

COLOURING THE CITY

March 22-24, 2002

Training Summary

What is *Colouring The City*?

Colouring The City is a three-day, political leadership skills training with an anti-racist perspective. It is part of a community development project called *Levelling The Field*, being done by Hamilton's Working Group on Racial Equity, based on their earlier research into barriers faced by racial minorities in civic political participation published in the report called *Unfurling The Flag*. The work has been funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage. For more background information on the Working Group on Racial Equity, please visit our web site: <<http://wgre.tripod.com/wgre.html>>.

The first *Colouring The City* training was completed by 24 youth of colour from Hamilton, Ontario, in late March of 2002. The training was delivered by two experienced anti-racist trainers, Rita Kohli and Jojo Geronimo. The bulk of this document is a summary of notes taken during the training.

Day 1: Morning

Introductory Exercises

The day began with a welcome from a member of the Working Group, and a brief introduction to the group's history. This included mention of the *Unfurling The Flag* research report, which was the basis for the current project, as well as discussions of the group's successful interventions at city hall, which have contributed to the creation of a standalone anti-racism committee and an Access and Equity Office.

The trainers began with a few introductory exercises, to allow participants to get to know one another, and to build an understanding of peoples' expectations. The first was a line-up, in which individuals were encouraged to physically place themselves on a spectrum indicating their experience with municipal political issues, from "a little" to "some" to "a lot". People clustered between "a little" and "some", but questions from the trainers as to the nature of peoples' involvement made participants realize that they really did have more experience than they first thought. Activities included voting, working on a campaign, organizing an International Women's Day event, children's rights work, and multiculturalism.

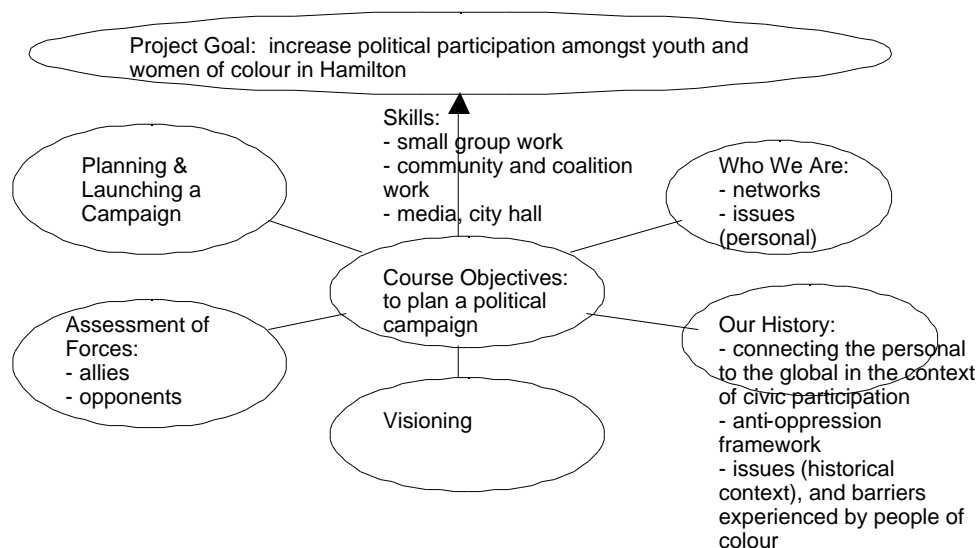
Next, participants stood in a circle. Individuals were asked to step towards the centre of the circle if they met certain characteristics—15 were women, 15 were born in Canada, and 7 were born in Hamilton. Then each participant had to

present a goal or expectation for the weekend. These included things like acquiring information, learning how to deal with racism, making connections, and learning how to effectively communicate and advocate for ideas. One trainer also noted how individuals identified themselves during this exercise: as a mother; as a racial minority or person of colour or Black person or someone who has experienced discrimination or a woman of colour; by religion; as a youth. As well, different spaces for activity were mentioned: school, community, Hamilton, family.

The trainers emphasized that, though all participants were youth of colour, the preceding exercise illustrated many differences amongst them, and that this diversity within unity, however defined, was a strong argument for inclusive politics.

Tables were displayed on flipchart paper on the wall, showing summary statistics of the identities claimed by individuals on their applications in terms of gender, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender, religion/spirituality, age, and ethnicity. Participants were given time to look over the tables, and appreciate their own diversity.

