Myles Horton was a visionary and founding father of principles for adult education. His desire to extend education to all people inspired some of the strongest social and political movements of his time. The Highlander Folk School is a product of his vision and a forum to spread education to all who wished to seek it. Horton’s spirit of social justice and love of learning is one that educators should emulate in their classrooms.
Myles Horton

- Myles Horton is said to be one of the people that helped push the civil rights movement of the 1950’s (National-Lewis University, 2011). Born in 1905 in Tennessee, he grew up to attend Cumberland College. His freshman year he led a campaign to end freshman hazing by fraternities and moved on to leading interracial meetings at the YMCA. While working at a camp between semesters, he was inspired to educate others and assist those less educated in advocating for themselves (National-Lewis University, 2011).
In 1932 Myles Horton established the Highlander Folk School with Don West. Their mission started out to “...educate and restore human dignity and confidence to the people of the Appalachians, bringing back pride in their culture, music, and heritage (Widdington, 2011).”

Highlander became a nexus for adult education by fostering learning collaborative for labor unions and social justice education. Horton began by working for labor rights and equality but shifted to overall human rights during the late 1950's. Although rooted in the Deep South and Appalachian communities; Highlander Folk School would grow to be the model of community mobilization.
Highlander Folk School

- Highlander Folk School, later renamed as Highlander Research and Education Center (HREC) is located in Tennessee. The foundation of the school was to allow a platform for people to share ideas and empower one another. Labor unions, social groups and activists gathered here to revolutionize political and social change from a grass roots level (Highlander Research and Education Center, 2011a).
Pushing the boundaries of social change, the first black speaker presented at Highlander in 1934. By 1942, all classes and workshops were integrated. Highlander moved toward integration because (the) "...success of the labor movement required confronting racism and the evils of segregation" (Highlander Research and Education Center, 2011a). Classes and workshops were attended and taught by individuals such as Rosa Parks and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (National-Lewis University, 2011).
Myles Horton's wife at the time, Zilphia Horton, was the school's music director in the 1940's. While working at the school, Zilphia learned a gospel hymn from tobacco workers. The hymn was "We Will Over Come." She reworded and added verses to make "We Shall Over Come," (Highlander Research and Education Center, 2011c).

(We shall o-ver come. We shall o-ver come. We shall o-ver come some day.)

Oh, deep in my heart I do be-lieve, that We shall o-ver come some day.

(The Mudcat Café, 2011)
“We Shall Overcome...”

- The tradition of teaching, "We Shall Over Come" carried on with other music directors at Highlander. The song was picked up and became the founding anthem of the Civil Rights Movement.

- The commercial royalties from the song have been used to finance the "We Shall Over Come" Fund. Presently the fund continues to support grassroots community projects that promote social justice and equality (Highlander Research and Education Center, 2011c).

(Ward, 2005)
Trouble for Highlander

- The political and social strife between races was ramping up. Highlander was in the middle of a media attack and wound up in propaganda being used by white supremacist groups. Accusations included Highlander being a communist school as well as instigator for growing tensions in the south. (Highlander Research and Education Center, 2011b)

- Highlander’s mission was jeopardized in 1961 when the State of Tennessee withdrew the charter school status, and revoked the buildings and land where Highlander Folk School was based. (Highlander Research and Education Center, 2011b)

- Closing was a result of allegations that Highlander, “…violated its charter by "permitting integration in its school work," that it had operated for Mr. Horton's personal benefit and that it had sold beer in violation of Tennessee law. (National-Lewis University, 2011).”
“You can padlock a building. You can’t padlock an idea. Highlander is an idea. You can’t kill it and you can’t close it in. This workshop is part of the idea. It will grow wherever people take it.”

Myles Horton (Highlander Research and Education Center, 2011d)

- Highlander was reopened, months after the shut-down of the old facilities, as HREC. For 10 years HREC was located in Knoxville, TN before it moved to the present location in New Market, TN. (Highlander Research and Education Center, 2011b)
Moving forward

- Around the 1970's, Highlander returned focus to the Appalachian communities. Working with miners for environmental standards, health care and for improving the lives of the people affected by the coal industry.

- Throughout the 1980’s-90’s Highlander continued work with environmental equality, and social justice issues such as immigration, sexuality and gender.

- In 2007, HREC celebrated 75 years of service. Over 1000 people, representing 35 states and 12 countries came together for 3 days of celebration, workshops, music and fellowship.

- Today, HREC is still active in grass roots mobilization. Workshops, classes and retreats are held at HREC regularly as well as scholarly works generated from the center. Continued work on social justice and equality remains as their top priority in service.
Myles continued close work with the HREC for many years. He was honored at the fiftieth anniversary of the Highlander in 1982 by women and men of many nationalities and backgrounds.

Myles died in 1990 but his life story has been told in numerous books as well as a film documentary.

His legacy and vision lives on through the continued work of Highlander.
What can we learn from...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highlander Research and Education Center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model for adult education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political and social grassroots organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-to-peer fellowship and mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proof that powerful ideas and contributions can come from collaboration of people for the common good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myles Horton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vision of equality of education for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit of social justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning should have no boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change happens gradually but powerfully when you have the will to see it through</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Emily Dinwiddie, Historical Review
References


