SOCIAL MOVEMENT LEARNING ABOUT JUST TRANSITION IN CENTRAL APPALACHIA

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by
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Abstract

This study utilizes adult learning, working-class, hegemonic masculinity, and political economy theories to explore the education and learning that supports engagement in the Just Transition movement in Central Appalachia. The central research question is as follows: in communities with economies formerly dominated by the coal industry, how does an organization promoting multiple Just Transition initiatives use education and learning to support engagement in this work? The sub-questions that guide this study are as follows: (1) how does the gendered history of the coal industry and the changing political economy of the post-coal reality influence the educational efforts of an organization working toward a Just Transition? (2) how do informal and non-formal learning opportunities attempt to promote a just transition in the region? (3) how have people perceived these informal and non-formal learning opportunities as transforming themselves, their communities, and/or region and nation over the past decades?

In this case study, data was collected between November 2019 and July 2020. Data included 14 semi-structured interviews of Eastern Kentucky members and staff of the grassroots community organization, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth. Written documents, curricula of non-formal education, observational data, and the organizational website also served as important sources of data. Field notes and analytic memos were instrumental and aided in the analysis of data.

An important finding of this study is that the organization created a community of practice, which was instrumental in enhancing the engagement of community members in the organization’s initiatives. Within that community of practice, there was a dialectical
relationship between non-formal education and informal learning. Additionally, some informal learning occurred which was unrelated to the non-formal education. Another finding was that the changing gendered history and political economy of the coal industry shaped how the organization approached its work. More specifically, the organization moved from attempting to hold the hegemonic coal industry accountable to environmental protections to, instead, pushing for proactive alternatives through Just Transition. Within their Just Transition efforts, the coal industry continued to shape which projects and campaigns were pursued by the organization, including how people grappled with the loss of identity, dealt with legacy effects of the coal industry, maintained a focus on energy production through a focus on renewable energy and energy efficiency, and engaged with voter empowerment. Both non-formal education and informal learning played an important role in the organization fulfilling its mission, which is illustrated throughout this study.
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Chapter 1
Overview

This chapter, the first of six, provides a brief introduction to the context and history of coal in the Central Appalachian region. It also introduces the case study organization, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC), their Just Transition initiatives, and some of their related non-formal educational activities. Importantly, this overview chapter describes the significance and statement of the problem with my main research question and related sub-questions of the study.

This dissertation explores how a community organization promoting multiple Just Transition strategies uses education and learning to promote engagement in this work in Central Appalachia. This study contributes to the body of knowledge related to social movement learning in Adult Education and social movements in Appalachian Studies. This study is the first study to explore the educational practices and learning in Central Appalachia that have developed to support the Just Transition of the economy. It begins with situating Central Appalachia in the global climate justice movement.

From September 20th to 27th, 2019, over 7.6 million people participated in Global Climate Strikes in 185 countries calling for an immediate phase-out of fossil fuels; this was the largest set of actions in the climate justice movement (Rosane, 2019). There is increasing recognition that communities formerly dependent on fossil fuels need support to transition away from fossil fuel dependency (Pollin & Callaci, 2019). Grassroots organizations describe this work as Just Transition, “a strategy for reconciling the needs of workers with the imperative of environmental reform” (Abraham, 2017).
Since the Central Appalachian region is becoming a post-industrial region, developing an economy which does not depend on coal is more important than ever. Furthermore, the legacy of coal mining and related working-class masculinity shape the process of transformation of the economy.

Adult education for social justice and environmentally sustainable development is a process of learning skills or competencies for social change (Brookfield & Holst, 2010). It is essential to support this transition, though scholars have yet to explore this kind of learning happening within organizations working for Just Transition in Central Appalachia. Since current efforts to transition the Appalachian economy is multi-faceted, examining different educational strategies taken by a community organization and the related learning addresses a gap in the literature and is an important contribution to the academic literature in the field of Appalachian Studies and Adult Education. This dissertation is a case study of the grassroots community organization KFTC and their work on Just Transition. It explores and illuminates the ways in which learning and education occur and are critical components of the organization's ability to successfully advance its Just Transition initiatives.

**Statement of the Problem**

Changes in economic, environmental, and health conditions in the coal-producing region of Central Appalachia, which includes Eastern Kentucky, East Tennessee, Southwest Virginia, and Southern West Virginia, have created a need for education about a Just Transition. This region has long been associated with extreme poverty and unequal distribution of land where outside corporate interests colonized the region through
resource exploitation (Caudill, 2001; Montrie, 2003). The coal industry negatively affects residents’ health, miners’ working conditions, and environment quality; these negative effects continuously increase (Ahern et al., 2011; Aken et al., 2009; Bell, 2013; Griffith et al., 2012; Lindberg et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the local communities’ strong identification with coal mining also continues (Bell & York, 2010).

During the last two decades, increased mechanization of the coal industry reduced employment, increased productivity, and caused greater environmental damage (Carley, Evans, & Konisky, 2018). From 1985 to 1997, direct coal employment dropped by 50%, while production hit its peak in 2011 (McIlmoil, Hansen, Askins, & Betcher, 2013). Since 2011, coal production has dropped, due in part to a shift towards an increase in low-carbon natural gas development and environmental regulations (Carley et al., 2018). Coal employment declined as the industry shifted to different forms of mining that enable the coal companies to maximize profits. One example is mountaintop removal mining (MTR), where explosives are used to remove mountaintops. Then, the “overburden,” or mountain above the coal seam, is pushed into the valleys below to expose the coal seams (McIlmoil et al., 2013). This type of mining produces two-and-a-half times more coal per worker than underground mining (Hansell, 2018). The increasing negative effects of the coal industry on the environment and on health, as well as a significant drop in employment in recent years has spurred an increased focus on transitioning the economy to one not dependent on coal mining. The region is close to a post-coal moment and needs to build a new economy.
Just Transition is a social movement that brings together grassroots organizations in different locations and is a relatively recent convergence of different approaches that integrate environmental and economic justice issues (Abraham, 2017; Tarus et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2016). As a result, there has been minimal research on educational practices in this movement in Appalachia. This research seeks to fill this gap.

Additionally, this research is significant to the field of adult education because the identification of adult educational practices that result in engagement can serve as a model to improve adult education for other community organizations in Appalachia and for other fossil-fuel dependent economies. For example, individuals involved with social change efforts could acquire greater knowledge of issues, develop skills, and enhance effective practices of community organizations and collective action while increasing critical consciousness (Niesz et al., 2018). This analysis identifies ways in which a community organization bolsters informal and non-formal learning through the creation of reflexive practice and communities of practice. With the recent growth of the global climate justice movement and deindustrialization occurring across the globe, identifying effective educational practices can improve adult learning, which enables people to better support policy reform and job creation that is rapidly needed as communities shift away from fossil fuels.

This dissertation is based on a qualitative case study of a community organization working on Just Transition in Central Appalachia data with data collected between November 2019 and September 2020. Case study research explores in-depth a contemporary phenomenon in its real-world context (Yin, 2003).
Research Questions

The central research question is as follows: in communities with economies formerly dominated by the coal industry, how does an organization promoting multiple Just Transition initiatives use education and learning to support engagement in this work? The sub-questions that guide this study are as follows: (1) how does the gendered history of the coal industry and the changing political economy of the post-coal reality influence the educational efforts of an organization working toward a Just Transition? (2) how do informal and non-formal learning opportunities attempt to promote a just transition in the region? (3) how have people perceived these informal and non-formal learning opportunities as transforming themselves, their communities, and/or region and nation over the past decades?

Background

Background for this study summarizes the history of the region and the organization, as well as the structure of the organization and its mission—all of which are crucial for understanding context.

After the Civil War, the local economy of Central Appalachia began shifting away from subsistence farming towards logging and underground coal mining; timber and coal left the region to develop the Industrialized North (Billings & Blee, 2000; Montrie, 2003). By the end of the nineteenth century, absentee landowners owned two thirds to three-quarters of the region, leaving most of the resident population without land ownership or title (Montrie, 2003). Much of the conversion of land ownership occurred following the rapid growth and demand for coal to supply steam engines and the railroad
system (Hansell, 2018; Stoll, 2017). Coal camps began opening in the 1880s and maintained a unitary system of power affecting all aspects of the miners’ and their families’ lives, including company-owned housing (Eller, 1982, 2008; Gaventa, 1980). The start of coal mining varied across the region; for example, in Harlan County, Kentucky, coal was first shipped out of the county in 1911 following the completion of the L&N Railroad (Eller, 1982). By the end of the 1920s, the region was transformed due to industrialization (Eller, 1982).

Following World War II, mechanized contour strip mining spread and expanded, particularly in the 1950s. Currently, various mining methods are used in Central Appalachia. Depending on geology, contour mining, auger mining, and underground mining are among the various approaches to extracting coal, each resulting in different amounts of environmental degradation (Strobo, 2012). Following a movement to ban strip mining, the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act was enacted in 1977, which served to regulate the practice (Montrie, 2003). Community organizations have formed across the Central Appalachian region in attempt to hold the coal industry accountable to that law and to pursue environmental protection. Since this period, the role of the coal industry in the economy has had booms and busts, but coal industry employment has declined over time; yet, the communities still identify strongly with the coal industry, despite its damage to their communities and their livelihoods (Bell & York, 2010).
Case Study Description

KFTC was created in 1981 in Eastern Kentucky and has evolved to be a statewide, multi-issue organization that works on a range of different economic, social, and environmental justice issues. This organization emphasizes leadership development of its members and has been at the forefront of environmental justice organizing, as well as Just Transition work in the heart of the coal-producing counties of Eastern Kentucky. The non-formal education and informal learning in this organization is integral to engagement in its work and is the focus of this case study.

In 1981, the organization grew out of a participatory research project sponsored by Highlander Research and Education Center called the Land Ownership Task Force, which consisted of six Appalachian states documenting that out-of-state companies owned most of the land and paid very little taxes in the coal-producing regions (Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force, 1981). According to Kentuckians for the Commonwealth’s (1991) book documenting their first ten years, KFTC was formed in Eastern Kentucky and originally called the Kentucky Fair Tax Coalition to push for the unmined minerals tax. During the 1980s, another core issue that KFTC worked on was the broad form deed in which coal companies could strip mine a property owner’s land without permission. This eventually led to the Save the Homeplace campaign that resulted in changes to Kentucky’s Constitution to protect landowner’s rights.

Over time, the scope of the organization’s work expanded to be statewide; some of the additional issues on which they worked included hazardous waste incinerators, out-of-state garbage, and oil and gas issues. In the mid-1990s, KFTC started addressing
economic justice issues, which included welfare reform and the role of money in politics. The organization also protected Black Mountain, the highest mountain peak in the state, from surface mining. Local issues have ranged from use-of-force policies in Louisville, limits on logging in the Daniel Boone National Forest, water privatization in Lexington, and a living wage. The organization also worked on comprehensive tax reform, raising the minimum wage, voting rights for former felons, sustainable energy, and voter registration.

At the time of the study, KFTC membership was approximately 12,000 dues-paying members with fourteen chapters across the state, four of which are in Eastern Kentucky. The active involvement varies from chapter to chapter and depends on the time of year. There is currently a larger number of members in the urban centers than rural communities. Many people make phone calls during the legislative session or prior to elections. This organization helped citizens develop strategies to address social, economic, and environmental justice issues in communities in Eastern Kentucky degraded by coal, including Just Transition work (Kentuckians for the Commonwealth [KFTC], 2021). Each chapter has a representative and alternate on the Steering Committee, which is the main decision-making body for the organization; they also have five members on the Executive Committee that makes decisions between Steering Committee meetings. There are also organizational and issue-based committees that develop strategy, including the Land Reform, Economic Justice, and New Energy and Transition committees. Governance committees include the Personnel, Leadership Development, and Finance Committees. KFTC’s 23 staff members play an explicitly
background role and help KFTC members develop their own stories and speak for themselves.

Figure 1 highlights core organizational priorities for KFTC. This diagram was shared during one of the Empower Kentucky Leadership Network virtual trainings. All of the different elements in the diagram are a part of KFTC’s community of practice. Numerous elements of this diagram are involved with KFTC’s Just Transition work. For example, the Communications, Media, and Narrative element of the work includes highlighting stories of successful examples of Just Transition. Communication is both internal and external to the organization, which includes the development of print materials and website resources that educate people about this work. The Research, Analysis, and Policy work element of Just Transition includes the Empower Kentucky

Figure 1

KFTC’s Diagram of Key Organizing Strategies
energy plan, which engaged 1,200 Kentuckians in the development of the plan through workshops, listening sessions, house parties, interviews, and an online survey (Empower Kentucky, 2021). Synapse Energy Economics supplemented this public process with data. The environmental justice analysis of the state is another example of research conducted that contributes to Just Transition. The Direct Action and Advocacy elements are consistent with the organizing that KFTC members are most engaged with and are often informed by non-formal education. Reflecting on practice also is a part of the learning process. The Coalition and Movement Building element related to Just Transition includes the regional Alliance for Appalachia, the Climate Justice Alliance, and the Green New Deal Network.

One of the efforts that increased over time, which is relevant to this study, is the emphasis on elections within KFTC’s organizing work. This work touches on many of the organization’s key organizing strategies. The coal industry’s stranglehold over the local and state politics in the state is one of the reasons voter engagement has become a bigger part of KFTC’s work. Initially, their electoral work was non-partisan, which included voter registration, candidate surveys, and candidate forums. According to participants, they sought to infuse the issues into the public dialogue. In 2010, they created a political action committee to support candidates that were reflective of their vision as shared by one of the interviewees. This included a focus on local and state-level elections. This shift in strategy was due in part to the shift in the legislature towards more conservative values and the lack of progress on many of the organizational goals.
Just Transition Initiatives

For this study, I explored the education and learning related to Just Transition initiatives being pursued by KFTC in the coal-producing region of the state. Many different initiatives were occurring across the region. Although I focused on several specific Just Transition initiatives, KFTC members described their engagement with other parts of the organization overall. The direct action and advocacy work explored in this study included challenges to environmental injustices and pursuit of Just Transition Alternatives. Environmental justice campaigns, the Benham $aves Project, rural electric cooperative organizing, and the creation of the Empower Kentucky energy plan are among the campaigns that the organization has worked on over time. I describe these Just Transition initiatives in detail to illustrate some of the main ways that KFTC pursues this body of work. I also describe three of KFTC’s non-formal education activities related to Just Transition.

Environmental Justice Campaigns

First, according to their website and interviews, there are numerous examples in the history of the organization of coordinated action against the coal companies that broke laws and whose actions resulted in injustice (KFTC, 2021). This included pollution to groundwater and surface water, damage to people’s homes from blasting, subsidence, flooding, stolen land, and crumbling roads from overweight coal trucks. Mountaintop removal mining and valley fills has been the most egregious form of coal mining, resulting in the destruction of thousands of miles of streams and negative impacts on people’s health. Related campaigns have included challenging mining permits, pushing
for the enforcement of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 (SMCRA), and engaging in proposed regulatory changes to relevant laws.

Challenging individual mining permits were driven by community-level concerns and often sought to have proposed mining permits denied or modified. Community members would review mining maps and permit applications and request permit hearings. Enforcement campaigns consisted of affected community members filing complaints with the enforcement agencies and frequently engaged the local media to push specific coal companies to improve their practices.

As an example of how KFTC members engaged in administrative or regulatory changes, the federal Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement proposed a change to the stream buffer zone rule in 2009 following litigation to curb damage caused by mountaintop removal. SMCRA was supposed to prevent mining within 100 feet of an intermittent or perennial stream; however, the rule was not fully enforced due to consistent exceptions to mining permits (Stream Buffer Zone and Related Rules, 2009). The rule change process typically consists of a public hearing for people to make public comments as well as opportunities for written comments. Other examples included public comment at EPA’s Environmental Impact Statement hearing about mountaintop removal mining and valley fills and the Nationwide 21 Permit related to the Army Corps of Engineers. During these types of hearings, coal companies often forced their workers to attend, which frequently resulted in a hostile environment between concerned citizens and workers misinformed by their bosses.
**Benham $aves Community Energy Project**

A Just Transition project being pursued by Harlan County KFTC members was the Benham $aves Community Energy Project. Community activists in the adjacent communities of Benham and Lynch have long been working to protect themselves from environmental injustices and create sustainable alternatives in the heart of coal country. This began with the successful efforts to protect the highest peak in the state from surface mining in the late 1990s through a campaign that became statewide, as described by interviewees. According to KFTC’s website and newsletter, in 2010, a petition was filed to declare another portion of the region unsuitable for mining to prevent additional strip mining (KFTC, 2021). During the last ten years, KFTC members in these two communities have garnered resources for energy efficiency upgrades for residents and municipal buildings. This included some technical assistance from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

Because the community of Benham has a municipal-owned utility, the KFTC chapter created the Benham $aves program, which pays the upfront cost of energy efficiency upgrades and no more than 85% of the savings go towards paying off the upgrades through a revolving community investment fund. This program worked in conjunction with two other nonprofit allied organizations, Mountain Association of Community Economic Development (recently renamed Mountain Association), an organization that provides small-business loans, business support, energy savings, and technical policy support, and COAP, a low-income homeowner rehabilitation
organization. KFTC members and other allies have installed solar panels on the Kentucky Coal Miners Museum and several municipal facilities in Benham and Lynch.

Community projects are an integral part of Just Transition work. They are manageable to implement and demonstrate that progress is being made in this massive shift in the local economy; therefore, exploring an example of a community project was integral to address the research questions regarding learning and education through these efforts. The Benham $aves Program was one of the first projects in the region rooted in Appalachian Transition, though it has gone through ebbs and flows in its progress. In addition to its longevity, it is also important to note that the project recently received a substantial influx of financial resources of over $200,000. Because the strategy of this promising program pursues bolstering renewable energy, it confronts the historical relationship and related components of the coal-mining identity of the region.

**Renew East Kentucky/Rural Electric Cooperative Reform**

Another one of KFTC’s Just Transition initiatives I explored was originally called the Renew East Kentucky project, which sought to encourage the rural electric cooperatives in the region to provide resources to residents for energy efficiency upgrades and renewable energy. These efforts included reforming the electric co-ops by participating in cooperative elections and encouraging the co-ops to provide clean energy sources. Rural electric cooperatives have a long history and were a part of the New Deal’s Rural Electrification Administration (REA) during the 1930s that enabled access to electricity in rural communities across the United States (Cannon, 2000). This approach to Just Transition work pursued both reviving democratic engagement with a
cooperative organizational structure, as well as making a change at a broader scale than one community.

According to campaign literature, the goal of this effort was initially called Renew East Kentucky and sought to move the rural electric cooperatives “toward cleaner energy, increased energy efficiency, and more open and democratic governance” (KFTC, 2012). As described on the website, KFTC members participated in the Clean Energy Collaborative with the East Kentucky Power Cooperative, the statewide board of 16 distribution cooperatives, and developed a plan to send to the Board of Directors (KFTC, 2021). Several KFTC members ran for their local electric cooperative boards, engaged with the existing cooperative board members, and participating co-op board meetings. They also aimed to pass a Members’ Bill of Rights and 30-point plan for reforms related to making the cooperatives more accessible and engaging.

**Legislative Reform**

Another strategy explored in this case study focused on federal legislation supporting Just Transition within the region. The three main pieces of federal legislation currently being pursued include the RECLAIM Act, the Black Lung Benefits, and the Green New Deal. The RECLAIM Act would provide access to a large sum of money that would help support the reclamation of abandoned mines, which in turn could also facilitate alternative economic development. Black Lung Disease is the commonly-known name for pneumoconiosis caused by coal dust, which is a preventable disease (Perret et al., 2017). Former coal miners and community activists are working for an extension of the Black Lung Excise Tax, which funds the Black Lung Disability Trust
Fund that provides resources for coal miners who are struggling with this disease (Berkes, 2019). These efforts are often referred to as Black Lung Benefits. The Green New Deal is a national effort to invest in communities to transition past fossil fuels; some community activists from the Appalachian region have been involved with contributing to that campaign.

Black Lung Association and KFTC members and other allies have been involved with lobbying legislators and demonstrating support for these pieces of legislation. For example, on July 22nd-24th, 2019, 150 citizens from across Central Appalachia went to Washington, D.C. to lobby legislators about Black Lung benefits. This lobbying effort included an unusual mix of concerned citizens, including former coal miners and environmental justice advocates. The interaction between these two different groups and the related challenges presented an opportunity to explore the research questions, particularly related to the impact of the global political economy of coal and working-class masculinity related to Just Transition initiatives. Furthermore, exploring federal legislative reform is important to address the research questions because these strategies seek to address systemic, large-scale social change efforts across the region.

**Empower Kentucky Plan**

Another aspect of the Just Transition work was the creation of the Empower Kentucky Plan, a grassroots energy plan for the state. As described on the website, this resulted from a process of events called A Seat at the Table, rooted in story circles and conversations with over 1,000 Kentuckians in every Congressional District in the state between April 2015 and 2017 (Empower Kentucky, 2021). People participated in a three-
hour program that included dinner, music, and a discussion about what they envisioned for the state related to energy. Chris Woolery, a KFTC member, said of this event that it, “was a great opportunity for us to step into a void that the legislature and the administration had left by saying, ‘We’re not gonna make any rules that comply with the Clean Power Plan.’” KFTC with the support of allied organizations created the Empower Kentucky Plan in response to the Clean Power Plan, which was a regulation issued by the Obama administration. This regulation used the Clean Air Act to require the electric system to reduce greenhouse gases by 30%-32%. The creation of this plan was described by interview participants as an important part of the process in the evolution of the work. Through this specific process of engagement with the community, KFTC members were able to learn what a Just Transition could look like.

**KFTC’s Educational Practices**

Education is an integral aspect of KFTC’s work and is intertwined with all of their organizing strategies. The organization has county-level chapters that engage members in the organizing work, including offering chapter-level educational workshops. The organization also offers statewide trainings open to different subsets of the organization. For example, the KFTC annual meeting includes various workshops and networking opportunities; this multi-day gathering is open to all members and is usually attended by over 100 KFTC members each year. In recent years, the organization also hosted a series of trainings for groups of KFTC leaders who apply and are selected; these trainings occur multiple times over a six-to-nine-month time period. Trainings focus on skills and political analysis that educate people to take action to promote change. The non-formal
education explored in this study included Appalachia’s Bright Future Conference, the Power House Project, the Empower Kentucky Leadership Network, and skills-based workshops, which are introduced in the following pages. The organization also enabled its members to participate in trainings outside of the organization as well.

**Appalachia’s Bright Future**

The first educational activity I examined was Appalachia’s Bright Future, which occurred in 2013 and was a three-day conference that took place in Harlan County, Kentucky. According to the website, the focus was on “the changing economy, lessons from other regions that have gone through transition, and examples of entrepreneurs and communities beginning to build our bright future” (KFTC, 2021, Appalachia’s Bright Future). Through these examples, KFTC members were able to build their knowledge about strategies for Just Transition to implement locally. Around two hundred people participated in this event. According to one of KFTC’s staff, this event marked a shift to include Just Transition language in the organization’s discussions. Appalachia’s Bright Future served as an example of non-formal education for organizing in the pursuit of Just Transition.

According to the program, the event included story sharing, workshops, and the opportunity to practice skills. The Transition story sharing component included people working on issues locally, such as the Appalachia Media Institute and the Community Farm Alliance, as well as speakers from the Black Mesa reservation, fisheries in New England, the mining area of Wales, England, and the Labor Network for Sustainability. The people from other regions shared their experiences of also pursuing economic
transition. Other speakers consisted of community leaders and staff from various non-profit organizations working within the Central Appalachian region. The opening plenary highlighted the importance of local businesses, enterprises and entrepreneurs, key sectors, support of workers, the generation of long-term investments, capacity building, self-reliance, and a focus on youth.

The event included numerous workshops that explored different aspects of the transition, including local food economy, land and stream restoration, renewable energy, sustainable forestry, arts and culture, and broadband access. A forum allowed participants to engage in an interactive method to practice conversations about the future of Eastern Kentucky and what a Just Transition means. Facilitators brought issues into clear focus and guided participants to talk about the need to create an alternative future beyond coal in impactful ways. One person summarized the event as having hard discussions rooted in stories, site visits, food, and mural development. A long-term staff member considered this educational event pivotal in terms of the way it shifted KFTC’s approach to discussing these issues and their educational practices related to Just Transition. This event also included food, music, and fellowship.

**Power House Project**

The second non-formal education activity I examined, the Power House Project, was a curriculum KFTC developed to support the rural electric cooperatives five primary goals along with allied organization, Mountain Association. According to their evaluation document, the goals of this organizing work included making energy efficiency and renewable energy accessible within the energy cooperative region, shifting the culture of
co-ops to embrace clean energy, improving the governance of the cooperative through greater member participation, building a movement of member owners, and communicating a new narrative about the value of energy efficiency and renewable energy in Eastern Kentucky.

Fifteen workshops took place in counties with rural electric cooperatives from April 2018 to January 2019. The focus of the two-hour workshop included at-home strategies for improving energy efficiency as well as “maps and materials for the workshops that show utility service territories for each county, the average burden on Kentucky households, state legislative districts, and other relevant data” (KFTC, 2020, The Power House Project). The goal of the workshop was to help people understand the importance of engaging in their local rural electric cooperatives in order to secure affordable energy and support for energy efficiency and renewable energies. This included providing participants with background educational information about rural electric cooperatives, people’s rights as member-owners, ways to access co-op programs, renewable energy, and participation’s connection to building power. These workshops exposed a greater number of people to ideas about how they could engage with their rural electric cooperatives and how current energy reliance impacts their lives.

**Empower Kentucky Leadership Network**

The third non-formal education component I reviewed was the Empower Kentucky Leadership Network, which was a multi-session program that lasted over nine months between the fall of 2019 and spring of 2020. Forty grassroots leaders from across Kentucky participated in this effort. As stated in the curriculum, the purpose of the
Empower Kentucky Leadership Network was to “inspire and support each other to propel a grassroots movement for Just Transition, Climate Justice, Equity, and a healthy democracy in Kentucky” (KFTC, 2020, Empower Kentucky Leadership Network). The educational series started with a multi-day face-to-face gathering. There were also monthly webinars that lasted an hour and a half per session. Smaller peer groups were created to enable people to build a stronger network and reflect on the content. Kevin Short, a KFTC member, described it as “a new program of peer mentorship and peer coaching.” The final face-to-face gathering was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Topics during the virtual portions were based on cohort members’ interests related to Just Transition efforts. As described on the website, the topics included Centering Racial, Economic, and Social Justice, Climate Crisis and the Green New Deal, Kentucky’s Energy Landscape, Race-Class Narrative, Cultural Organizing, and Organizing and Movement Building (KFTC, 2021).

As evident in the curriculum materials from this face-to-face gathering, participants discussed “how the world is and how it should be.” During that gathering, facilitators created a story circle, which is a discussion-based conversation about problems faced in the community and the main causes of those problems. Participants engaged in a Movement Generation simulation activity to visualize how much fossil fuel was consumed in 20-year periods while discussing what was happening during those time periods in Kentucky. The curriculum materials also indicated that participants discussed what Just Transition is and how it is an evolving process. They explored different conceptualizations of power, including a discussion about how to build power and
identify dimensions of power. There was also a focus on policy solutions to address climate change and Just Transition.

Through observing recordings of the virtual gatherings and the PowerPoint slides, key points of the non-formal education I identified included the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing, the importance of people who were most directly affected by environmental injustices taking the lead in the climate movement, understanding the cumulative impact of various pollutants, understanding the roots of the problems related to racism and colonialism, and the importance of taking action. This included distinguishing between grassroots environmental justice and mainstream environmental organizations. There were also discussions about what it will take to realize changes and how addressing the feasibility of the problem, including changing the narrative. The materials also included information about the regulated monopoly of the energy infrastructure and the history of Kentucky politics related to holding the coal industry accountable. Content also promoted clean energy as “more than hostile policy landscape,” and included success stories in the state (including 500,000 kilowatt hours of renewable energy in Eastern Kentucky). There were also conversations about the important role music and culture plays in getting people involved.

**Skills-based Trainings**

Fourth, in the interviews and observations I conducted, research participants reflected on skills-based trainings sponsored by KFTC and other allied organizations that members participated in about topics such as lobbying, direct actions, and communications. Sometimes these trainings would occur just prior to engaging in the
organizing activity. Other times, they were a part of a separate training and hosted by a coalition that the organization was a part of, such as the Alliance for Appalachia. I observed a day of lobbying when KFTC members went to Frankfort, the state capital, to engage in lobbying activities. The lobbying efforts included an orientation conducted by a KFTC staff member prior to meeting with legislators. The orientation covered an overview of the pieces of legislation, the status of the bill, and relevant legislators who needed to be met with that day. Conversations between different KFTC members explored the political context and how the group planned to approach the lobby visits. As noted by interviewees, skills-based trainings included virtually and in-person formats. In-person trainings often included role-plays and participants sharing and reflecting on their experiences.

**Cultural Exchanges**

In interviews about experiences that facilitated learning, KFTC members also discussed the importance of participating in various cross-community exchanges through the organization, which was another component of the organization’s learning opportunities. One type of an exchange was KFTC members’ participation in several gatherings in San Francisco, California with the Climate Justice Alliance (CJA), which is a coalition of 40 frontline organizations and networks. One of these gatherings, called Solidarity to Solutions, brought grassroots voices and solutions to a global climate summit hosted by the California Governor in 2018 (KFTC, 2018). Nine of 500 delegates to this gathering were KFTC members, and this gathering focused on being in solidarity with others affected by climate change, stopping subsidies from going to multinational
corporations, demanding public funds to repair damages, ending disaster capitalism, and pushing for place-based solutions. A march at this gathering consisted of 30,000 people organized by the People’s Climate Movement and involved three other networks of people. According to the interviewees, they also participated in CJA meetings that put them in contact with people from other regions directly affected by climate change.

**Organization of Chapters**

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. This chapter provided a brief introduction to the context and history of coal in the Central Appalachian region, as well as a vignette about the case-study organization (KFTC), their Just Transition initiatives, and some of the related non-formal education and educational practices related to Just Transition. It described the statement of the problem with the main research question and related sub-questions of the study. It also described my case study organization and their Just Transition initiatives, which consisted of environmental justice campaigns, Benham $AVES/Community Energy Project, Renew East Kentucky/Rural electric cooperative reform, and legislative reform, Empower Kentucky Plan. KFTC’s educational practices related to Just Transition were also explored, including Appalachia’s Bright Future, Power House Project, Empower Kentucky Leadership Network, skills-based trainings, and cultural exchanges.

In Chapter Two, I present a review of the literature related to the political economy of Central Appalachia, Gaventa’s (1980) three-dimensional approach to power, Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony, social change efforts in Appalachia, gender, and Just Transition. I argue that Appalachia is best understood as an internal periphery
within a world system. Gaventa’s and Gramsci’s theories create a theoretical lens for me to explore the political economy of the region that influences KFTC’s educational practices. I also introduce my theoretical framework which includes a discussion of adult learning, informal learning, non-formal education, situated learning and communities of practice, and working-class masculinity.

In Chapter Three, I present the research methodology for my study. This includes my research questions and case study design. This chapter describes data collection, including semi-structured interviews, participation recruitment, participant observation, campaign literature, curriculum, and other data. Coding and analysis as well as validity and reliability aspects of this study are also described.

Chapter Four explores the gendered history of the political economy of coal’s impact on organizational educational practices. These findings include an examination of three different periods of the coal industry, including the historical dominance of the coal industry, expansion of scale with fewer workers, and the industry’s decline. During each of these three time periods, KFTC’s educational work is explored. I show KFTC’s important historical work within the region focused on holding the coal industry accountable. In 2003, they launched the Canary Project, which more explicitly challenged the coal industry’s hegemony, and started to integrate proactive solutions. I argue that KFTC’s current Just Transition strategies acknowledge the legacy of coal industry’s impact on identity and reframe mining masculinity to embrace renewable energy. Their campaigns continue to counteract the coal industry’s impact, maintain continued focus on energy through clean energy, and increase engagement in elections.
Chapter Five explores the findings of my analysis of KFTC’s non-formal education and informal learning. This includes an exploration of leadership development as education work. KFTC is a community of practice that consists of informal learning as well as a dialectical relationship between non-formal education and informal learning. The themes identified include demonstration of efficacy, skills, consciousness-raising, understanding power, and solidarity.

Chapter Six presents a summary of the major findings in my data. I also present implications of the study for organizers and the field of Adult Education, share limitations in my study, and indicate future research in the growing field of Just Transition research. The organization helped to create a community of practice, which was instrumental in enabling KFTC members to learn and engage with Just Transition initiatives. Within that community of practice, there was a dialectical relationship between non-formal education and informal learning. Additionally, some informal learning occurred, which was unrelated to the non-formal education. Therefore, social movement education and practice was fundamental to facilitating social movement learning.

Another finding centered around the changing gendered history and political economy of the coal industry shaped how the organization approached its organizing work. More specifically, the organization moved from attempting hold the hegemonic coal industry accountable to environmental and workplace safety laws to pushing for proactive alternatives through Just Transition initiatives. Within their Just Transition efforts, the coal industry and related hegemonic masculinity continued to shape which
projects and campaigns were pursued by the organization, including how people within
the region grappled with the loss of identity, dealt with legacy effects of the coal industry,
maintained a focus on energy production through a focus on renewable energy and
energy efficiency, and engaged with voter empowerment. Non-formal education and
informal learning played an important role in the organization fulfilling its mission.
Chapter 2

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I explored the history of coal mining and the political economy in Central Appalachia, indicating different theories explaining the poverty in the region and changes in the coal industry over time. My research contributes to the internal periphery approach to Appalachia’s political economy as well as the coal industry’s hegemony and power within the region. This study explored how a community organization and its educational practices challenge the coal industry’s hegemony. Additionally, the region has a long history of organized political resistance, which included unionized miners and community activists, as well as the divisions among these groups. I also explored gender dynamics within Central Appalachia. My research adds to the body of knowledge related to Appalachian organized political resistance by bringing a unique focus to the educational aspects of social movement work within the region.

The limited research on Just Transition, particularly in Appalachia, currently highlights different definitions and charts how this topic has been explored over time. My empirical study contributes to the growing body of research around Just Transition in general and how Just Transition initiatives are manifesting within Appalachia. In addition, although there is much research on social movement learning, including explorations of non-formal education, informal learning, and communities of practice, I add a deeper understanding to the dynamic interrelationship between non-formal education and informal learning within a community of practice. My research specifically
focused on the education and learning that happened within a social movement organization focused on its membership. Additionally, my research adds to the body of feminist research focused on working-class masculinity.

**Political Economy of Central Appalachia**

In this section, I introduce three ways of understanding the political economy of Central Appalachia. These theories attempt to explain the prevalent high levels of poverty and persistent underdevelopment in the region. Understanding the political economy of Central Appalachia is necessary for this study because it relates to the social movement learning occurring within the case study organization. In this section, I describe three theories of political economy relevant to Appalachia. I argue that the internal periphery within a world systems analysis is the most relevant to my study because this theory best describes the case study organization’s orientation to education and learning.

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty launched in Appalachian Kentucky sought to, and subsequently failed, to address the comparably higher levels of poverty in this region compared to every other area in the United States (Billings & Blee, 2000). The three theories I explore are: the culture of poverty, the internal colony, and internal periphery. Table 1 outlines the key arguments and shortcomings to these three theories. I argue that the internal periphery approach to global political economy within the region is most relevant to my research study.

The culture-of-poverty theory, which is no longer given weight in Appalachian scholarship, focused on the deficiencies of individuals and family patterns. However, mainstream media often continues to use this theory as justification for depicting people
from the region as ignorant and in part to blame for their economic struggles. For example, Diane Sawyer’s (2009) 20/20 piece, *A Hidden America: Children of the Table*

**Table 1**

**Political Economy Theories for Appalachia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Main Issue</th>
<th>Shortcomings</th>
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| Culture of Poverty      | Blames the individual and culture for poverty                              | -Fails to acknowledge the structural elements of exploitation and oppression within the region  
|                         |                                                                            | -Blames the victim                                                           |
|                         |                                                                            | -Ahistorical                                                                |
| Internal Colony         | Absentee land and mineral ownership                                        | -Obscures exploiters within the region                                        |
|                         |                                                                            | -Discounts Appalachia from other regions being negatively affected by the global economy |
| Internal Periphery      | Periphery in a global economy, dependent primarily on one extractive industry | -Obscures resistance evident in place-based activism                           |

the Mountains, outraged Appalachian scholars and many people from the region for its depiction of conditions in Eastern Kentucky and failed to acknowledge the structural issues related to systemic poverty. Anglin (2016a) stated that the depictions of poverty in Sawyer’s piece appear to be persuasive as justification to blame the victim, yet erase social heterogeneity, the political economic context, and health inequalities. Another example is Jack Well’s (1965) book *Yesterday’s People* that described the people in the region as backwards, violent, and fatalistic.