The trainers then presented the outline for the weekend. It was important that they start from input from the participants themselves and teach according to what they heard, much as in politics the best model is to listen in the community first. The following diagram was presented:



After some discussion of this material, the trainers went over some logistical information, including guidelines for the weekend—they centred on creating a

safe space for people and showing respect—as well as the process for dealing with any conflict that might arise.

Mapping Our Network

Each person had to think of connections they had to groups, organizations, institutions, and other spaces in the community, as part of building a map of the strengths, assets, and resources represented in the room. They were to decide if each connection related to service provision, community development, or advocacy and policy, write the connection on a sticky note, and paste it on a chart under the appropriate heading. The network included educational institutions, organizations involved with women's anti-violence activity, 93.3 FM CFMU radio, peace and social justice groups, student groups, and community agencies. The trainers noted that they were impressed at the concentration of links in the community development area, which is usually a sparse one when they use this exercise with a group. There was then a brief discussion of different kinds of organizations.

Clustering Our Issues

Each participant was instructed to choose one issue that mattered to them, and write it on a sticky note. Then each person said their issue, and they were stuck on flip chart paper in clusters. Three clusters had multiple entries: anti-racism (by far the largest), human rights, and women's rights. Other individuals were also interested in religious awareness, mental health, environment, education, and health.

Day 1: Afternoon

Historical Timeline Exercise

The trainers instructed participants to think about events that they consider to have political significance. Everyone was to write one such event with *personal* significance on a sticky note. Each small group was then to come up with two or three politically significant events at the Hamilton municipal level, and another two or three at the provincial/national/global level. Each individual stuck their event on a timeline stretching from 1974 to the present, and briefly described it. Events of personal significance included educational experiences, travelling to underdeveloped countries, meeting a particular person, or large-scale events with personal impacts.

"Mine was a few different things that happened in one day. First I found a mail-order bride catalogue on a bus, and that made me angry. Then--well, I had this neighbour who was a domestic worker, a woman of colour, and she was not allowed to talk to anyone, by her employer. I smiled at her when I went by, that day, and she smiled back at me, and then her employer, who was there, started verbally cutting her down. That made me very angry, so I did what I do whenever I'm angry and called my Mom. She told me that I was in a time and place where I was allowed to be angry, where it was okay for a woman to be angry, and she encouraged me to use my anger."

"Well, I didn't meet him, but I was in Toronto when I was, maybe, ten years old, in 1990. I saw Nelson Mandela. He had just been released from prison. He was older than I thought, since all the pictures I'd seen of him were from before he went to prison. But it was just so amazing."

"Mine was a bit longer ago than most of these. It was in 1983, the U.S. invasion of Grenada. My neighbour's house was destroyed. It made me ask all kinds of questions. Who did this? Why did it happen? Was anything going to happen to us?"

Events identified at the municipal level included the Gandhi Peace Walk, the creation of Hamilton's Access and Equity Office, the burning of the Hindu Samaj Temple, and the resignation of Mike Harris.

Events at the provincial, national, and global level included a wide range of things, from protest against the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in April 2001, to the ongoing aggression between India and Pakistan, to the World Conference Against Racism, to the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement, to the Sharpeville Massacre in South Africa, to the election of Mike Harris, to the Vietnam War, to the introduction of multiculturalism in Canada by Pierre Trudeau.

There was then extensive discussion about the events, the levels, and the themes that emerged from the timeline. It demonstrated stories of exclusion and barriers of all sorts, as well as people responding to those barriers by moments of resistance. The trend towards corporate globalization or neoliberalism was drawn out from the events that the group had listed, and they were connected to important themes for Canadian society: the growing "economic apartheid" or "racialization of poverty" in the country, and the impact this has on the ability of racialized people to participate politically.

Another theme that came up was the urge to feel despair in the face of such overwhelming, global-scale events. It was suggested that people could also draw hope and inspiration from victories of the past. As well, much of the remainder of the weekend would be spent learning skills to help do something about all of this.

Visioning And Framing

The participants were broken into 3 groups—anti-racism, human and women's rights, and mixed—and encouraged to come up with a political vision. What would Hamilton look like in terms of people, places, and events if their vision was realized?

Anti-Racism

It is important to have fair representation in government, inclusive schools and curriculum, and better media representation of racial minorities. Cultural spaces must be better recognized, and businesses would not be "ghettoized". The power dynamics behind current barriers and discrimination must be recognized and addressed.

