally dream about the world we want to see...and take on the learning we connect with to manifest that world."

The gathering had a number of reflective exercises where we discussed key questions pertaining to our vision of a larger movement. Questions addressed topics such as "what our ideal world would be as it relates to education" and "what the challenges and difficulties standing in the way are" among many others. In less than two days, I found a surprising sense of community and camaraderie with my fellow attendees. I simply could not image what transpired. I am reminded of an [article](#) by [Chris Mercogliano](#) where he described the Community (capitalization intended) of The Free School in Albany, NY. In what he felt was the best articulation of the essence of community, Chris used a portion from M. Scott Peck's classic treatise on the subject, *The Different Drum*:

"If we are going to use the word meaningfully we must restrict it to a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to rejoice together, mourn together, and to delight in each other, making the other's condition our own."



Maria, Photo by Jayeesha Dutta

In our limited time, I believe the *Education Circle of Change* made huge strides made towards reaching Peck's beautiful description of *Community*.

One important aspect to this gathering was the size. With less than thirty individuals in attendance, the opportunity to connect on a deeper level and network in a more meaningful way was greatly increased. Learning about all the work and projects my fellow attendees were involved in left me proud to know I was in some way a part of something greater and more significant going on in the world of education today. Towards the end of my first day in attendance I met Gail Spotted Tail. Gail is an early childhood educator from the Rosebud Sioux Reservation, who works to incorporate the Lakota language and culture into the daily lives of their children and families. This effort, *Wohpe Ekta Woglakab*, which translates to "Through the

nest they speak their language” is just one of the many profound examples that was shared throughout the event.

Before the event began, Spirit in Action wrote about the “hope that a commitment to continue the process from those who are inspired to do so” comes from the gathering. They continued to write, “The circle can grow, new voices will be included and alliances to advance a shared agenda for education may, and we hope, will emerge. Folks may engage in concrete collaborations with new allies or form distinct initiatives.” I am pleased to report that a commitment to the continuation of the process was made and the goal of “a vibrant, vision-based network for educational transformation” is certainly possible.***

Groups/Organizations Represented:

Allied Media Projects, <http://www.alliedmediaconference.org/about/amp>
Alternative Education Resource Organization, <http://www.educationrevolution.org>
AntiRacism Education
Baltimore Algebra Project, <http://www.baltimore-algebra-project.org>
Detroit Summer, <http://www.detroitsummer.org>
Ohio Coalition for Quality Education, <http://www.ocqe.org>
Education for Liberation Network, <http://www.edliberation.org>
George Mason University, <http://www.gmu.edu>
Harriet Tubman Free School, <http://www.tubmanschool.org>
Institute for Humane Education, <http://www.humaneeducation.org>
Mind Power Collective, <http://www.mindpowercollective.org>
National Black Child Development Institute, <http://www.nbcdi.org>
National Council of La Raza, <http://www.nclr.org>
Oakland Asian Students Educational Services (OASES), <http://www.oases.org>
Parent Voices, <http://www.parentvoices.org>
Rethinking Schools, <http://www.rethinkingschools.org>
Rosebud Sioux Reservation, <http://www.rosebudsiouxtribe-nsn.gov>
Schott Foundation, <http://www.schottfoundation.org>
Shikshantar: The Peoples’ Insitute for Rethinking Education and Development, <http://www.swaraj.org/shikshantar>
Sicangu Oyate Cikala Waunspe Oti, gstteccs@yahoo.com
Southwest Youth Collaborative, <http://www.swyc.org>
Spirit in Action, <http://www.spiritinaction.net>
Teaching for Change, <http://www.teachingforchange.org>
University of Oklahoma, <http://www.ou.edu>
Wohpe Ekta Woglakab, gstteccs@yahoo.com
YES!, <http://www.yesworld.org>
Youth in Focus, <http://www.youthinfoocus.net>
Zero To Three, <http://www.zerotothree.org>