The culture-of-poverty theory prescribes education, social work, and clinical psychology as strategies to address longstanding problems within the region (Walls, 1978). In other words, this model focuses on a pathology-oriented understanding of the
region. It attributes poverty to Appalachian culture and to the region’s isolation from the rest of the country. Walls (1978) goes on to argue that this theory overgeneralizes problems experienced by families and fails to acknowledge a historical and structural perspective. This approach results in policies that address symptoms of poverty, as opposed to systemic causes based on context and historical patterns (Billings & Blee, 2000).

Although there is much criticism within Appalachian scholarship about the shortcomings of this theory, it still needs to be contended with because the culture of poverty serves as a justification for “Othering” the region. Often referred to as “white trash,” this group of marginalized people is stigmatized as not able to be productive, own property, or raise upwardly-mobile offspring (Isenberg, 2016). This is most evident in the recent popularity of the J.D. Vance’s New York Times bestseller *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (2016), which is the latest rendition of an ahistorical blaming of the individual that disregards the long history of corporate exploitation within the region. This book spurred the writing of two books in response, including an edited volume with over 40 Appalachian contributors called *Appalachian Reckoning: A region responds to Hillbilly Elegy* (2019), and Catte’s (2018) book, *What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia*.

From a more structural perspective, Lewis, Johnson, and Askins’s (1978) influential publication of *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case* referred to the region as an “internal colony” due to corporate absentee land ownership (p. 322). The creation of the internal colonialism theory was a turning point in the
research about the region because it offered “an explicitly political response to a dominant narrative about Appalachia” (Anglin, 2016b, p. 51). This orientation blames the economic and political exploitation of the region on outside mineral owners and corporations and is oriented in how the region is integrated, not isolated from the U.S. economy. Harry Caudill’s book (2001) *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, although full of highly-problematic cultural stereotypes, helped to popularize the internal colonialism theory of Appalachia following its original publication in 1963.

Some proponents of this theory claim that the culture-of-poverty theory as legitimizing the exploitation of the land and people in the region (Billings & Blee, 2000). In other words, alternative economic development was denied by the will of the large land-holding companies (Gaventa, 1978). These nonlocal ownership patterns of subsurface mineral rights and land negatively affected taxation, political dependency, and economic development alternatives (Billings & Blee, 2000). As an example, one company owned 17% of the surface land in Claiborne County, Tennessee and 90% of the mineral (sub-surface) ownership; yet, they only contributed 3% of the local tax revenue (Gaventa, 1978).

In recent years, a growing number of scholars have raised questions about the utility of the internal colony model and its primary and oversimplified focus on absentee land owners as the main driver for the exploitation of the region (Anglin, 2016b; Billings, 2016; S. Fisher & Smith, 2016; Smith & Fisher, 2016). Anglin (2016b) argues that the links between Appalachia and other regional, national, and international economies are obscured by the lens of Appalachian exceptionalism as evident in the internal colonialism
approach. Blaming “outsiders” also oversimplifies the exploitation, particularly discounting profiteers from within the region (Fisher & Smith, 2016, p. 2).

Since the inception of the internal colonialism theory, other scholars argued that Appalachia was better described as an “internal periphery” due to uneven capitalist development within an advanced capitalist society (Walls, 1978, p. 319). Both the internal colonialism and internal periphery theories point to the exploitation of the region’s natural resources as well as to the domination of its people (Bell & York, 2010). However, Walls (1978) argued that Appalachia reflected characteristics of a peripheral country, including underdevelopment, poverty, and dependency; yet, the region is within an advanced capitalist country. Due to the extraction of raw materials from the region, such as timber, coal, oil, and gas, uneven capitalist development created dependency much like peripheral countries (Walls, 1978).

This approach acknowledges that the modern capitalist world system consists of the world economy that is based on unequal exchange of goods. Surplus value flows from the weaker spatial areas, the periphery, to the core (Wallerstein, 2004). Some researchers argued that the impact of capitalist markets for other sectors, state development and coercion, and cultural strategies also factor into why the internal periphery approach into world systems analysis more adequately explains the deep poverty in this region (Billings & Blee, 2000). Central Appalachia’s peripheral status within the world system helped to solidify the coal industry’s hegemony within the region. In turn, the hegemony of the coal industry also made it difficult for the region to diversify its economy.
Additionally, in the 1980s, a shift towards neoliberalism by Reagan in the United States and Thatcher in Great Britain started to dismantle institutions that promoted egalitarian distributive measures (Harvey, 2007). Based on empirical evidence, neoliberalism could be defined as a “political project to re-establish the conditions of capital accumulation and to restore the power of the economic elite” (Harvey, 2005, p. 19). Neoliberalism magnified profit maximization by externalizing costs. I would argue that neoliberalism reinforced Appalachia’s periphery status within the capitalist world system. Additionally, during the last two decades of the twentieth century, devolution occurred with shifts among responsibilities at different levels of government, which included a transfer of some control, development, and support of policies to states and local governments (Sharp & Parisi, 2003).

My research was based on the internal periphery explanation of Appalachia’s marginalization within the world systems theory. The internal periphery approach is most relevant to my study because the organization I explored recognizes that both companies and people in positions of power within—and outside of the region—maximize profit while minimizing responsibility for the health and well-being of the environment and workers. For example, factors influencing the coal industry go beyond the nation-state; these factors include competition with other fossil fuels from other parts of the world, declining costs of renewables and their subsequent increasing market share, and growing recognition that a global strategy is needed to mitigate climate change, which is evident in the Paris Climate Accord in 2015.
Additionally, the internal colonialism falls short in terms of not having an internal government that rules the subjugated people (Walls, 1978). The divisions within the Appalachian context are rooted in class processes (Walls, 1978). Furthermore, capitalist domination within the region is shaped by cultural hegemony shaped by consent (Gramsci & Buttigieg, 2011; Walls, 1978).

Furthermore, U.S. coal communities typically experience hardship related to the busts in the boom-and-bust cycle. The “resource curse” is defined as “a tendency for communities that rely heavily on certain extractive resources to become ‘addicted’ to these resources and to develop overly dependent or specialized economies” (Carley et al., 2018, p. 136). The acceleration of globalization and neoliberalist values reduces the consideration of alternative development possibilities (Lobao, 2014). Due to the dependence on a fixed resource in the global economy, the lack of economic diversification exacerbates the impact of economic downturns within the region (McNeil, 2011). In other words, core-periphery dynamics in a world-systems analysis most accurately reflects the singular focus of rural-based economies under capitalism.

As a result, locations dependent on natural resource extraction typically have extensive poverty, stifled development, and poor socioeconomic outcomes (Perdue & Pavela, 2012). A majority of the 301 research studies in a meta-analysis from various disciplines found a correlation between coal production and negative economic outcomes in mining communities, like poverty rates and lower-income levels, (Freudenburg & Wilson, 2002). Disparities partly show the chronic socioeconomic issues inherent in coal-
dependent economies and illustrate the need for economic diversification in these areas (Zullig & Hendryx, 2011).

**Coal’s Hegemony and Power**

In *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*, Gaventa (1980) described the power coal companies had in the region. His seminal study explored three dimensions of power exhibited by the coal companies. In this section, I describe the three dimensions and then relate them to current dynamics with coal in Central Appalachia. In the first-dimensional approach to power, the mechanism of power consists of political resources, like jobs, votes, and influence; this is a straightforward, visible assessment of who participates and who wins and loses. The second-dimensional approach to power relates to the “mobilization of bias” that includes predominant rituals and procedures resulting in barriers to participation; this relates to which participants and issues are excluded (p. 14). Gaventa (2006) describes this as hidden power, or setting the political agenda, and notes participates at the decision-making table.

Gaventa’s (1980) third-dimensional approach to power shaped people’s understanding of the issues and the internalization of powerlessness. The powerless viewed themselves “through the invocation of myths or symbols, the use of threat or rumors, or other mechanisms of power, [and that] the powerful may be able to ensure that certain beliefs and actions emerge in one context while apparently contradictory grievances may be expressed in others” (p. 19). This is similar to Gramsci’s (1992) concept of hegemony related to cultural dominance of the ruling class over the powerless,
which was linked to both consent and force. One of his major theoretical contributions consisted of how consent and force work in tandem. As an example, he argued that when the state seeks to take unpopular action mobilizing public opinion through newspapers and political parties is important; political society is indistinguishable with civil society. This cultural hegemony caused the power elite’s values to be a part of the common beliefs and practices in the social structure (Bell, 2016).

This third dimension of power is evident in Appalachia in that despite, the range of negative effects caused by the coal industry, many people continue to support it. This hidden power manifested as the industry has bolstered efforts that supported coal heritage by selectively representing positive attributes of the industry and influencing residents’ perceptions of coal-related events (Lewin, 2017). Research has explored how the coal industry actively constructs a community economic identity within the region to maintain control as well as the link between coal and hegemonic masculinity (Bell & York, 2010). Bodenhamer (2016) found that the pro-coal discourse emphasized the longevity of the industry and resulted in a sense of pride, energy security and employment, emphasis on environmentally-conscious practices, and attacks on those challenging coal’s hegemonic position. Additionally, very few high-paying, low-skilled jobs outside of the coal industry exist, contributing support to this narrative.

As a result, there is extreme polarization in local communities and backlash against those who stand up for their right to a safe and healthy place to live. My research contributes to a greater understanding of the challenges associated with coal’s hegemony over time and ways a community organization’s efforts acknowledge that cultural
hegemony while pivoting towards a better future beyond coal. Although Gaventa’s (1980) original study provided much insight to the power of the coal industry within the region, he failed to acknowledge the agency of people to organize and resist. Much like Gaventa’s (2019) revised thesis, I argue that there are numerous examples of resistance despite the hegemonic power of the coal industry. I use the three dimensions of power to inform how I analyze the changing political economy of coal and its impact on KFTC’s educational practices and approaches its organizing work on environmental justice and Just Transition within the region.

**Social Change Efforts in Appalachia**

Increasingly, case study research explored various labor and community organizing efforts in the Appalachian region; this research depicts a history of resistance, including what contributes to success or failure, and shows the impact of marginalized identities on change efforts (Bell, 2013; Fisher, 1993; Fisher & Smith, 2012; Weinbaum, 2004). Both scholars and activists have written case studies of local campaigns and social change efforts. Activist efforts were shaped by their connection to place, Appalachian identity, class struggle, and gender. Activists have included women sitting in front of bulldozers, rank-and-file miners standing on the picket lines, and disabled miners pushing for Black Lung benefits (Fisher, 1993).

Research related to union development showed that in response to the concentrated power of the coal operators, labor organizing and unrest periodically surfaced in the region (Eller, 1982). The 1929-33 violent rebellion against poor working conditions spurred efforts to unionize (Montrie, 2003). The union that emerged from
these struggles was the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), and by 1948 it became the largest union in the country (Hansell, 2018). The peak of coal mining-related worker mobilization occurred in 1978 (Yarrow, 1990). During the last several decades, there has been a significant decline in union membership in the coal-producing counties in Central Appalachia due, in part, to the rise of multinational coal companies and their anti-union orientation (Smith, 2015). The elimination of the union resulted from the closing of large union mines and subcontracting mining to smaller operations (Yarrow, 1990).

Additionally, several research studies have explored the Pittston Coal Strike in Southwestern Virginia in 1989 (Beckwith, 2001; Sessions & Ansley, 1993). Beckwith (2001) argued that the UMWA used gender framing of mining masculinities to transform the union’s collective action repertoire from traditional picketing to nonviolent civil disobedience. In other words, the UMWA used what “a man on strike” meant to change their strike behavior to incorporate nonviolence (p. 299). My research also explored gender framing’s impact on changes in strategy. Because KFTC had former coal miners acting as spokespeople for Just Transition, my research demonstrates how a community organization used hegemonic masculinity evident in the coal miner identity to make renewable energy a viable option for the Central Appalachian region.

Appalachian scholarship on social movements also documented the history of organized resistance within the region against strip mining. Montrie (2003) described how campaigns to stop large-scale surface mining occurred during the 1960s. Some of these efforts ranged from legislative campaigns to nonviolent direct action to more drastic
forms of direct action, including the blowing up of surface mining equipment and the exchange of gunfire. Between 1967 and 1968, over $2 million of mining equipment was blown up in Eastern Kentucky (Bingman, 1993). Historically, there was disagreement among different environmental citizen activists about their goals related to surface mining. In other words, some community activists wanted to ban the practice, whereas others wanted to regulate strip mining. During the 1960s, efforts to regulate the practice were occurring at the state level. As the federal level, West Virginia Congressman Ken Hechler introduced legislation in 1971 for an outright ban on the practice (Montrie, 2003). Others sought to regulate the practice to find a balance between “responsible” strip mining and mitigation of negative environmental effects. These two factions of the movement primarily differed in their goals based on their understandings of their political clout and consequent perceptions of what their citizen engagement could accomplish. After three presidential vetoes, these efforts eventually led to the passage of the federal Surface Mining Reclamation and Control Act in 1977 (Montrie, 2003).

Due to the separation of the mineral, or sub-surface, rights and surface rights, coal companies or landholding companies sought to extract the coal by any means necessary. During the 1950s when strip mining began, citizens affected by the broad form deeds sought to legally challenge the validity of these deeds arguing that when their ancestors sold their mineral rights, they were only giving permission for deep mining. The state courts interpreted broad form deeds to allow mineral owners in Kentucky to be able to strip mine without the surface owner’s permission (Bingman, 1993). This spurred Kentuckians for the Commonwealth to address the issue, which included passing
legislation that was overturned by the Kentucky Supreme Court and eventually referendum by 82% of the vote to change Kentucky’s Constitution (Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, 1991; Szakos, 1993). Despite backlash from other residents and the industry, individuals and communities continued to fight for better enforcement of mine safety and environmental laws to pursue accountability from the industry.

More recent research explored accounts of individual and collective opposition to mountaintop removal mining in Appalachia (Bell, 2013; House & Howard, 2009; McNeil, 2011; Szakos, 1993). A collection of oral histories described the experiences of many individuals who have been fighting mountaintop removal (House & Howard, 2009). McNeil (2011) documented the Coal River Mountain Watch and Friends of Mountains’ community organizing efforts in West Virginia; the author argued that their environmental justice work related mountaintop removal (MTR) to larger social, political, and economic forces of the coal industry by connecting with other organizations. He argued that Coal River Mountain Watch filled a void left by the fading union, because this organization represented local people against the industry and the state; further, he stated that Coal River Mountain Watch’s style of organizing was different than union organizing because it was led primarily by women. Strobo (2012) concluded that recent citizen efforts through the legal system have challenged the stranglehold that the coal industry has on the region.

My research adds to the literature on community organizing groups challenging mountaintop removal; however, many of the people I interviewed were men. There is also a substantial amount of research about environmental justice organizing efforts in
West Virginia that is often generalized to the whole Central Appalachian region (Bell, 2013, 2016; Feng, 2020; Scott, 2010). My research suggests that generalizing for the whole region is not necessarily appropriate. Although there are certainly similarities between some aspects of community organizations’ strategies, there also some distinctions that are noteworthy.

Additionally, the relationship between coal miners and community environmental activists has been the subject of several works. In some cases, local union workers and environmental justice activists stood in solidarity with each other; this was most pronounced during the 1970s (Abraham, 2017). In some instances, for example, community members blocked coal trucks in their communities when coal mining was causing property damage to people’s homes, and the coal truck drivers supported their demands by not trying to push through blockades. Increasingly, over time, polarization developed between coal miners and environmental justice organizers when coal miners perceived environmental justice organizing as a threat to their livelihoods. As an illustration, leadership within the UMWA has taken a vague stance of supporting MTR except for certain instances (McNeil, 2011). In other cases, such as during a proposed coal truck weight increase in 2001 in West Virginia, union and community activists have worked together (McNeil, 2011). But, overall, these divisions have become more pronounced over time. My research adds to the social movement literature in Appalachia where community organizing efforts sought to reverse the trend toward polarization between coal miners and environmental justice community activists.
Other research illustrated the link between the global political economy and local organizing efforts. Weinbaum’s (2004) research on three cases related to economic justice in the context of the global political economy in East Tennessee was particularly instructive because the Just Transition movement seeks to respond locally to the global political economy as well. Furthermore, Fisher and Smith (2012) explored 17 diverse place-based struggles for justice impacted by globalization. My research adds to the growing body of literature on community organizing in the global political economy, particularly exploring the post-coal reality in the region. I argue that my research confirms the internal periphery approach to political economy; additionally, I expand this theory to include how people still have agency when living in the global periphery. Also, despite the three dimensions of power documented by Gaventa (1980), which were also evident in my data, people still had agency to resist the coal industry’s hegemony and pursue a Just Transition.

Additionally, my research adds to the body of Appalachian scholarship that focuses on social movements within the region. One of my main contributions consists of the in-depth exploration of education and learning that occurs through the participation in these social movements. The limited literature that exists about the educational approaches to social movement learning within the region were firsthand accounts from organizers. My research study garnered multiple perspectives to identify themes across participants. Also, this study includes a broader scope by conducting a content analysis of organizational literature and curriculum. This content analysis adds to the research about community activists engaging with environmental justice campaigns. This study adds the
additional lens of exploring Just Transition efforts. There is very little Just Transition research in Appalachia that has been conducted; this study expands this important topic, especially as the region is grappling with a near-post coal moment.

Gender in Appalachia

There is a growing body of research on gender dynamics in the region. Researchers in this area have studied female coal miners and related discrimination (Hall, 1990; Maggard, 1994; Tallichet, 2011), as well as the importance of the role of women in union and environmental justice organizing (Bell, 2013; McNeil, 2011; Seitz, 1998). Most relevant to my study, however, is the research regarding working-class masculinity that is manifest within the region and linked to community economic identity (Bell, 2016; Bell & York, 2010; Scott, 2007). This literature is most relevant because I am exploring the gendered history of the coal industry; coal mining is considered a male profession in part because so few women have been miners. Furthermore, since the Central Appalachian region has strongly identified with coal mining, this legacy must be grappled with in the transition to a post-coal economy.

Scholars have shown that in the region there has historically been segregation of men and women’s work from the late 1880s to early 1900s. Males were traditionally the primary breadwinners within the ideology of a “family wage” and females were dependent on male income earners (Maggard, 1994b). The structures of heterosexual normativity and the capitalist economy worked together to create dependent masculinity (Scott, 2010). Miners, who were primarily male and white, became dependent on companies, bosses, corporations, and politicians; they dismiss environmentalists if they
did not work in the coal industry (Scott, 2007). Coal mining employment was often ranked as one of the most dangerous industries in the world, putting employees at risk for injury or death (Maggard, 1994). Studies have shown that in the United States, males’ sense of worth and masculinity are tied to their ability to do dangerous work and when unemployment occurs, they struggle with depression, anxiety, and loss of identity (Ward, 2013).

Furthermore, the coal industry’s public relations’ campaign, Friends of Coal, strategically used this hegemonic masculinity and related ideology to maintain power within the region by keeping community economic identity tied to mining (Bell & York, 2010). Mining historically held both economic and cultural significance, which has resulted in some resistance to imagining other options for the economy (Scott, 2010). Yet, there was also a willingness on the part of some miners to consider other economic options; the loyalty to the industry was nuanced (Feng, 2020). Consequently, addressing the hegemony of the coal industry rooted in white working-class masculinity is a necessary part of the process of transitioning the economic base of the region. My research contributes to building a deeper understanding of the challenges that the hegemony of the coal industry and the complicated dynamics that hegemonic masculinity in Central Appalachia as well as the impact these two dynamics have on the prospects of Just Transition.

**Defining Just Transition**

Just Transition is a contested term. Several prevalent definitions appear in the literature. In general, the Just Transition movement focuses specifically on the transition
to a low-carbon society experienced equitably across groups and communities (Carley et al., 2018; Humphreys & Korn, 2014; Lewin, 2017; Taylor, Hufford, & Bilbrey, 2016). Just Transition efforts first proposed through combined efforts between labor unions and environmental justice organizations to phase out industries harming both workers and local communities (Abraham, 2019; Heffron & McCauley, 2018; Newell & Mulvaney, 2013). Table 2 highlights some of the distinctions between different conceptualizations of Just Transition.

**Table 2**

*Different Definitions of Just Transition*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitions</th>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Proponents</th>
<th>Justification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A focus on worker health and safety</td>
<td>Engagement between unions and environmental activists</td>
<td>Union workers</td>
<td>Regulations can contribute to improving the quality of life of workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A solution to address climate change</td>
<td>Retraining of former fossil fuel workers to fit into the existing economy</td>
<td>Mainstream Democrats</td>
<td>Unending economic growth can contribute to working-class people to have a larger slice of the economic pie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A changing focus on renewable energy</td>
<td>-100% renewable energy -Living wage</td>
<td>Sunrise Movement</td>
<td>Climate change is the biggest crisis that needs to be addressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The radical transformation of the economy</td>
<td>-Democratization -Decentralization -Diversification of economic activity -Redistribution of resources and power -Reduction of consumption</td>
<td>Movement Generation, KFTC</td>
<td>Profit maximization, the concentration of political and economic interests, and unending economic growth is not a sufficient strategy for an equitable, sustainable future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Just Transition concept originated in the United States in the 1970s when union leader Tony Mazzocchi in the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers’ Union sought environmental group involvement against the Shell company due to worker health and safety issues (Pai et al., 2020). Since then, the Just Transition concept has evolved with the climate change movement to include the climate, the environment, and energy for all (Pai et al., 2020). Some people view such efforts as an opportunity to transform the purpose of the economy, whereas others simply want to retrain former coal workers to fit into a post-coal economy which continues to focus on profit maximization.

In a systematic review of the literature on Just Transitions, Pai et al. (2020) identified 17 strategies being pursued around Just Transition from the 33 articles. Their research focus included long-term planning, role of unions, community engagement, local jobs and diversified economies, coal as identity, gender gap in energy sector jobs, education/research institutions, pension protection, Just Transition principles and planning, legislative and regulatory processes, job quality, job guarantees and compensation, worker transition service, local infrastructure development, communication of phase-out plans, environmental remediation, and retraining workers (Pai et al., 2020).

On the more radical end of Just Transition conceptualizations, Movement Generation’s Justice and Ecology Project describes these initiatives as an effort to “democratize, decentralize, and diversify economic activity while we damper down consumption, and (re)distribute resources power” (Movement Generation, n.d., p. 3). Their Justice and Ecology Project’s Just Transition framework argues for a shift away
from an extractive economy rooted in a consumerist and colonial worldview and a military-driven form of governance that extracts resources and exploits labor in pursuit of the enclosure of wealth and power. Movement Generation is pursuing a regenerative economy with a worldview focused on caring and sacredness that seeks to regenerate resources through cooperative labor and deep democracy for ecological and social well-being. For Movement Generation, the purpose of the economy should shift toward “ecological restoration, community resilience, and social equity” (Movement Generation, n.d., p. 15). Organizations like Movement Generation are pushing for a dramatic transformation of the purpose of the economy and related institutions. This is similar to the Black Mesa Water Coalition (BMWC) in Navajo and Hopi communities, which is a youth-led, inter-tribal approach to cultivating alternative industries like solar plants, sovereignty projects, and woodcrafts, and which is rooted in transformed social relations and ethical practices (Brown & Spiegel, 2019).

Other organizations who use the term “Just Transition” seek to transform a coal-based economy towards “a sustainable, community-controlled economy” with an emphasis on different sectors (Ackerman & Comings, 2015). For some, like the Sunrise Movement, this focuses on a transition to 100% renewable energy within 12 years and assurance of living wage jobs for all workers, including those in low-income communities and communities of color, through a pursuit of a Green New Deal (Sunrise Movement, n.d.). In Central Appalachia, the economic sectors targeted by various community-based organizations include the following: energy efficiency, local food production, health care, sustainable forestry and wood products, tourism, and
environmental remediation, particularly of former coal mines (Ackerman & Comings, 2015).

Research related to a Just Transition in Appalachia is limited. One research study explores trade-offs related to Just Transition (Newell & Mulvaney, 2013). Other researchers have conducted comparative studies on Just Transition between Appalachia and the Ruhr Valley in Germany, such as Abraham (2017). In the study, Abraham acknowledged that the UMWA President Cecil Roberts is skeptical about a Just Transition. Another study proposed a Just Transition framework for fossil fuel workers in the United States (Pollin & Callaci, 2019). Additionally, Taylor et al. (2016) identified forty-five organizations within Appalachia doing projects related to economic transition, including local food and forestry, tourism (that includes arts and amenities), entrepreneurship, energy, land reform/planning, and public revenues. A follow-up study identified three barriers to a Just Transition, including historical patterns of corporate greed, shrinking democratic public spaces, and cultural disempowerment (Tarus et al., 2017). My research adds to the growing body of literature around Just Transition by exploring the learning and education occurring in one organization. Additionally, Just Transition has little other discussion in the Adult Education literature.

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC), which is the community organization I studied in this research project, defines Just Transition as:

an equitable and sustainable economy, one that works for all people. The term Just Transition describes an all-in, inclusive, and place-based process to build
economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative one (KFTC, n.d.).

KFTC’s stance is most consistent with a more radical orientation to Just Transition. For example, KFTC shares Movement Generation’s zine about Just Transition to its involved members. Just Transition includes efforts to bolster clean energy, in addition to increasing jobs and protecting workers (Brecher, 2012). Just Transition efforts consist of a wide set of strategies, including promoting local foods, encouraging sustainable forestry, supporting small business development, and others (Taylor et al., 2016). KFTC conceptualizes Just Transition as a shift toward more sustainable employment that do not jeopardize the health and safety of workers or communities. KFTC’s principles for Just Transition established in 2013 are as follows:

- Improve the quality of life for people and communities affected by economic disruption, environmental damage, and inequality
- Foster inclusion, participation, and collaboration
- Generate good, stable, and meaningful jobs and broad access to opportunities and benefits
- Promote innovation, self-reliance and broadly held local wealth
- Protect and restore public health and environment
- Respect the past while strengthening communities and culture
- Consider the effects of decisions on future generations

In this research study, I used KFTC’s definition of Just Transition as the lens for my analysis.
Educational Theoretical Framework

Along with my use of the model of internal periphery to understand the political economy of Appalachia, I also used several theories of learning to understand the learning and educational of KFTC’s Just Transition work. Merriam & Bierema (2013) outlined the three main typologies of adult education of being formal, non-formal, and informal. Formal learning was not relevant for my study because my case study organization was not related to educational bureaucracies. First, I used Foley’s (1999) concept of informal learning. Second, I used the concept of non-formal education, which was explored in the literature on social movement learning. These concepts aided in understanding the informal learning and non-formal education happening within KFTC’s Just Transition initiatives in Eastern Kentucky. Third, since I considered KFTC to be a community of practice, I used situated learning as conceptualized by Wenger and Lave (1991). This concept helped me understand the informal learning and non-formal education that occurs in Just Transition efforts that are promoted by a local community organization when organization members work on related projects or campaigns. To see how I integrated the various learning theories in my analysis of KFTC’s educational work, see Figure 7.

Learning is not restricted to educational institutions and formal educational settings, particularly within social movements (Scandrett et al., 2010). Learning occurs through the process of being engaged, as well as through non-formal structured educational initiatives. Some aspects of learning occur collectively in a socio-cultural
context, whereas some of the learning occurs individually. In this section, I will describe several adult learning theories applicable to this case study.

**Adult Environmental Social Movement Learning (SML)**

There is substantial scholarship that distinguishes between Old Social Movements (OSMs) and New Social Movements (NSMs). This includes an emphasis in NSMs, which include specific issues and/or identity politics, such as the civil rights, gender rights, sexuality, environmental, and the peace movements in the United States and the consequent impact those movements may have on learning; alternatively, OSMs emphasize labor rights and education (Dykstra & Law, 1994; Budd L. Hall et al., 2011). However, Holst (2018) argues that this dichotomy does not adequately apply to some current movements. Spencer (1995) breaks down this distinction by exploring the labor education happening related to environmental issues.

I argue that the environmental justice movement does not fit into this dichotomy. For example, for Black women in the environmental justice movement, learning and knowledge construction is not abstract but is specific for protecting one's physical place, environmental health, and unfair practices; these environmental justice movements occur where practices violate socially-embedded values and logic of capital accumulation (Bowles, 2006). Although I agree with most of Bowles’ (2006) claims, I disagree that the presence of injustice is enough to spur movement building. This counterclaim is also evident in Gaventa’s (1980) book about power and powerlessness within Central Appalachia. My research adds to the body of research about environmental justice, where community activists in Eastern Kentucky are primarily working-class and directly
affected by the issues they are challenging within their communities, including the hegemony of the coal industry. KFTC’s work and related learning challenges the dichotomy of OSMs and NSMs.

In some environmental SML research, different aspects of engagement are explored, including the process of politicization and maintenance of long-term commitment. Curnow et al. (2018) theorized that politicization is a sociocultural learning process that includes political concept development, changing practices, reconfigured ways of knowing, and new identities in formation. This included a recognition that experience is a legitimate source of knowledge. Kovan & Dirkx (2003) explored the role of learning in maintaining long-term commitment of environmental activists. There was an element of spirituality to their learning experience, which connected to emotion as a driver for their activism. Both studies highlight the role embodied learning plays in activists’ learning. Drew (2014) further explored how embodied learning in direct action on animal liberation consists of a “see-feel-learn” sequence in the learning process. This study explored the Clayoquot Sound logging direct action protests in 1993, which spurred protestors’ learning through embodied experiences and resultant emotions of the confrontation with the state through the legal system. Their Ecofeminist Peace Camp, which included educational workshops, also attended to the emotional and physical toll of engagement. My study adds to this body of knowledge related to embodied learning and the different ways of knowing in environmental social movement learning.

Other environmental social movement learning scholars focus on different scales of learning. Scandrett et al. (2010) theorized about three levels of learning (micro-,
meso-, and macro-level learning) through an exploration of three case studies of environmental justice movements. Micro-level learning could include self-directed learning or making sense of an issue in collaboration with others. Meso-level learning has to do with the dominant frame and reframing of worldviews or conceptualizations, whereas macro-level learning consists of ideological change and hegemony. Klutzz and Walter (2018) built on this model by integrating the micro-, meso-, and macro- levels of learning within two continua of unorganized and organized learning. They also applied individual and collective learning to the climate justice movement. In other words, micro-level learning could occur in a non-formal workshop where someone is trained how to lobby, whereas macro-level learning may focus on the political and economic factors causing a situation.

Larri and Whitehouse (2019) also built on the micro-, meso-, and macro- levels of learning to better understand the links between individual, group, and movement learning within a women’s group advocating against gas fracking in Australia. This specific application illuminated the implications of gender on learning. Larri and Whitehouse (2019) equated macro-level learning more with educating outside the movement, which was different than Kluttz and Walter’s (2018) focused on the hegemonic power structures. Although this conceptualization highlighted how learning occurs both individually and collectively in different capacities, the learning occurred simultaneously. They tried to claim distinctions that are not as clear cut, which oversimplifies some aspects of the learning.
My research confirmed that individual and collective learning as well as organized and unorganized learning occurred within the Just Transition movement. In addition, micro-, meso-, and macro-level learning was occurred; however, I did use this approach to conceptualize the social movement learning happening within KFTC because this theory attempts to create divisions between types and/or locations of learning that is not useful.

**Informal Learning**

Foley’s (1999) conceptualization of informal learning in social movements made it clear that an important aspect of the learning that happens within Just Transition work. This could also be described as “incidental learning”—learning that is embedded in social action (Foley, 1999). In other words, it is learning that is integrated into the work people are doing for social change or “learning in the struggle” (Foley, 1999, p. 39). This is similar to what other scholars describe as a pedagogy of mobilization:

the learning inherent in the building and maintaining of a social movement and its organizations. Through participation in a social movement, people learn numerous skills and ways of thinking analytically and strategically as they struggle to understand their movement in motion…Moreover, as coalitions are formed, people’s understanding of the interconnectedness of relations within a social totality becomes increasingly sophisticated (Holst, 2002, p. 87-88).

In other words, the process of being involved enabled people to gain skills, which may include being a spokesperson, lobbying a legislator, or writing a letter to the editor. Dykstra and Law (1994) identified four dimensions to this bottom-up process, or
pedagogy of mobilization, including organizing, continuing participation, political action, and network building; the participation included both leadership development and learning strategic thinking.

This learning is not often acknowledged because it is frequently seen as merely a part of the process of being engaged with an effort. However, in the case of the Terania Creek campaign to protect the rainforest in Australia, for example, this learning was paramount. Participants learned about rainforest ecology, acquired an understanding of the State, became aware of how to engage with the state, developed media skills, participated in the development of democratic organizations, and took direct action (Foley, 1999). People involved with this campaign also experienced conscientization (Foley, 1999). Through the process of taking action and engaging with different actors, people learn about a variety of topics that enable them to take collective action together.

Understanding learning in struggle requires a framework that embeds context to learning and acknowledges that it is a process (Foley, 2001). It is essential to examine the political-economic context of the situation to understand the pattern of learning (Foley, 2001). However, when addressing one oppressive structure, social movements can sometimes reproduce oppressive structures, such as patriarchy resulting in narrowed opportunities for women within the Catholic Workers movement (Parrish & Taylor, 2007). In my study, KFTC’s focus on challenging the hegemony of the coal industry in Eastern Kentucky’s focus of Just Transition did not adequately address gender and racial dynamics. Therefore, my first research sub-question addressed the need to understand the broader political economic context of the coal industry. For this study, the concept of
informal learning helped to explain some of the learning that occurs through engagement with social action.

There is a body of research that seeks to further clarify the pathways for informal learning. For example, Langdon (2011) expanded the theory of learning in struggle to include learning *through* the struggle and learning *to* struggle (emphasis in the original). Langdon (2011) argued that learning happens *through* struggle intense moments of conflict over resources, issues, or policies that result in deeper awareness of the socio-political terrain. Learning *to* struggle indicated that the movement taught participants how to struggle against neoliberal globalization. Foroughi (2013) argued for four pathways to informal learning, including learning through strategizing, learning through struggle, learning by doing and observing, and learning through engagement and socialization. Foroughi’s conceptualization of learning through struggle put more emphasis on engagement with different stakeholders than moments of intense struggle. Based on my case study, I argue that some aspects of Foroughi’s expansion of informal learning is better explained by communities of practice, particularly doing and observing, as well as engagement and socialization.

Members of KFTC took action and created spaces to reflect on the work that they were doing. They learned through the process of being engaged with their local community. In addition, the integration of the political economy, micro-politics, ideologies, discursive practices, educational interventions, and learning likely all influence the learning process (Foley, 1999). It would be impossible to ignore the role that the changes in the coal industry play in the aforementioned factors.
Non-formal Education

Within social movements, various non-formal educational interventions occur in communities. Non-formal education is sponsored by organizations but is typically short-term and voluntary; non-formal education is distinguished from formal education because it is not sponsored by educational institutions whose primary mission is to educate (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). Non-formal social movement education includes workshops, teach-ins, lecture tours, and seminars (Dykstra & Law, 1994). Numerous scholars have found that intentional educational efforts are essential to building strong social movements (Choudry, 2015; Horton & Freire, 1990; Tarlau, 2014; Walters, 2005). For example, Brookfield and Holst (2010) wrote about Septima Clark’s literacy work with the Citizenship Schools. They also discussed the civil rights movement in the U.S. South, and Ella Baker’s anti-racism work, which integrated skills development and consciousness raising through the NAACP, as well as the Sandinista National Literacy Crusade following the revolution in Nicaragua in 1979 (Brookfield & Holst, 2010).