Human & Women's Rights

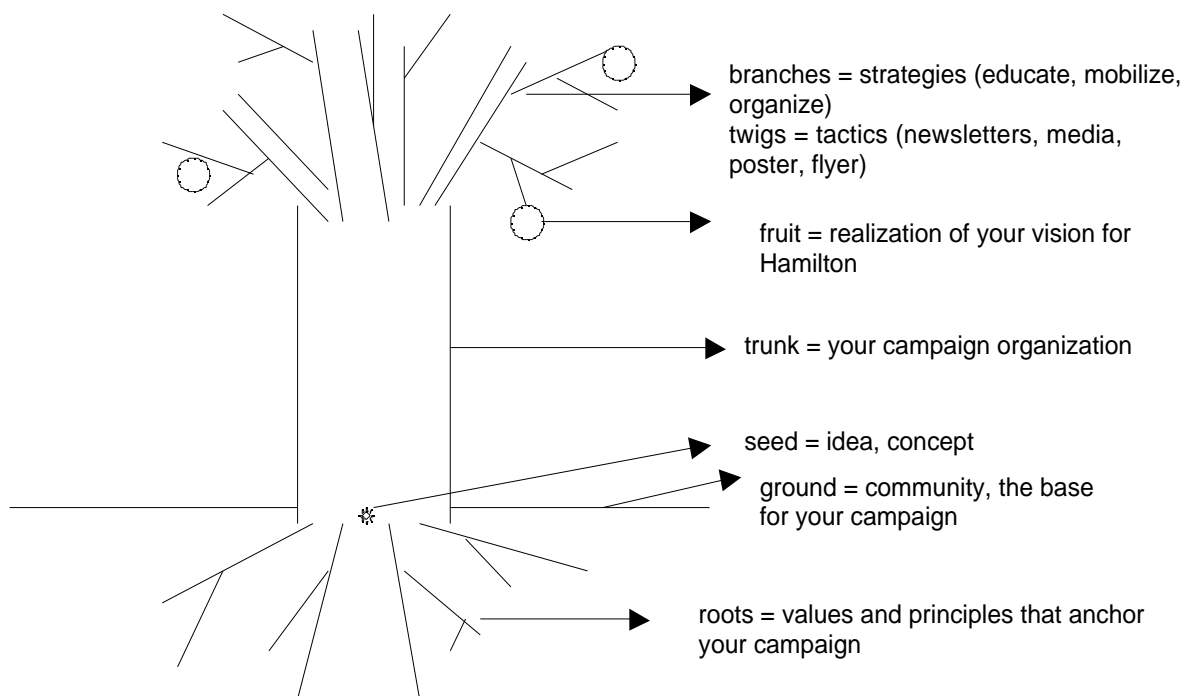
There must be free, universal access to social services and supports and the elimination of poverty. City hall should be representative and accessible, corporations should be regulated, and measures should be taken to ensure that voices opposing oppression get heard.

Mixed Group

Representation at city hall may be restructured to ensure diversity. Representatives should spend more time in the community, and multicultural festivals must receive funding.

Model of a Campaign

The image of a tree was used to represent the important elements in a political campaign, and it was used to synthesize the ideas of the day.



Day 2: Morning

Review of Day 1

Participants were generally happy with the pace and content of the training. The trainers felt that the work so far from the participants had been “absolutely amazing”. There was some discussion of guidelines and use of language, using a couple of comments made on the previous day to illustrate the ways in which

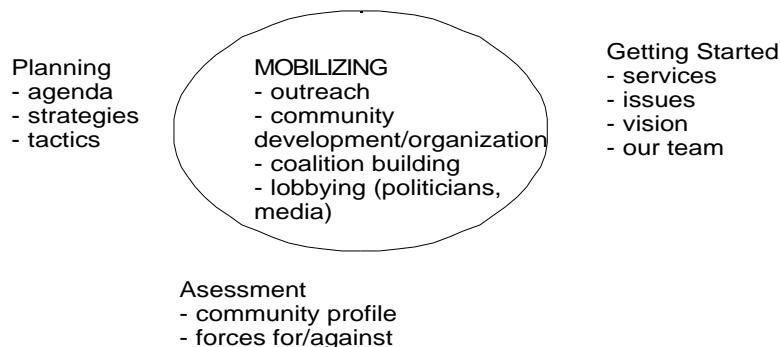
oppressive behaviour can slip past our best intentions, and how it can be addressed maturely and sensitively.

