

OCTOBER 2025

RAISING CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

ADULT LEARNING IN A “DIGITAL” SOCIALIST
BOOK CLUB

DERRON BORDERS, KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

PAGE 1

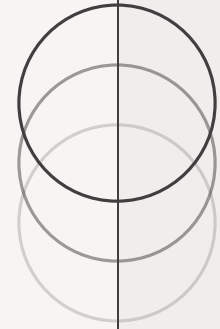


OCTOBER 2025

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Cincinnati is located within the traditional homelands of the Miami and Shawnee people, who were forcibly removed by European settler colonizers. I acknowledge the continued settler-colonialism that is still taking place and the Indigenous context for which institutions of higher education were established in the United States. I endeavor to honor all Indigenous peoples by engaging in critical scholarship that centers decolonized perspectives and Indigenous epistemologies, recognizing that transforming educational practices requires dismantling the colonial foundations upon which our institutions were built.

PAGE 2



OCTOBER 2025

Learning Outcomes

- Apply Kowalski's (1998) framework of interacting factors—environment, organization, program, and learners—to analyze digital informal adult learning communities.
- Critically evaluate how digital “third places” function as counterhegemonic sites of collective learning and class consciousness.
- Reflect on the contradictions of radical and liberatory education within neoliberal capitalist conditions.

PAGE 3

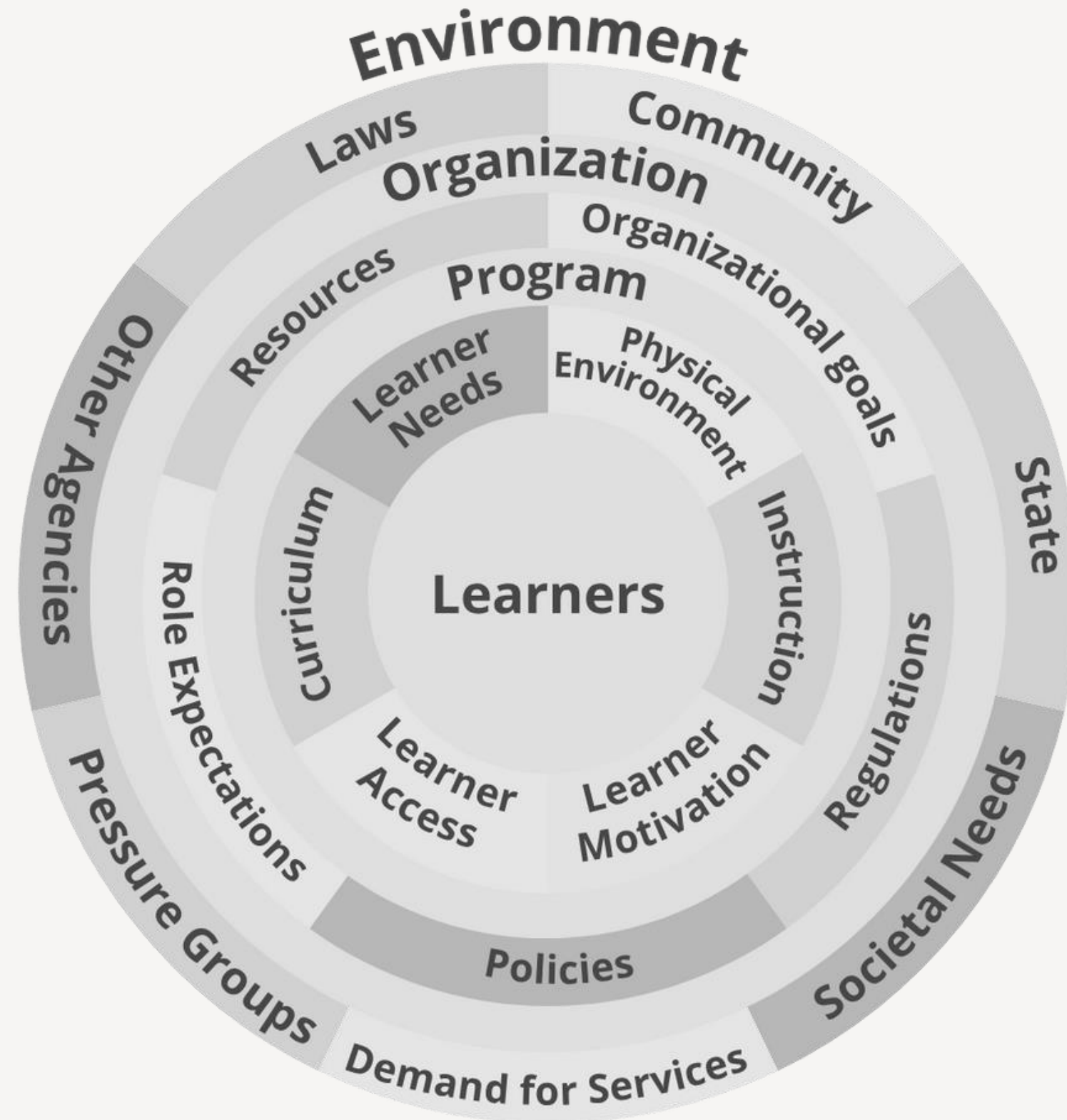
Purpose

How do participants in a digital socialist book club use online platforms to construct and sustain collective learning and class consciousness?