Non-formal workshops may focus on technical knowledge about an issue, or the skills and practices of an organization (Niesz, Korora, Walkuski, & Foot, 2018). KFTC describes this work as leadership development, sometimes indicating that they are doing popular education, which historically has been done in Latin America. Ismail (2009) found that a disjuncture occurred between the popular education and the changing political landscape in South Africa related to the Victoria Mxenge Housing Development Association. Similarly, as was evident in my case study, the focus of the non-formal education and informal learning evolved due to changes in the political economy of coal.
Non-formal educational interventions also shaped the possibilities of sustainable innovations past coal. KFTC hosted local workshops throughout the year, an annual meeting that focused on education, and workshops before people took action, like lobbying or knocking on doors. Those efforts served to shape what possibilities KFTC members pursued and how they went about trying to make those changes. Non-formal workshops with KFTC activists, particularly including power analysis, could be conceptualized using Freire’s (1970) notion of conscientization as they helped participants understand power dynamics contributing to oppression within the region and the continued hegemony of the coal industry. Through social interactions, people learned to take action and learned from each other.

**Situated Learning and Communities of Practice**

Situated learning theorizes that learning to occurs through social interaction and recognizes that people are active in the “*practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities” (Wenger, 1998). To that end, this theory can be understood as the learning that happens within the set of relationships between people, activities, and the world. These relationships occur over time as people relate to and interact with other communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Many social movement learning scholars have used communities of practice to explain some aspects of the learning (Curnow, 2013; Jurow et al., 2016; Jurow & Shea, 2015; Ollis, 2008, 2011).

Communities of practice involve the negotiation of meaning, practice as a source of coherence of a community, practice as a learning process, practice as a boundary, and
practice as local (Wenger, 1998). The five dimensions of identity within a community of practice include the following: the negotiated experience of self, community membership, learning trajectory, nexus of multi-membership, and the intersection between the local and global (Paechter, 2003). Within a community of practice, newcomers learn from more experienced people through the process of engaging in activities, and they slowly become more versed in what it means to be a part of that particular community (Fox, 2000). The community of practice includes a range of people with different levels of experience, expertise, authority, age, and personality (Roberts, 2006). To be considered officially a part of a community of practice, a novice must be considered to have “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 14). In other words, members of a community of practice are willing to invest in the novice individual.

Another element of situated learning is the integration of tools in the process of learning. Tools serve to build an understanding of what a practice is and how it is remembered (Lundin & Nuldén, 2007). Tools, in the case of KFTC, could consist of a petition, voter registration card, or campaign literature.

Communities of practice are relevant to the study of learning in social movements. For example, in Curnow’s (2013) study of Students Working for Ethical Purchasing and Trade through University Partnerships (SWEPT UP), an international student activist organization involved with efforts to work for ethical purchases, products, and policies, is an example of situated learning. In this study, the community of practice consisted of the organizers. The skills they possessed ranged from strategy development, public speaking, negotiation, planning events and conferences, and media work (Curnow,
Learning and knowing were part of being involved with the community and were part of the process of doing. Novice activists learned various skills from more experienced activists through the process of being involved with different activities and slowly engaging in greater levels of participation and leadership.

The use of communities of practice in social movement learning also involves some extension of Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory. Ollis (2008) argued that learning to engage in social movements involves embodied knowledge through the act of physical engagement with the body in protest. Their study extended communities of practice from not just a social practice to also include an embodied practice which includes emotions like anger and passion that spur a desire to enact change. The physical act of engaging in a picket line or public protest served as a source of learning. Participants in the social movement explored in this study also use reflection to remake the practice and think about systems. Cooper (2007) also found that participants learned through embodied experience of participating in a union strike. Some of the participants in my study shared that experiencing emotions like mutual anger was an aspect of their learning. In other cases, the process of engaging in activity like lobbying spurred their learning. It was not possible to separate the body from the practice of engagement in the community, so my research adds to this expanded understanding of the community of practice.

Others argued that some people might not want to move from the periphery of the practice within social movements. Ollis (2011) argued there were distinctions between what she defined as lifelong activists and circumstantial activists in terms of their learning process. Ollis argued that lifelong activists tend to learn incrementally, whereas
circumstantial activists learn rapidly because of responding to a crisis. In those engagement in crisis, circumstantial activists maintained their peripherality in the practice because they do not want to be identified as activists. Although I agree that circumstantial activists are forced to learn activism rapidly, Ollis (2011) failed to recognize that some circumstantial activists may end up engaging more deeply in the community of practice. I found through the development of solidarity with other communities facing injustice that some activists who engaged due to a crisis continue their involvement.

Research also demonstrated an acknowledgement that power dynamics can play out and influence learning in a community of practice (Curnow, 2013; Jurow et al., 2016; Jurow & Shea, 2015). Curnow (2013) described how some people’s ability to move within a community of practice is restricted by gender roles. Jurow and Shea (2015) explored changing participation in evolving communities of practice when people reorganize social, spatial, and temporal aspects of the practice. They examined power dynamics related to inclusion and orientation of practice in equity-oriented scale-making in the local food justice movement. Jurow et al. (2016) identified invisible work being done by promotoras, or residents who served as community food justice workers in Spanish-speaking communities, to support the growth of food in gardens to have greater food access. Their study explored what was consequential for different roles within the community. By illuminating how power dynamics eclipsed acknowledgement of food justice work, Jurow and Shea were able to identify opportunities to better support the learning. My study also acknowledged where gaps due to race, class, and gender occur in
the community’s understanding of Just Transition. Through KFTC’s reflexivity within their community of practice, the organizational understanding of Just Transition evolved.

Larrabure et al. (2011) explored two case studies in new cooperativism in Latin America which sought to make horizontal organization of labor an example of a post-capitalist form of economic organization. Learning is praxis, where theory and practice are a necessary part of each other. New cooperativism seeks to develop alternatives to the division of labor and priorities within capitalist mode of production, “creating the new inside the old” (Larrabure et al., 2011, p. 183). Instead of just criticizing the status quo, it was informed by the political economic context in which it is situated. In this research, the learning happened informally and on-the-job. My research adds to the body of literature that explores ways to pursue more equitable economic relations that are shaped by the political economic contexts in which they are situated. Similarly, my case study demonstrates that individuals and communities of practice must struggle against the dominant relations and develop new practices for both learning and in order to realize their goals. Cooper (2007) explored a case study on the South African Municipal Worker’s Union which found that the education programs, plus engagement with organizational practice of the union and strike activity, contributed to the learning in the community of practice. This led to a dialogical relationship between union leadership and rank-and-file workers.

Similarly, my research recognizes the importance of the educational programs of an organization and engagement in the practice and seeks to explain the relationship between the two components that contribute to learning. Furthermore, many seasoned
community activists within KFTC informally mentored new members; therefore, the community of practice was a means to explore that aspect of their involvement. The concept of communities of practice provides a different lens through which to explore the informal learning that occurs through engagement with social movements. It complemented and deepened the understanding of the social element of the learning that occurs through Just Transition initiatives.

**Feminist Theories**

Over the last forty years, feminist theory has sought to challenge gender-based biases and exclusions in a variety of different disciplines, and it has been an avenue to challenge imbalances of power within practices and institutions. By acknowledging the importance of marginalized populations’ knowledge, feminist research seeks to amplify the voice of those who are oppressed (DeVault & Gross, 2007). In this study, I used feminist theories to explore critical education, and learning in Just Transition and explored how the gendered history of the coal industry shaped the organization’s educational efforts. The theory must relevant is working-class masculinity, which is explained in this section.

**Working-class masculinity**

To understand learning in Just Transition work, it is necessary to understand how the coal industry uses hegemonic masculinity to maintain power within the region (Bell & York, 2010). Specifically, gender is socially constructed as the “acts, gestures, and desire produce(s) the effect of an internal core or substance on the surface of the body” (Butler, 1990). Understanding masculinity and femininity as a social construct that is not
constructed by biology is a fairly new understanding (Harding, 1987). Masculinity is not fixed in the body, but it is a configuration of practices accomplished in social interaction (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In other words, gender is a process that occurs through consistent practices in conjunction with others.

Among those performances, not all manifestations of gender are equally valued. To that end, there is increasing recognition that there are different forms of masculinity that include a hierarchy (Bell, 2016). The mechanisms by which hegemonic masculinity, which is often dominant and most valued, are maintained includes “policing of men as well as the exclusion or discrediting of women” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 844). However, promoting fixed typologies of different types of masculinity has been critiqued as an oversimplification (Ward, 2013). This is due, in part, to the argument that masculinities are not fixed categories; they result from a process and action in a specific context (Beckwith, 2001).

Masculinities develop and are maintained through relationship with femininities and other masculinities (Scott, 2007). Masculinity is dependent on this binary for individuals to be able to make sense of themselves (Weis, 2004). In the 1980s, for example, white working-class young men were expected to be in the public sphere of employment, whereas their potential partners would be in the private sphere as homemakers (Weis, 2004). These individuals propagated unequal relations between genders, reinforced traditional sex roles, and excluded women from their labor (Filteau, 2014). This is a form of hegemonic masculinity which is a “pattern of practice” that facilitates the dominance of men over women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832).
Men who work in male-dominated, natural resource-based occupations have traditionally considered themselves to be independent, physically strong, decisive, and tough (Filteau, 2014). This gendered understanding of work is embodied in the white heterosexual male breadwinner within Central Appalachia (Scott, 2007). However, it is important to note that both Black and women have worked in mines in the region, but their presence is no longer as common due to narrowing of the field and discrimination (Scott, 2007). Mining masculinities involve independence, capacity for violence, physical strength, and loyalty to family and community; these are located in the male heterosexual body (Beckwith, 2001). In other words, the gendered work of coal mining has historically reflected this specific type of masculinity.

Furthermore, working-class communities—and entire towns—often identify with “what the men do: a steel town, a mining town” (Scott, 2007, p. 493). Coal is also framed as a defining culture, and there is a loss of that coal mining identity due to the current economic transition happening in Appalachia (Carley et al., 2018). As a result, working-class masculinity has made challenging the coal industry’s hegemony more difficult, and those challenges have sometimes been perceived as an affront to the coal miners. Bell and York (2016) argued that the coal industry has used hegemonic masculinity to reinforce their dominance. This has also resulted in opposition to the need for a transition. The viability of different solutions is also shaped by hegemonic masculinity within the Appalachian region.

This study explored the extent to which the educative efforts related to Just Transition initiatives challenged the hegemonic masculinity associated with coal mining
and the region. The structures of heterosexual normativity and the capitalist economy worked together to create dependent masculinity (Scott, 2007). In a Just Transition, community members may wonder, “what constitutes real work when the male worker is the head of the household limited economic options for the community?” (Scott, 2007). Moreover, coal mining was frequently described as a common identity in the community, not just for those working in the mines (Carley et al., 2018).

Masculinities have shifted in natural-resource dependent communities when there is an economic decline (Filteau, 2014, 2015). More specifically, there are recent examples where men redefined a dominant form of masculinity due to market shifts, changes in technology, and environmental concerns (Filteau, 2014). In Sherman’s (2009) study of economic decline in a logging town in Northern California due to the 1990 ruling that the Northern Spotted Owl was an endangered species, men’s gender norms and gender identity as the main breadwinner changed; whereas, women’s only gender norms shifted due to their greater integration into the workforce. For those with flexible conceptions of masculinity, gender expectations related to work, marriage, and fatherhood changed to keep families afloat, which resulted in the masculine ideal focusing on “involved parenting,” family values, and hard work (p. 170).

Conceptually, working-class masculinity and shifts in the coal miner identity shape the possibilities for Just Transition. By understanding working-class masculinity’s relationship to the political economy, a deeper understanding of educational efforts and Just Transition can be developed. Also, “King Coal’s” significance in the area has feudal overtones and is not directly related to economic rationality (Scott, 2010). For example,
some KFTC leaders from Eastern Kentucky are former coal miners. Through the process of being involved in the community of practice, they started to develop ownership of the idea that their community’s future did not need to be tied to the coal industry. This may be a similar process how gender trajectories shift when women become more integrated into the economy and men become more involved with the labor within a household (Weiss, 2004). I argue that the Just Transition initiatives directly challenge coal’s hegemony and indirectly affects local conceptions of masculinity.

**Conclusion**

Central Appalachia has been dominated by the coal industry for over a century. As a result, this region is a part of the internal periphery of the global political economy, which resulted in dependency and hegemony of this industry, despite its extreme negative impacts on communities. This political economic history shapes the organizing and educational work of KFTC, which seeks support the development of a post-coal economy. I used the internal periphery approach to understand the changes in the global political economy of coal and how those changes shape the organizing strategies pursued by KFTC and the related educational practices. Gaventa’s (1980) three dimensions of power shape the challenges and opportunities KFTC pursues to challenge the coal industry’s hegemony in Eastern Kentucky. I also explored how the coal industry uses working-class masculinity to bolster their hegemony within the region. This study explored KFTC’s approach to Just Transition and the non-formal education and informal learning that contributed to this body of work.
In addition, substantial research exists on social movement learning, including explorations on non-formal education, informal learning, and communities of practice. I argue that KFTC created a community of practice, which included people learning through the social practice of engagement in the community. Non-formal education that includes both online and face-to-face KFTC workshops was a part of the community of practice that contributed to KFTC members’ learning. Informal learning is also occurred through people’s engagement. Throughout my research, I identified themes in the learning outcomes for Eastern Kentucky KFTC members engaged in various Just Transition initiatives. I also seek to understanding how that learning happens and the relationship between the non-formal education and informal learning. I add to a deeper understanding of the dynamic interrelationship between non-formal education and informal learning within a community of practice.
Chapter 3

Methods

The research addressed within this study examines an organization’s use of education and learning to support engagement in multiple Just Transition initiatives. This research lends itself to a qualitative case study research methodology. Qualitative research is defined as “addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). The qualitative process seeks to understand the research in its own context or the natural setting (Creswell, 2013). This chapter outlines the research questions, the case study design, data collection, coding and analysis, and validity and reliability.

Research Questions

The main research question addressed within this study is as follows: in communities with economies formerly dominated by the coal industry, how does an organization promoting multiple Just Transition initiatives use education and learning to support engagement in this work? The three sub-questions that guide this study are as follows: (1) how does the gendered history of the coal industry and the changing political economy of the post-coal reality influence the educational efforts of an organization working toward a Just Transition? (2) how do informal and non-formal learning opportunities attempt to promote a just transition in the region? (3) how have people perceived these informal and non-formal learning opportunities as transforming themselves, their communities, and/or region and nation over the past decades?
Case Study Design

This study was conducted as a single case study. Because the coal industry’s hegemony has dominated the Central Appalachian region culturally and economically for over a century, understanding the education and learning in Just Transition in Central Appalachia needed to be contextualized and embedded within a specific case. Some of the defining characteristics of a case study include examining a “bounded social phenomenon,” generating a “thick” description of the phenomenon and using multiple approaches to triangulate the conclusions (Snow & Trom, 2002, p. 147; Yin, 2003).

Integrating multiple sources of data collection, including content analysis of social movement educational literature and curriculum, as well as qualitative interviews, was necessary to thoroughly address the research questions. Utilizing multiple sources of data is an important aspect of case study research (Creswell, 2013; Snow & Trom, 2002). Additionally, participant observations of non-formal educational workshops and activities related to Just Transition occurred virtually. Therefore, case study research was most appropriate for this project.

Data Collection

Case study research is an approach that explores in-depth a contemporary phenomenon in its real-world context. Qualitative case studies use interviews, document analysis, and observations as data collection methods (Yin, 2003). I collected multiple sources of data for this case study. This included semi-structured interviews with 19 KFTC members and staff in Eastern Kentucky involved with Just Transition initiatives. These efforts involved engagement with environmental justice campaigns, Benham’s
community energy project, rural electric cooperatives, federal legislation, and the development of a grassroots energy plan for the state. Initial face-to-face interviews were conducted in November and December 2019. Most of these interviews were completed face-to-face. Additional and follow-up interviews were conducted between March and July 2020. Due to the global pandemic during 2020, some of the data collection methods shifted to include interviews and participant observations over virtual video conferencing. No notable differences were evident between the different approaches to interviewing.

I also conducted content analysis of KFTC’s work related to Just Transition, including materials related to issue-based campaigns, KFTC’s bimonthly newsletter, and the organization’s website. Content analysis was also done for one of the training series that occurred during the study. My observational data was truncated due to the COVID-19 pandemic; however, I was able to participate in a lobby day and virtual gatherings that included educational content. Additionally, I explored the curriculum of three of KFTC’s non-formal education, including the Empower Kentucky Leadership Network multi-session training, the Power House Project, and Appalachia’s Bright Future.

Data sources included semi-structured interviews, content analysis, and observations. The integration of these multiple sources of data enabled me to understand both the non-formal and informal learning happening through multiple Just Transition initiatives within the organization. Through the semi-structured interviews, I gained insights about the influence of the global political economy of coal on Just Transition efforts. The content analysis of both the literature and websites illuminated the learning occurring in this work. By observing one of the training programs, I gained insight into
how the educational literature was utilized as a tool for education and into the kinds of issues and content that prompted reflection and learning.

Semi-structured Interviews and Participant Recruitment

Interviews are an important means to collect data because they complement what the researcher is seeing and experiencing (Fetterman, 2010). Interviews are a means to get information that would not otherwise be available to observe; they often involve one-on-one conversations that seek to elicit a particular type of information (Merriam, 1998). I used purposeful sampling to interview community activists involved with a community organization working on Just Transition initiatives. Purposeful sampling was used because of the focus of my research questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The criteria for the purposeful sample included 19 individuals who were involved with different Just Transition strategies. The purposeful sample included a diverse mix of people involved with the Just Transition efforts within the organization, including retired/former coal miners, residents, and community college employees. The sample also included female and male participants in a range of ages. The gender breakdown and age of participants was dependent on the specific initiatives. Additionally, snowball sampling occurred when the people involved with different strategies referred others to be interviewed (Merriam, 1998).

Nineteen semi-structured interviews with key informants were conducted, with each interview lasting between 60-90 minutes. Fourteen interviews were used for analysis. Of the five interviews not used for analysis, three people had not been actively engaged in the Just Transition work for at least one year, one person’s data was lost due
to file corruption, and the other person primarily worked on Just Transition in a different part of the state. The 14 interviews were the primary source of data for this study since the interview data addressed the various research questions and context. Table 3 includes demographic information about the people whose interviews were used for this study.

The interviews aimed to be comparable to an encounter between people with common interests that want to make experiences heard (DeValut & Gross, 2014), and therefore were conducted through face-to-face interviews in people’s homes or places where they felt most comfortable. Due to restrictions of face-to-face data collection because of the pandemic, some initial and follow-up interviews were conducted via video conferencing or telephone. The semi-structured interviews enabled me to understand the types of activities related to Just Transition initiatives in which participants were involved, and they also revealed the different mechanisms for their learning and their non-formal education. The interviews also provided the opportunity to explore how the individuals identified with the coal industry and whether or not that has changed over time.

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis. Interviewees received an informed consent document to sign, which included the option to waive their anonymity. This option was consistent with feminist methodologies where community activists can have their stories shared as part of their activist work (Bell, 2013). In all cases, people did not want their responses to be anonymous. Following the completion of my analysis, I checked with each interviewee to confirm that they did not want their input to be anonymous.
Some of the interviewees were selected based on my previous familiarity with them due to our common involvement with relevant initiatives. Additionally, I emailed three of the staff people in the organization to identify appropriate members. This generated a larger number of people from which to recruit than those with whom I was previously familiar. Some of the interviewees were contacted directly by phone if we had previous contact. For new interviewees, I emailed requests who were suggested by the contact person at the organization. Some people did not respond to the request to be interviewed. Follow-up emails were sent to those who did not initially respond. After two failed attempts, the individual was considered unreachable. Each interviewee was also asked if there were additional people that should be contacted, which generated a larger list of people to be interviewed.

**Table 3**

*Demographic Information of Interview Participants and Interview Details*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Yrs. Involved</th>
<th>Length of interview</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Location/Date(s) of Interview(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carl Shoupe</td>
<td>Retired disabled coal miner, former UMWA organizer</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>102 mins, 2 recorded interviews</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Harlan County home 12/5/19, 12/6/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teri Blanton</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>90 mins, 3 recorded interviews</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Madison County, home 11/25/19, 11/26/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne Hill</td>
<td>Retired nurse</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>48 mins</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Pulaski County, home, 11/26/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott Shoupe</td>
<td>Former coal miner, renewable energy installer</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>43 mins</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Harlan County, home 12/6/19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many people were suggested who were involved with Just Transition initiatives but were not actively involved within KFTC.

**Participant Observation**

Due to the global pandemic, the observational data were limited. Prior to the restrictions on face-to-face travel, I participated in a lobby day at the state capital. I also participated in six live virtual gatherings and watched five recorded webinars for participants in the Empower Kentucky Leadership Network. Table 4 highlights the activities I participated in, when, for how long, and how the content was gathered. I took

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Active Periods</th>
<th>Recording Length</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kathy Curtis</td>
<td>Benedictine sister, only active in last 2</td>
<td>12/3/19</td>
<td>101 mins</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>Floyd County, Benedictine monastery, 12/3/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chloe Smith</td>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>12/4/19</td>
<td>55 mins</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Floyd County, home, 12/4/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanley Sturgill</td>
<td>Retired MSHA inspector</td>
<td>12/7/19</td>
<td>56 mins</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Harlan County, home, 12/7/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon Sturgill</td>
<td>Stay-at-home mom</td>
<td>12/7/19</td>
<td>56 mins</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Harlan County, home, 12/7/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy Wilson</td>
<td>Retired Traditional Music Director</td>
<td>12/2/19</td>
<td>70 mins</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Knott County, office, 12/2/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Short</td>
<td>KFTC apprentice</td>
<td>12/11/19</td>
<td>52 mins</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Laurel County, home, 12/11/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bennie Massey</td>
<td>Retired coal miner</td>
<td>12/7/19</td>
<td>46 mins</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Harlan County, home, 12/7/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Woolery</td>
<td>Mountain Association</td>
<td>3/14/20</td>
<td>75 mins</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Fayette County, home, 3/14/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry Hardt</td>
<td>KFTC staff</td>
<td>6/3/20</td>
<td>126 mins</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Zoom, 6/3/20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy Silver</td>
<td>Community college professor</td>
<td>5/13/20</td>
<td>75 mins</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Zoom, 5/13/20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
note of what content was shared, how this information was shared, who shared content, and the amount of interaction participants had.

**Table 4**

*Observational Data from Participant Observation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Length of Time</th>
<th>Content Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citizen lobbying</td>
<td>3/10/20</td>
<td>5 hours</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KFTC All-In virtual gathering</td>
<td>3/30/20</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Booker Town Hall</td>
<td>4/28/20</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing Kentucky Culture</td>
<td>5/27/20</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter Empower phone banks</td>
<td>6/4/20, 6/8/20</td>
<td>2 hours per session</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empower Kentucky Leadership</td>
<td>January to June 2020</td>
<td>5 – 2 hour sessions</td>
<td>Recorded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power House workshop</td>
<td>6/15/20</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just Transition Town Hall</td>
<td>3/31/21</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The lobby day that I participated in focused on the restoration of voting rights for former felons. Although the issue was not focused on Just Transition, KFTC’s approach to training and participation would have been the same. Participation involved engaging in a brief training conducted by the KFTC staff person for the three KFTC members, which occurred in the cafeteria prior to engaging in lobbying activity. They discussed the status of the bill, reviewed the legislative record, clarified who was on the relevant committee, and discussed what role each person was going to play in the meeting. I joined the group of three citizen lobbyists and one staff member for lobbying. Following each meeting with a state legislator, the group would reflect on what each person took away from the meeting. I sought to limit my participation during the lobbying to reduce potential biases that might have been produced (Yin, 2003).
I also viewed the video conference recordings of the multi-session Empower Kentucky Leadership Network training that were made available on their website. This observational data enabled me to see the curriculum at work (Yin, 2003). The 40 Empower Kentucky Leadership Network participants who applied and were selected to be a part of this multi-session training focused on Just Transition and climate change training were committed to taking action and were from different parts of the state. I watched the recordings, paused to take notes, and re-watched sections when a salient point was made. I took note of the approach taken for various types of content, including presentation of new information versus more discussion-based sections. The virtual gatherings typically included a combination of KFTC staff, KFTC leaders, and guests from other organizations sharing content and reflections. The virtual gatherings included PowerPoint slides, but they switched between the slides and a gallery view of participants’ cameras so participants could engage with each other. This training was initially designed to be a hybrid model with weekend-long face-to-face gatherings; however, the final retreat was canceled due to the pandemic.

Additionally, I participated in six virtual gatherings that occurred during the pandemic, which had a modified structure due to switching to a virtual format. The virtual gatherings covered various topics, including Covid-19, the Power House Project workshop, cultural organizing, and training and phone banks for the 2020 primary election. The first virtual gathering had 63 participants and focused on holding space for each other to reflect on COVID-19. At the beginning of each virtual gathering, the group would review how to use the software, recognizing that people would have differing
levels of familiarity with this kind of software. To enable greater participation, they integrated breakout rooms for people to share their reflections and concerns. They also discussed how the pandemic reinforced the importance of their work and changed their approach.

As a result of the endorsement of former state representative Charles Booker for U.S. Senate, they hosted a town hall meeting that included 147 participants. KFTC members from around the state were able to ask questions. The Sharing Kentucky Culture workshop included breakout groups focused on faith, writing, visual arts, music, and farming. KFTC members shared examples of each category and described how culture can be integrated into social justice work. In the small group breakout rooms, participants reflected on how the cultural activity meant for them personally and how it could be used for community organizing. The structure of smaller group discussions emphasized the value of each person’s perspective. The phone bank trainings focused on using the software, reviewing the phone script, and responding to frequently asked questions. Following the phone bank, people would reflect on how things went, interesting stories, and improving their practice.

It was not possible for me to participate in any of the planning meetings due to cancelations and shifts in approach due to the pandemic. However, I was able to gain some meaning through small and large patterns of behavior that are evident over time through what I was able to engage in virtually (Fetterman, 2010).
Organizational Literature

In this research study, physical artifacts were collected as data to address the research questions. These artifacts consisted of issue-based campaign literature, web content, and educational literature. Artifacts are often explored in social movement research (Snow & Trom, 2002). One artifact collected was KFTC’s bimonthly newsletter, *Balancing the Scales*, which is mailed to all KFTC members. The newsletter was printed on recycled newsprint and ranged from 20 to 30 pages long per issue. The newsletter included updates about different issue campaigns labelled economic justice, racial justice, coal and water, new energy, and transition. There were also sections on member reflections, executive committee corner, calendar of events, Steering Committee information, staff contact information, and photos of KFTC members taking action (some color and some black and white). The content areas varied, sometimes including sections on building grassroots power, the annual organizational nomination process, information about the Kentucky General Assembly, and engaging in elections. The newsletter celebrated the work people were doing and highlighted ways for members to become informed and take action.

The Just Transition aspects of the newsletter between 2015 to 2020 were reviewed for content. This timeframe was selected because I was able to access printed copies of this time frame. The content related to other organizational campaigns was not included in my data collection and analysis because it did not address my research questions about Just Transition. Because the legislative and electoral overlapped with the Just Transition work, it was also reviewed. Some of the Just Transition work was not included in the
analysis, such as challenging electric rate hikes and involvement with saving the post offices, because the participants interviewed did not discuss those efforts.

I also analyzed campaign literature developed by KFTC and distributed during various outreach events, information table materials, and presentations about the organization. These documents were also available to be downloaded on the organizational website. Table 5 describes the different types of campaign documents analyzed. The *Black Mountain* booklet was created in 2010 with the help of Harlan County KFTC chapter members. This booklet included profiles of nine Harlan County KFTC members who were involved with Just Transition efforts and photos of their communities. The *Renew East Kentucky* flier described the initial efforts to reform the rural electric cooperatives. The *Just Transition* main flier described the need for a Just Transition, as well as principles of a Just Transition and a 14-part policy platform. This document shared stories of other communities who transitioned from mono-economies.

The *Appalachia’s Bright Future* conference booklet included detailed information about the conference workshops and presenters. The *Empower Kentucky Report* was produced with the help of research conducted by Synapse Energy Economics that modeled the impact of the Empower Kentucky Plan on jobs, pollution, costs, bills, and Kentucky’s energy system in comparison to a business-as-usual plan. This report also included KFTC’s Environmental Justice Analysis that utilized data from the EPA. This document expanded the analysis to include Kentucky-specific pollution indicators. The *Fix What’s Broke* booklet spotlighted the importance of addressing the Black Lung
Disability Trust Fund, the RECLAIM Act, and the protection of coal miners’ pensions to build a Just Transition.

Table 5

Campaign Documents Analyzed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Publication Year(s)</th>
<th>Format</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Mountain Booklet</td>
<td>16 pages</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renew East Kentucky</td>
<td>2 pages</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just Transition Main Flier</td>
<td>4 pages</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appalachia’s Bright Future Conference Booklet</td>
<td>24 pages</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empower Kentucky Executive Summary</td>
<td>12 pages</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empower Kentucky Report</td>
<td>68 pages</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fix What’s Broke Booklet</td>
<td>12 pages</td>
<td>2018, 2019</td>
<td>paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECLAIM Act Flier</td>
<td>2 pages</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Lung Flier</td>
<td>2 pages</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>paper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Web content from KFTC’s website and campaign websites was also collected and analyzed. This included the New Energy and Transition portion of KFTC’s website, which was broken down into three subsections: Energy Democracy, Just Transition, and Sustainable Energy. There was also a section of the website that included archived information about the Appalachia’s Bright Future event. The agenda of the gathering was reviewed for content and format. KFTC had a separate website for the Empower Kentucky initiative. Relevant blog posts about Just Transitions initiatives were also explored for themes.

Curriculum

For two of the organization’s non-formal education trainings, I was provided access to the curricula. This included the Empower Kentucky Leadership Network
training that occurred November 2019 through June 2020, as well as the Power House Project that consisted of one workshop in multiple locations starting in early 2018.

For the Empower Kentucky Leadership Network training, the curriculum included a detailed agenda about how KFTC structured the different aspects of the face-to-face gathering for the Empower Kentucky Leadership Network, including popular education activities and group discussion activities. The face-to-face gathering detailed agenda was a 20-page agenda Google document shared between KFTC co-facilitators with a list of logistical items for various facilitators to bring to create a welcoming space, account for meals, and provide printed materials for each participant. Based on the agenda, the gathering began with a KFTC member sharing a poem she had written, and another KFTC member doing a land acknowledgment of the indigenous people who had originally lived in the area. They also had a buddy system for the weekend to encourage the sense that they had an anchor for their experience. People broke out into small groups to reflect on the key problems faced by frontline communities and causes for the injustices. With each question posed on the agenda, possible answers were included as a reference point. The large-group report-backs encouraged participants to reflect on similarities and differences as well as how identities would be impacted differently. There also was space for people to reflect in journals about how climate change affected participants personally and how they could stay connected and engaged.

For the virtual component of this training, I had access to the PowerPoint slides and the webinar recording. The virtual components included time for people to reflect on the topics collectively, but there was more emphasis on information sharing. KFTC
integrated guests from other organizations to talk about the interconnections between their work and share more details about how certain populations were disproportionately affected by injustice.

The Power House Project included the agenda and an internal evaluation document, which included how and why they developed the curriculum, outreach and follow-up strategies, and detailed the evolution of the workshop over time. This project grew out of an assessment of KFTC’s organizing work around the rural electric cooperatives following one-on-one meetings with KFTC members. The goals that they identified were to make energy efficiency and renewable energy accessible, shift the culture of the energy cooperatives to support clean energy solutions, improve governance and member involvement, build a movement of member owners, and communicate a new narrative in Eastern Kentucky. The materials reviewed included a presentation of information about why people have higher energy bills and what can be done to reduce high bills. KFTC facilitators and Mountain Association staff shared the history of the rural electric cooperatives that were a product of FDR’s Rural Electrification Administration Electric Co-operation Corporation Act of 1935 and their rights as member-owners. They also shared how to engage with organizing around these structures.

Other Data

Throughout the entire process, my field notes captured information which provided a frame of reference for the study (Madison, 2012). Following each interview, I wrote initial reflections in a notebook about themes that I noticed during the process and
emerging questions. This field note process ensured that the analysis of the qualitative
data informed further data collection and ensured that the analyses were ongoing and
iterative throughout the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I also used these field notes as
a space to reflect about how my previous connection to this work might be affecting my
follow-up questions. For example, my preliminary findings indicated that informal
learning was very important. This was consistent with my experience knowing how
important group car rides to and from different activist activities were for critical
reflection. After several rounds of reviewing the transcripts, I noted that although the
interviewees frequently could not remember specific workshops where they learned
something, they were saying the training was important.

Field notes ensured reflexivity throughout the process. For example, following the
first two interviews, I reflected on the gender-related questions in the interview protocol.
They felt out of place and forced. I noticed that one person’s responses to those questions
seemed to be in line with what they might have thought I wanted to hear. I decided to
rework some of the interview questions to better reflect the first three research questions
and also to see if issues related to gender came up more organically when asked in
relation to other questions. For example, I removed this question and prompt, “how has
the relationship between men and women in the region changed? Describe day-to-day life
now. Describe how it used to be when coal used to be big. Are things different with your
kids or parents?” because it was taking the conversation in a really different direction. I
decided it would be better to ask follow-up questions related to gender if the interviewee
brought it up.
Researcher Positionality

My connection to this research and my engagement with social justice issues in Central Appalachia has been a significant part of my life for the last twenty years. I previously worked for the case study organization and have deep understanding of the social justice issues. Prior to working as a community organizer for the case study organization, I volunteered as well as worked for the Appalachia Service Project, a non-profit organization addressing emergency home repair needs of people experiencing poverty within the region, and I worked there as a staff person during my summers of undergraduate study. While pursuing my undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies, I engaged in student activism related to sweatshops, affordable housing, and environmental issues. I also spent a semester studying in Costa Rica to take an interdisciplinary look at sustainable development issues.

Following these experiences, I wanted to be engaged with grassroots community organizing and gained familiarity with KFTC’s work. Grassroots organizations and environmental justice movements are predominantly local in nature, more participatory, focused on action, and critical of experts and lobbying defining environmental agendas (Barry, 2001). The selection of this organization for this research project came from my experience as a community organizer working with Kentuckians for the Commonwealth in Eastern Kentucky.

I started as an intern with KFTC in 2003 and then worked as a chapter organizer with the Harlan and Perry County chapters from 2004 to 2011. In June 2003, the organization launched the Canary Project, which expanded their goals to focus on
stopping mountaintop removal coal mining, as well as focus on renewable energy and sustainable economic development. I started a few days before the Flyover Festival, which was the first large-scale event that enabled people from across the state to take short flights from volunteer pilots to see the scale of the devastation of mountaintop removal coal mining from the air.

After that initial gathering, I worked with numerous communities which were having problems with the coal companies. The region in which I worked was large and sometimes required me to drive over two mountains to get to a community. Community members often reached out to the organization when they were having problems, such as their well water being destroyed after a coal company started mining in their community. People would organize community meetings that might spur 40 to 50 people to initially participate. I helped people develop strategies to address their problems both individually and during these meetings. These meetings would include clarifying goals, targets, and tactics. Often, a small group of four to six people would emerge who would be very dedicated to addressing the problems. I helped people file complaints with the state mining enforcement agencies and engage in the permitting process. We also would drive to Frankfort, the state capital, or the local permitting offices to look at mining permits and maps.

The structure of the organization focused on empowering people who are directly affected by injustice, so I spent a lot of time working one-on-one with leaders to develop speeches or write letters to the editor. I was not allowed to speak to the media to reinforce the orientation of people directly affected being the experts. This organizational policy
also reflected learning from the history within the region during the failures during the 1960s War on Poverty social change efforts being led by outsiders. Gaventa (1978) concurred that the social movements needed to led by Appalachians as opposed to those from outside.

After community members became engaged because of a local issue, some would stay involved with the work on other issues. We also had monthly chapter meetings to identify ways that the local chapter wanted to participate in statewide campaigns, do outreach locally, and have grassroots fundraising activities. I was also involved with supporting KFTC’s Land Reform Committee, which developed the strategy for environmental justice campaigns in the state. This included an annual I Love Mountains lobby day that drew over 1,000 participants for nine years. We also held many Mountain Witness Tours to educate people from other parts of the state about the damage people were experiencing. As a result of mountaintop removal, community organizing groups in the mountains in West Virginia, Tennessee, and Virginia started to work more closely together and developed the Alliance for Appalachia in 2006. Through this coalition, KFTC members joined people from the region and the rest of the country to lobby against mountaintop removal coal mining and engage with various federal enforcement agencies.