There was then an explicit recognition of the tension within the group between anti-racist understandings, which seek to get at root causes of power and privilege imbalance, and multicultural understandings, which trust explorations of difference as sufficient to address issues of racism. The tension was not resolved, but there was good discussion. Trainers emphasized the importance and appropriateness of having space designated for people of colour, be it political organizing space or services or something else. This was all related back to a framework introduced on Day 1, in which political practice can be seen as Conformist, Reformist, or Transformative—the last is what the training is shooting for.

Anatomy of a Political Campaign

The important features of a political campaign were discussed, using the following diagram as a focus:

Anatomy of a Political Campaign



The groups were then encouraged to further define their issues using a tool called “diamond analysis”. Their current, broad issue would be placed on a line in the middle of a page. Above and below there would be smaller lines, to contain

more focused components of the central topic, and then above and below each of those would be a further focusing. In the course of this exercise, the group with mixed issues decided to focus on employment, and the group concerned with human & women's rights decided to focus on child poverty. Each group held a 3-minute, mock press conference to present their candidate, and their issue.

Day 2: Afternoon

After a brief review of the morning's activities, the trainers suggested that the anti-racism group split into two different groups, approximately along age lines. This was well received by participants. During the following exercise, the younger anti-racism group did both that exercise, and the diamond analysis, and decided to focus on anti-racism at the school council level. The group doing anti-racism at the municipal level decided to focus more narrowly on poverty in communities of colour.

Defining Your Constituency

Participants were introduced to the idea of "constituency groups"—groupings of people within society who, because of their membership in that group, might be more or less likely to support a particular platform. This included many different kinds of groupings: gender, race, age, ability, literacy level, employment status, and many others. It was emphasized that "constituency groups" was a more appropriate term than "special interest groups" because many of these groups so labelled are people who have been marginalized by those with power, and the term "special interest groups" further dismisses their concerns.

Child Poverty Group

- Constituency Groups: 1) Single parents, 2) Un/underemployed, 3) People of colour, 4) New immigrants/refugees
- Reasons:
 - less income, high childcare costs
 - language barriers
 - deprivation of work opportunities

Poverty in Communities of Colour Group

- Constituency Groups: 1) People of colour, 2) Immigrants/refugees, 3) Women of colour, especially single moms, 4) People with ESL needs
- Reasons:
 - 15-35% of Hamilton population are people of colour
 - poverty in Hamilton: 41% of racial minorities, vs. only 22% overall
 - unfair discrimination in hiring practices
 - lack of accessible social services

Employment Group

- Constituency Groups: 1) Un/underemployed, 2) Immigrants/refugees, 3) Educationally marginalized people, 4) Disabled people
- Reasons:
 - health impacts
 - poverty
 - barriers to education, employment

Anti-racism at School Council Group

- Constituency Groups: 1) People of colour/aboriginal, 2) Age, 3) Immigrants and refugees, 4) Language groups
- Reasons:
 - many diverse backgrounds in Hamilton
 - Most people in high school are under 21
 - 120+ languages spoken in Hamilton

The next step will be to take this core support, and expand it into soft support and undecided voters.

Day 2: Informal Evening Session

This optional session, attended by most participants, began with a few exercises to get people talking and comfortable, but was mostly a general discussion of peoples' experiences and concerns. Participants related experiences of racism, and some of the very personal suffering those experiences have caused.

- "I thought I was home in Canada, I was accepted, but I'm defined by skin colour."
- From a classmate after September 11th: "Don't sit next to me. You'll kill me."
- being Black, and living in North America because of the slavery of ancestors and 400 years of oppression: "I have a right to rant and rave."

There was discussion of relating to White people, and of developing relationships with the struggles of First Nations people, and issues of relating to family members with different experiences or understandings or ways of dealing with things, and conflict within and between communities of colour.

- "How do we harness hope?"
- "How do we claim power and use it as a building tool?"

Day 3: Morning

Review of Previous Day

There was another productive discussion of experiences of skin colour racism, for example its influence in experiences of immigration. All immigrants face

barriers, but those who also experience racism based on the colour of their skin experience more and different barriers. The trainers talked about how barriers could be systemic—how they could appear to be neutral, but have discriminatory and oppressive effects. For example, the design of a building may be neutral in that it is the same for anyone who wishes to enter the building, but if the only way in is up a flight of stairs, it would present a discriminatory barrier for someone confined to a wheelchair.