Framework

INTERACTING FACTORS IN AN ADULT
EDUCATION PROGRAM (KOWALSKI, 1998)

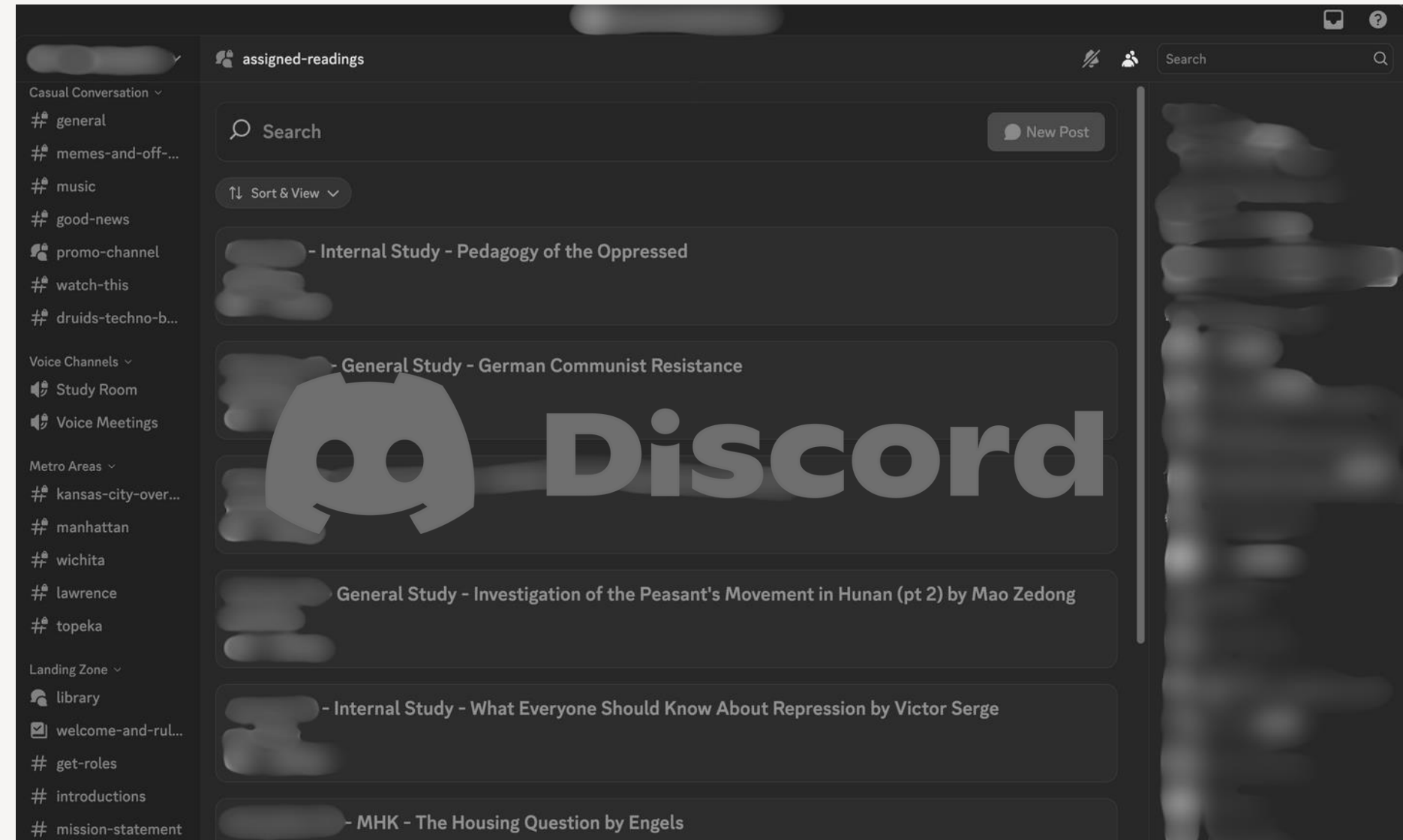


OCTOBER 2025

PAGE 5

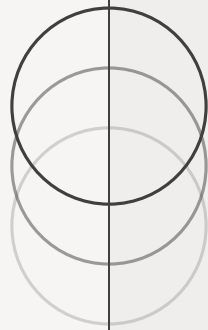
Overview

- Founded in 2022
- Organized democratically through “collective decision-making”
- Collective co-construction of knowledge through Discord, Obsidian, Github