During my time as a community organizer with Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, we also worked on a range of economic and social justice issues. One initiative included taking citizens to lobby in Frankfort once per week during the state legislative session, which alternated between three-month and six-week legislative sessions every other year. The range of issues also included comprehensive tax reform
and voting rights for former felons. Additionally, we organized local workshops and statewide trainings and engaged with elections in a non-partisan way. Registering people to vote was an avenue to start talking with people about the changes they wanted to see in their communities. This engagement consisted of presenting in community college classrooms and having information tables at local festivals.

Over time, I became increasingly interested in pursuing work around transitioning Appalachia’s economy. This was spurred by the fact that coal companies consistently operate in a way to subvert the law and disregard the impact they have on communities. It became increasingly clear that a post-coal economy was needed to move in the direction of greater sustainability for communities. Working with marginalized people to help them find their voice and better understand the larger context were aspects of this work that I was most passionate about. This focus on the adult education aspects of community organizing spurred me to explore this topic for my dissertation.

While approaching my data analysis, I often reflected on my own experiences as an organizer within the region. I was mindful of the informal learning I observed, considering car rides to organizing activities and other moments of reflection as integral for participants’ learning. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, my ability to observe was limited, and I was very conscious of the limitations of my data. In some respects, my prior knowledge made analysis easier because I could identify gaps in what participants shared and was able to be strategic with follow-up interviews in these cases. However, my prior experience also made some of the analysis more difficult because I was hesitant to make definitive conclusions due to fears of misrepresenting the organization. Also, I
am very invested in a multi-issue, anti-oppressive approach to organizing, but that approach, which is captured well by Naples’ (2013) intersectional feminist praxis was not the most relevant framework for understanding the learning. For example, one of the key learning outcomes in this study was the demonstration of efficacy, which was not related to any of the five dimensions of intersectional feminist praxis. Also, how people learning about power was more nuanced than “countering power imbalances” (p. 660).

I am also keenly aware that based on my experiences as an organizer in the region, I have strong opinions about these issues. I fundamentally believe that Just Transition is necessary, and I never saw a coal company or oil and gas company in the region which operated in a way that was consistent with being a “good neighbor” as some of the coal companies’ claim. I also participated in a meeting where retired UMWA coal miners and miners’ widows pleaded with the UMWA President Cecil Roberts to support an end to MTR and engage in Just Transition. UMWA’s recent change of position is long overdue. I believe that it is impossible to be unbiased in one’s research, and I sought to maintain an awareness of bias throughout the data collection and analysis process.

**Coding and Analysis**

I conducted a thematic analysis of interview data for this case study (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Glesne, 2010). This included an inductive way of looking at the data. In other words, I did not start with a list of potential codes as I read through the interview transcripts or campaign material. I kept an open mind about what the data was telling me, as opposed to having an expectation about what I would find. My analysis included identifying patterns across the interviews and other sources of data, such as the Just
Transition booklet and the curriculum for non-formal education to which I had access to (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, multiple participants talked about the loyalty which community members had to the coal industry. Some participants described it as a misgiven loyalty. Another pattern I noticed early in the research was that participants did not distinguish during the interviews between the environmental justice work and the Just Transition work. Interview participants also shared about other campaigns, like the Poor People’s Campaign, when I asked questions.

The memo writing during data collection served as a reflective field log to begin the analysis process and to direct the data collection process (Glesne, 2010; Saldaña, 2016). For example, I noted how I was struggling to make sense of the different suggestions people gave about who I should talk to. This included suggestions to talk with people from other organizations within the region who were working on projects related to Just Transition or using that language. I decided that although those would be important perspectives for an overall understanding of Just Transition in the region, I would not interview them because my study was focused on the educational practices and learning related to KFTC.

I subsequently interviewed a few people who were not related to the organization on the recommendation of my host when I visited the area. However, I did not include these interviews in my analysis for this study. Another reflective field log early on in my data collection noted that the way people talked about Just Transition was different from when I had stopped organizing in 2011. I was curious about how to explain the differences I was noticing about people’s openness to talking about coal’s decline.
I started coding the data during the spring of 2020. Follow-up and additional interviews were completed following some of the initial coding. One of my additional interviews was with a long-time KFTC staff person. I thought their perspective would be important, particularly because most participants shared how their experiences with the coal industry affected their understanding of their power within the region, but those experiences were not necessarily tied to KFTC. In other words, I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the educational practices of the organization.

This distinction between organizational and informal learning from experiences living in a community dominated by coal caused me to go back and reevaluate some of my initial conclusions. An example of a follow-up interview occurred when I was clarifying the relationship between non-formal education and informal learning. Because I have long-standing relationships with many of the people I interviewed, it was easy for me to ask some of them for follow-up conversations. In this circumstance, I asked more pointed questions such as, “You said that the lobby training happened before the Week in Washington. How important was the training? What would have happened if you hadn’t had the training?” These follow-up interviews helped me tease out more nuanced aspects of the learning process. My analysis consisted of two phases of coding the data manually to identify primary codes and categories. An example of a primary code was “being shunned,” which later was included under the theme of “threats by the coal industry.”

For the semi-structured interviews, two cycles of coding were conducted to identify categories in the data, which helped to identify the themes in the data. To code, I used hard copies of the transcripts and wrote in the margins with pencil for the initial
coding. Figure 3.1 highlights how I approached the initial coding and theme identification. I read through each response and wrote an initial reflection of what I thought the data was telling me. Initially, I tried line-by-line coding, but found that it was too cumbersome and that I gained better understanding by developing a code for multiple lines at a time. As I proceeded with additional transcripts, sometimes I would go back and erase the initial codes based on something that better reflected what I was finding in other data. As I was clarifying the themes, I would reflect on which initial codes related to each other and then grouped those codes. Figure 2 illustrates how I used colored pencils to identify different themes. Sometimes sections of text would have multiple colors for multiple themes, such pink for educational practices and green for Just Transition. The color-coding approach allowed me be able to pull out relevant data points when I started the writing process.

During the initial coding, I primarily used gerunds to identify actions (Charmaz, 2006). For example, some of the initial codes on this interview included, “making it a regional issue,” “reframing issues,” “showing alternatives,” “expanding beyond Just Transition about miners.” Using gerunds to depict action is also considered process coding (Saldaña, 2016). Process coding was the strategy I used to identify my initial codes.

Since the process of learning and education is action-oriented, this approach to first cycle coding, or initial coding, provided a nuanced exploration of the research questions. For example, I found that my participants identified how people perceived their transformation, as opposed to whether it led to effective organizational action. This
caused me to consider slight modifications to my research questions. To complement this approach, I also did In Vivo coding, which utilizes a word or phrase that was in the actual words of research participants (Saldaña, 2016). When I struggled to identify a gerund that would effectively capture what was happening in the data, I used the In Vivo coding. For example, one of the interviewees described who was being left out of Just Transition by focusing on coal miners as “shadow people.” I decided that using that phrase as the code was better than any gerund to identify that portion of data.

Although I did not have specific codes when I started the coding process, my experience as a community organizer framed my understanding of education and learning occurring in the Just Transition work. Because of my prior experience, I knew that one education aspect of the Just Transition work included highlighting successful examples. In the coding process, I was not surprised to see that KFTC members found successful
examples to be an important aspect of the educational work. The coding process also caused me to reflect on why the demonstration of efficacy was important and different from other campaigns on which KFTC worked.

Next, the second cycle coding utilized focused coding to develop categories and major themes from the first cycle coding (Saldaña, 2016). For example, the initial coding included “connecting to reservation communities,” “demonstrating successful alternatives,” and “sharing success stories in the mountains.” The focused coding that enabled the development of categories, such as “demonstrating success.” The theme that emerged was the learning outcome of “demonstrating efficacy.” These decisions were informed by the research questions guiding the study.

The research questions also informed decisions I made to exclude extraneous data. For instance, throughout my research, I collected data not related to organizing, including the background of research participants and how coal affected their families. This was relevant to understand the connections between the social context and how it influences their consciousness as community activists. Multiple people shared examples of how they had experiences with the coal companies being exploitative and how they gained a greater understanding of how power is abused, prior to connecting to KFTC. It was important to distinguish between how they learned through those experiences and how they learned through KFTC in the category and theme development process. Understanding how they learned from their experiences with coal companies that were not connected KFTC did not contribute to answering my research question and I found this part of the analysis to be confusing impeded my analysis.
One of the ways I clarified the larger categories and themes was to write all of the initial codes onto index cards. This visualization showed the patterns in a new light. I then put the index cards in piles based on the sub-questions of the research project. However, this is when I realized that I needed to distinguish between experiences of learning related to KFTC and not related to KFTC. Eventually, the second cycle coding reorganized and condensed the initial coding into categories and major themes (Saldaña, 2016). I highlighted data associated with the second cycle codes in different colors in the transcripts.

To perform the content analysis of both the print and web-based campaign literature, I utilized Saldaña’s (2016) analytical approach. Instead of writing short-phrased codes like I did for the interview transcripts, I wrote analytic memos of what I was observing in the content. For example, I noted the key themes people were expressing and how that information was being communicated. I also noted the inclusion of photos of KFTC members taking action, which was prominent in the campaign materials, KFTC’s website, and the newsletter. Further, I read the featured quotes from KFTC members, which was consistent with the importance placed on helping support people to find their voice.

Accordingly, I sought to understand the clues about who developed the materials and the core messages that were being communicated. I noted both the macro look and feel of the newsletter and how different work was categorized over time, like the language of the Canary Project between 2003 to 2013 compared to the High Roads Initiative between 2004 to 2008-9. The time periods varied depending on the type of
campaign. I also noted the headings on the top of the newsletter related to how different aspects of their work were categorized, like economic justice, coal and water, and Just Transition. I noticed trends during different periods of the year, such as the time period leading up to the primary and general elections when there was more information about voter empowerment. I also examined the micro level details including organization and design elements.

Saldaña (2016) also informed how I approached the video analysis of the educational program recordings. Saldaña (2016) described that an analytic insight should capture social action and interaction of talk and material content. For my analysis, I stopped the videos every five minutes to take written notes; these notes included evaluation of the conversation as well as the visual record, including facial expressions, gestures, and manipulation of objects. I also took note of who presented various content and what was emphasized on the PowerPoint slides. I took field notes while watching the videos and sought to identify analytic insights after viewing the videos three to four times.

**Validity and Reliability**

Establishing validity and reliability are important components of the research process, but they are particularly challenging in qualitative research. Reliability seeks to ensure that data can be duplicated and bias is minimized, whereas validity is rooted in ensuring that claims coming out of research are truthful (Krippendorff, 2013). I used various strategies to ensure validity and reliability in this research project, including
triangulation of the data, member checking, and reflexivity throughout the research process.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation consists of the integration of multiple methods and sources of data in the research process (Snow & Trom, 2002). Incorporating different forms of data into the research project is one of the cornerstones of the case study method (Yin, 2014). In this study, triangulation was created through interviews, participant observations, and content analysis of literature and curriculum. For example, several interviewees talked about the Canary Project being a pivotal shift within KFTC’s work on coal mining issues. KFTC’s official written Position on Coal was an important reference point in the organization and on the website. It illustrated the shift in emphasis toward moving past coal. Another illustration consisted of the importance of a collaborative, democratic process in Just Transition, which was one of the elements identified by respondents. KFTC’s main Just Transition document also highlighted the importance of an inclusive process. Triangulation consisted of interviews, participant observations, and content analysis of literature and the curriculum. Incorporating different forms of data into the research project is one of the cornerstones of the case study method (Yin, 2014). Ultimately, the use of multiple sources of data corroborated the findings and strengthened the construct validity of the case study (Yin, 2014).

**Member Checking**

After completing the preliminary conclusions from the analysis process, I requested feedback from three of the research participants (Teri Blanton, Stanley Sturgill,
and Carl Shoupe) to ensure that my interpretative process was consistent with the themes that interview participants were wanting to communicate. This process of member checking ensured that I reflected the interview participants’ perspectives, specifically asking if they agreed with the initial conclusions in the conference proceedings. These participants indicated that I accurately portrayed their experience of learning through the organizational activities. They also informed me that there were no sections that were problematic for them personally or politically (Glense, 2010). Additionally, all research participants reviewed the transcripts of their interviews. In some cases, people expanded on a point they made. This sometimes resulted in fruitful conversations, like a discussion about how there are different ways of interpreting what is meant by popular education. I also asked one of the participants who is well-versed in the history of the coal industry to review Chapter Four to see if he saw any gaps in my description of the political economy.

**Reflexivity**

Good case study research requires that the researcher acknowledge her power and privilege in the situation and her role in the research process (Madison, 2012). This is important to acknowledge because power dynamics can bias the data generated through the process, thereby biasing the conclusions to the research questions. For example, because I engaged in academic research, some participants may have deferred to my perspective or answer questions based on what they thought I might want to hear. The fact that I spent a significant amount of time working in these communities and have long-term working relationships with many of the interviewees inclines me to think that participants felt comfortable sharing their true perspectives with me. However, there were
a few instances where I noted that I was skeptical of the responses. As a result, I asked additional questions to clarify these participants’ true perspectives. In one instance, the person thought I was asking about the organizing academies, and he was saying very positive remarks; however, it became clear that he had not participated in any of them. Additionally, there were a few points when people shared additional information with me but were hesitant for it “to be on the record.”

In conducting this research, I explored my role as the researcher and was reflexive throughout all stages of the research process (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007). During the design of the research questions and the interview protocol, I gathered input from multiple people, including community activists. I did a pilot interview with one participant (Teri Blanton) and asked for her perspective about the wording of the interview questions. During my data collection, I took notes immediately following the interviews to record some of my initial thoughts and reflections on patterns observed. As I worked through the coding process, I read through the transcripts multiple times to consider different ways of interpreting the data. I also considered different arguments to make with my data. During this process, I found that one interpretation did not seem accurate, so I flipped the argument and reinterpreted the data to clarify my thinking. I also checked back with some of the research participants later in the analysis process to see if my assessment resonated with them.

My research journal enabled me to reflect on my role after I conducted interviews and participated in observation. I considered different ways of interpreting the data and reviewed where my vested interest as a former community organizer might bias my
interpretations. For example, my initial findings identified the informal learning as playing a bigger role in KFTC members’ learning than the non-formal education. I revisited some of my initial findings through the iterative process of analysis. I reassessed my data to determine if it substantiated that claim. This caused me to modify my findings.

Because power imbalances can occur between the researcher and the subjects and perceptions of legitimate data (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007), creating a reflexive practice of research can make these issues visible (Naples 2013). Becoming cognizant of potential biases throughout the process encouraged me to approach the data collection and analysis in a way that considered different viewpoints. This occurred during data collection, as well as during the interpretation of the data. The interpretation of the material was given to each interviewee to review to ensure they felt that the interpretations were consistent with their understandings. This process guaranteed that knowledge was shared with the local organization to benefit their work.

This study involved “backyard” research because the research involved studying an organization for which I previously worked (Glesne, 2010). Since I lived and worked in this region for eight years, my connections facilitated access to key individuals. I already knew most of the key informants in the study, providing a helpful starting place and providing me access to others involved with the efforts. However, my previous work with the organization made the analysis more challenging in some ways. I worried about misrepresenting the organization or letting down people I hold in high regard.
I am also very aware of how many researchers come into the area and take KFTC members’ time. I feared being one of those academics who extract knowledge from the community and do not contribute anything in return. At times, these concerns were paralyzing. I also was quite aware of the gaps in my data collection. This related to Hesse-Biber and Piatelli’s (2007) acknowledgment of one’s positionality as an insider or outsider. Other social movement aspects during the tumultuous year of 2020 allowed unique opportunities for data collection and learning in motion, particularly with the momentum around Black Lives Matter and justice for Breonna Taylor, as well as KFTC’s engagement around the primary election; KFTC endorsed Charles Booker, a progressive candidate, who would have faced off with U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell in the general election. However, it was difficult to integrate additional data collection into my research questions.

I also needed to acknowledge my situated perspective in the data collection and analysis of the project (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). This was done primarily through my field notes and research journal. I spent significant time reflecting on the interviews and how my longstanding relationships with many of the research participants might have affected my interpretation of their reflections. Throughout the process, I was very conscious to not misrepresent the organization. As I took field notes, I included reflections about my personal and cultural biases. In these various ways, I sought to be as reflexive as possible throughout the research process.
Chapter 4

Global Political Economy of Coal’s Influence on Education

The organization and its educational practices explored in this study have been shaped by the gendered history of the coal industry and the changing political economy of Central Appalachia. By gendered history, I am referring to traditional gender identity and gender norms with men in the public sphere as breadwinners and women in the private sphere as homemakers. This structure of gender historically helped to maximize profits for the coal companies. Additionally, coal mining was equated with masculinity due to dangerous work (Bell, 2016; Maggard, 1994a). By changing political economy, I refer to the changes in coal production, coal employment, and relevant laws and interrelated dynamics with the state.

This chapter explores how this history has influenced the educational efforts of an organization working toward a Just Transition. I argue that KFTC’s early organizing work between 1981 and 1990 in the region was focused on defending against abuses by the coal industry, specifically related to environmental justice and taxation. Their work evolved between 1990 and 2009 to proactively move beyond coal, but subsequent organizing work was still influenced by the legacy of coal mining on the region and was evident in KFTC members’ perspectives and the organizational strategy. Consequently, KFTC’s educational practices related to their environmental justice work have focused on how to hold the coal industry accountable to environmental protections, including helping people understand their rights within the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act.
Starting in 2007 when miners’ widows lobbied in Frankfort (Kentucky’s state capital), KFTC became more involved with worker safety of coal miners as well.

There was a shift towards a more proactive focus beyond coal, which eventually was described as KFTC’s Just Transition work. Responding to the coal industry continued to play a role, even as the coal industry’s dominance in the local economy declined. The organization’s educational practices broadened to include the global context and the shifting orientation toward proactive solutions. This chapter also explores how KFTC conceptualizes Just Transition and includes some of KFTC members’ internal critiques. I argue that the coal industry continues to play a role in KFTC’s Just Transition work as people in the region grapple with the loss of identity, the legacy of coal impacts, and a continued focus on clean energy—all of which shapes the organization’s current educational practices. Table 6 highlights three time periods of the coal industry’s political economy in the region and how KFTC’s organizing and related educational work evolved in tandem.

The Context that KFTC Emerged From 1880s to 1990: A Gendered Political Economy Analysis of the Historical Domination of the Coal Industry

Freese (2003) documented that between 1850 and 1890, coal consumption in the United States doubled every decade. By the late 1890s, United States coal production became the largest producer bypassing Britain. During this time period, coal provided 71% of the nation’s energy; oil, natural gas, and hydro power provided less than 3%, and wood dropped to 21%. Williams (2002) documented the historical dominance of the coal industry in the Central Appalachian economy dating back to the creation of the coal...
Table 6

*KFTC’s Work Related to Coal’s Changing Political Economy in Central Appalachia*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Economy of Coal</th>
<th>KFTC’s Work</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coal Dominates Region</strong></td>
<td><strong>KFTC Created to Hold Coal Companies Accountable</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1880s-1990</strong></td>
<td><strong>1981-1990</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Underground mining (began late 1800s)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Start of strip mining (1950’s-60s)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Anti-strip-mining movement (mid-1960s to early 1970s)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 3 vetoes before 1977 federal surface mining law</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Reagan administration’s significant reduction in funding for the federal Office of Surface Mining</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Kentucky Supreme Court Broad Form Deed ruling in favor of the coal industry (1987)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Decline of unionized mines (late 1980s)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• KFTC’s creation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Unmined Minerals Tax Campaign</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Constitutional Amendment Campaign against the Broad Form Deed 1988</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Local enforcement campaigns</td>
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<td><strong>Larger-scale Extraction, Fewer Workers</strong></td>
<td><strong>KFTC Primarily Focused on Stopping MTR and pivoting towards a Pro-active Solution</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1990-2009</strong></td>
<td><strong>1990-2009</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Increase in mountaintop removal mining</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Increase in Coal production</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• $3.8 million investment in George W. Bush’s presidential race that resulted in his win in West Virginia and the presidency</td>
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<td>• President Bush administration redefined waste to fill in the Clean Water Act</td>
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<td>• U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (WV) committee assignment affected legislative strategy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Continued loss of employment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 2002 Coal industry sponsored Friends of Coal campaign</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Some increased employment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• State Rep. Jim Gooch’s blocking of state legislation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Increase demand for Central Appalachia’s low sulfur coal due to Clean Air Act changes in 1990 regarding sulfur dioxide</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Legal battles attempting to stop mountaintop removal</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 2003 Launch of Canary Project</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Stream Saver bill and 10 years of I Love Mountains Day (state legislative campaign)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Clean Protection Action Campaign (federal legislation)</td>
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<td>• Coal truck campaign</td>
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<td>• Continued local enforcement campaigns</td>
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<td>• Challenging proposal rule changes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• High Roads Initiative, language changed to Appalachian Transition Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Net Metering Campaign</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 2008 Benham’s initial efforts around energy project</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Non-partisan voter engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coals’ Decline</td>
<td>KFTC Turns to a Just Transition</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009-present</td>
<td>2009-present</td>
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| • President Obama’s So-called “War on Coal” | • Continued efforts around state and federal MTR legislation until about 2015  
• Coal company bankruptcies | • Increased engagement in elections  
• Increasing recognition in Coal’s Decline | • 2013 Just Transition language utilization at Appalachia’s Bright Future  
• Increased competition from natural gas and renewable energy | • Continued local enforcement campaigns  
• Paris Climate calling for international action on climate change | • Dealing with legacy impacts of coal (RECLAIM Act, Black Lung, etc.)  
• Elimination of environmental and mine safety regulations during Trump presidency | • Increased efforts around renewable energy and energy efficiency |

camps in the late 1800s. Historically, the coal industry played a dominate role in the local political economy in the region (Eller, 2008; Hansell, 2018; Montrie, 2003). Coal companies created dependency by owning the homes and all aspects of the towns and paying the miners in script that could only be used in the company store (Bell, 2016; Stoll, 2017). During the period of industrialization, the local economies were segregated by gender and a strict division of labor (Maggard, 1994a). Women only had access to housing in the coal camps as long as their husbands were employed by the companies. Stoll (2017) described the land purchases and the extension of railroad lines spurred during this time due to large-scale industrialization. The Constitution of West Virginia magnified the power of the county judges, which narrowed who needed to be swayed to benefit corporate interests. Elected officials in Congress also had conflicts of interest in the coal companies.

With the boom of the coal industry during the early part of the twentieth century, companies brought in a significant number of workers from diverse European immigrant populations and African Americans in hopes of using language and cultural barriers to
prevent unionization (Eller, 1982; Gaventa, 1980). However, the United Mine Workers on their first contract in 1898 and became the largest, most powerful union in the country (Freese, 2003). Many of the small company towns were also named after coal companies. Coal production in the U.S. grew due to World War I’s demand for fuel, steel, and the chemical industry. In addition, Central Appalachia’s economy, being rooted in the extraction of raw materials, created dependency and uneven capitalist development. This is consistent with the political economic theory that the region is a part of the internal peripheral of the global economy (Walls, 1978).

Beckwith (2001) conflated miners and men because coal mining is one of the most predominantly male industries in the United States. She argued that the nature of the work marks coal mining as masculine, including its physical demands, danger, bravery, independence, and militance. The perception of violent male miners continues to exist, even though most of the violence in union fights was from the company or the state. This connection between coal mining and masculinity has historically been tied to membership with the UMWA (Bell, 2016).

After World War II, mechanization in the coal industry drastically changed production and societal relations within the region, affecting both underground mining operations and the recently adopted surface mining operations (Perdue & Pavela, 2012). Companies sold the homes to residents in the mid-twentith century, which ended the company camp approach to coal mining operations. The boom-and-bust cycle of the coal industry shifted during the 1970s due to increased oil prices and a greater demand for coal (Hansell, 2018; Perdue & Pavela, 2012). In the 1980s, the Central Appalachian
region experienced another bust phase due to economic restructuring towards a service economy and a recession (Perdue & Pavela, 2012). However, as evident in Scott’s (2010) research, people in the region continued to equate work with coal mining; they would not describe low-wage employment such as employment by Walmart as work. While the demand for coal grew between 1985 and 1990 (with an all-time high of 294 million tons in 1990), but the number of jobs decreased during this time period (McIlmoil et al., 2013).

The 1980s also reflected the early stages of the implementation of the federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act passed in 1977. Following the passage of this legislation and the oil crisis in the late 1970s, Central Appalachia’s coal production increased over 50% in the 1980s (McIlmoil & Hansen, 2010). During the 1980s, the Reagan administration cut the federal Office of Surface Mining’s budget for enforcement (Eller, 2008). Eller (2008) stated that the number of coal mining jobs dropped by 70% in the last two decades of the twentieth century, from 159,000 to 46,000. During the 1980s, Massey Coal and Pittston Coal systematically broke the union. As one example, Massey bought out all of the union mines in some communities and reopened them as non-union mines (Bell, 2009). Then, in 1984, Massey refused to sign an industry-agreement and won a federal injunction against the UMWA’s mass sit-in during the strike. A state court fined the union $200,000 for their actions (Beckwith, 2001).

Loyalty to the Industry

Despite the decline in employment and a history of exploitation, a strong loyalty to the coal industry remained, which shaped how KFTC approached its work. KFTC
members historically experienced direct and indirect threats because of their involvement in the organization when they sought to hold the coal industry accountable to environmental laws. Numerous people I interviewed for this study referenced the loyalty many people in Eastern Kentucky historically have had with the coal industry. When interviewed, Randy Wilson, a KFTC member, shared many people in the region often expressed their identification with coal, saying, “We’ve always been coal. My papaw and my dad everything…” People in the region often shared how their family was connected to the coal industry. Sharing this connection enabled them to find belonging in the region. Additionally, KFTC members often conflated miners with being male. The way many Eastern Kentuckians have historically associated the region with mining perpetuates hegemonic masculinity by centering masculine economic primacy.

Coal mining is also linked to the region’s identity. Kevin Short, a KFTC member, reflected, “It’s like a way of life for people and not just a job, one that is dangerous to you and your livelihood that they admit treated them poorly, but there’s still some weird sense of loyalty to it.” This quote reflects how coal means more than just employment to the people who have worked in the industry. Although Kevin Short did not make an association between coal employment and masculinity directly, he did indicate that many people link coal mining to the region’s identity. Lewin (2017) wrote about how mining in Appalachia is endowed with heroism and sacred meaning that affirms hegemonic masculinity, honors fallen miners, and symbolizes regional values of self-sufficiency and hard work, in part because it has been one of the few opportunities where workers can find a living wage. Scott (2010) defined hegemonic masculinity as having three
characteristics: being the breadwinner, presenting an extraordinarily tough guy image, and having a connection to modernity.

In my research, I observed similar examples of hegemonic masculinity and the emphasis placed on self-sufficiency, pride, and hard work. Many people believed that coal was and continues to be the only way to make a decent living in the region. Carl Shoupe, a KFTC member and retired disabled coal miner stated, “Coal miners are a proud bunch anyway. You know, it’s a very hard industry to work in...the men are very proud of what they do.” Much like many people in the region, Carl’s statement conflated men and mining. Although some women worked in the coal industry after challenges to discrimination in the 1970s, they were often the last to be hired and first to be let go; generally speaking, very few women have historically worked in the mines (Scott, 2010). Carl’s comments also indicated that even though people found coal mining to be challenging work that sometime caused fatalities and significant injuries, many had positive associations with it. Scott (2010) stated, “The hardships of mining can be read as evidence of their [miners] patriotic devotion to America and their central role in the national economy” (p. 143).

This region’s pride for coal miners’ hard work and the cultural hegemony of the industry shaped how KFTC approached its efforts to pursue accountability to the mining laws and the prospects for creating other possible economic futures. KFTC communicated an acknowledgement of coal’s connection to Kentucky’s heritage and culture, whereas an outside activist group, Mountain Justice, used language like, “King Coal, off with its head” at some of their protests. The frequently used language of King
Coal also conflates the coal industry with masculinity. In KFTC’s Position on Coal, they recognized the dangerous work being done through mining, affirmed the history of resistance through the union movement, and described coal miners as the “economic backbone of their families, their churches, and their communities” (KFTC, 2007). However, KFTC’s discourse also challenged the perception that coal mining had produced prosperity for the region and highlighted the need to stop the destruction, thereby challenging the industry’s hegemony. However, KFTC’s discourse evident in their Position on Coal and other materials did not challenge hegemonic masculinity. Acknowledging both the importance of coal and its problems enabled people to pivot toward the need for accountability and reform.

Another form of benevolence toward the coal industry was evident in various local institutions within the region. Several interviewees discussed the challenges or unintended consequences of efforts to garner taxes from the industry, like the coal severance tax and the unmined minerals tax. For example, the coal severance tax was created by the state legislature in 1972 to provide resources to diversify the economy. Half of the tax income went to the state’s General Fund and half went back to coal-impacted counties. Some interviewees argued that this caused the local governments to be more passive in their engagement with coal companies because they needed those resources to balance the county budgets. Others stated that those resources often went to pay for road repairs that the companies should have been responsible for fixing if they were following the laws, whereas others felt more of those resources should have come back to Eastern Kentucky counties. This primary dependence on one industry for its tax
base reflects that the region is a part of the internal periphery in an advanced capitalist country in the global economy. The industry’s hegemony limited what elected officials thought were viable economic options within the region to produce tax revenue, which resulted in consent from the local government. This consent caused the local government to use funds that were supposed to be for economic diversification to instead repair damage to the local infrastructure.

**Threats**

KFTC was founded in 1981 shortly after the enactment of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977, the federal law regulating surface mining. Throughout those first 30 years of the organization’s existence, KFTC leaders experienced ongoing threats due to their critiques of the coal industry. The following reflections are about both these historical threats and about more contemporary examples. Although loyalty and threats seem to be at odds, this is how hegemony works—through both concessions and repression, or as Gramsci (1992) described consent and force. Teri Blanton, KFTC member, described the contradiction, “Coal’s not good to them, but people think it is going to be their savior. It’s like spousal abuse where people feel trapped, or some people think there’s nothing better they can do.” Teri’s reflection demonstrates the complicated relationship that the region has with coal mining. This reflects the cultural hegemony of the coal industry or Gaventa’s (1980) third dimension of power, which shapes the “necessities, possibilities, or strategies of conflict” (p. 20). This also aligns with his arguments that highly unequal power relationships result in the powerless being highly dependent.
Numerous KFTC members expressed an experience of fear related to employment, threat of violence, or other forms of intimidation because of standing up to the coal industry during the early years of the organization. Throughout its history, a long-time KFTC staff member Jerry Hardt shared, “We often had booths at county festivals. I’m thinking of the Black Gold festival in Hazard where, of course, there were a lot of coal presence but where people were sent over to the booth to harass KFTC folks.”

Starting in the mid-2000s, the coal industry displayed strip mining equipment at this festival in an effort to reclaim the festival’s celebration of coal (which is sometimes referred to as black gold) and distributed black balloons to children that said, “Coal Mining Our Future” on them. This educative strategy by the coal industry reflects Gaventa’s (1980) third mechanism of power by shaping what people within the region perceive as possible.

Over the years, KFTC staff and members had exchanges at these festivals with other local people who were very angry over KFTC’s organizational positions on mountaintop removal. This perspective included reflections about how people would scream at them saying that they were “trying to take food out of babies’ mouths.”

Embedded in this perspective is the gender norm that coal mining is essential to obtain a family wage and women are dependent on men (Maggard, 1994a). As a result, KFTC members needed to learn de-escalation skills and to find common ground with people. This often included trying to avoid arguments with opponents, acknowledging people’s fears, and reframing KFTC’s goals.

KFTC members also experienced disdain from others for their involvement in the organization in Eastern Kentucky. Jerry, KFTC staff person, shared:
I just think there are a lot of other subtle ways that people are threatened. People get shunned if they’re outspoken, and they get shunned by their neighbors because just the possibility of associating with someone who is labelled anti-coal. Involvement with an organization seeking to hold the coal industry accountable resulted in local people assuming that KFTC members were against the industry, or “trying to shut them down.” KFTC members talked about how they tried to distinguish their support for the miners versus the companies. In other cases, they would emphasize their concerns about specific industry practices, like mountaintop removal coal mining or a specific mining permit. In these cases, they would say things like, “I’m not against coal; I just want them to do it right.” These subtle forms of control resulted in KFTC members feeling ostracized by other people in their community, which made it difficult to engage in organizing. Although these challenges dissuaded some from becoming involved, KFTC members who were actively involved in the region learned how to talk about coal mining issues more strategically.

Additionally, the collective memory of violence against union activists in the region throughout the 20th century influenced whether some people would become involved. Joanne, a KFTC member, reflected on why she thought such a small number of people attended a meeting with the state in opposition to proposed mining that would threaten the community’s local water supply. She stated, “I think they’re [community members] afraid; the coal companies got them afraid to say anything. They’ve always been like that. Used to… the coal company would shoot them.” She indicated that there has been a long history of intimidation when standing up against the coal companies due
to the history of violence directed at those in opposition to the coal companies. In Gaventa’s (1980) book that explored why there was not more rebellion in the face of so much inequality in Appalachia, he told the story of a community worker whose home was shot at due to their activist involvement by those who felt threatened by their efforts. Both concessions and repression integrate to reinforce the hegemony of the coal industry within the region.

Another example of intimidation was shared when the organization was holding a protest outside of a coal company’s office, some KFTC members were concerned about being affiliated with opposition to coal. Jerry, a KFTC staff person, described one example of this as follows:

One woman who was very active in KFTC, she was active around other issues came in and wore a mask. As she said, I’m wearing this mask because I have a nephew that works for the coal industry. So she was afraid just her appearance, she wasn’t a spokesperson or anything, but just her appearance would have repercussions for her nephew. This person was familiar with situations where coal companies threatened people’s employment due to involvement with trying to hold the coal companies accountable; as a result, she took action to conceal her identity but continued to engage in protest. This aligns with Bingman’s (1993) description of how economic need isolated protesters by making the conflict personal between people trying to stop strip mining and miners themselves. For example, the companies doing strip mining would often hire someone from the community to work with them to pit neighbor against neighbor. The effort to
conceal one’s identity and still protest also speaks to the history of resistance within the region despite the barriers.

As a result of this climate of fear, several KFTC members talked about the importance of learning to stand up to opposition and to de-escalate contentious situations. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the community is not monolithic in terms of their perspectives on coal and the history of the industry. Community members who had objections to the coal industry had to weigh the risks of standing up and decide they could best support the opposition. The coal industry created a climate of fear for KFTC members who were trying to stand up to the coal industry. This included verbal harassment, threats to employment, and a history of violence against activists. Much like Gaventa’s (2019) revised thesis, I argue that there are numerous examples of resistance despite the hegemonic power of the coal industry.

**Influence on Politics**

Similarly, the coal companies’ influence is evident in political control through payoffs and threats with local and state politicians representing the region. Understanding those connections were part of the educative work of KFTC. To illustrate, one blog post on KFTC’s website stated that “more than $2 million poured into federal races in the last two years by Alliance Resources CEO Joe Craft alone” (KFTC, 2018). KFTC members also reflected on stories of politicians who were connected to the coal companies. For example, Joanne Hill, a KFTC member reflected, “Well, there’s too much power like, Mitch McConnell…the big coal man that’s giving them all this money so…don’t want to make him mad even in politics.” In this case, people in the organization recognized that
there is a connection between monetary contributions to electoral campaigns and political favors. The way she described the situation illustrated the perspective that politicians were controlled by the coal industry’s interests. Teri Blanton, a KFTC member, also shared the sentiment that Kentucky has, “the best politicians money could buy.”

Additionally, numerous research participants expressed how U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell had been a barrier toward their organizing goals, including failing to secure a long-term funding source for the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund, which provides financial support for former miners who have Black Lung. Another example shared by several of the interviewees discussing a television advertisement from Mitch McConnell’s 2020 reelection campaign. This included video footage of KFTC and Black Lung Association members’ lobby visit when they were trying to urge McConnell to use his power to support legislation related to Black Lung benefits. The footage was taken from a KFTC member’s social media account without her permission and misrepresented McConnell’s actions. McConnell’s campaign video claimed that he was working on behalf of the coal miners, as opposed to blocking the fund. For the general public who were not following the issue in Congress, they assumed McConnell had helped secure resources for the fund.