Then there was some discussion of process issues from the previous day. The guidelines were reaffirmed, and the participants encouraged the trainers to be more assertive in stopping side conversations amongst participants. There was also some discussion of the issue of creating space for those who are less comfortable speaking, and trying to understand the reasons behind peoples' silences.

Finally, material was reviewed for the groups to consider in putting together their final campaign plans. They were encouraged to think about having a focused platform, about how they might expand their base of support, and about how they might act in creative, mobilizing ways.

Day 3: Afternoon

Simulated Campaign Launch

Each group prepared a simulated community event or campaign launch event, to include promotional material, and a question and answer period.

Anti-Racism at the School Council Level

- group name = STAR (Students and Teachers Against Racism)
- level = school council
- main issue = racial equality
- slogan = "Reach for the STAR!"
- platform = will promote anti-racism events and clubs, including multicultural events, speakers on racism, and peer support for people who experience racism
- material = campaign buttons in the shape of a star, graphical overhead

Poverty in Communities of Colour

- campaign slogan = "From Margin To Centre", title of a book by Black feminist bell hooks, because both book and campaign focus on how to empower ourselves and get our views heard
- main issue = elimination of poverty within marginalized communities
- level = municipal
- campaign team = actual representatives on the campaign team from various relevant constituencies
- platform = increase resources for employment, childcare, accessibility of city hall, education
- event = "The Party With A Purpose", a fundraising party

Child Poverty

- chant = "It takes a community to raise a child."
- event = Child Outreach Picnic, candlelight vigil
- level = school board trustee
- main issues = child outreach and poverty
- platform = use school system to identify problems, promote mutual aid and networks within community, work with the community to develop further agenda, form coalitions with other organizations, support parents
- material = posters, candles at the vigil
- vigil = included speech by community member experiencing issue, moment of silence

Employment

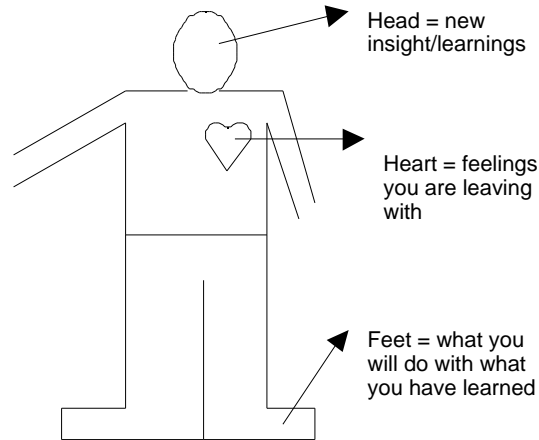
- chant = long and musical, rest of group got to learn it
- slogan = "Equality Employment in Hamilton Means A Healthy City"
- name = Coalition of Hamiltonians Addressing Municipal Priorities
- material = signs, campaign logo
- level = municipal
- platform = decrease cost of equivalency tests for immigrant professionals, increase bursaries, skills exchange for immigrants/refugees, better educational needs assessments, better physical accessibility of workplaces, more social/therapeutic centres for overall health

Final Wrap-Up

The trainers had the participants put in chronological order a series of sheets, each naming an activity in the training. This refreshed everyone's memory as to what had been done. Then the trainers provided some general feedback, mostly positive, and also gave some specific suggestions about the campaigns.

A brainstorm of possible next steps arrived at a fairly emphatic desire to remain active. Some people wanted to be involved in research. Others wanted more training, or more opportunity for informal discussion. Many wanted more information. Somebody suggested having an email list.

The final exercise was an evaluation based on the following diagram:



Each person was encouraged to say something about their own experience of the training, under the “head”, “heart”, and “feet” categories. Some sample responses:

Insight/learning:

- increased awareness of own marginalizing practices
- realization that change is possible
- there are others who care
- political activity

Feelings:

- excited, motivated, inspired
- “I am not alone”
- comfortable
- hope
- connected

Intended actions:

- learn more
- more community involvement
- act in more culturally appropriate ways
- be louder
- change my community

And after good-byes, hugs, and photographs, the training was complete. Watch out world, here we come!