Environment

LAWS
COMMUNITY
STATE
SOCIETAL NEEDS
DEMAND FOR SERVICES
PRESSURE GROUPS
OTHER AGENCIES



OCTOBER 2025

HOSTILE SOCIO-POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

- Majority of members are primarily located in college towns like Manhattan and Lawrence
 - High poverty
 - Mostly working class
- Seen as "radical" even for other local socialist and liberal orgs
- Antagonistic state legislature
- National movement toward authoritarian fascism
 - Educational hegemony – anti-Marixst, anti-DEI, etc.
 - Spread of disinformation and misinformation
 - Use of lawfare on free speech
 - Criminalization of leftist activism
- Surveillance threats

Organization

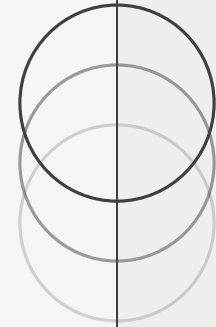
RESOURCES

ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

REGULATIONS

POLICIES

ROLE EXPECTATIONS



OCTOBER 2025

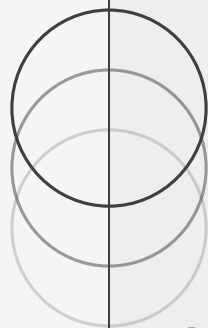
INFORMAL LEARNING IN A FORMAL ORGANIZATION

- Mission - to agitate the working class toward democratic revolution through liberatory praxis (i.e., putting education and theory into practice)
- Formal organization (Kowalski, 1998)
 - Shared leadership - coordinated and administered by a “cadre”
 - All planning and decisions are done collectively and democratically by the whole book club, no hierarchy
 - This is done:
 - Synchronously – video/voice chats during meetings and study sessions
 - Asynchronously – utilizing git with Obsidian and GitHub
- No fees/budget, most resources are open access or procured through mutual aid

PAGE 9

Program

LEARNER NEEDS
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT
INSTRUCTION
LEARNER MOTIVATION
LEARNER ACCESS
CURRICULUM

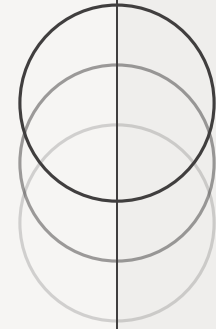


OCTOBER 2025

A VIRTUAL “THIRD PLACE” (OLDENBURG, 1999)

- Digital platform, Discord, enables synchronous & asynchronous learning
- Bi-weekly study sessions
 - Curriculum development driven by membership
- Bi-weekly (alternate weeks) internal study sessions (deeper dive)
- Monthly business meetings
- Instruction is democratic
 - Cadre member or volunteer prepares study outline for each study session
 - Group utilizes collective intelligence, “an aggregation of skills, understanding, and knowledge” (Skyring, 2014, p. 27) around the topic for learning
 - Notes posted on Github where it tracks all iterations of the document
- Asynchronous discussions and engagement build trust and camaraderie.

PAGE 10



ACTIVISTS AND LIFE-LONG LEARNERS

- Late teens to late middle-age
- Invited or referred by already existing member
- Diverse professional and educational backgrounds
- Hold multiple marginalized identities
- Most are students, activists, and/or organizers part of other organizations like the Democratic Socialists of America or community aid organizations

Discussion

- digital structure becomes not just a logistical necessity, but a radical act of resistance against an increasingly authoritarian fascist state's encroachment on emancipatory education
- the synchronous and asynchronous engagement on Discord allows for knowledge co-construction that is constantly transforming
- learner demographic underscores a contradiction inherent to radical education under capitalism: while the club's ethos rejects bourgeois exclusivity, its very existence is mediated by the material conditions of a capitalist society

Discussion

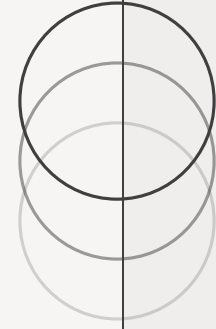
- The club is reproducing the very class hierarchy that it is trying to liberate itself from (Freire, 2005)
- The exclusion of the lumpenproletariat is structural
 - Reliance on technology
 - Need for consistent internet access
 - Frequent meetings assumes access to free time
- Revolutionary pedagogy cannot transcend these contradictions without directly confronting these material deprivations, a tension that remains unresolved in the current political-economic order

Conclusion

The book club emerges not merely as an andragogical space, but as a contest site of resistance, embodying both the possibilities and limitations of revolutionary praxis in an era of authoritarian fascism.

Its existence underscores the necessity and fragility of counterhegemonic communities in sustaining critical consciousness amid systemic repression.

References



OCTOBER 2025

THANKYOU



PAGE 13