Educating KFTC members about elected officials’ action and inaction on relevant issues is a part of their education work. For example, through the process of engaging in the Kentucky legislative session in 2006, KFTC members helped stop a gravel truck bill that would have raised the weight limits to an unsafe level. While making phone calls for the election turn-out that year, KFTC members shared that the incumbent state
Representative Howard Cornett sponsored the unsafe legislation. When he lost that election, other elected officials in the state knew that KFTC actions contributed to the election outcome.

Interviewees also shared stories about elected officials standing up to the industry and having their positions were threatened. One example of this was shared by Jerry, KFTC staff person:

I remember a state legislator who was not from the mountains, calling us that the coal industry had threatened him with saying they would do everything in their power to defeat him in his next re-election if he didn’t vote a certain way because he was a Republican who was expected to vote with the industry.

This is an example of a threat to political power based on the manipulation from the coal companies. The industry had tracked how elected officials’ votes related to their interests and explicitly used their resources to influence elections regardless of whether or not coal is produced in the respective district. KFTC members described how the coal industry controlled the state legislature. This control included both Democrats and Republicans, reflecting what Gaventa (1980) described as the second dimension of power, where certain issues are repressed from the decision-making arena.

KFTC’s First Decade: Issues KFTC Historically Worked on in the Region (1981-1990)

KFTC arose in this contentious political economic context in 1981, after almost eight decades of the coal industry’s dominance in the region. The creation of the organization followed the regional grassroots land study and floods in several parts of Eastern Kentucky. Following the massive flooding in April 1977, people’s efforts to
rebuild their communities brought greater awareness of the link between the intensity of flooding and strip mining (Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, 1991). These flood relief efforts resulted in the creation of several community groups, which eventually combined to make KFTC. The Appalachian Land Ownership Study brought citizens together, with the support of Highlander Research and Education Center, to do a participatory action research project identifying land and mineral ownership patterns (Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force, 1981). This study documented what many people in the region had known for years about unequal distribution of land and mineral ownership. For example, as of 1981, 76% of the land in 12 Eastern Kentucky Counties was owned by corporations or individuals outside the counties or government agencies. Additionally, Pocahontas-Kentucky Corporation owned 81,333 acres of mineral rights worth $7 million but only paid $76 in property taxes. The unmined minerals tax campaign was one of KFTC’s first campaigns and why the organization was initially named the Kentucky Fair Tax Coalition.

Within Eastern Kentucky, many of the main issues KFTC initially challenged were various injustices related to the coal industry. Jerry Hardt, KFTC staff person, reflected on their work:

For decades, I guess it [coal] shaped pretty much everything in the region…and in just a wide range of issues, particularly in the early years of KFTC, a lot to do with water quality. Many hundred, thousands of people had their water wells damaged or destroyed by blasting from mining, and that surface water quality was a big issue as well… Quality of life issues that related, that ranged from…dust
from coal haul roads and tipples, hundreds of coal trucks a day on small rural roads, sometimes running school buses off the road. In terms of the broad form deed, in terms of undivided property, so people losing their land, sometimes the land was actually stolen from folks, probably more often than sometimes. Jerry reflected on how the hegemonic power of the coal industry drove what people within the organization wanted to work on in Eastern Kentucky. People in the region experienced externalities from the coal industry, such as side effects that negatively affected people’s quality of life that were not reflected in the cost of the production. This caused people to connect with KFTC and work together to try to achieve accountability within the coal industry. For example, drinking water from underground wells in some communities was destroyed due to mining polluting the water table. The Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 states that if a coal company destroys the quality or quantity of a nearby resident’s drinking water the coal company have to replace it with the same quality and quantity as pre-mining water (405 Ky. Admin. Regs. 16:060, 2021).

The companies would often put the burden of proof on the individuals to demonstrate that damage had been done; KFTC members would alleviate the burden by learning the relevant regulations and organizing to try to make the coal companies follow the law. This was evident in the KFTC newsletter, website, and interviews with members. For example, KFTC held a property tax workshop to give an overview of the property tax situation and how the organization could engage in the 1982 Kentucky General Assembly. They also taught people to test and sample water and to learn about solutions to water problems through the courts, changes in the law, and better enforcement by
KFTC’s Citizens Education and Water Monitoring Project (Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, 1991). These issues often related to the health and safety of residents of Eastern Kentucky.

In other cases, coal companies used nuances in property laws to minimize their costs, like the broad form deed that allowed strip mining of land without the surface owner’s permission. In response, KFTC members learned about the laws related to these complex issues impacting quality of life and how to challenge them. This is consistent with other environmental justice activists who are propelled into action because of direct effects on their homes and communities. For example, Barry (2008) explored the motivations of community activists involved with Coal River Mountain Watch in West Virginia and found that many of their members became involved because of the negative effect the coal industry was having on their families and communities. KFTC’s leadership, like many environmentalist justice activist organizations, consisted of women during the early years; this reflected the commitment to involve women, minorities, and the poor in the organization (Szakos, 1993).

KFTC’s educational efforts associated with this environmental justice work focused on helping people navigate these immediate problems with the coal industry and mountaintop removal coal mining. Teri Blanton, a KFTC member, recalled, “Coalfield Survival workshops that we did…helping people learn their rights around coal-impacted communities. And what are your rights as a citizen?” Coalfield Survival School workshops were held during the late 1990s to mid-2000s, but similar educational efforts have taken place since the inception of the organization. These workshops were designed
around addressing specific problems community members were having, like documenting the impact of blasting on their homes, or the process for challenging a mining permit. Periodically, there would be a series of workshops over time. KFTC also distributed printed materials for awareness. Teri stated they created the Coalfield Survival School workshop series because people did not trust the coal companies to come into their homes to do the pre-blast surveys. The workshops helped citizens learn how to ensure documentation was done properly so they could have a record if the mining caused problems to their homes. KFTC also distributed a book by Squillace (1990) called *The Strip Mining Handbook* [short title] published by the Environmental Policy Institute. It was a comprehensive guide for citizens to challenge damage from coal companies.

Additionally, Jerry described the leadership development work at the time as “walking with people through the experience of working on whatever that is.” This consisted of starting where people were at and helping community members gain the skills, knowledge, and political analysis to be able to challenge the injustice they experienced. This included helping the individuals request a mining permit conference from state regulators or reviewing a proposed mining permit. The focus of the leadership development work during this time was often rooted in how to obtain accountability from the coal industry. Additionally, many people became involved with the organization to stop mountaintop removal coal mining. In summary, KFTC’s work in Eastern Kentucky historically focused on holding the coal industry accountable for mining laws, the abuses of the Broad Form deed, and unmined minerals tax.
Larger-scale Extraction, Fewer Workers: Shifts in the Coal Industry (1990-2008)

Between 1990 and 2008, coal provided over half of the electricity in the United States (Freese, 2003). There was an increase in mountaintop removal mining in the late 1990s and 2000s (Bell, 2016; Burns, 2007; Montrie, 2003). Coal productivity did not translate to coal employment (Ryerson, 2020). For example, coal production in 2006 was slightly lower than in 1979 whereas mining employment fell from 50,000 to 20,000 (Strobo, 2012). Also, between 1993 and 1997 (with a second peak at 291 million tons in 1997), the number of jobs decreased during these time periods (McIlmoil et al., 2013). Additionally, the new service economy consisted of more female workers than the industrial economy; many of which were low-wage jobs (Eller, 2008).

In addition to decreased mining employment, multinational coal companies increasingly took an anti-union stance, and the number of union workers declined in 1980s (Bell, 2016). This was due in part to the fact that mechanization was needed for companies to compete, and only the large companies could afford the newer equipment (Freese, 2003). The Clinton administration also reduced the budget and eliminated six field offices of the federal Office of Surface Mining (Eller, 2008). This reflected the impact of neoliberalism on an internal periphery region within an advance capitalist country.

During the time period of 1990-2008, environmental impacts were also pronounced. For example, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (2005) Environmental Impact Statement on Mountaintop Mining and Valley Fills in
Appalachia, mountaintop removals and/or valley fills negatively impacted 1,200 miles of streams between 1985 to 2001, which resulted in 724 miles of streams being buried.

Additionally, the Clean Air Act amendments of 1990, which mandated sulfur dioxide limits on the nation’s coal-fired power plants, led to increased demand for low-sulfur coal in the Central Appalachian region that was expensive to extract (Carley et al., 2018). The industry argued that the low-sulfur coal in the region could only be mined through mountaintop removal because the coal seams were so thin (Bell, 2016). Due to cost, there was also a shift towards greater extraction from other coal basins, like the Powder River Basin in the Western states (McIlmoil et al., 2013). In 1970, before environmental laws targeted sulfur content, very little coal was produced in the western coalfields; in the early 2000s, more than half of U.S. coal was based in this region (Freese, 2003).

The coal industry opposed efforts to address anthropogenic-induced climate change through a public relations campaign, lobbying Congress, and providing financial contributions to political candidates. In 1997, almost all countries in the United Nations created the Kyoto Protocol, a binding international treaty to address anthropogenic-induced climate change that required rich countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 5% below 1990s levels by 2008-2012. However, due to the coal industry efforts to discount the scientific evidence related to the need for limits on carbon dioxide, the U.S. Senate did not ratify it (Freese, 2003).

During the 2000 presidential election, the coal lobby spent $3.8 million, which was three times the amount it had during the previous presidential election backing
George W. Bush against Al Gore who had promised to increase regulations (Hamburger, 2001). Bush won West Virginia with 52% of the vote; this state had not voted for a non-incumbent Republican for president since 1928. According to the Wall Street Journal, top White House staff and West Virginia political players described George W. Bush’s election as “basically a coal-fired victory” because he needed those five electoral votes (Hamburger, 2001).

In addition, mountain removal mining practices were being challenged legally during this period. In 1999 and 2003, U.S. District Judge Hayden II in the Southern District in West Virginia made two important rulings that blocked state permits and required the enforcement of the Clean Water Act, which would have limited MTR (Scott, 2010; Eller, 2008). The Democratic West Virginia U.S. Senator, Robert Byrd, attempted to overturn this legal decision legislatively (Hamburger, 2001). Later, both of these decisions were overturned by the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals (Strobo, 2012). In 2002, President George W. Bush’s administration used an executive order to change the definition of valley fills’ impact on streams from “waste” to “fill” in the Clean Water Act; this allowed mountaintop removal and valley fills to continue and expand because “fill” was no longer a violation (KFTC, n.d.a). This order spurred community organizing groups in the region to launch a federal legislative campaign to restore the original intention through the Clean Water Protection Act. In 2008, the Bush administration proposed weakening the stream buffer zone rule that prohibited dumping waste into streams. Democratic elected officials, Governor Steve Beshear, Kentucky Attorney General Jack Conway, and Congressmen Ben Chandler and John Yarmuth officially
objected to that weakening. However, Governor Beshear’s administration routinely gave waivers to that rule (KFTC, 2008).

While the use of coal dropped significantly in most developed countries, including western Europe where it declined 42% in a 15 year period, coal use increased in the United States (Freese, 2003). According to Freese (2003), three factors influenced this: Bush’s election, the dramatic increase in the price of natural gas, and California’s electricity crisis. More coal was burned than ever before in 2001 by pushing existing coal-fired power plants to run harder. In 1996, 5 million primarily underground miners in China extracted a relatively equivalent amount of coal compared to 90,000 miners in the United States.

McNeil (2011) argued that mountaintop removal is a logical product of neoliberalism that consisted of social, economic, cultural, and political ideas. MTR is the most efficient means to extract coal; however, this practice is also the most environmentally destructive and requires the least number of workers. MTR was initially supposed to be an uncommon strip mining practice in Appalachia to ensure some environmental protections. However, coal companies routinely were granted Approximate Original Contour (AOC) waivers by state regulators so the exception became the rule. Additionally, as described above, the Bush administration changed wording in the Clean Water Act to eliminate any protections from MTR. After the 1990s, the reliance on MTR increased substantially (Austin & Clark, 2012). Trends in coal employment over this time period are illustrated in Figure 3, which comes from a report by Downstream Strategies (an organization doing research on environmental and
economic development in the region). Downstream Strategies used data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration to demonstrate the drop in coal employment in the coal-producing areas compared to the amount of surface mining sites over the past 25+ years. Labor productivity improved in both the deep mines and surface mines due to increased mechanization. However, since 2000, there has been a drop in labor productivity (McIlmoil et al., 2013). There was also a shift toward greater extraction from other coal basins due to cost (McIlmoil et al., 2013). Furthermore, neoliberalism in the globalized coal market pushed coal companies to restructure to cut costs by avoiding enforcement of health, safety, and environmental regulations and by selling assets to subsidiaries to eliminate union contracts. By 1999, no union mines were operating in Eastern Kentucky (Chomsky & Berry, 2012; Hansell, 2018).
Furthermore, I argue that neoliberalism is part of the political project of the world systems/internal periphery theory. In other words, neoliberalism justified the elimination of environmental and workplace protections. Appalachia’s position as a part of the internal periphery within an advanced capitalist country is perpetuated through a neoliberal policy orientation. The coal industry literally and figuratively constrained the regional economy since its inception.

State-level legislative campaigns were also introduced in Kentucky, West Virginia, and Tennessee. House and Howard (2009) described KFTC’s engagement at the state-level with this issue. Both Democrats and Republicans were loyal to the coal industry. KFTC’s Stream Saver bill was introduced in 2005 and slowly gained momentum with the annual I Love Mountains Lobby Day. During the second year, over 1,200 citizens rallied at the Kentucky capital. The legislation had not been heard in the House Natural Resources Committee because the chair state representative, Jim Gooch, refused to pull up the bill. He claimed that there was no public outcry to address the issue of MTR. This resulted in KFTC members submitting 60 letters to the editor, which took up an entire page of the Lexington Herald-Leader. This is an example of Gaventa’s (1980) second dimension of power, where an issue is excluded from consideration based on the rules of the game. The bill was finally heard in 2008 in the House Appropriations Committee, but it ultimately failed. KFTC’s non-formal and informal educational work during this time period included helping people learn about the legislation as well as the barriers to the vote.
Additionally, environmental regulators consistently failed to enforce mining laws. For example, the Martin County Coal sludge spill occurred in October 2000, causing 300 million gallons of sludge into two creeks. At the time, this spill was the worst environmental disaster in the southeastern United States and was recorded to be 20 times larger than the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska (Eller, 2008). The initial investigation by the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) determined that the regulatory agency had failed to enforce their own recommendation and were negligent. However, the Bush administration replaced the investigation team, reduced the fines, and demoted Jack Spadaro who was the head of the National Mine Health and Safety Academy and was forced out of the government for his heavy-hitting criticism.

The collusion between coal companies and politicians was also evident in miner health and safety issues. For example, in 2007, a group of coal miner widows lobbied the state legislature to improve protections after several mining accidents resulted in fatalities the previous year. KFTC members lobbied in solidarity with these efforts. This included helping people understand the connections between political opposition and ties to the coal industry. Figure 4 illustrates this connection in a political cartoon in the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, one of the two statewide newspapers. Kentucky State Representatives Gooch and Robin Webb watered down the legislation and were also barriers to garnering better environmental protections from the coal industry. Democratic Rep. Jody Richards was the speaker of the House at the time and attempted to delay the hearing of the mine safety bill in the House. KFTC’s informal educational work included informing members about the legislative process through email action alerts as well as through phone trees.
In this communication, KFTC organizers and members would connect with KFTC members to keep them informed and able to take action by contacting the state legislative message line or writing a letter to the editor.

**Friends of Coal**

Interviewees specifically cited the challenge of the propaganda pushed by the coal industry public relations effort, Friends of Coal, starting in 2002 that sought to maintain the importance of the industry within the region, regardless of the decline in employment, through a large-scale public relations campaign. Between 2010 and 2013 alone, $50 million was spent on marketing and lobbying within the region by the National Mining Association (Lewin, 2017). Bell and York (2010) researched how the Friends of Coal campaign appropriated West Virginia cultural icons and hegemonic masculinity to
present coal as the provider and patriotic defender. The Friends of Coal effort presented and perpetuated this image through creating memorabilia, sponsoring numerous events, and in creating of the Coal Education Development and Resource (CEDAR) educational program for K-12 schools.

Bell and York (2016) also argued that the approach reinforced hegemonic masculinity by connecting football coaches and winning with the coal industry through the sponsorship of the “Friends of Coal Bowl” between West Virginia University and Marshall University. Their commercials also conflated the coal industry with coal miners, and coal miners had masculine subjectivity as providers. In 2006, Friends of Coal became the main corporate sponsor for professional bass fisherman Jeremy Starks, aligning the coal industry with the outdoorsman icon. The selection of masculine sports figures illustrates how the coal industry used hegemonic masculinity to maintain their dominance within the region.

The patriotic defender ideology came from the coal industry’s discourse about protecting the United States from the influence of foreign oil. Scott (2010) asserted that this construction of patriotism linked with masculinity is particularly important because it enables Appalachia’s membership in the nation, as opposed to its normal status as “Other.” Even though there had been a decline in coal employment, communities continued to identify with the industry.

Furthermore, Bell and York (2016) argued that the sponsorship of various cultural and sporting events “perpetuated the ideology of dependency” (p. 104). Ryerson (2020) outlined how the constant visibility of pro-coal efforts through bumper stickers like
“Friends of Coal,” “Coal Mining Our Future,” license plates, and other memorabilia garnered “consent by selectively appropriating and recontextualizing central functions of the UMWA” for communities to collectively experience and process emotions of loss, anger, pride, connectedness, and some sense of control in the wake of union’s void (p. 722).

Several interviewees referenced how challenging it was to counter the Friends of Coal efforts. Teri, a KFTC member, reflected “I just wish that there was some way that we’d had the money to combat all of the bad publicity that the Friends of Coal put out there, the misinformation that they did.” It was very difficult for a grassroots organization to combat the expensive efforts by the coal industry used to amplify their messaging and emphasize the importance of their role within the region. The coal industry exaggerated the impact that greater environmental regulations would have on coal mining employment in the region. Teri referenced an effort to strengthen the stream buffer zone for surface mining:

It was the stream buffer zone hearing and on the radio, they’re [the coal industry] hollering all day long, ‘Come to this hearing. The job you save could be your own.’ It was like, ‘Do not mine within 100 feet of a stream.’

The coal industry would equate any attempt to have more stringent regulations with the elimination of jobs. Making these false claims resulted in greater animosity between people in the community seeking greater environmental protection with those who were employed by the industry. As a result, some of KFTC’s educational work included how the organization’s efforts would benefit the local community. KFTC members learned
about the stream buffer zone proposed rule change through discussions at their local chapter meetings and during the Land Reform Committee meetings. This issue was also described in the newsletter and on the website (KFTC, 2008).

One of the arguments in support of mountaintop removal coal mining is that it created flatland for economic development. Eller (2008) outlined how local, state, and federal governments invested public funds heavily in industrial recruitment and the shortcomings of this strategy. For example, $209 million was invested in grants, tax credits, and local bonds to recruit Trust Joist, glued wooden trusses. A computer-based call center was recruited for the industrial park but left in 2003, relocating to El Salvador when the tax breaks ended. In other cases, companies never opened, or they created fewer jobs than were predicted.

**Shift in Organizational Approach**

Starting in 2003, KFTC’s work evolved to increase focus on proactive solutions. Due to the greater devastation caused by mountaintop removal mining and the longstanding lack of prosperity in the mountains, existing KFTC leaders expanded the organization’s focus on these environmental justice issues. They launched the Canary Project, which had four primary goals: enforcement of existing coal laws, better laws when the current laws were inadequate, alternative economic development, and sustainable energy. The Canary Project drew on the symbolism of a canary in the coal mine, which were historically used by coal miners to identify if toxic levels of carbon monoxide were present in a deep mine. Using this analogy, KFTC’s Canary Project
implied that the Central Appalachian region was like a canary warning the rest of the country of coal’s devastating effects.

The launch of the Canary Project began with KFTC’s Flyover Festival, which took place at the Hazard, Kentucky airport, with about 500 KFTC members in attendance. This was the first large-scale educational event that enabled people from across the state to take short flights from volunteer pilots to see the scale of the devastation of mountaintop removal coal mining from the air. Often, it was difficult to see the large-scale strip mining from the roadside; so, this event expanded access to who could see the scale of the devastation to galvanize additional community activism against mountaintop removal and introduce KFTC members to the broadened scope of this body of work. Participating in a flyover has been described as a visceral experience. I would argue these kinds of activities reflect embodied learning experiences.

Due to the increased mining with fewer workers, and the greater destruction from mountaintop removal mining during this time period, KFTC questioned the hegemony of the coal industry in the region more explicitly and also paved the way for future Just Transition efforts. This included utilizing language like, “a better future beyond coal is possible” (KFTC, 2007). KFTC highlighted that coal is a finite resource and that coal is not cheap nor clean. This included using language like the “true costs of coal” in their educational materials.

The third and fourth goals of the Canary Project began to develop, with KFTC initially collectively calling them the High Roads Initiative. Promoting the “high road” to economic development was instituted as opposed to the “low road” like large tax breaks
for big corporations. In 2009, they started calling these efforts Appalachian Transition (KFTC, 2011). One of their initial efforts included a joint website between KFTC and allied organization, Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (now called Mountain Association), which was a resource for “ideas, research, opportunities, and success stories” that demonstrated that economic diversification exists (Strobo, 2012, p. 105). At that time, there were not specific KFTC projects or pieces of legislation being pursued, but over time KFTC was able to actualize some of these goals.

Gradually, the focus of the organizing shifted from what it was against to what it was for. Jerry Hardt described the shift as follows:

It added a different lens…not just fighting against mountaintop removal… It changed the question around—and I think KFTC had this question long ago—along the lines of—‘What would like the future of Eastern Kentucky to be? Is mountaintop removal a barrier to that future or is it an enabler?’

This shift created a different way of looking at the issues on which KFTC was working. This shift in orientation towards what they wanted to create could be seen as being more aspirational and visionary for the region. It resulted in a different approach to education and communication that highlighted what they wanted to create and how addressing injustices was necessary to reach that vision. Teri, a KFTC member, shared, “We could talk about what kind of future we want for Kentucky and how do we think we can get there.” Focus on their vision changed how they thought about what kinds of organizing activities KFTC pursued. This change in orientation and organizing is consistent with the concept of Just Transition, which later shaped the educational activities of KFTC.
Just Transition in KFTC

Pai et al. (2020) described the Just Transition concept that originated in the United States in the 1970s by Tony Mazzocchi, a union leader in the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers’ Union. It sought environmental group involvement against Shell regarding worker health and safety issues. These labor union activists recognized that the industries they worked in were causing environmental problems and advocated for change to worker health and safety as well as the environment. Since the mid-2000s, the Just Transition concept, which focuses on transitions for fossil fuel workers and communities has been adapted and incorporated into climate change discourse within and outside of academia.

The Just Transition framework recognizes that “an economy based on extracting resources from a finite ecosystem faster than the capacity of the system to regenerate” will collapse or require reorganization (Mascarenhas-Swan, 2017, p. 38). The Labor Network for Sustainability recently conducted a listening project to identify what Just Transition consists of. They also outlined key short and long-term policy proposals which would advance these goals, including a relief plan, bridge funding for the public sector affected by a loss of fossil-fuel tax revenue, and a rapid response team to address job displacement (Cha et al., 2020).

In my research, several KFTC members talked about the evolution of KFTC’s work to use the Just Transition framework. Teri Blanton, KFTC member, shared, “The Just Transition part comes out of one of the goals of the Canary Project…one of the goals of the Canary Project to build a just and sustainable Appalachia and then to watch the
different programs along the way and how it’s changed.” The organization did not use the language of Just Transition at that time, but this member indicated that Just Transition was consistent with what they were hoping to achieve through the Canary Project.

KFTC’s incorporation of the Just Transition language in 2013 to describe their efforts to transition the Appalachian economy connected their efforts with other efforts to shift the economy past fossil fuels outside of the region. Teri said, “They had other businesses to come in and show things that you can do, and it’s just the education of things that’s possible if you have access to clean water and clean soil.” Teri noted that access to a clean environment was fundamental to enabling start-up businesses within the region. This demonstration of efficacy showed that a Just Transition was possible.

In 2013, the initial focus of Just Transition within KFTC was rooted in Eastern Kentucky, which is one of the coal-producing parts of the state. KFTC’s narrative emphasized the history of coal and the dramatic transition happening within the Appalachian region, like the loss of 6,000 coal jobs during an 18-month period. “We have an opportunity to manage a transition that’s already happening if we take that opportunity. We don’t have to leave individuals and communities behind,” Chris, a KFTC member, stated. Chris’ perspective recognized that the global political economy of coal was rapidly changing, and KFTC (as well as many other organizations in the region), supported the development of projects and policies which would create new economic opportunities.

KFTC materials also demonstrated that they wanted to celebrate the local culture and invest in the community. They had a 14-part plan of public policies and positions,
which included intentions such as creating a new planning body, launching a long-term regional planning fund from severance taxes, investing in training for laid-off coal miners, and accelerating promising sectors such as local food systems, energy-efficient affordable housing, land and stream restoration, arts and culture, tourism, and renewable energy. On its website in 2018, KFTC defined Just Transition as “a comprehensive effort to support coal communities and workers as we shift away from a fossil fuel economy to one that is more sustainable and equitable” (KFTC, 2018).

One of KFTC’s first large-scale educational gatherings rooted in the Just Transition approach was called Appalachia’s Bright Future. Jerry described this event:

It was in 2013 at KFTC’s Appalachia’s Bright Future conference, which was really our Just Transition conference. We called it that because there was so much doom and gloom in the region. There were just like constant layoffs of hundreds of miners—seemed like one after another. No real efforts being made towards solutions.

During this timeframe, the loss of coal mining jobs was pronounced. Demonstrating that Just Transition alternatives were possible was a key part of KFTC’s approach. By highlighting work that was happening in the region and successes in other areas affected by large-scale economic transitions, KFTC and other allied organizations hoped to generate momentum towards a Just Transition.

By showing existing alternatives, KFTC’s efforts slowly challenged the perception that coal mining employment was essential for Eastern Kentucky to thrive. Chloe Smith, a KFTC member in Floyd County, reflected, “I think a lot of people can’t
imagine another way yet because it’s not something they’ve ever seen…The narrative that we’ve been coal country forever, and we will be coal country forever is going to be a hard one to break.” This indicates that many people believe that coal is the only option for prosperity within the region. This dominant way of thinking required a reimagining on the part of KFTC members in the region what is possible to overcome. Chloe added, “I do try to like gently suggest that there are communities that are making transitions, and they are doing it successfully.” Challenging the hegemonic discourse is embedded in demonstrating that a Just Transition is possible. These grassroots efforts for Just Transition seek to counter that narrative and demonstrating examples where transition has occurred is fundamental.

Additionally, KFTC was deliberate about framing their issues in a way that reflected this proactive approach. This shift was critical because it modified the proposed solutions to the problems within the region. Benford and Snow (2000) defined this as prognostic framing that “involves the articulation of a proposed solution to the problem’ (p. 616). Jerry described, “We did the New Power frame which is really a shift towards…leading with what we’re for and what our values and vision is rather than leading with the problem.” The New Power frame (a term coined by KFTC to describe the shift in language and goals) referred to both grassroots political power as well as energy production. This orientation indirectly challenged the hegemonic discourse and prominence of the coal industry in the Appalachian political economy. The New Power frame also preemptively addressed the counternarrative from the industry that KFTC was pushing to eliminate local jobs. By demonstrating that people could build power locally
and create alternative energy which created jobs, they were focused on their vision, as opposed to solely on what they were trying to challenge.

Just Transition contrasted with the traditional state-sponsored approach to economic development in the region that focused on attracting large-scale manufacturing or other large sources of outside corporate employment. For example, in 2013, an initiative funded by the state government, called Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR), was created to pursue economic diversification. “SOAR itself is a strong reflection of the old way of doing things…it was the same old people whose names you had seen associated with economic development efforts for the last 20 or 30 years,” Jerry, a KFTC staff person, reflected. KFTC sought to pursue a more grassroots orientation to community economic development. Kathy, a KFTC member, said, “It’s [SOAR] all at the top. It’s studies and administration, and by the time it gets down, it’s not creating real jobs. It’s paying people who have jobs already, but it’s not creating a whole lot here in Floyd County.” Although there was limited data about this effort, it was evident that a Just Transition approach was different from this mainstream approach that had often failed in the region. KFTC’s educative work included efforts to highlight how a Just Transition was different from traditional approaches to economic diversification in Eastern Kentucky.

In this section, I described how KFTC’s Just Transition efforts were initially structured. This included Appalachia’s Bright Future, the first major educational event utilizing the Just Transition framework that took place in Harlan County. The importance of demonstrating alternatives and reimagining the region were key to this work. As a
result, KFTC changed how their communication materials were framed. Interviewees also reflected on how Just Transition is different from traditional approaches to economic development, like industrial recruitment within the region. Together, these points support my argument that KFTC’s orientation to their organizing shifted to be more proactive.

**Different Elements of Just Transition**

From my interviews, many people in the region, and within KFTC, were unclear about what the term and concept of Just Transition meant. Joanne, a KFTC member, stated, “And to different people, it means different things because we’ve asked…We hear that a lot.” This lack of a clarity about Just Transition was a theme expressed by a number of people. Carl shared, “A lot of people think of it as just the energy part of it trying to transition into renewable energies and everything, but Just Transition can mean a lot of different things.” He went on to talk about how issues of gay rights could be a part of a Just Transition. Others felt it referred to a way to address climate change. Although there was a lack of clarity about the term and concept, there were some elements that were consistent amongst participants regarding their vision of Just Transition. The three main consistent elements included: collaborating with marginalized people, tackling climate change, and addressing problems from the old economy.

KFTC members emphasized the importance of having a collaborative democratic process to facilitate a Just Transition. The campaign literature described “public leaders who encourage collaboration, reduce polarization, and create a process that allows for meaningful public participation from all walks of life and perspectives” (KFTC, 2013). This language emphasized the inclusion of people who are often left out of conversations,
including young people, women, and unemployed or underemployed individuals. Chloe shared, “My vision for Just Transition is something collaborative. Something that involves the people that will be most affected by climate change.” Kevin also shared that listening to those communities most affected is important, “communities whether that’s Appalachia, whether that’s indigenous communities, communities of color.” This emphasized people from marginalized communities need a voice in the changes that happen through economic transformation.

Haraway (2004) argued for the value of embodied knowledge from subjugated standpoints. This feminist perspective recognizes that direct experiences with injustice produce different ways of knowing. In KFTC, people’s experiences were an important source of understanding and knowing. This reflected embodied learning contributing to KFTC’s members learning. Often, KFTC members would be reminded that they were experts in their own experiences, affirming their voices. Naples (2013) highlighted the importance of praxis that integrates diverse standpoints and different ways of knowing. KFTC recognizes that through those diverse perspectives, their strategies could be strengthened. KFTC’s structure helped to facilitate a democratic process that emphasized being a member-led organization. This orientation also reflects the element of democratizing, described in Table 2 about different definitions of Just Transition. KFTC’s approach to Just Transition reflects a more radical approach to understanding and pursuing Just Transition work.

Just Transition also recognizes that in creating the new economy, there should be efforts to address climate change and to reduce environmental harm. “I would describe a
Just Transition as the process of radically transforming our economy as to not kill the earth in a way that is fair to all impacted communities,” Kevin Short, a KFTC member, shared. Transforming the economy to address environmental and equity issues are important to this vision of Just Transition. Again, KFTC’s approach reflects a more radical definition of Just Transition, as evident in Table 2. This perspective is consistent with Chloe’s perspective, “I think my vision is a way to reduce harm to the earth and to restore as much of the earth as we can in a way that also honors people and their labor and their personhood.” Harm reduction and restoration of the environment are components of Just Transition. In Appalachia’s historical role as an internal periphery in an advanced capitalist economy, extraction of coal maximizes profit by extracting as much surplus value as possible and externalizing environmental costs. By contrast, a Just Transition prioritizes environmental protection. In their descriptions, Kevin and Tracy were specifically referring to addressing climate change as a component of their visions of Just Transition. The desire to address and restore environmental damage was consistent amongst these participants.

Some of the elements of a Just Transition as described by participants included addressing problems from the old economy, including legacy effects of mining, and taking care of workers. “How do we clean up the messes from the past by creating jobs for the future?” Teri reflected. Her perspective included addressing the environmental degradation caused by the coal industry’s efforts to maximize profits resulting in abandoned and/or unclaimed mines. Jerry, a KFTC staff person, went on to share, “It [Just Transition] serves the community and talks a lot about taking care of the workers
who were the victims of the coal economy. So, the transition is not just about what beautiful thing are we going to create.” He added that in a Just Transition, retired and disabled coal miners would have basic benefits and health care. KFTC’s support for Black Lung benefits for former miners, as well as for workers who were denied pay because of the Blackjewel bankruptcy in 2019, reflected the organization’s emphasis of taking care of workers who were victims of the coal economy. The organization recognized the significant amount of damage caused by the coal industry’s prioritization of profit over people, and it invested in addressing those problems as a foundation to build a new economy and create employment.

KFTC members have different interpretations of what Just Transition is. KFTC members and staff also shared reflections on elements regarding how people conceptualize Just Transition that included collaboration, inclusion of marginalized people, environmental remediation, and problem resolution of past economic development. This supports my argument that KFTC’s orientation became more focused on creating proactive solutions, as opposed to simply continuing to challenge injustices caused by the coal industry.

**Coal’s Industry’s Demise: Production Decline (2009-2021)**

Anglin (2016b) stated that the Central Appalachian region is close to a post-coal moment due to reduced international demand, reduced investment in coal from the financial sector, greater recognition of climate change, competition with other countries, and increased demand for other energy sources. This has resulted in coal being less dominant in the region than in previous time periods, the industry framing efforts for
greater environmental protection as a “war on coal,” and the fall-out from Trump’s deregulations. Changes also include private financing moving away from coal due to the fossil fuel divestment movement, which has shifted $7 trillion out of coal, oil, and gas across the globe (Brown & Spiegel, 2019). Additionally, the coal industry and the U.S. Department of Energy have made efforts to develop carbon sequestration that captures the carbon dioxide released from power plants (Freese, 2003).

Foreign exports from the region increased by 16.3 million tons since 2008, yet in 2011, more than half of the Central Appalachian coal was sold for domestic electricity production (McIlmoil et al., 2013). The vulnerability to these market factors vary by county in the Central Appalachian coal basin (McIlmoil et al., 2013). As of 2017, the number of coal mining jobs in Eastern Kentucky was 3,844, which is a drop from 13,679 in 2011; this is reflective of the lowest amount of coal used by utilities in 30 years (Estep, 2017). Many reports indicate that the easily economically-recoverable coal in Central Appalachia has already been mined (McIlmoil et al., 2013; Milici, 2000; Ruppert, 2000).

The coal industry increasingly competes with other forms of energy. Natural gas drilling, due in part to the increase in hydraulic fracturing, has become economically competitive with coal extraction (Perdue & Pavela, 2012). Between 2010 and 2015, 40% of the coal-fired power plants in the United States (200 in total) closed in favor of other sources of energy; many converted to gas (Hansell, 2018). Eastern Kentucky is particularly vulnerable to coal-fired power plant retirements because 12% of total coal production went to power plants retiring in 2011 (McIlmoil et al., 2013). Additionally, new environmental standards, such as the likely forthcoming standards concerning
carbon emissions to address climate change, and restrictions on coal ash disposal, make natural gas drilling an increasingly viable source of energy (Perdue & Pavela, 2012). Other environmental legislation that may influence the cost of coal includes mercury and air toxic standards, greenhouse gas tailoring rule, coal combustion residuals, the Stream Protection Rule, and the EPS involvement with surface coal mine permits (McIlmoil et al., 2013). Ultimately, the low fuel prices for natural gas-fired power plants in comparison to the cost of coal plant production is having the largest impact on coal-fired electric generation (McIlmoil et al., 2013).

Coal is Less Dominate

Many interviewees in my study described how the coal industry is less dominant than it used to be, but there are still different perceptions within the region about whether the coal industry will have a resurgence. This perception is important because it affects people’s openness to economic alternatives. Figure 5 depicts the most recent drop in coal mining employment in the United States, indicating that employment has fallen 42% since 2011, with the largest drop occurring within the Central Appalachian region (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2019). Additionally, more than half of the mines in the region have closed since 2008. Between 2007 and 2012, coal mining employment in Central Appalachia increased slightly due to an increase in underground coal mining, in part because of the legal victories against strip mining by environmental justice organizations in Central Appalachia (Strobo, 2012). According to Energy Information Administration’s (EIA) Annual Coal Report (2019), the coal industry has recently experienced greater competition from natural gas and renewable energy.
Figure 5

U.S. Coal mining Employment by Production Region

Figure 6 illustrates how the use of coal for electricity generation in the U.S. started to decline in 2009, and natural gas outpaced coal as the biggest generator of electricity in 2015. The increase in natural gas consumption resulted from it being considered a cleaner fuel source than coal because it contributes less to greenhouse gases that cause global climate change (Strobo, 2012). Roy Silver, from Harlan County, reflected, “You got cheaper natural gas largely due to fracking and then more competition from other places in the state, nationally and also other countries, like Colombia and China.” For example, coal from the Power River Basin in the Western United States is currently more affordable across the country because it is more plentiful and easily accessible (Strobo, 2012).
Also, coal reserves were depleted in Eastern Kentucky, which now necessitate thinner seams of coal to be mined, resulting in higher costs (Strobo, 2012). Roy reflected how this has played out locally:

On the ground, you see declining permit applications… Some that we challenged have been withdrawn because there is just not the market to sell the coal. Then, you have the more extreme cases like the Revelation Coal that screwed people by basically going in cutting corners, not paying their bills, and then not paying their workers.

Roy’s perspective illustrates the numerous factors influencing the reduced market share of Appalachian coal, including the national and global energy economies. To save money, some companies have been externalizing costs onto employees or not obeying health and safety as well as environmental laws. Additionally, there has been a significant
increase in coal company bankruptcies during this period. As one example, the nation’s second largest coal company, Alpha Natural Resources, filed for bankruptcy in 2015; this resulted in lay-offs of 6,500 employees and closed eighty mines since 2011 (Stoll, 2017).

Historically, there were booms and busts in the coal cycle, (Montrie, 2003) and people in the region often correctly assumed that the industry would come back. However, this perspective within the region appears to be evolving. As part of the perspective-shift, the changes during the last five years have also shaped how KFTC’s approach to its education related to Just Transition initiatives. Jerry, KFTC staff person, reflected that people in the region are recently more likely to share negative opinions about the coal industry or discuss the legacy impacts of coal, “I do not think it’s as bad as it used to be or as pervasive… Coal is just not as present to manipulate and control, dominate conversations.” Jerry felt that the power of the coal industry had recently declined, noting that people used to be more guarded about any negative opinions they shared about coal but now share them more freely. Puckett et al. (2012) argued that local public spaces where people can express their dismay about mountaintop removal was limited due to fear that such sentiments might be perceived as “anti-coal.” Randy Wilson reflected on how people in the region are more open to talking about Just Transition efforts because coal employment has declined so much. “People were so resistant to anything else, but hell there’s, it’s just not here” Randy reflected. He attributed the decline in opposition to alternatives to the lack of employment in coal mining, noting that coal mining is “just not here.”
One of KFTC’s educational goals was to communicate to people in the region that coal is a finite resource which is declining. Carl shared how difficult pushing for renewable energy in his local community was:

The mayor and several of the councils that they were just totally against what we were trying to do. They were saying that we were going to shut down coal mining and all this stuff… All we were trying to do was tell them…what was ahead. You know that coal was going out of here in a few years.

This reflection related to an initiative KFTC created in Benham related to Just Transition. Any local effort to highlight the value of renewable energy was met with disdain because of its potential impact on the coal industry. KFTC members were specifically trying to educate the community that the decline of the coal industry was caused by the reduced amount of economically recoverable coal, as opposed to their efforts related to environmental protections.

Other KFTC members perceived that some people in the region still think the coal industry is going to come back. This is relevant because many people within Appalachia are still loyal to the industry. For example, Stanley shared:

Coal is still, even though it’s on rock bottom right now, it’s still their number one priority for most people around here where I live, even though you got these little fly-by-night coal companies, like Blackjewel, that done the miners the way they did about stealing money out of their bank accounts.

Stanley was referring to the coal company that went bankrupt in July 2019; Roy also spoke about Revelation Coal, a subsidiary of the same company. He indicated that even
though there was little employment in the industry and people were experiencing poor working conditions, many people remained loyal to the industry. Therefore, this continued to be something that KFTC members needed to respond to in their educative work.

KFTC members felt the federal elections in 2012 and 2016 indicated that various people in the region recognized the coal industry was not going to have a resurgence. One participant indicated that they felt like people in the region accepted the end of coal industry’s prominence after Obama was reelected in 2012. Jerry reflected, “I think it was probably for the wrong reasons, but I think when President Obama won re-election …There was a kind of concession, a mental concession that, coal is not going to come back.” This perspective seemed surprising because of how the 2016 Trump presidential campaign engaged with the region.

*Challenging the perception of Obama’s So-Called “War on Coal” (2009-2016)*

President Obama’s administration attempted to hold the coal industry more accountable for the negative effects of mountaintop removal mining than the previous administration, but KFTC and other organizations in The Alliance for Appalachia argued that the situation did not ultimately change. Strobo (2012) described the Environmental Protection Agency’s announcement in September 2009 communicating that it would be coordinating with the Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of Interior to revisit 79 Section 404 of the Clean Water Act permits related to valley fills. This resulted in one permit being revoked and a new interim guidance memorandum related to conductivity
standards, a measure of ions in the water and indicator of pollution, being established downstream of valley fills. The final guidance was issued in July 2011 (Strobo, 2012).

The industry propagated a narrative that government overreach and extreme environmentalists conflicted with the American hero, the coal miner. This trope integrated and conflated the interests of workers and coal companies and cast government entities as enemies. (Ryerson, 2020). To this end, the coal industry used hegemonic masculinity to galvanize opposition against stronger environmental protections. The Office of Inspector General’s review confirmed that there was some delay in permitting due to the EPA’s involvement, which was fuel for the coal industry’s assertion that Obama’s administration was engaging in a “war on coal” (Lowry, 2011). However, the state agencies responsible did not enforce limits even though the new restrictions was upheld in numerous court cases (Kuykendall, 2014).

As a result, the coal industry’s language claiming there was a “war on coal” magnified polarization within Appalachian communities. In addition, the industry’s discourse used masculine imagery to dissuade state action against mountaintop removal mining and valley fills. In other words, any proposed regulations to strengthen environmental protection was an attack on miners and hegemonic masculinity. I would argue that the industry’s use of the language of war, attacks, and fighting reaffirmed the importance and role of hegemonic masculinity to the survival of Appalachian communities. As a result, the coal industry sought to demonize KFTC activists and other environmental justice social movement organizations within the region. Through the
strategic use of hegemonic masculine discourse, the prospects of environmental justice and a Just Transition became even more difficult to obtain.

In 2014, the EPA published a rule under the Clean Air Act called the Clean Power Plan to establish a reduction of carbon dioxide to 30% below 2005 levels by 2030 for the United States Power sector to mitigate anthropogenic climate change (Carbonell, 2015). The industry consistently responded to any claim for stronger environmental protections as Obama’s “war on coal” (Houser et al., 2017). However, Houser et al. (2017) argued that environmental regulations only accounted for 3.5% of the drop in U.S. coal production. In other words, other factors played a more significant role in the reduction in coal production and use.

Although KFTC was increasingly trying to focus on solutions, the coal industry’s offensive measures meant that KFTC needed to continue to evaluate and change their efforts in order to respond to the coal industry. Through their public relations efforts, the coal industry attempted to propagate the perspective that the decline in coal production was due to environmental regulations, as opposed to examining and communicating factual information about the global political economy of coal. KFTC members directly challenged the idea of the “War on Coal” through their organizing efforts. An example is an opinion piece from one of the KFTC members on their organizational blog that included:

Instead of insisting that the Clean Water Act be enforced, [U.S. Representative] Hal Rogers attacks the EPA and blames environmental regulators for the loss of coal jobs…There is no “War on Coal”, there is a war on the people and land of
Appalachia, and I occupied Roger’s office to demand that he do something about it, now. (Henson, n.d., as cited by KFTC, n.d.).

This person wanted people to know that her Congressional representative was failing to ensure enforcement of existing laws and to address environmental devastation. As a result, a group of KFTC members staged a nonviolent sit-in in the representative’s office.

This person also claimed that regulations were not the cause of the decline of the coal industry. Teri Blanton reflected “The supposed ‘War on Coal,’ which never really happened…there was not a damn thing that he [President Obama] either passed or did anything that actually went through because it was either stopped by litigation or stopped by Congress; so nothing really changed.” Teri was specifically referencing the EPA guidance that would have limited the conductivity level in streams below surface mining permits. Because the EPA did not go through the formal rule-making process a federal judge halted the implementation of this rule (National Mining Association v. EPA, 2012).

The coal industry public relations campaign sought to divert responsibility to follow the laws as well as prevent increased regulation of their extraction practices.

So-called Trump Country (2016-present)

Pai, Kathryn, & Zerriffti (2020) found that four key coal-producing states, Kentucky, West Virginia, Wyoming, and Pennsylvania, received 30% more votes for Trump than Clinton during the presidential election in 2016, which they suspected was due to the Trump’s promise to bring coal jobs back. Catte’s (2018) book, What you are getting wrong about Appalachia effectively articulated the construction by the media of the “Trump Country genre” as another example of a long history of “Othering” of
Appalachia, that “reduce voters to a series of caricatures and stereotypes” (p. 31). A key piece missing from this analysis is that Democratic Presidential Candidate Bernie Sanders won 50% of the vote and won every county in West Virginia’s primary. Additionally, the region also had one of the highest rates of non-participation in the election compared to other regions, which could be an indicator of lack of trust and disinterest in national politics (Gaventa, 2019).

The key misstep that Democratic Presidential Candidate Hilary Clinton made during the campaign was in March 2016 when she stated, “And we’re going to put a lot of coal miners and coal companies out of business, right?” (Catte, 2018). The Trump campaign effectively took this part of her comment, which was part of a statement she made related to economic transition in Appalachia, out of context and turned it into a threat to workers (Catte, 2018). Brown and Spiegel (2019) argued that U.S. president Trump’s rhetoric related to leaving the 2015 United Nations’ Paris Climate Accord, which was a legally-binding international treaty requiring action to reduce climate change, was more about manipulating the debate than about coal job generation.

KFTC members felt like President Trump’s unfulfilled promises were an important indicator to others in the region that the coal industry was not going to be revived. Randy, a KFTC member, reflected:

I think when Trump came along and promised that he would revive the coal industry, and I think that there was a lot of people hoped that he would, but I’m not sure they any longer had the expectation that he would or that he could have…And of course he hasn’t done anything.
Since Trump, as a presidential candidate, was so vocally in support of the coal miners, the lack of subsequent job creation was an indicator to some in the region that the coal industry was not going to return in any substantial capacity. This was probably particularly the case because the Trump administration did eliminate regulations related to the environment and worker health and safety, yet coal employment continued to decline. However, others felt that other local people and some politicians continued to emphasize the prospects of a coal industry revival. As evident on their website, KFTC shared information from utility companies and other non-progressive sources that the demand for coal was declining in comparison to other sources of energy regardless of who was elected (KFTC, 2008).

Following the election, KFTC educated their members about the pro-fossil fuel actions of Trump’s appointees—Scott Pruitt to head the EPA, and Wilbur Ross as Secretary of the Department of Commerce. KFTC encouraged members to contact their elected officials to block their nominations. KFTC also highlighted the detrimental effects of Trump’s actions to eliminate environmental protections related to coal mining and climate change, like replacing the Clean Power Plan and leaving the Paris Accord through their newsletter and website (KFTC, 2017). Their educational work often affirmed that protecting people’s health and safety was not the cause of declining coal mining employment. The sociocultural context in the region shaped KFTC’s educational practices because KFTC members needed to gain the confidence to respond to perspectives within the region.
In the following sections, I analyze how KFTC adapted to these changes between 2008 to 2021 by first looking at the global connections they attempted to promote, the critiques of Just Transition that began to emerge, and the major initiatives of KFTC in the contemporary context.

KFTC Making Global Connections (2008-2021)

Since 2008, there has also been an increasing effort within KFTC’s educational practices to increase understanding about the global impact of the coal industry and fossil fuels. This has included connecting KFTC members with people affected by the life cycle of coal, including other communities affected by coal extraction in Colombia, and communicating about the impact of fossil fuels through the Climate Justice Alliance. They also focused educational efforts on various global economic factors, influencing the decline in coal’s competitiveness. Teri stated:

It’s actually learning about the global impacts, and looking at, changing their worldview…It’s not just a survival mode in this one devastating economy, but it’s how to look at things through the worldview and realize that on the whole scope of things, everything’s changing.

This reflects the recognition KFTC has been focused on a larger context for understanding the impact of the coal industry, including global climate change and coal as a finite resource.

The organization also communicated about the changing role of the coal industry in the global energy landscape through its educational efforts. This included sharing information on their blog and newsletter about how natural gas was overtaking coal as the
primary source of energy in 2016 (Lacey, 2012). Teri shared one of the areas of education consists of “helping people to understand that, you know, coal is no longer the dominating factor in the energy sector.” I argue that this recognizes that the region is part of the internal periphery within a core country in the world system. Wallerstein (2004) described the relationship between peripheral and core counties within the capitalist world economy. Extraction of raw materials, like coal, creates dependency and uneven capitalist development much like peripheral countries (Walls, 1978). The depletion of easily-extractable coal in Appalachia, and the advancement of natural gas and renewable energy technologies has resulted in other sources of energy becoming more economical in the global economy. A former coal miner Scott Shoupe added:

Coal is a market-driven business, and if you look back on the history of it, all it has done had declined…it’s had its peaks up and down, but if you look at coal from a history standpoint, the decline is down….People don’t look at the facts of its ending.

Scott’s reflection further demonstrates that KFTC members understand that coal mining is not a renewable resource and will not be economically feasible. Several other interviewees also reflected that they try to increase understanding in the region by communicating that coal is a finite resource which is diminishing.

KFTC and Witness for Peace worked together on an exchange program in 2008-2009, sending small delegations of their memberships to the coal-producing regions in Central Appalachia and Colombia, South America. Union coal miners from Colombia spent two weeks in Eastern Kentucky and West Virginia sharing stories with community
activists. Several KFTC members also visited Colombia for a few weeks. These experiences expanded participants’ consciousness and affected their approach to organizing. According to KFTC’s website, these exchanges enabled participants to learn from each other about the impact coal mining was having on their communities and explore how they can work to be in solidarity to hold corporations accountable to human rights. Participants in the exchange indicated that they better understood “the global and systemic nature of the problems their communities faced” (Chomsky & Berry, 2012, p. 264). This was evident in KFTC member Randy’s reflections about participating in the Colombian exchange:

> When we went to Colombia and that was, you know, I [was] pretty charged up after that, seeing what they were up against there and their spirits… It just made me understand the global connections with coal and energy and who was affected.

The process of engaging with people from another region also devastated by the coal industry helped him better understand the life cycle of coal and the impact the industry was having on communities in other parts of the world. Chomsky and Berry (2012) found that the union members from Colombia were astounded when hearing about the devastation in Eastern Kentucky in the United States, which they felt was worse than in their country. Both KFTC members and Colombian union activists recognized that they were in the same web of global relationships. Some Kentuckians also shared that the working conditions and violence the Colombian miners experienced reminded them of the local labor history. However, KFTC members also found that in recent years the
UMWA has been more timid and more willing to make concessions, as was evident in their unwillingness to take a position against mountaintop removal mining in an effort to protect coal mining jobs. These exchanges also helped KFTC members connect their work to the climate change movement.

**Critiques of Just Transition**

Some KFTC members critiqued some aspects of the organization’s initial Just Transition vision. One critique resulted in expanding the focus of the work to include others beyond coal miners affected by this economic transition. KFTC members also broadened their Just Transition work beyond the coal mining portions of the state. Interview participants described how education on the Just Transition framework was difficult to elucidate.

There was a recognition that the focus should not just be on coal miners who were displaced due to the drop in coal mining employment. For example, Teri reflected:

> I think as we move forward with Just Transition, we not only think about the coal miners, but we think about the working single mothers, or the working poor all together. And it’s not just the few that had the job in the coal mines, but other people that should benefit also with wages that’s not just minimum wage jobs.

I argue that Teri’s perspective reflects a feminist critique of Just Transition’s primary focus on coal miners, which highlights the need to address the lack of living wage for many people within the region. Scott (2010) stated that coal mining is considered primarily a masculine job that enables the miner to be the provider or breadwinner. Very few women have historically been coal miners, and the difficult physical labor of coal
mining was considered highly valued as opposed to the invisible labor that women contributed to the household.

However, many people in the region do not reflect heteronormative relations of economic security, which consist of a primary breadwinner. As a result, people have struggled economically regardless of the coal mining employment in the region. Teri Blanton added, “There’s a lot of shadow people that need to be included in this Just Transition.” She indicated that there were many people who currently struggle economically; yet, their challenges would remain unseen and unaddressed if there was not more comprehensive way of addressing the economic inequality. Scott (2010) stated, “The habitual focus on mining as the only work that matters in the coalfields erases the paid and unpaid work that women do to support their families and consequently affirms the community’s identification with coal” (p. 75).

Furthermore, the Appalachian region has historically had high rates of poverty, and there is a need to address all the individuals struggling. Anglin (2016a) stated that primarily focusing on the coal-based economy focuses on a subsection of workers including primarily white, native-born, and male labor force, which becomes the history of Appalachia (emphasis in original). Expanding its focus to include people beyond coal workers was a necessary evolution of KFTC’s Just Transition framework. KFTC’s framework for Just Transition evolved to use more inclusive language; however, identifying how to actualize their goals has been difficult.

Just Transition for KFTC also evolved to include a statewide focus within the organization. This included recognition that communities of color in urban areas were
also negatively affected by the extractive economy. Kevin Short, KFTC member, reflected on Louisville, saying, “West Louisville, it was basically the dumping ground for a lot of companies…a more Black community than the rest of Louisville.” Kevin’s perspective highlighted the similarities between the working-class, primarily (but not solely) white communities in Appalachia and the Black communities in Louisville who were struggling with different aspects of the life cycle of coal and extractive economies more broadly. Although the organization worked to be in solidarity with those communities throughout its history, KFTC did not initially refer to that work as Just Transition. Additionally, KFTC members revisited their main Just Transition document in 2020 through the Empower Kentucky Leadership Network and concluded that it did not adequately center people of color. This spurred the organization to create a work team to create a “open, inclusive, transparent process to update and affirm a broadly shared description of our Just Transition vision, principles and platform” (KFTC, 2020).

In response to some members’ critiques of Just Transition, KFTC broadened its focus of Just Transition. Table 7 highlights some of the shifts over time. By expanding the geographic focus of Just Transition to include areas beyond the coal-producing regions of the state, the organization more explicitly recognized the whole state as affected by these economic changes. Additionally, a range of workers were included in the revised focus, not just coal miners. Also, the initial focus on changes in the energy infrastructure broadened to include a range of social justice issues. KFTC’s recent definition Just Transition was “an all-in, inclusive, and place-based process to build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative one”
Through their team focused on Just Transition, KFTC leaders plan to create a formal process to redefine what Just Transition means for their work.

**Table 7**

*Evolution of KFTC’s Just Transition Framework*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As of 2013 Original Framework</th>
<th>Geographic Focus</th>
<th>Types of Workers to Aid</th>
<th>Focus of Organizational Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Kentucky</td>
<td>Coal miners</td>
<td>Clean energy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 2017 Changes</td>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>All workers who have struggled to find a living wage job</td>
<td>Inclusive of a variety of social justice issues, including addressing discrimination and climate justice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, the term and concept of Just Transition can be difficult for KFTC members to talk about within the region. Chris Woolerly, KFTC member, reflected:

> So really, I think it’s a useful frame, but when we’re talking to folks on the ground, we don’t, I mean, it just kind of gets…it can get in the way…Really, it’s just about empowering and enabling people to grab a hold of these market forces, take advantage of them, instead of getting stepped on.

This quote highlighted the degree to which conversations could be challenging because the terminology was not necessarily accessible. He indicated that the framing of Just Transition was important but also could be a barrier toward fruitful dialogue.

Some of the organization’s educational work focused on creating space for KFTC members to reflect on what was meant by the term Just Transition. “I think people are afraid of false solutions…and so some of them, like, prickle at the words ‘Just Transition’ because they don’t know if we’re just using a buzzword, or we really mean this to be
just,” Chloe Smith, a KFTC member, said. In other words, some community members felt that it was not possible to replace coal jobs with living-wage jobs. That skepticism was evident in much of the UMWA President Cecil Roberts’ reaction to Just Transition. The challenge was that the rate of market shift and related coal employment job loss outpaced the efforts to transition the economy. Therefore, Kentuckians sometimes associated the term Just Transition with the elimination of jobs.

During the Empower Kentucky Leadership Network face-to-face gathering, the participants spent time discussing what Just Transition was due to the lack of understanding among some KFTC members. Kathy, a KFTC member who recently became involved again, shared:

I equated the term Just Transition with turning off the spigot, not re-piping the house… It was a very negative term for me. People helped me work through the term to understand that the reason they said Just Transition is because the situation at that time was unjust.

Kathy made the analogy of plumbing being turned off because the abrupt loss of coal mining jobs in her community outpaced the creation of new jobs. She stated that she did not previously connect the term to the existing oppression within the region related to concentration of land ownership, role of the coal industry, political decisions, and corporate interests. She reflected to ten years before there was substantial animosity locally related to KFTC’s anti-mountaintop removal campaign and the proactive work was just starting; she did not feel like there were adequate plans related to how the transition was to happen. Ryerson (2020) made a similar argument that in a choice
between a precarious but known reality of coal mining and an abstraction, a precarious reality wins. As a result, some people within the region have blamed organizations like KFTC for supporting processes to create new opportunities rather than citing shifts in the global political economy of coal for the decline of coal mining jobs.

KFTC Today

Although KFTC’s Just Transition efforts consisted of attempts to move beyond the coal industry, I argue that the legacy of coal mining continued to shape how KFTC members viewed themselves and the strategy they pursued. Much of the current Just Transition strategy being pursued by KFTC within Eastern Kentucky focuses on the legacy damage caused by the coal industry and acknowledges the importance of coal’s history of the region. This includes pushing for federal legislation. There is also a continued emphasis on energy production but with a focus on renewable energy and energy efficiency. The organization has also become more engaged with elections over time to support candidates invested in Just Transition and other progressive issues.

Identity

The culture of coal is certainly not as dominant as it used to be in the region, but the loss of identity associated with the coal economy’s decline within Central Appalachia shapes KFTC’s Just Transition efforts. For example, Kathy Curtis, a KFTC member, shared this sentiment, “It wasn’t that they were coal miners themselves, but the region identified with coal, and this is where I’m from.” In other words, working in the coal industry was more than a job; the hegemonic masculinity associated with coal mining became a part of the region’s identity. Scott (2007) described the cultural weight of being
a coal miner who earns a family wage, which equated men to breadwinners and
providers; communities often identify with men’s work. As a result, the region’s cultural
identity with coal mining has a bearing on what people think is possible.

Interview participants pointedly acknowledged that many people in the region are
grieving a loss. Kathy went on to say, “I think there’s a lot of grief there, again, with that
identity of who we are. It’s like, ‘They’ve taken our identity away.’” “They being the
powers that be, whether it’s Obama or the EPA or KFTC.” Lewin (2017) also found that
many people within the region blamed the EPA and President Obama for the shutting
down of coal mines because of some new proposed regulations. The coal industry
strategically blamed the decline in the industry employment and the loss of hegemonic
masculinity on institutions and environmental groups in order to provoke a lot of
community hostility toward them.

Many people in the region fail to recognize other factors which contributed to the
downturn of coal mining within the region, like the comparative advantage of natural gas
as a different source of energy. Carley et al. (2018) also found that residents of
Appalachia experienced a sense of grief and have struggled to create a new conception of
self. Jerry Hardt, KFTC staff person, stated, “Coal, for better or worse, defined the way
that we thought about ourselves, thought about the region, thought about for a lot of folks
who we were as individuals. And I think it’s probably important to replace that.” Figuring
out how to bolster a new regional identity is an important part of the process of creating a
Just Transition. As a result, KFTC sought to demonstrate successful examples of Just
Transition and communicate other assets within the region like the mountain culture.
Connecting employment in the coal industry to the region’s way of life or to identity has bolstered coal’s cultural hegemony, and thereby created a barrier to be able to envision alternative options for the region. Kevin described the challenge, “People saw wanting to transition out of coal as an attack on our values because by connecting coal to our values, they make it part of our values and attaching that as attacking all of Kentucky, all of West Virginia, all of Appalachia.” The coal industry propaganda used hegemonic masculinity to bolster this community identity connection and conflate the industry with the miners. To counter that, KFTC members sought to distinguish themselves as being opposed to certain practices, rather than being “anti-miner.” Chloe shared, “I have coal miners in my family as well, and I’m never anti-miner.” An important part of KFTC’s educative work included distancing the organization from being seen as anti-coal by acknowledging the important role the industry has played in the region in campaign literature. KFTC members often would acknowledge their connection to the industry when talking about the need for reform.

KFTC also has uplifted some aspects of coal’s history as it advocates for Just Transition. For example, KFTC often has former coal miners as spokespeople. “KFTC organizes not around that, through it… We see that there is a mindset that coal is important to people and by organizing with past miners…we show people that we’re working with the impacted communities,” Kevin Short reflected. I argue that having former coal miners as KFTC spokespeople plays an important role in Just Transition by challenging the perception that coal mining is the region’s only identity. By highlighting both White and Black former coal miners advocating to stop mountaintop removal and
pushing for renewable energy, KFTC acknowledged the pride people have with coal miners in the region while challenging the coal industry’s hegemony.

Having male former coal miners as prominent spokespeople for Just Transition and environmental justice is particularly interesting because this contrasts with the research documenting the predominate role women in Appalachia have played in the anti-strip mining and anti-mountaintop removal movements (Bell, 2013, 2016; Bingman, 1993; McNeil, 2011). For example, Bell (2016) argued that fewer men are involved with the environmental justice movement due to the loyalty they have with the coal industry and “a strong culture of silence” due to a fear of losing status with other men in the community for taking a critical stance on the coal industry (p. 83). By contrast, many of the men who participated in my study were former coal miners and had been actively involved with the union; therefore, it would be difficult for other community members to argue their legitimacy to speak against the coal industry.

Additionally, highlighting the role of former coal miners is evident in KFTC’s campaign literature, like in the “Visions from Black Mountain” document from 2010 where residents reflected on the opportunities and challenges in the region and acknowledged the pride related to their connection to coal industry. This document included reflections from several former miners. One person featured who was a former coal miner stated:

Coal mining is going to be around for a while yet here in the mountains. It’s part of our history and our present. But the industry is about played out, and we can’t let it rob us of our future.
Literature like this clearly demonstrated that KFTC recognized the importance of coal mining, which is a gendered form of employment since very few women have been coal miners. This is similar to what Beckwith (2001) described as the UMWA’s gender reframing of mining masculinities to engage in nonviolent resistance in the Pittston Coal Strike in 1989-90. In other words, KFTC challenged the hegemony of the coal industry through gender reframing mining masculinity that supports renewable energy. Having former coal miners at the forefront of a Just Transition has symbolic power related to the region’s history.

Beyond the region’s identity with coal, there are larger redefinitions that need to be realized to create a sustainable future in the region. Jerry stated, “But I don’t know if Eastern Kentucky, I’ll say, has a self-image beyond the image that we’re Appalachia, and we’re poor, and we’re the neglected part of the state—and all those negatives that are historic and even go beyond coal.” This perception of Appalachia in the United States as a backwards or ignorant “Other” (Fisher & Smith, 2012) goes beyond the connection with the coal industry and also needs to be redefined for Central Appalachia to continue to be on the periphery of the economy.

**Legacy Impacts of Coal**

In addition to the ongoing challenging of the loss of regional identity associated with coal mining, some of KFTC’s Just Transition work focused on addressing legacy impacts of the coal industry. As reflected by KFTC members and as evident in the organizational materials, there has been a focus on advocating for federal pieces of legislation, including the RECLAIM Act and the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund.
Recent coal company bankruptcies have also resulted in opportunities for KFTC to highlight the importance of a Just Transition and to address legacy effects of the coal industry. Jerry Hardt, KFTC staff person, reflected, “So all of that recognizes who has been most impacted by our past economy and who need and deserve some support.” His statement shows the need to address previous damage done by coal mines through the reclamation process, which seeks to mitigate the damage caused by previous mining practices and ensure that former coal miners have access to the Black Lung benefits.

Some of KFTC’s campaign literature titled, “Fixing What’s Broke: Why Congress must support a Just Transition for miners with black lung and their communities” described different legislative initiatives that would address these legacy effects of the coal industry. Some of the legacy impacts of the coal industry that KFTC tackled as a part of their Just Transition initiatives consisted of federal legislative campaigns focused on garnering resources to reclaim abandoned mines, ensuring the solvency of Black Lung benefits, and addressing the negative fall-out from coal company bankruptcies on the environment and former coal miners.

The RECLAIM Act would accelerate the release of $1 billion over five years for reclamation projects that are connected to economic and community development on or near old mine sites (KFTC, 2015). KFTC is a part of coalition of groups who are organizing in support of this federal legislation. The funds would be distributed over 20 states that have abandoned mines in the United States. “The RECLAIM bill really gives you a little bit of hope that maybe they can use that to clean up the messes from the past while creating jobs for the future,” Teri reflected. Additional legislative organizing
efforts focused on restoring the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund, a fee paid on coal production to pay for benefits and health for miners and surviving dependents (KFTC, 2015). KFTC worked in conjunction with allied organizations to support these legislative campaigns. KFTC’s materials included language like, “It’s time to do right by our miners and their communities.” Their language acknowledged the important role coal mining has played in the region while also calling for action to address problems caused by it.

In addition, there has been an increase in coal company bankruptcies in recent years. The bankruptcy of Blackjewel Mining company in 2019 resulted in laid off coal miners engaging in a blockade of the railroad tracks after their last paychecks bounced. The blockade prevented the coal train from the mine site from leaving the area. KFTC’s involvement was in solidarity with the coal miners’ efforts and ensured that the environmental liabilities were addressed. Kathy reflected, “There was so much pride locally and the fact that these guys were standing up for themselves, that they wanted to be miners. They were miners. They did a good job. They deserved to be paid.” Many people within the region were aware of this particular bankruptcy case because there was widespread media coverage of the blockade. KFTC sought to broaden people’s understanding about the environmental impacts of this particular situation and to identify ways to be supportive of the miners. They also expanded the public dialogue to explore the environmental ramifications on the region of the bankruptcies.

According to KFTC’s newsletter, 149 of the 213 Blackjewel mining permits in Kentucky were not transferred to a new company, which made the state responsible for their clean up. The fact that no companies took over the majority of this bankrupt
companies’ former mining permits caused KFTC to join other organizations to intervene in the bankruptcy proceedings.

**Continued Focus on Energy**

There continued to be a focus on energy in KFTC’s efforts around Just Transition. This focus included efforts which pushed for energy alternatives ranging from pushing for reform in the rural electric cooperatives, supporting local energy projects, creating a state-level energy plan, and (starting in 2018) supporting a Green New Deal. The Green New Deal is a large-scale industrial and economic mobilization to decarbonize the United States economy by 2030 while addressing structural inequality by guaranteeing a family wage, adequate medical leave, high-quality health care, affordable housing, economic security, and a clean environment (Galvin & Healy, 2020). By pushing for a Green New Deal, KFTC’s support maintains the organization’s focus on energy due to the Green New Deal’s investment in energy efficiency upgrades and meeting power needs through renewable energy.

KFTC’s efforts included engagement with efforts at the local, state, and national levels. Scott Shoupe, a KFTC member and former deep miner, reflected, “This area’s always been a coal producer and been known and recognized for being a world player in energy production… I foresee that we could continue that same trend here but with renewables, with solar.” Maintaining this connection to energy production is something that other KFTC members have indicated they want the organization to continue. Scott received training through an allied organization, Mountain Association, and now has a small business as a renewable energy installer. KFTC members engaged with organizing
around the Green New Deal in various ways. A KFTC facilitator, Lisa Abbott, of the Empower Kentucky Network Training shared about this work:

We didn’t call [it] the Green New Deal at that time, that phrase wasn’t on the table, but the ideas that we were after wholly consistent I think with the Green New Deal. How do we shape a Just Transition to a clean energy economy in Kentucky that prioritizes racial justice, that prioritizes the creation of good jobs, that helps people afford their energy bills, and, better yet, own their energy system?

In other words, KFTC members had been working on activities that could be under the banner of the Green New Deal for over a decade. Their goals emphasized clean energy, living wage jobs that protect people’s health, and addressing inequality.

The Green New Deal’s emergence as a national policy brought greater attention to KFTC’s goals that they had been engaged in for a long time. KFTC incorporated the language of The Green New Deal into their work and created new collaborations at the national level as a result. This included several KFTC members and other citizen activists meeting with U.S. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who introduced the resolution into Congress in 2019. Members also participated in a multi-state Green New Deal tour and had local educational events about the policy.

KFTC has also engaged with allies from across the country through the Climate Justice Alliance. This included the largest march on the West Coast about climate change. Kevin Short, a KFTC member, shared about a gathering:

We were protesting a climate summit… If you’re inviting Shell to this meeting,
it’s not a meeting to see what you can radically do to transform the economy and to save the earth…unless you wanted to talk real solutions and actually get impacted communities in that meeting, we’re not going to be here for it.

Kevin reflected the perspective that “real solutions” to the climate crisis could not be addressed by continuing to burn fossil fuels. People within KFTC worked to ensure that climate solutions engage the people who are directly affected by fossil fuels. They recognized that grassroots participation is key to addressing structural roots to the climate change problems.

**Engagement with Elections**

The increased focus on voter registration and engagement was evident in KFTC’s educational efforts and the informal learning in recent years. “These days where all the legislation that moves is bad legislation, it seems,” said Jerry Hardt, KFTC staff. The “bad legislation” he mentioned related to KFTC’s political analysis of the conservative shift in the state legislature. This conservative shift reflected, but was not limited to, the influence of the coal industry in who was being elected. Jerry indicated that part of the shift happened in 2016. As a result, legislation KFTC has advocated for has not moved, and the organization has spent a lot of time trying to block problematic legislation.

KFTC members described various small-scale, grassroots community development efforts happening around Just Transition, but they also expressed that is limited and varies across the region. To illustrate, throughout Southeastern Kentucky efforts are occurring to build on local communities’ assets and create small businesses and opportunities for young people to stay in the region. For example, Benham,
Cumberland, and Lynch in Harlan County has developed a multi-pronged approach to increase cultural and nature-based tourism; this is evident through the Benham Schoolhouse Inn, the Kentucky Coal Mining Museum, Portal 31 Exhibition Coal Mine, and Black Mountain-based adventure tourism.

I would argue that regardless of whether or not these efforts are described as Just Transition initiatives, they are occurring throughout the region despite a lack of or limited amount of government support. “It’s [Just Transition] happening. It’s just not…we don’t have the right leadership to really get it up to another level” Randy reflected. A lack of political will to garner large-scale resources has been one of the key barriers to Just Transition efforts. Kathy shared, “Elections is a really great way to help to encourage people to take back some of their own power.” KFTC members have recognized that one way to collectively demonstrate power can be through elections. Engagement with elections was evident in their trainings, website, and newsletter. This focus on greater engagement in elections is consistent with the goal of democratization as part of the definition of Just Transition in Table 2.

Efforts to engage in local elections were also relevant to KFTC’s Just Transition work. These election efforts were key to making progress on some of the local Just Transition goals within the community of Benham. “We’ve been trying to get people that we know that are on our side to run for office…. try to get elected to where you would have at least a voice” Carl reflected. When the local KFTC chapter was working on developing the community energy project, the local city council was not open to the chapter’s ideas. “That was our first duty to get those daggone people that were totally
against us out of office and get some people in these smaller offices and these community office and county offices that we could work with.” He talked about being elected to the local city council and later appointed to the Benham Power Board. Wanda Humphrey, who was also a KFTC member, was appointed as the mayor of Benham after challenging a violation of the open meetings law when the previous mayor resigned and tried to have his wife appointed.

Another important element of the local organizing efforts was to correct the undue influence of the mayor by separating the power board out of the city finances. Participating in these official capacities on the city council and on the Benham Power Board also enabled KFTC members to start locally pursuing renewable energy. “I think it is critical for people to get engaged in their communities in a variety of levels typically in little mountain communities… Share a different way to approach problems in the community” reflected Roy Silver, who became the chair of the Benham Power Board. This political engagement enabled organization members to engage in their work in new ways. KFTC’s engagement with elections has been an important strategy related to the Just Transition work.

**Conclusion**

Much of the organization’s initial focus within Eastern Kentucky consisted of holding the coal industry accountable to laws that would affect the community. The historical disregard of the coal industry in the region spurred KFTC members to learn their rights within the law and to push for reforms related to coal mining. This learning
occurred through non-formal education as well as through informal learning that was evident through engagement in the community of practice.

Over time, the orientation of KFTC’s work shifted to be more proactive and explicit to challenge the hegemony and devastation of the coal industry. Because the coal industry blamed regulations for the loss of jobs, KFTC expanded its educational work to highlight the global political economy of coal. These efforts included connecting KFTC members with other communities directly affected by fossil fuels nationally and internationally. As the coal industry declined, Just Transition became a larger part of KFTC’s work. In response, the coal industry used hegemonic masculinity to bolster the connection between the community and coal. KFTC acknowledged and highlighted some aspects of that history while reframing gender in mining masculinities and pivoting towards Just Transition within its educational efforts.

Part of KFTC’s Just Transition work involved addressing problems from the legacy of the coal industry through reclaiming abandoned mines and ensuring former miners have adequate benefits. Their related educational work has included increasing awareness about federal pieces of legislation being advocated for and guidance for how to engage in citizen lobbying. Just Transition is much broader than clean energy production, but KFTC has continued to focus on energy, particularly clean energy, within its work. KFTC has facilitated learning about clean energy options through non-formal education and through informal learning by engaging with Just Transition initiatives. In addition, organizing to have more progressive elected officials has also become a greater focus of the organizational work, in hopes that KFTC’s issue-based work will gain
greater traction. The coal industry historically shaped KFTC’s efforts through their defensive efforts against the abuses of the industry. The industry continues to influence KFTC even as the organization shifts to be more proactive and move past a focus on coal in its work.

Throughout this chapter, I argued that KTFC’s educational efforts initially focused on reacting to and opposing abuses caused by the coal industry. KFTC also educated its members about the broader energy landscape and the global impacts of coal. Over time, the organization shifted to be more proactive due to increased scale of destruction and the continued loss of coal mining jobs in the shifting global political economy. As a result, KFTC’s educational work progressed to focus on a Just Transition for the region and still included opposition to abuses caused by the coal industry. KFTC’s educational efforts acknowledged the importance of coal mining to the region and pivoted toward creating a more sustainable future. Although Just Transition efforts aimed to move beyond the coal industry, I argue that the legacy of coal mining continued to shape how KFTC members viewed themselves and the strategies they pursued.
Chapter 5

Non-Formal Education and Informal Learning in KFTC

This chapter explores the diverse educational practices in KFTC’s Just Transition work, including nonformal education similar to popular education and informal learning. I define non-formal education as voluntary curriculum with a facilitator (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). By informal learning I am referring to social movement learning, which Foley (1999) described as “learning in the struggle” (p. 39). I also use the concept of community of practice to explore how newcomers learn from more experienced people through the process of engaging in activities and slowly become more versed in what it means to be a part of that specific community (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

This chapter explores these practices with respect to several Just Transition Initiatives in the organization. These initiatives include environmental justice campaigns, organizing in rural electric cooperatives, a community energy project, and the Empower Kentucky grassroots energy plan. The sub-questions explored in this chapter are: 1) How do informal and non-formal learning opportunities attempt to promote a just transition in the region? 2) How have people perceived these informal and non-formal learning opportunities as transforming themselves, their communities, and/or region and nation over the past decades?

I argue that the organization created a community of practice that included a dialectical relationship between their non-formal education and informal learning. Some informal learning also occurred not related to the non-formal education. For example,
learning occurred through creation and evolution of the Benham $AVES Community Energy Project where there was no non-formal education. KFTC used both non-formal education, which was rooted in the principles of popular education, and informal learning as important aspects of the educational practice of KFTC and the Just Transition work within the organization. Non-formal education ranged from workshops lasting between 90-minutes to three-hours to up to weekend-long meetings. The non-formal education was similar to popular education because they encouraged marginalized people to analyze their own experiences and explore strategies to challenge power relations and take action for social change (Choudry, 2015).

In the account of movement activists, informal learning and the related communities of practice resulted in important learning for KFTC leaders. Informal learning through experiences, including lobbying and engaging in campaigns was consistently mentioned by KFTC leaders as part of their development as leaders in the organization and in Just Transition initiatives. I argue that the distinction between non-formal education and informal learning becomes blurry within the context of social movements. In some sense, these two settings of learning operates on a continuum. This is also consistent with what I argue regarding the dialectical relationship between non-formal education and informal learning.

In addition, cross-community exchanges were integral to KFTC leaders’ learning and building relationships with other community activists. Stories were also an important way KFTC members learned, particularly through stories which demonstrated that alternative economic development was possible. The community of practice was evident
in how newer members learned from more experienced KFTC members and staff. Some of the learning occurred between a dialectical relationship between the non-formal and the informal learning. Learning also occurred independent of the informal learning through the communities of practice, which resulted in engagement of KFTC leaders.

**Leadership Development as Educational Work**

KFTC described their educational efforts as leadership development. They viewed leadership as collaboration that helps a group work toward a shared vision and goal (Lauderdale, 2008). Many scholars have acknowledged the importance of leadership and leadership development within social movements, particularly as it relates to relationship building, public narratives, and devising strategy. For example, Ganz (2010) defines leadership as “accepting responsibility to create conditions that enable others to achieve shared purpose in the face of uncertainty” (p. 527). Ganz writes that leaders in social movements help build the community and mobilize resources to challenge those with more power. In his view, leadership development consists of creating space where leadership can collaborate and grow.

Social movement leaders contribute to hope in the face of struggle, create community, and help others learn through their involvement. This is consistent with Freire’s (1970) argument that oppression must be perceived “as a limiting situation which they can transform” (p. 49). This aligns with how KFTC conceives of leadership development within their work. This element of hope is key to Just Transition because of its challenge to the hegemony of the coal industry within the region. This element of hope
is also consistent with Preskill and Brookfield (2009), who state that leadership is a collective and democratic process.

In KFTC’s view, leadership development is essential because it helps make other social change strategies possible. Long-time community organizer and executive director of Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, Burt Lauderdale (2008), described their leadership development work as follows:

Genuine leadership is much more than a set of skills. Grassroots leaders work from a growing base of knowledge, a political analysis that can be described and demonstrated and a point of view rooted in shared values and a common vision.

(p. 78)

Lauderdale’s description of leadership recognizes that leadership can be developed, and it is oriented toward a collective vision. KFTC leadership development consisted of trainings and workshops as well as support from organizers and veteran leaders. KFTC used the terms “training” and “workshops” similarly to how they are used in non-formal adult education. Training being similar to non-formal adult education aligns with Holst’s (2009) description of radical training practices that include a mastery of action and principle.

KFTC recognized that all people have the potential to lead and that there is an “art and science to leadership development” (Lauderdale, 2008, p. 74). In 1985, KFTC staff members developed a leadership development handbook that helped guide their work for many years. The handbook included training designs for many basic organizing skills. It also served as a model for their approach to organizing, highlighting the importance of
engaging ordinary citizens. The handbook emphasized the importance of creating a safe space for people to try out new skills and emphasized collaboration with others. The ongoing importance of this handbook showed that the organization approached leadership development in systematic ways through KFTC’s training programs, in addition to one-on-one mentoring.

I argue that KFTC’s approach to leadership development is similar to non-formal education and informal learning that contributes to a community of practice within the field of adult education. Non-formal, popular education is a significant component of learning within social movements. Choudry (2015) wrote about how popular education links activism and collective spaces for people to produce knowledge and to be agents of change. Merriam & Bierema (2013) nonformal learning educational activities were generally brief in duration and voluntary. Dykstra and Law (1994) also noted that non-formal education includes a variety of formats, including workshops and seminars, teach-ins, and traveling lecture series. Additionally, informal learning happens through the process of engagement around social change. “Learning in the struggle,” defined by Foley (1999), as “embedded in, the action taken by activists” (p. 39) is commonly referred to as how informal learning manifesting within social movement efforts.

A community of practice consists of new individuals learning from people with more experience through the process of engagement (Fox, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Wenger (1998) argued the four aspects of the community of practice that contribute to learning are the community, practice, identity, and meaning. There are three dimensions of community, including joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire. I
argue that KFTC is a community of practice because new people learned from the community and through the process of being involved. Just Transition initiatives explored that contributed to informal learning included environmental justice campaigns, the Benham Saves Project, rural electric cooperatives, and Empower Kentucky energy plan. Both the non-formal education and informal learning contributed to the learning happening within the community.

I argue that one aspect of the social movement learning in KFTC consisted of a dialectical relationship between the non-formal education and informal learning, which strengthened KFTC’s organizing. By dialectical, I mean an interrelationship that builds on each other and contributes to the other. I use the term dialectical relationship to describe the relationship between nonformal and informal learning because people involved with KFTC in this study learned by both participating in nonformal education activities and by being involved with various activities related to campaigns and lobbying, which developed skills, broadened consciousness, recognized power, demonstrated efficacy, and created solidarity.

I created Figure 8 to demonstrate the learning that happened within the community of practice. In Figure 8, the relationship depicts the dialectical nature of the learning within the community of practice. It also illustrates that informal learning occurred which was not related to the non-formal education. I have included Wenger’s (1998) four components of social learning in Figure 8. Wenger (1998) indicated that there are four components to the social theory of learning which include practice, community, identity, and meaning. I included all four of these components in the figure.
Non-formal education helps to create a baseline of understanding, which is solidified through social engagement of the practice. In this case study, members who learned techniques and practices through trainings developed skills that led to engagement with campaign efforts to create a Just Transition. The non-formal education and the informal learning both contributed to mastery; these two forms of learning built on each other through a dialectical relationship. Again, by dialectical relationship I refer to that dynamic interrelation where one builds off the other. This relationship helped to create the community of practice in the organization. Moreover, informal learning was also observed within the community of practice beyond the dialectical relationship with
KFTC’s non-formal education. The non-formal education and informal learning contributed to how KFTC members learned through their engagement with the community of practice.

**Impact of Education and Learning**

Throughout my 14 interviews with KFTC members and staff, many themes emerged that illustrated the effects of these non-formal and informal learning opportunities. As the following analysis will show, learning outcomes were referenced in terms of people’s participation in the organization. Themes evident in the learning included that efficacy of Just Transition, developed skills, raised consciousness, deepened understanding of power, and created solidarity with other communities. Through the process of engaging with others in a community of practice, KFTC members gained knowledge which enabled them to participate in initiatives related to Just Transition.

**Demonstration of Efficacy**

Organizational leaders highlighted successful Just Transition stories as an important part of their learning, which allowed them to recognize that Just Transition was possible. In my interviews, tangible examples included greater awareness about renewable energy, rural electric cooperative engagement, a community energy project, and creation of a grassroots-developed energy plan for the state.

First, many interviewees referred to greater awareness of renewable energy. KFTC leader and former coal miner, Bennie Massey, reflected on participating in two or three KFTC workshops focused on “changing from coal, educating our kids, and getting them an education so they can come up with their own ideas about new ways of doing
things.” These workshops increased his understanding about other sources of energy besides coal. The workshops also helped him understand some of the factors that would enable change. The workshops were a part of the practice of engagement with KFTC and gave him a foundation for making meaning of new concepts he was exposed to through the organizing work. He also shared, “I had no idea the panels and the wind things and that create electricity.” This quote indicated that Bennie was not initially familiar with renewable energy. The non-formal education exposed him to new information related to Just Transition. Through the social practice of being engaged in non-formal education and through the organizing work, Bennie and other KFTC members pursued solar energy panel installation on some of the municipal buildings in their local community.

A second theme I noted in my interviews that related to a demonstration of efficacy was organizing around rural electric cooperatives. Randy Wilson, a KFTC member, reflected on the Empower Kentucky Summit in Louisville where a speaker from North Carolina shared about success in their rural electric cooperative organizing work. These efforts consisted of reclaiming the democratic institution of their power company, the rural electric cooperative; they sought get the co-op board to listen to their member shareholders by creating energy efficiency programs. Randy said, “on-bill financing that they did in the county and that the energy co-op…was able to get that through.” On-bill financing enabled people to gain access to upfront capital to do energy efficiency upgrades to their homes, and then the monetary savings from having greater energy efficient homes went towards repaying those costs through a revolving loan fund. Learning from successful initiatives related to a rural electric cooperative provided Randy
with new insights about how to organize locally around his electric cooperative. The strategy of pushing for on-bill financing to enable cooperative members to invest in residential energy efficiency upgrades and renewable energy was successful. Being a part of the community of practice of KFTC exposed Randy to successful examples of Just Transition, which allowed him find new meaning in the community of practice about what was possible in Eastern Kentucky.

Engagement with KFTC’s members local electric cooperatives also contributed to informal learning of KFTC members. KFTC and allied organizations stopped the East Kentucky Power Cooperative (EKPC) from building a new power plant in Winchester and pushed the co-op board to address the co-op’s increased energy needs with renewable energy installation. “Through our efforts, they did not put in another power plant, coal-fired plant, they invested in solar,” Randy reflected. This outcome was considered by many as an important example of success for the organization. This reflection also demonstrated that grassroots engagement can create change—an important learning outcome.

Through the public hearing about the proposed coal-fired power plant, the process of engaging in the social practice facilitated learning for the community of activists. KFTC members and other activists were informed by stories shared during the public comment portion of the public hearing and the campaign literature distributed by KFTC members at the event. Teri Blanton, a KFTC member, described this campaign as an important educational opportunity for the organization. She reflected on the large turn-out at the public hearing about the proposed power plant, “There were also a lot of steel
workers and union workers that was there in favor of it [the alternative plan] because they were talking about other opportunities to create energy like windmills and solar panels.” Additionally, KFTC members and other people who attended the public hearing created new meaning about the jobs versus the environment argument often used in opposition to their efforts for greater environmental protection, specifically that clean energy options create jobs.

Third, the local community energy project called Benham $AVES project in Harlan County was often referenced in interviews as an important example of success for Just Transition. Since Benham has a municipal-owned utility, KFTC members were able to push the Benham City Council and the Benham Power Board to incorporate on-bill financing into residents’ power bills, enabling residents to invest in energy efficiency upgrades and slowly pay back the costs on their bills through their energy savings. KFTC members were also able to garner some financial donations to defray the upfront costs of upgrades.

KFTC members also pushed for a solar demonstration project that resulted in solar panels being installed on the Kentucky Coal Mining Museum, which was owned by the local community college. In describing this project, Roy reflected, “That made it real to people that it wasn’t as abstract.” Having tangible examples of Just Transition in Eastern Kentucky helped KFTC members and other community members to make meaning out of the abstract concept of Just Transition. KFTC members cited this example as being particularly important because of the symbolic value of a museum which memorialized the history of coal choosing to embrace the future of clean energy.
Additionally, this effort highlighted how KFTC challenged the hegemony of the coal industry because several former coal miners were the same leaders who pushed for renewable energy. One interviewee expressed concern that more could have been done to engage a greater number of people in the energy project to enable better ownership. This Just Transition initiative demonstrated success and acknowledged the historical and social context of the coal industry.

Fourth and finally, the Empower Kentucky Plan also became an important reference point in the organization’s efforts to pursue a Just Transition, helping people learn through a demonstration of efficacy. KFTC spearheaded an effort to gather input from people across the state to identify priorities for developing an energy plan. With the support of allied organizations, KFTC created an energy plan that would create jobs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. “These options actually save money and create all kinds of benefits, and we’ve been able to communicate from that ever since” Chris Woolery, a KFTC member, stated.

Through participation in an inclusive social process, KFTC members identified priorities that enabled the creation of the plan. Being able to demonstrate the benefits of a well-researched energy proposal was important for the conversations citizens had with decision makers and with potential KFTC members. This plan became a tool of the practice and helped to make meaning of Just Transition. The development of the Empower Kentucky Plan was one milestone in making the concept of Just Transition a concrete reality. This plan would create 46,300 net additional jobs in energy efficiency in the next 15 years (Empower Kentucky, 2021). Helping KFTC members understand the
plan was later incorporated into KFTC’s non-formal education. For example, it was included in one of the Empower Kentucky Leadership Network webinars. A KFTC staff member, Lisa Abbott, shared the following reflection while she facilitated a webinar about the Empower Kentucky plan:

What if we demonstrated a totally different narrative? That actually being intentional about reducing greenhouse gas emissions can also be a strategy to create jobs, help people lower and manage their energy bills, improve public health, and, oh by the way, meet our moral obligation to act on climate. (KFTC, 2020)

Lisa’s perspective challenges the hegemonic discourse that coal is necessary for employment in Kentucky. Through the Empower Kentucky Plan, a proactive solution could address the need for jobs and address environmental justice. Having a credible energy plan that was data-driven and informed by a diverse group of people from all over the state was an important part of being able to demonstrate that another reality was possible. This plan was part of a shared repertoire in the community of practice to shape the public discourse. Creating this plan helped KFTC members and other supportive people learn what Kentuckians’ priorities were and that reducing greenhouse gases in Kentucky while creating jobs was a realistic option that could be pursued in the state.

Exposure to new ideas and realizing the efficacy of alternatives were important parts of the educational work. In the above cases, interview participants referred to stopping the EKPC power plant from being built, the solar panels on the Kentucky Coal Mining Museum and the local energy project in Benham, and the Empower Kentucky
energy plan as successful stories. Through KFTC’s community of practice, these Just Transition examples demonstrated a changing ability to envision the future. Being able to visualize sustainable economic alternatives is particularly important in the coal-producing region, where many residents perceived that coal mining was the only option for economic opportunities. These Just Transition initiatives and related workshops led by KFTC were liberatory—giving engaged members examples that alternatives are possible, thereby breaking the hegemonic control of the coal industry.

**Skills Development**

Members who learned techniques and practices through trainings developed skills, and these skills led to engaging with campaign efforts to create a Just Transition. The non-formal education and the informal learning both contributed to skill development; these two forms of learning build on each other through a dialectical relationship. Again, by dialectical relationship, I refer to that dynamic interrelation where one builds off the other. This relationship of learning forms helped to create the community of practice in the organization. Some of the skills gained that were mentioned by KFTC members included public speaking, direct actions with the possibility of civil disobedience, lobbying, and framing associated with communication.

First, KFTC members described the development of their public speaking ability through their participation. A former coal miner and KFTC member, Carl Shoupe, described his experiences testifying at a Congressional hearing in opposition to mountaintop removal coal mining, “It’s been somewhat intimidating, so of the situations I got into, but thanks to the good training that I’ve had through the
organization... I feel like I became a better public speaker.” Participating in the non-formal education and benefiting from the additional support provided by KFTC led to his confidence while engaging in challenging activities related to organizing. The mutual engagement between KFTC leaders and staff working on environmental justice and Just Transition enabled him to have the skills to be able to speak for the community of activists from Eastern Kentucky and to challenge mining practices in front of Congress. As was evident in the newsletter about his testimony, he shared about the impact inaction would have on his community and about the importance of several pieces of federal legislation.

Second, KFTC members also developed skills in direct actions and civil disobedience. After long-standing inaction on mountaintop removal mining, members of this community of practice decided to escalate their tactics. A retired mine inspector and KFTC member, Stanley Sturgill, shared his thoughts about how the training with KFTC prepared him to participate in sit-ins in elected officials’ offices. He stated, “we were instructed through [the organization], through classes of what we needed to do if we were arrested. We did that, and that’s how it got resolved eventually.” He described how the non-formal education helped him and other members of the community of practice to know how to effectively engage in civil disobedience during their planned direct action. Through their mutual engagement, KFTC members staged a sit-in in Congressman Hal Roger’s Washington D.C. office and created a shared repertoire of how they were going to proceed with the sit-in. This helped members make meaning of their strategic decision to escalate and know how to proceed with the action.
In another example, meeting together prior to going to the Governor Steve Beshear’s office in Kentucky’s state capital, Stanley had an opportunity to learn from others about principles of nonviolence and what possible outcomes might occur. This non-formal education enabled him to be confident in this type of action, which was fairly new to him. Stanley also described the importance of group readiness through the training, saying “we met prior to going to the Governor’s office the night before and had a big meeting about it, what we wanted to present to the Governor. We had our requests on cards of what we were trying to do, trying to save our water, trying to save our mountains.” The non-formal education enabled him to know the step-by-step plan of how the community of practitioners would engage when meeting with the Governor. The creation of cards with their list of demands was a part of the shared repertoire. In these examples, the individuals expressed confidence as activists due to the non-formal training they received. The non-formal education of KFTC led to people developing the skills needed to engage in direct action tactics. Through the embodied practice of mutual engagement, they solidified their learning transfer.

This learning is consistent with the social movement research that demonstrates skills acquisition plays an important role in empowerment related to social movement participation. For example, Dyke and Dixon (2013) found that participants in Union Summer felt better able to take action and sustained longer-term involvement after learning the nuts and bolts of organizing. Vestergren et al. (2019) explored the subjective and objective changes activists experienced through their participation in an
environmental campaign in Sweden. Among the documented changes, acquisition of skills, like how to run a meeting, was expressed by participants.

Third, KFTC members also gained skills in lobbying to support their efforts at the state and federal levels. Teri, a KFTC member, reflected:

Through the Alliance for Appalachia, we would go in the day before. We would always have an entire day of training, and everything was planned out, and we would have meetings set up ahead of time, and people knew what their roles were—because everybody had roles to play.

KFTC is a coalition member of the Alliance for Appalachia, the organization which facilitated the non-formal education that occurred at the beginning of the Week in Washington Anti-Mountaintop Removal lobby trip, which occurred annually between 2005 through 2011. The Alliance for Appalachia was founded in 2006 as a non-partisan coalition that now includes 16 member organizations within the region working to promote a sustainable future and address environmental justice, like mountaintop removal coal mining (Alliance for Appalachia, n.d.). This non-formal educational event helped the community of activists feel competent while engaging in the citizen lobbying. Participants’ competence and confidence were a result of their opportunity to practice skills through role playing.

Acquiring skills contributed to feeling empowered in social movement participation. Again, the importance of developing organizing skills was similar to what Dyke and Dixon (2013) wrote about in their case of AFL-CIO’s Union Summer program regarding the development of skills resulting in empowerment. Participating in planning
the lobby meetings and having clearly defined roles helped people identify as lobbyists. Specific campaign skills, like lobbying, were important outcomes of the non-formal trainings that members participated in because of their involvement with KFTC.

Although the lobby training (a form of non-formal education) was important to many KFTC participants, the actual experience of doing the lobbying (informal learning) helped to solidify the learning. Joanne described the experience of lobbying for the first time, “I was just standing there not knowing what to do.” Although she likely had training prior to going to meet with the elected official, she said that she did not. Joanne emphasized the importance of being involved with trainings. During her first lobbying experience, another environmental justice activist in the community of practice noticed that she looked lost and responded, indicating that she would be coming with him for the day:

I just watched him, and then we went in another one, and he’s like, ‘Okay, you’re on your own.’ And he come out; he just really bragged on me, told me I’d done good, and I felt like I did. That he wasn’t just saying that, and I guess that’s what gave me the confidence.

Joanne gained a greater sense of competence through the social process of engaging with a more experienced member of the community of practice. Observing how he engaged in lobbying helped her make meaning out of the training that she likely participated in prior to her engaging in the activity. Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that the learning occurs through increasing participation in a community. The relationship between meaning and action are socially-mediated and change through the course of activity. As a result,
someone moves from the periphery of the practice to full participation of the community of practice through that mutual engagement. Non-formal education grounded participants in the basics of the practice, and then the experience of engaging in the activity solidified participants’ sense of competence, which is an example of how a dialectical relationship between the non-formal education and informal learning occurred.

Fourth, organizational leaders learned communication skills related to how they talked about issues via various non-formal education programs. Teri Blanton, a KFTC member, shared what she learned by participating in various trainings, “The way you would frame the way you would talk about things would not alienate people on the one side and the other side.” She learned that certain ways of describing issues created opportunities to have further discussions with others. Her experience indicated that how an issue is described could influence the support the public gives for a particular position.

Through the social practice, a shared repertoire was developed regarding how to talk about issues KFTC was working on was developed. As evident in other social movement research, collective action frame resonance influences its effectiveness in social movements. Benford and Snow (2000) defined frame resonance as “the effectiveness or mobilizing potency of proffered framings (p. 619). The process of engaging with the community of activists clarified the frames that would be wisest for communicating KFTC’s work. Teri found this to be particularly important when she talked about place, sharing:

When you talk about coalfields, and that’s allowing coal to be the dominate frame when we should be talking about healthy communities, and clean water, and stuff
like that. Before, in like mountain communities, as opposed to coalfields. You know, changing your words helps people see things in a different way. The region has historically been referred to as “the coalfields,” which symbolically cements the region to coal mining. By creating a shared repertoire of discourse not binding the region to coal production, like referring to the region as “the mountains” or “mountain communities,” challenged the hegemonic discourse of coal. Benford and Snow (2000) argued that part of the goal of collective action frames involves identifying who is to blame and proposing solutions. KFTC members epitomized this process by changing their language in order to demonstrate that a future without coal was possible. By removing coal from how the place was described, KFTC members countered one aspect of the hegemonical control of the coal industry in the region. The communication workshops contributed to the process of creating the community of practice where KFTC members could make meaning by using concepts such framing to advance Just Transition efforts. The non-formal education helped leaders understand how to frame issues and changed how leaders talked about the issues on which they worked.

Consciousness-raising

KFTC members also broadened their worldview through engagement in the community of practice. Participating in a diversity of non-formal education workshops and engaging in the community of practice created space for KFTC members to reflect on their experiences and connect them to structural inequalities they were facing.

For example, Teri Blanton, KFTC member, talked about how she was affected by doing an activity called the Privilege Walk, which helped her make the connection
between her working-class background and her lack of privilege. From the description of this activity, activists stood in a line and if they had a certain resource, like access to books as a child or their parents’ owning a home, they would take a step forward. This demonstrated unequal distribution of wealth and privilege. Teri reflected:

It ended up, the one that I was in, there was a Black lady that lived inner-city was…one step behind me, so she was farther out than me. But the only one step that I had in front of her was that I inherited a house from my parents, but you know, it was in a federal Superfund site, so it’s like, you know. I didn’t get much. I got a poisoned house.

This interactive exercise in KFTC’s community of practice helped Teri make meaning from of her experiences with inequality. She also recognized the commonalities she had with other marginalized people across the state. This aligns with other research on popular education. Choudry (2015) argued that simulations can connect with people on an emotional level, which enables learning about power relations and systems that result in stratification. The Privilege Walk was an example of a simulation that helped KFTC members to make meaning of some of the structural inequalities they were facing.

KFTC members also gained a deeper understanding of different forms of oppression by engaging in the community of practice. For example, Kathy Curtis, a KFTC member, talked about what she learned at the Empower Kentucky Leadership Network weekend workshop, “There were several of us that got our foundations rocked because of what we thought, especially racial justice, indigenous rights, the oppression that people are experiencing just because of their education level, their skin color, their
nationality.” By mutually engaging in the community, she gained a much deeper understanding of the impact of racism. The stories shared by some of the other KFTC members caused her to reevaluate some of her longstanding beliefs. The engagement with the non-formal education was a part of the practice which helped broaden her perspective.

These are examples of what Freire (1970) described as conscientization, which helps people understand power dynamics contributing to oppression. While Freire focused on non-formal education that contributes to consciousness raising, I argue that this learning happens through a community of practice that includes both non-formal education and informal learning. This sometimes resulted in a dialectical relationship between the non-formal education and the informal learning. Understanding the structural aspects of the issues people in the region faced through participating in non-formal education helped KFTC members expand their perspectives.

**Understanding Power**

Additionally, KFTC members grew in their understanding of power dynamics through their engagement with the community of practice. This included KFTC members learning to collectively build people power together. This also consisted of KFTC members learning about different dimensions of power. Through involvement with Just Transition initiatives, KFTC members recognized the unequal distribution of power related to the state and the coal industry.

Through the process of confrontation, activists often gained knowledge of how political and economic systems and power dynamics work. For example, the Martin
County Coal slurry disaster in October 2000 resulted in 306 million gallons of coal slurry flooding and breaking through an abandoned underground mine. Teri Blanton, KFTC member, confronted state environmental regulators in Frankfort, Kentucky about this situation. She stated, “They did let it happen. They knew it was a disaster. They knew it was a danger to the communities below them.” Here, Teri analyzed the power relations which allowed the disaster to happen.

The example that Blanton is reflected on was caused by Martin County Coal Company when the bottom of the slurry impoundment, which is an earthen dam that holds a coal processing by-product owned by Massey Energy, broke through an abandoned underground mine. Bryant et al. (2007) explained the incident to which Teri is referring. The company knew that the slurry impoundment had previously been leaking and broke through in 1994. Through her engagement in KFTC’s community of practice, Teri learned that the state environmental enforcement agency and the company were complacent about addressing the hazard in the community. It was through the practice of organizing to address this transgression that she made meaning of how the state and the coal company disregarded the mining laws. While confronting the state at a public hearing, Teri stated:

It’s like one of my first times I’m slamming them in their own house, but I was thinking about it as being their own house at that point. Later on, I learned it’s not their house. It’s my house; it’s our house.

She initially viewed the state government as something not connected or accountable to her.
By confronting the state, which was a part of KFTC’s community of practice, she started to reconceive who the state should be accountable to. Her perspective of the state changed as she realized that the government should represent the public’s interests. Her changed perspective was most consistent with Gaventa’s third dimension of power due to residents’ uncritical consciousness regarding the behavior of the company and state. By being involved with challenging an injustice and challenging the dominant power structure, people in the organization gained greater knowledge about how power is unequally distributed related to the coal industry and how the state should work to protect the interests of the public.

Another example of KFTC members learning about the unequal distribution of power through experiences included the coal companies not consistently following the laws. To illustrate, Joanne became involved with KFTC after a coal company attempted to mine through the cemetery where a number of her family members are buried. She reflected on her new understanding of the industry by saying, “[it] goes back to my cemetery when I seen that they really don’t care, and they don’t play by the rules.” Regulations state that coal companies are not allowed to mine within 100 feet of a cemetery unless they have received a waiver by the land owner (Virginia Coal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1979, 1979). She discovered that the company was planning to mine through the cemetery when she found flags scattered throughout it during a visit to her family members’ graves. This example reflected Gaventa’s second dimension of power, in which the construction of institutional barriers makes it difficult
to know how to engage. Some people might have responded to Joanne’s situation by not engaging due to an anticipated defeat.

However, even though Joanne did not know the institutional procedures, she reached out to organizations working on similar issues to help her navigate the situation. Through that community, she learned the steps of challenging the coal company’s plan to mine through the cemetery by engaging state and federal agencies and contacting the company. Through her engagement with others who had experienced similar challenges, Joanne was able to gain the knowledge necessary to take action with others to protect her family’s gravesites. This is similar to Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notion of moving from the periphery of the community to the center of the practice. Lave and Wenger argued that changing locations is a part of one’s learning trajectory. Newcomers with KFTC started on the periphery of the community of practice; by taking action, they moved towards full participation. The process of engaging to hold this coal company accountable to the law helped Joanne understand how the coal industry wields its power.

Joann’s experience is consistent with the feminist perspective that “knowledge develops directly from lived experiences rather than abstract theorizing” (Naples, 2013, p. 661). This epistemological orientation recognizes that there are different ways of knowing. Furthermore, Haraway (2004) argued for “situated and embodied knowledges and against various forms of unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims” (p.88). Within Eastern Kentucky, it was common for KFTC members to have personal experiences resulting from the disregard of the coal industry within their communities.
Consequently, KFTC members changed how they understood the industry and learned how to become involved in challenging the injustices through the community of practice.

Additionally, through their engagement with KFTC, members also learned how to build power collectively. Bennie Massey, a KFTC member, reflected that the organization taught him, “we can get anything passed because we have the power and vote.” The process of working collectively through KFTC and sometimes achieving their goals helped Bennie see how grassroots power can be built within a community organization. This reflects Gaventa’s first dimension of power that consists of open conflict with competing resources. The practice of engaging both with the legislative and with electoral processes caused him to make meaning out of those experiences and to understand how to build power collectively to make social change. Bennie’s reflection about the ability to collectively build power was consistent with his prior experience as a union member with the UMWA. Another KFTC member, Teri Blanton, recognized the power of organizing collectively after reading the organizational newsletter. She reflected:

I picked up a Balancing the Scales, which is KFTC’s newspaper, and I read it and thought, ‘Wow, these people think the same way I do, so that’s when I joined the organization ‘cause than I wasn’t alone standing out there fighting this coal company.

By reading the organizational newsletter, Teri realized that other people had a similar perspective about the coal companies and that a community existed for her to connect with. Becoming a member of the organization helped her feel a sense of belonging.
KFTC’s community enabled her to gain a sense of competence that she could challenge injustices she faced with the coal company in her local community. This sense of belonging is a component of engaging in a community of practice.

Additionally, KFTC members’ participation with large-scale actions evoked feelings of connectedness within a larger movement. Randy Wilson, a KFTC member from Knott County, talked about attending the United Nations Council on Sustainable Development. He reflected, “I saw there were a lot of people across the world that were working on this and a lot of young people, and that really gave me hope that we could get, do something.” A delegation of community activists from Central Appalachia engaged in the large-scale gathering, which served to reinforce Randy’s knowledge that there were people working collectively across the globe on issues of environmental justice and sustainability. By engaging in the social practice, Randy felt the collective power in numbers and saw that action could potentially result in collective change. In Randy’s case, the combination of action with a large group of young people affirmed that hope. Engagement with others helped KFTC members see how power could be built and realize that they had some amount of agency to make changes.

Third, the success with the Benham $AVES Project also highlighted how there was an unequal distribution of power related to concentration of land ownership in Eastern Kentucky. Carl reflected on his experience of working to implement a solar energy demonstration project, “It was difficult; the coal companies own all of this land here outside of the city limits. They wouldn’t allow us to put these solar panels, ground mounts or anything on their property.” Carl indicated that the coal company tried to stop
their attempt of support community development through installing solar panels. By pursuing a Just Transition initiative and confronting the obstacle created by the coal company, local KFTC members were able to make greater meaning of the coal company’s power to dictate community outcomes.

The company also attempted to wield their power by attempting to stop some community activists in Benham and Lynch from continuing to try to prevent surface mining from occurring near their communities. Roy Silver shared that the coal company “would not permit any use of their property unless people like Carl, and Stanley, and Bennie, and I would withdrawal our petition.” KFTC members filed a Lands Unsuitable for Mining petition with the state, which would have prevented mining from occurring in the community with surface impacts. In the coal company’s attempt to block potential restrictions on their mining plans, it also prevented a community development project from proceeding as it was initially conceived.

The coal company’s action reflected Gaventa’s (1980) third dimension of power, or cultural hegemony. The company attempted to shape the consciousness of KFTC members, encouraging them to stop pursuing sustainable energy because of a lack of access to land. The concentration of land and mineral ownership has long been considered a barrier to economic development in the region (Gaventa, 1980; Lewis & Knipe, 1978). Facing this obstacle confirmed members’ beliefs about the power that the coal industry had in coal-producing communities in the region. The activists’ refusal to cave to the coal company’s interests challenged power imbalances.
The lack of access to land was a challenge for KFTC and other engaged community members to meet their goals of Just Transition with the Benham $aves Project in particular, and the local group of KFTC members changed their plans about how to proceed with efforts that ensured it moved forward. Carl shared, “so we said, ‘Daggone, if we can’t put it on their property, we’ll just put it on the top of the coal museum.’ We got about 20 plus [solar] panels up on top of the Benham coal museum.” Through participating in this project, members of KFTC learned how to strategically modify their goals to ensure that a demonstration project related to renewable energy was still able to be installed in their community.

Because the coal museum was owned by the community college, KFTC members, the local city, an allied organization, and others involved with the project had more flexibility to engage with the community energy project than in the local park land owned by the coal company. The project required reflexivity in their organizing strategy. KFTC members also learned about how coal companies use their power through land ownership to block the creation of energy alternatives. This organizing experience contributed to people learning more about how the coal companies attempt to maintain hegemonical power within the region. The KFTC members who worked on this project were not willing to be pressured by the coal company, and they found an alternative way to approach their goal.

Additionally, Randy ran for the cooperative board in Clay County. Although he did not win a seat on his local rural electric cooperative board, the social process of engaging with people about the EKPC elections enabled him and other KFTC members
to have conversations about the benefits of having more democratically engaged electric cooperative boards. Randy reflected on his experience saying, “It’s another way to keep the conversation going about energy and where it comes from and alternatives.” By organizing a campaign for grassroots activist to be on the rural electric cooperative board, this effort sought to challenge Gaventa’s (1980) second mechanism of power, the institutional procedures that enable some people to maintain control. Randy shared that he learned people who “can’t afford [their energy] juice bill…just decide between the food and prescription drugs and their electric bill… What’s going out the walls and windows, and stuff weren’t efficient.” In other words, people were losing money that they could have used to meet their basic needs to money being lost due to inefficient homes.

Through this KFTC members engagement in the struggle, he gained a better understanding of the financial constraints people in the region struggled with daily. Conversations with residents also led him to learn about residents’ inability to invest in energy efficiency upgrades due to their limited monetary resources. Through these outreach efforts, Randy made greater meaning out of people’s experiences; residents were concerned about making ends meet as opposed to worrying about the coal industry or the environment. KFTC members also encountered a lot of resistance in their efforts to engage with the rural electric cooperative boards, which reaffirmed their perspective that challenging the status quo would be difficult.

Through the process of social engagement in the community of practice, KFTC members gained a better understanding of different dimensions of power. In other words,
by doing outreach in their local communities, KFTC members learned about their economic hardships and oppression they faced from the coal industry. Their learning included how the coal industry employed various dimensions of power to maintain their hegemony in the region. However, these learning experiences were not limited to abuses of power by the state or coal companies. KFTC members also learned how to build power collectively that could contribute to the goals of Just Transition. Much of this learning was informal, but in some instances, there was a dialectical relationship between the non-formal education and the informal learning.

**Solidarity**

Exchanges between different communities fostered relationships which enabled KFTC members to learn about others’ experiences, expand their perspectives, and explore different organizing strategies. These exchanges included KFTC chapter exchanges to different parts of the state, which gave Kentuckians a chance to share their stories about local issue campaigns. Exchanges also included gatherings of different organizations across the country which were working on environmental justice issues and exchanges with other communities organizing for a Just Transition. I put these exchanges under the learning category of solidarity because KFTC members learned from others and took action in support of other communities directly affected by injustice.

Exchanges occurred across the state between different local chapters of the organization. These exchanges helped KFTC leaders make a personal connection to the local issues that members from different parts of the state were working on. In other words, this helped KFTC members to gain a broader understanding and ownership of
injustices other people were experiencing. This process built solidarity as participants became personally invested in supporting the affected communities beyond their own. For example, Teri Blanton, a KFTC member from Eastern Kentucky, participated in an exchange in Western Kentucky where local activists were organizing around problems with Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs):

This woman said something about, ‘I check my baby’s bed before it [sic] goes to bed, and it would be clean and then I wake up the next morning, and there’s rat feces all over it.’ And it’s like, so how can you not want to work on that issue ‘cause that woman just said there are rats crawling on her baby while it’s [sic] sleeping?

Teri was emotionally impacted by hearing how the CAFOs negatively affected the health and safety of another KFTC member’s children. Organizational members understood the problems associated with CAFOs in a deeper way after building a relationship with someone directly affected by this kind of injustice. Teri’s experience produced feelings of solidarity, in part, because she could relate with the anger of a fellow mother as she struggled to protect the well-being of her child. This learning that resulted in solidarity occurred within a specific social context and was rooted in a personal story.

Learning about other people’s experiences with injustice resulted in empathy and spurred members to want to support each other. This link between emotion and learning is similar to Ollis’s (2008) finding that an embodied practice which created emotions like anger spurred learning in social movement activity. Through KFTC’s exchanges, solidarity resulted from the development of personal connections formed between
different members. These connections were similar to bonds of solidarity created in cross-border feminist exchanges. For example, Alvarez (2000) wrote that local movement activists engaged with transnational contacts to create strategic bonds of solidarity with others who shared stigmatized values locally. This solidarity was rooted in the relationships which were built between different people in the organization.

Additionally, members who developed those social and community connections could also sustain longer-term engagement in KFTC. Teri added to the aforementioned example by saying, “then once we started seeing outside of just your issue and then seeing how your issue affects this community over here. Even though you got yours fixed, you’re going to help them over there.” Although people might have initially become involved with the organization to address their immediate problem, the relationship building that occurred led some KFTC members to continue involvement in the organization to take action on the behalf of other members. The development of solidarity between different communities facing injustices resulted in continued involvement with KFTC. Again, participation in a social practice helped to create a community of practice that sustained involvement. Building connections created opportunities for cross-movement social action. The process of sharing experiences resulted in deeper understanding of oppression and a desire to engage in solidarity.

Additionally, some KFTC leaders participated in exchange experiences with people from other organizations. For example, the Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) connected KFTC members with other grassroots activists (primarily fishermen) from another CJA member organization that protested against Exxon and big oil refineries in
California. Carl discussed parallels he saw between his community and other communities that organized around environmental justice issues caused by fossil fuel energy extraction:

> When you go out into these different communities and start talking about specific issues, you find out it’s just a different location and different people. But really, it’s the same problems in Kentucky as it is in California as far as these companies polluting and destroying property and water… It’s the same basically all over, wherever you go.”

Hearing people’s experiences with injustices that were the result of other corporate polluters caused KFTC members to understand the commonalities between the groups’ struggles. Members were also able to make greater meaning out of the environmental injustices caused by fossil fuel companies in their own communities, which caused KFTC members to feel a part of the larger community of climate justice activists. The group’s sense of identity also started to encompass this broader national and international understanding of their community. This example also showed the broadening of members’ worldviews to include the understanding of the systemic roots to local community problems and include a greater sense of solidarity with others affected by fossil fuel extraction.

These community exchanges were particularly relevant in efforts around Just Transition when KFTC members engaged with other communities affected by the decline of the coal industry. Following an exchange with another coal-producing region, Scott Shoupe, a former coal miner and KFTC member, shared:
The couple [of] small towns down in Wyoming that we went to were…, like, just mirror images of here. I mean, to the point of they were built by coal, and that’s all that’s ever been there, and now they’re just kind of stuck with their heads in the sand too on what we do next. You know, what is Just Transition? How do we get a Just Transition?

Hearing people’s stories about the struggle to transition in other coal-producing regions of the world shaped how KFTC members understood the challenges they faced locally. Scott specifically referenced the challenge of overcoming the dominance of the coal industry in the local economy. Participants in these exchanges found that there were many of commonalities between the different communities, and they gained new insights about how they could approach their local work.

Learning through this community helped KFTC members make meaning out of the strategies they were pursuing. Carl shared his experience with participating in a Just Transition Summit in Australia, “We met with a lot of the local mayors and commissioners that were in this coal area and how they were trying to keep their cities from being polluted.” Through the process of engaging with local elected officials in the other coal-producing regions, KFTC members gained deeper understanding about how they might need to engage with elected officials in Eastern Kentucky to advance the work of Just Transition. This helped them gain new perspectives about what might be possible in their local area. Carl added, “It was like a workshop out there. You know, talking about basically how we did things back here and how they did things up there.” The process of discussing what was happening in each respective community contributed to
greater understanding of how to approach implementation of local plans. Carl’s experience through a cultural exchange is consistent with other educational research that emphasized the importance of critical dialogue to facilitate that learning. Freire (1970) defined “critical and liberating dialogue” as “reflective participation in the act of liberation” (p.65). The process of engaging in dialogue with others working on Just Transition initiatives served to help people understand what was possible and understand that their social justice struggles were linked to other struggles across the state, country, and world.

**Analysis of the Learning**

As these five examples of learning outcomes illustrated, KFTC created a community of practice because the organization’s approach to learning was rooted in a sociocultural community. As Lave and Wenger (1991) wrote, “learning as increasing participation in communities of practice concerns the whole person acting in the world” (p. 49). New people learned from the organization’s community and through the process of being involved in it. The community consisted of people actively involved in organizing around Just Transition initiatives, which would be described by the Lave and Wenger (1991) as the practice. When people learned from others more experienced through the process of engagement, it was considered a community of practice. Adding to this literature on communities of practice, I argue that one aspect of this learning process which takes place is a dialectical relationship between non-formal education and informal learning within KFTC.
Many respondents reflected on experiences they had in other communities and cited organizing efforts as having a significant impact on them. Randy shared how saw this manifested in his involvement:

Anytime you get together, and you coalesce around a theme, and you share your stories… It’s not just the skills; it’s just being in a community and becoming a part of it. You start sharing yourself…and they’re very encouraging and so, you know just get involved.

Randy gained more through his participation than mere skill development. As KFTC members shared their experiences with others involved with Just Transition, they formed relationships with other members in the group. Those connections often spurred people to take actions. The meaning that they were making was through the engagement with others and activities related to social movement activities. This is similar to Lave and Wenger’s (1991) claim regarding the importance of participation in a social practice that helped to facilitate learning. Through the engagement with others, KFTC created a community of practice consisting of members of the organization. The engagement with the sociocultural community was key to the learning and the construction of identity related to that community.

Through mutual engagement in the organization and the support received while engaging with activist activities, KFTC members started to identify with the community of practice and learned to make meaning of their involvement. For example, Chloe Smith, a KFTC member, reflected that KFTC, “does allow for people to step into leadership and in those unique ways, and lets people feel supported in doing new things.” Through the
act of practice in a social context, the person became a part of the community (Wenger, 1998). Chloe talked about the experience of learning how to engage in door-to-door outreach during the election. She shared, “You just go and do things. But I watched the first few times, and then I would speak for part of it, kind of work my way in.”

Through mutual engagement, KFTC members developed a shared repertoire of practice and became competent in different skills. For example, Chloe observed how a more experienced participant conducted door-to-door election canvassing, and then she modelled her approach after her fellow KFTC member. Jerry Hardt, KFTC staff, described KFTC’s approach to leadership development as “connecting folks with resources, including those who have experience [and] have been through some of that before.” This indicated that KFTC’s members previous experiences challenging an injustice was considered a resource for newer engaged members navigating how to organize around a local issue. In this context, more experienced KFTC leaders were considered in the center of the practice. They supported the inward trajectory of newcomers through sharing of their experiences about how they approached organizing.

Learning happened through the development of relationships in the community of practice. “A lot of the training is riding in the cars out there, you know meeting people, getting to know their stories” Randy, a KFTC member, reflected. This KFTC member indicated that he viewed the learning happening not in the non-formal education, but through peer-to-peer exchanges outside of the training. In these more informal spaces, he would make meaning out of the experiences or content that the group was exposed to at a workshop or an organizing activity. Another KFTC member, Kevin, talked about how he
learned by being involved, “They participated in rallies, the teacher pension issue, and I got to see people firsthand speak on their values and in the meetings that we have monthly, see people speak from their heart.” This KFTC member reflected on how participating helped him understand how to talk about the issues that he cared about. The learning, thinking, and knowing were a part of the social process of engagement in this community. Through the practice, he gained the framework and perspective that was consistent with the community of activists related to Just Transition and other campaigns on which KFTC was working. These reflections demonstrated that by being part of the community of practice, newer individuals involved with this organization learned from more experienced members of the organization in order to contribute to Just Transition work.

Several participants shared how more experienced people in the organization helped them learn how to engage in community organizing effectively. Teri, a KFTC member, discussed how to pivot when a reporter asked a question that was not consistent with the campaign goals and how to talk in sound bites. She shared, “I had Jerry as a teacher.” He had worked with her one-on-one to support her as she learned how to talk effectively to reporters. While she had participated in the non-formal education that informed her practice, the coaching prior to the interview helped her translate the principles she learned into feeling competent to be interviewed by the media. The non-formal education served as a base for her to draw on when she was engaged in the actual organizing activity. This is reflective on the dialectical relationship between the non-formal education and the informal learning.
Additionally, Joanne Hill, a KFTC member, discussed the importance of having role models within the organization who helped her engage with Just Transition initiatives. She actively worked on the RECLAIM Act at the federal level, which is one of the core policies being pursued related to Just Transition. She named two specific people within KFTC that she often asked questions of while engaging in organizing, “What’s that? Who’s that? What are we doing?” These people played an important role in her learning. They helped her learn who the political players were and how the organization was approaching a particular community organizing activity. The two role models viewed her as belonging to the community, so they shared perspectives and strategies with her to help gain greater insights about the practice. This is consistent with the notion that more experienced people helped to support the development of newcomers through the social community.

KFTC also created cohorts and organizing academies that consisted of multi-session non-formal educational interventions. These efforts essentially created a community of practice consisting of the leadership cohort within KFTC’s community of practice. The organization sought to create shared ownership of an identity in order to create more peer-to-peer exchanges like KFTC members in the Empower Kentucky Leadership Network. One of the participants, Chloe, reflected “If I’ve had a question about something that I remembered somebody at the cohort had experience with, I’d message them and be like, ‘Hey, could you tell me more about X, Y, Z thing?’” She felt like she was a part of the community and was empowered to gain support from other participants in the cohort. Through the mutual engagement established during the non-
formal education, relationships were built and sustained outside the formal structure. The creation of the community of practice of the leadership cohort also demonstrated the dialectical relationship between the non-formal education and informal learning. The informal learning that happened through engagement with the practice also enriched future non-formal educational efforts.

It was evident that both the non-formal education and informal learning opportunities shaped the experience of leaders within the organization. Although interview participants indicated that the training was important to their development of skills and understanding of power, they struggled to identify specific workshops or trainings that were relevant. The learning was most evident in the stories these leaders shared about their experiences of being involved. Therefore, I would argue that there is a dialectical relationship between the non-formal education and the informal learning. This aligns with Choudry (2015) who claimed that the dialectical relationship between non-formal education and incidental learning is a “dynamic interrelation” (p. 101). Although the non-formal education enriched the learning that ultimately occurred in my study, other informal learning happened through the community of practice due to KFTC’s emphasis on leadership development. This is similar to Scandrett (2012) who wrote that there are times when incidental learning “has the dialectical character of popular education but without its structure” (p. 44).

KFTC members shared examples of non-formal education being paired with the informal learning. For example, Bennie Massey, a KFTC member, talked about learning about renewable energy at several workshops and seeing the installation of the solar
panels in an adjacent community. Both the non-formal education and the engagement with social practice exposed him to new ideas and strategies. As a result, Massey, who was also a member of the local city council of Lynch, a community with less than 800 people, pushed for solar panels on the city water and sewer plants. Additionally, the process of being connected with a community of practice enabled him to know how to proceed with achieving that goal, and he gained greater confidence, which enabled his engagement in the process.

Also, members shared examples in which they participated in non-formal education workshops and then engaged in a related organizing activity. This process of learning about a skill through a workshop and then engaging in action was described as an important example of how they learned. An example of this was shared by KFTC member Teri Blanton:

Lobbying is a great way of educating people about the issue. Once they know the issues that they’re talking about, and they go talk to people that’s supposed to be elected to represent them and then they walk out of there feeling self-confident because they knew more than the people that was there supposed to be representing them.

The way that she described the learning experience equated her learning with the organizing activity. There was no separation between the training and the experience. She added, “You can role play something a ton of times, but you aren’t really going to get it until you do it.” This is consistent with Freire’s (1970) concept of praxis that involves both reflection and action. Several KFTC members also shared that members often
returned to their communities after lobbying feeling more confident about talking with others. The process of engaging in lobbying helped to solidify the learning transfer for the individuals that they were initially exposed to during the lobby trainings. This aligns with Choudry’s (2015) description stating there is a dialectical relationship between the non-formal educational workshops and the informal learning. People participated more with the organization following engagement in an empowering activity.

Ultimately, it was difficult for KFTC members to distinguish between how they learned different skills. They mentioned the importance of non-formal education and their experiences related to organizing. Furthermore, some of the examples shared included an organizing activity that followed directly after a training activity. Therefore, a dialectical relationship between these two activities was evident in the experience of people working on Just Transition initiatives within this organization.

**Conclusions**

The organization explored in this study incorporated both non-formal education and informal learning opportunities into its work. Non-formal education helped to demonstrate efficacy about Just Transition, build skills, and enhance consciousness-raising. Leaders related numerous stories about how they learned through being involved. These stories related to understanding power dynamics, efficacy, and solidarity.

Based on the 14 interviews analyzed in this research study, I argue that the organization served as a community of practice that facilitated learning. The relationships built through the exchanges with other activists helped to support the learning process. One aspect of the learning within the community of practice was the dialectical
relationship between the non-formal education and informal learning. By dialectical, I mean that interrelationship that builds on each other and helps contribute to the other. People involved with Just Transition initiatives gained skills, recognized efficacy, raised consciousness, created solidarity, and challenged power imbalances. KFTC created a community of practice that contributed to the learning of both KFTC members and the larger public. My research study focused on understanding the non-formal education and the informal learning that KFTC members gain by participating in the community of practice. This can lead to future improvements in the learning outcomes by enhancing when and how educational practices are integrating into KFTC’s organizing work.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the research question: in communities with economies formerly dominated by the coal industry, how does an organization promoting multiple Just Transition initiatives use education and learning to support engagement in this work. To answer this research question, these sub-questions were explored: (1) how does the gendered history of the coal industry and the changing political economy of the post-coal reality influence the educational efforts of an organization working toward a Just Transition? (2) how do informal and non-formal learning opportunities attempt to promote a Just Transition in the region? (3) how have people perceived these informal and non-formal learning opportunities as transforming themselves, their communities, and/or region and nation over the past decades?

These research questions led to a case study methodology of a community organization in Central Appalachia that engages in Just Transition work. Data collection included 14 semi-structured interviews of Kentuckians for the Commonwealth leaders and staff members in Eastern Kentucky who have been involved with Just Transition initiatives. I completed a content analysis of KFTC’s educational materials related to Just Transition, which included their newsletter, website, and campaign literature. The curricula of three educational programs were also explored through content analysis.

This study contributed to building a better understanding of Just Transition initiatives within the Appalachian region. Furthermore, it identified ways that the
changing political economy of coal affects the educational practices of a community organization and how hegemonic masculinity affects Just Transition possibilities. Moreover, this research study built greater understanding of social movement learning through a community of practice. One aspect of the learning consisted of a dialectical relationship between the non-formal education and the informal learning.

**Contributions to Political Economic Theory of Appalachia**

This study has shown that the changing global political of economy of coal influenced KFTC’s organizing strategy and educational practice. This study empirically confirmed the internal periphery approach to global political economy in Appalachia, while it also illustrated a need for more gender analysis in this theory. Furthermore, this case study demonstrated that despite the region being in the global periphery, people within this region continue to have agency regardless of the hegemony of one industry. Although there are increasing questions about the shortcomings of the internal colony approach to political economy within Appalachian Studies scholarship, there is not much application of the internal periphery approach. This research project makes an important empirical contribution to the internal periphery theory as an explanation for the political economy of Appalachia.

Throughout KFTC’s history, its organizing work in Eastern Kentucky challenged the hegemony of the coal industry. During the early years of the organization, KFTC’s educational work contributed to members’ ability to challenge environmental and social injustice caused by the coal industry. One example of that was the Coalfield Survival Schools that enabled citizens to learn their rights within the Surface Mining Control and
Reclamation Act of 1977. Starting in 2003, the organization gradually shifted toward proactive alternatives through the creation of the Canary Project; consequently, the organization began to more explicitly question the coal industry’s hegemony and language like “a better future beyond coal is possible.” In addition to pushing for an end of the destruction caused by the coal industry, the organization also pursued efforts in alternative economic development and clean energy. These efforts occurred, in part, because the amount of devastation caused by the coal industry expanded. Mountaintop removal coal mining increased and the deep mining became more mechanized, which resulted in a decline in coal employment.

In 2013, the Just Transition orientation to KFTC’s work in Eastern Kentucky became more prominent. This work sought to “build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative one.” (KFTC, 2021). As a result, the educational work broadened to include understanding the global energy landscape and tying KFTC’s work to other communities struggling with fossil fuel impacts and the larger climate justice movement. While KFTC has sought to demonstrate that coal mining is not the only identity for the region, coal still influenced the Just Transition work in which KFTC engaged. The organization’s efforts included addressing the negative legacy effects, orienting towards clean energy alternatives, and pushing for electoral candidates invested in vision for a sustainable future.

Throughout KFTC’s history, the organization challenged the different dimensions of power evident in the region. Although the interrelationship between Gaventa’s (1980) three dimensions of power contributed to the hegemony of the coal industry, grassroots
activists have creatively approached collective action to challenge the industry’s power in Central Appalachia. Demonstrating successful examples of Just Transition is a key part of KFTC’s educational work to counter the coal industry’s hegemony. Demonstrating efficacy of sustainable economic alternatives exemplifies Freire’s (1992) emphasis on a pedagogy of hope that “through a serious, correct political analysis, is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be” (p. 3). The demonstration of efficacy as is evident in KFTC’s community of practice is instrumental to challenging the coal’s hegemony and pursuing a Just Transition

**Contributions to Feminist Theory**

My data confirmed that coal mining and masculinity have continued to be conflated within the region. In Eastern Kentucky, hegemonic masculinity was evident in the ideologies with the coal miner’s role as primary breadwinner and associated with self-sufficiency, and dangerous work. The coal industry has used hegemonic masculinity to bolster their role within the region. However, similar to Beckwith’s (2001) description of how the UMWA reframed mining masculinity to facilitate a change in tactics in the Pittston Coal Strike, KFTC has reframed hegemonic masculinity to include support for renewable energy and Just Transition by having former coal miners as spokespeople for these efforts.

Through the exploration of secondary data, I highlighted how the coal industry used hegemonic masculinity to maintain their cultural hegemony in the region despite the decline in coal employment. Bell and York’s (2010) research demonstrated how the coal industry’s public relations campaign in the mid-2000s, called Friends of Coal, used male
cultural icons and co-sponsorship of numerous community events to amplify the importance of coal to the region and solidify this ideology of dependence. The coal industry also sought to conflate coal miners with the industry. Through the coal industry’s discourse regarding the “war on coal”, which uses hegemonic masculinity imagery, the industry sought to dissuade state action against mountaintop removal mining and anthropogenic climate change. In other words, the coal mining industry’s narrative indicated that proposed regulations to strengthen environmental protection was an attack on miners and hegemonic masculinity. As a result, the coal industry sought to demonize those who were pushing for greater environmental protections, including KFTC activists and environmental justice social movement organizations within Central Appalachia. Their discourse attempted to increase polarization within local communities within the region by contending that increased environmental protection and the diversification of the economy, particularly if it included renewable energy, was an attack on coal miners and the related region identity.

KFTC challenged this hegemony by demonstrating the efficacy of Just Transition alternatives. Additionally, the organization affirmed the importance of the coal miner’s contribution to the economic backbone of the community while also challenging universal support for the industry. By spotlighting coal miners engaged with efforts to push for sustainable, renewable energy, KFTC used hegemonic masculinity and the regional identity tied to coal mining to pivot toward a sustainable energy-based future. By KFTC moving toward a broadened understanding of Just Transition, they continue to challenge the limitations of hegemony of the coal industry.
Contributions to Theories of Adult Education

My research adds to the body of Adult Education literature focused on social movement learning. However, the concept of social movement learning is only half the story. Social movement education is also important. This research showed that a social movement organization created a community of practice that enabled its members to learn. Through the social practice of engagement, KFTC members made meaning of their experiences, learned as they participated in social movement activities, became a part of the community, and learned through belonging to the community. This study also affirmed that newer members of the practice learned from more experienced members in the community. KFTC members shared five core themes related to learning outcomes: demonstration of efficacy, development of skills, consciousness-raising, understanding power, and solidarity.

My research builds on Wenger’s (1998) conceptualization of a community of practice by clarifying the relationship between non-formal education and informal learning. One aspect of the learning evident in my data is a dialectical relationship between the non-formal education and informal learning. My research clarifies what Choudry (2015) described as a “dynamic interrelation” (p. 101) that consists of the non-formal education creating a baseline of understanding, and the engagement in practice aiding in facilitating the learning transfer. This dialectical relationship was most evident in the skills development of KFTC members; they participated in a lobby training but indicated that they did not completely learn how to lobby until they actually did the practice.
This research study also builds on Freire’s (1970) theoretical contributions to consciousness raising. He focused on non-formal education; whereas, I demonstrate how the combination of non-formal education and informal learning both contributed to consciousness raising. Additionally, Freire’s emphasis on “critical and liberating dialogue” was not limited to non-formal education (p. 65). This dialogue was a part of all aspects of KFTC’s community of practice, including debriefing a lobby visit with an elected official and engaging in strategy development during a planning meeting. Moreover, it is important to not over emphasize the importance of the non-formal education. KFTC members shared numerous examples where engagement in the community of practice enabled them to learn, even when there was no related non-formal education.

**Implications**

This study is particularly timely in light of the Biden Administration’s commitment to address anthropogenic climate change. Additionally, on April 19th, 2021, the UMWA announced at a press conference with U.S. Senator Joe Manchin that they would support a transition to renewable energy if the national government provided supports for former coal miners. The president of the UMWA, Cecil Roberts, stated, “Energy transition and labor policies must be based on more than just promises down the road” (NY Times, 2021). This is a significant change in the union’s position on Just Transition, which thereby opens the possibility to build the political will in support of substantial investment needed to make Just Transition in Central Appalachia possible.
Additionally, in Central Appalachia, where the coal industry has maintained hegemony in the region for over a century, acknowledging the pride people have for coal miners creates an important bridge in the pursuit of sustainable economic alternative opportunities. To that end, it is important to demonstrate Just Transition is possible. This kind of demonstration is instrumental in enabling community members to envision and pursue a different future that is more sustainable and socially just.

The findings of this study suggest that the culture of an organization can encourage learning through its members’ participation in a social movement. Wenger’s (1998) conceptualization of communities of practice is a useful lens to understand how this learning can be facilitated. One aspect of the community of practice given attention within this research study was the relationship between non-formal education and informal learning. Non-formal education developed for social movements can create a basis for citizen activists to make meaning of their engagement with social action. This empirical study aligns with Freire’s (1970) argument regarding the importance of action with intellectual pursuits to cultivate praxis. Recognizing the interplay between non-formal education and informal learning can inform the development of educational practices of a social movement organization. Moreover, this study also points to the importance of bolstering strategies to facilitate informal learning through the engagement in the community of practice.

This is an important contribution to the growing body of knowledge around social movement learning. The research findings in this dissertation clarify the relationship between two different modes of learning, non-formal education and informal learning, in
the context of communities of practice. This makes both an empirical and theoretical contribution to this body of literature.

In addition, this important implications for people who are engaging in social movements and striving to help newer community activists to learn through their engagement. This analysis indicates that community organizations can strengthen their grassroots leadership by strategically designing social movement education in conjunction with opportunities to engage in practice. Additionally, creating opportunities for community activists to enhance their informal learning by integrating reflection into their social movement engagement will likely strengthen community activists political understanding, strategic thinking, and skills to more effectively engage in social movements.

Limitations

Due to the pandemic in 2020-21, my data collection pivoted and was limited. Specifically, I was unable to do as much participant observation in the communities as I planned to do. However, the global shift to greater digital engagement presented some additional opportunities to explore KFTC’s online approaches to educational interventions. As many of the interviewees shared, learning often happened outside of the context of a workshop—through the engagement in an activity, or in relationship with other KFTC members. As a result, I relied heavily on my interview data to analyze the learning. Additionally, with such dramatic shifts in people’s lives, I was unable to interview some key KFTC staff members and people from allied organizations to give a more robust depiction of the non-formal education and learning in Just Transition.
Another challenge was how to best determine where the ends of my bounded case study began and ended. Since my research questions were not focused on exploring KFTC’s entire body of work, it was challenging to know what parts to include and/or leave out. KFTC members often did not think in terms of siloed campaigns, so they often reflected on their engagement with the organization overall.

**Future Research**

There are many opportunities for future research. Due to the restrictions on face-to-face gatherings this past year, I would like to collect additional observational data related to non-formal education and informal learning. This would include observing strategy meetings, engaging in more social movement activities, and attending some face-to-face non-formal education. Data collected would help to further clarify in what contexts and how learning happens and potentially deepen my understanding of the dialectical relationship between the non-formal education and the informal learning.

Additionally, integrating an action research component to a follow-up study would be a great addition to enable KFTC members to have a more active role in the design of the research project and the analysis. This could enable KFTC members to gain skills that might benefit their engagement with community activism. Furthermore, this component could strengthen the research project by clarifying research questions that might be more applicable to their community organizing work.

To further understand the evolution of Just Transition, there are multiple ways I would like to expand this initial project. First, I would include research participants from across the commonwealth of Kentucky as opposed to solely focusing on KFTC members.
organizing around Just Transition in Eastern Kentucky, particularly because there is an increasing statewide orientation to KFTC’s Just Transition work. I would also include additional interviews with people who are involved with Just Transition projects through allied organizations, like Mountain Association, the Community Farm Alliance, and the Higher Ground. Much of Just Transition work is collaborative, and it would be useful to expand the scope of the study in order to have a better understanding of Just Transition and intersectional social justice initiatives across the Central Appalachian region.

Additionally, there are numerous opportunities for comparative educational and social movement research. I would like to include an exploration of other regions that are grappling with the shift away from coal, in both the domestic and international context. The exchanges between different organizations working on environmental justice related to fossil fuels and Just Transition could be fruitful areas of additional research, particularly because these exchanges were such an important part of KFTC members learning experiences. I would be particularly interested in exploring a comparative study with the trade unionist in Colombia because there have already been some interfaces between KFTC members and trade unionists in the coal-producing region of that country. The coal reserves in Colombia are owned by the state, so I would be interested to explore how the different ownership structures (i.e., public versus private mineral ownership) might compare in organizing and related educational work. I would also be interested in exploring the learning that has resulted from exchanges between coal miners in Wales in the United Kingdom and Central Appalachia. This would be particularly fruitful because the Thatcher administration’s policies in the 1980s spurred those communities to start
transition past coal much earlier than in Central Appalachia. I would also be interested in engaging in a comparative research project focused on the similarities and differences related to social movement learning related to Just Transition in Australia because the Just Transition Summit in 2019 that two KFTC members participated in there was formative for them.

Additionally, opportunities exist to engage in additional gender-related research in Appalachia and other fossil fuel-dominated communities. Many scholars (Scott, 2010; Bell, 2013) have argued that environmental justice work in the Central Appalachian region has primarily been done by women; however, much of that research has been conducted in West Virginia. As I noted in my research findings, KFTC’s amplification of Just Transition around renewable energy has been spearheaded by male former coal miners. I would like to better understand the differences between the engagement of male environmental justice/Just Transition community activists in Eastern Kentucky versus the limited number of male activists that was described by Bell (2016) as a “culture of silence” (p. 83). Although there is overlap between the organizing strategies between the regions of West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky, there are also some significant differences, particularly with respect to direct actions and the inclusion of outside spokespeople. Much of the research done community activism in different parts of Central Appalachia tends to imply generalizability to the whole region, which is not always accurate. I would like to explore the similarities and differences between how different community activist organizations approach their work around Just Transition and the related learning through engagement.


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Appendix A

Interview Protocol (Active Members)

Introduction
Hello, I’m Colleen Unroe. I am a graduate student at Penn State seeking to gather your input about learning that happens by participating in educational workshops and being involved related to Just Transition work in Appalachia.

We have a form that describes your rights as a research participant. I’ll let you read it more closely, but there are few things I’ll highlight. First, you may choose not to answer any specific questions, and you may end your participation at any time. I would like to audio-record our conversation, so that I have an accurate record of what you said. If you would like your name associated with your responses, this will be honored; however, you have the option for their responses to remain confidential if you prefer. If you agree to participate, please sign the form.

1. Can you talk a little about yourself, where you were born and grew up, what experiences shaped you the most?

2. How you first got involved with KFTC?

History

3. How has coal shaped you and your family’s life?

4. How is coal different now than it was 20 years ago? How are job opportunities different than they were?

5. How do people typically think of coal miners in this region? What are the positive and negative aspects of this identity?

6. How does the tradition of coal mining affect efforts to transition away from coal?

7. How has coal shaped how KFTC approaches its work? Particularly related to the decline of coal?

8. Tell me about some of the activities you have been involved with related to Just Transition. What are some campaigns? What have you done related to it? Why
were they important? How have efforts changed over time? What do you think Just Transition is?

9. What other activities has KFTC been involved with related to Just Transition? Why have those activities been important?

10. Can you describe the politics related to Just Transition? What are some of the obstacles?

Education and Learning

11. What skills have you learned through being involved? How did you figure out how to do that for the first time? Why do you think that approach was helpful?

12. What activities helped to broaden your understanding of the world?

13. What workshops have you participated in? What was the purpose of KFTC workshops? What are examples of how you put what you learned to use? How did that work or not? To what extent did you find it useful? Give some examples.

14. Are there things you did for the first time? How did you figure out how to do that? Why did you approach it that way? What in hindsight could be done differently?

15. In what ways has being involved changed you? How so?

16. Related to XXX campaign, what were some successes? What influenced those successes? Describe some of the challenges related to these campaigns. How do you see yourself addressing the challenges? How has that changed how you thought about what might work better?

17. Describe interactions you have had with political players. What was your
interaction with city council? How have you engaged with state legislators?

What about federal legislators? How did that go? What did you do?

18. In what ways has being involved changed you? How so?

**Perception of impact**

19. How do you think KFTC’s leadership development work affects people’s involvement?

20. How do you think KFTC’s leadership development work affects progress being made?
Appendix B

Interview Protocol (Staff)

Introduction
Hello, I’m Colleen Unroe. I am a graduate student at Penn State seeking to gather your input about learning related to Just Transition work in Appalachia.

I have a form that describes your rights as a research participant. I’ll let you read it more closely, but there are few things I’ll highlight. First, you may choose not to answer any specific questions, and you may end your participation at any time. I would like to audio-record our conversation, so that I have an accurate record of what you said. If you would like your name associated with your responses, this will be honored; however, you have the option for your responses to remain confidential if you prefer. If you agree to participate, please sign the form.

1. Can you talk a little about yourself, where you were born and grew up, how you first became politicized, and how you first got involved with KFTC?

2. What does Just Transition mean to you? How do you think KFTC incorporates Just Transition priorities?

History

3. How has the history of coal shaped KFTC’s work in the region?

4. How would you describe Just Transition and how its meaning has shifted over time?

5. How does the current political landscape at the state and federal level shape what Just Transition initiatives are pursued?

Education and Learning

6. How does KFTC work to educate people? Can you describe strategies KFTC uses to educate people?

7. How does KFTC think people best learn?

8. How does KFTC incorporate education into the work?
9. What are the goals of KFTC workshops on Just Transition? How are they structured? How do you develop the workshops?

10. What are examples you have seen where activists learn? Why do you think that approach was helpful?

11. How have people’s approaches to Just Transition changed? Why do you think that happened?

12. What skills have people gained? Where have they gained them? How have they gained them?

13. Do you think people’s perspective of the future of the region changed? Why?

14. How have people changed through being involved? What do you think makes them change?

15. How would describe the relationship between men and women when coal was big? How has the relationship between men and women in the region changed?

**Link between education and social change**

16. How do you think KFTC’s leadership development work affects people’s involvement?

17. How do you think it affects progress being made?

18. How does KFTC define success?

**Working-class masculinity**

19. How did people historically talk about coal? How do people talk about it now? How do you people think of a good job now? How is that different than before?

20. How would you describe the “coal miner identity” in this region, and its principle characteristics? What are the positive and negative aspects of this identity?
21. How does the attempt to transition away from coal affect that traditional coal miner identity?
CURRICULA VITAE

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Education
Master of Science (December 2016) in Rural Sociology, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania.
Bachelor of Arts (May 2002, cum laude) in Environmental Studies with minors Biology and Ethics and Dynamics of Social Action, Allegheny College, Meadville, Pennsylvania.
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Academic Work
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Publications