

**THROUGH A NEOLIBERAL LENS: HOW A CANADIAN  
COMMUNITY MEDIA PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK YOUTH  
OPERATES TODAY**

by

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## **Abstract**

Community media programs are created to foster democratic engagement in the public sphere, however, they increasingly need to organize their activities to meet objectives that are symptomatic of contemporary neoliberal policy environments. This thesis discusses the impact that neoliberalism has had on community media projects from a Canadian perspective. It examines a four month community media program funded by Service Canada using various methods to gather data, including surveys, interviews and participant observation. Findings indicate that the strict employment related outcomes of the program imposed by the federal government, not only have negative consequences on participants, they serve to deny access to programming for vulnerable youth populations. As such, it is suggested that the government of Canada reform their strict criteria for successful outcomes of these programs.

**Keywords:** Neoliberalism; At-Risk Youth; Community Media; Canada

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## **Introduction**

From its early growth in the late 1960's to its current position as a strategy within community development, the term "community media" has been applied liberally to various projects, platforms and ambitions. It has been used broadly to describe media that is non-corporate and often connected to a smaller, more amateur sense of media creation. When perceived as an alternative to mainstream media it can be considered radical, therefore holding a subversive relationship with mainstream authority (Downing, 2001). In general, the goal of community media is to transform people's engagement in the public sphere, through the creation of their own creative work. Through this, the aim of doing community media is to contribute to the transformation of society (Fountain, 2007). Competing goals within the field, however, have always seemed to conflict with the stated ambitions of practitioners. In addition, research has indicated that the enthusiasm surrounding the potential of media technologies has been inadequate to address social inequality. As a result, the outcomes of community media practice have always been located within a set of dilemmas and tensions between the aspirations of its practitioners and the realities of working within the field.

In the last fifty years, the attempt to transform community through local media production has been explored through radio, print media, video production, and increasingly, digital media. Since the mid 1990's, there has been an increase in small-scale video production as camera equipment costs have decreased in combination with a simultaneous proliferation of computer usage and the rise of the Internet. Indeed, video production is now a relatively common and simple way to encourage people to develop their own media. As a result, community development organizations are increasingly adding video production to their array of outreach programs in an effort to transform the lives of individuals living in the community.

## **The Problem with Community Media Programs Today**

If these developments are encouraging, at the same time, the current socio-economic environment that has been coincident with these new possibilities has represented a set of dilemmas for community media practitioners in terms of accomplishing the democratic goals that practitioners seek to achieve. Today, many community media facilitators find themselves working between the goals of trying to nurture young people to engage in democratic practices while simultaneously having to organize these activities through the lens of job-training objectives that are symptomatic of contemporary neoliberal policy environments. My concern with these sets of job-training objectives is that they may diminish the potential of community media production to be used as a way to foster democratic engagement in favour of using it as a way to achieve individual gain within the market. In other words, they may influence practitioners to approach the act of community media production as a selfish activity to benefit individual development, to the extent that the potential of community media production as an activity to encourage social transformation may be lost. This may perpetuate a neoliberal mindset that, in general, discourages people from pursuing activities that do not demonstrate their usefulness in the market, and as such, undermines the value and goals of civic engagement and social transformation.

Although research indicates that media figures centrally in the lives of youth in terms of democratic engagement (Giroux, 2001; Kellner, 2001; Stack & Kelly, 2006; Soep, 2006; Poyntz, 2008), in this thesis I seek to question the impact that government funded community media programs have on young participants. More specifically, the question I ask is, do these programs preserve a space for youth to engage in democratic activity? From a Canadian perspective, this question matters because while the federal government funds most of these programs, it is the government's employment-based outcomes that determine program eligibility. As such, there appears to be a tension between the objective of the government funding

programs that are key to fostering community media development initiatives and the democratic ambitions that are often central to such programs in the first place.

Given this, in my first chapter, I trace a brief history of the rise of community media, specifically with regard to video. In order to situate these practices, I outline the theoretical framework that underpins community media production focusing on the emancipatory pedagogies of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. I explain how community media development has always been fraught with tensions, as competing interests within the field play themselves out through various programs and organizations. As such, community media production has resulted in a variety of outcomes. Complicating these practices, I describe how recent economic changes associated with the onset of neoliberalism have imposed a new set of objectives for community media production. These aims are concerned with enabling the public to enter the market in an unfettered manner as a way to invigorate community and quality of life for the individual. The danger in doing so is that community media development is increasingly understood as a selfish activity to be used for individual development, instead of as a tool for voicing oneself in the community. As such, my aim is to assess the impact that neoliberalism has on how community media projects operate today. Because I am concerned with Canadian programs and the funding regimes that organize their activities, I have attempted to highlight the trajectory of community media largely within a Canadian context. Where helpful, however, I also point to developments in other national contexts.

In the second chapter, I detail the methodology of the study; a four month community media program funded by Service Canada called Kaleidoscope. I describe the methods I chose to guide my research and defend the values of critical ethnography within my study. Further, I explain how the notion of complexity informed the way I approached my field study. Finally, I discuss the various methods in which I gathered my data, and describe the background and people involved in the organization, including the participants.

In chapter three, I present what happened in the field study and my analysis. I describe the various stages in the video production process and the program itself, including the interactions of the participants and the facilitators. I explain how the facilitators encouraged the participants to approach community media production as an employment-related activity and how this discouraged them from thinking these activities in other ways, mainly in terms of their democratic potential. I contrast this outcome with how the participants themselves made sense of the program and utilized it to enlarge their capacity to discuss social issues and connect to a wider community in Vancouver. As such, I discuss how this program continues to demonstrate a variety of outcomes while competing tensions in aspirations inform the practices of community media production.

I conclude, however, that the strict employment related outcomes of the program, imposed by Service Canada, have negative consequences on participants because they narrow the participants' perceptions of the value of community media production, in general. They also serve to exclude the youth's most vulnerable voices, which increasingly limits the diversity required to have an informed and democratic public dialogue. As such, I suggest that the government of Canada reform their strict criteria for successful outcomes of these programs and embrace more qualitative and complex methods to evaluate the outcomes of these programs.

## **Chapter 1: Literature Review**

In this chapter, I provide a history of the development of community media since the 1960's, focusing on video. I describe the theoretical goals that have informed community media practice, and how current neoliberal economic agendas impose a different set of guidelines to shape community development programs. I suggest that it is increasingly difficult for community media programs to meet their traditional goals while having to work under a neoliberal agenda that inform community media practice.

### **The Rise of Community Media: Explorations and Interpellations**

Different forms of community expression have existed around the world for hundreds of years. Engaging in a public dialogue through various modes of communication can be considered community media. For example, dance, theatre and songs have all been considered part of the fabric of community media while over time, the press, radio and film have emerged as central resources for creative local production (Downing, 2001; For a more detailed history see Downing, 2001). Often, as electronic communication technology has emerged, so too has a utopianism surrounding the potential of each device to enhance the ability for community members to engage in civic participation (Burnett, 1991; Higgins, 1999; Papacharissi, 2002). That is to say, with each invention of communication technology a potential for democratic engagement has arisen with it. Of these technologies, video technology is today, perhaps the most readily available media for community production, largely because of the ubiquity of cameras now commonly found on cellular phones, computers and of course, hand held devices. Video has the power to disseminate information to vast audiences, thus carrying with it a potential to better

inform the public. Moreover, by using video, individuals are better equipped to enter a public dialogue on a range of issues. From documentary cinema to homemade clips shown on Youtube, it is increasingly commonplace for the public to receive and share information through this medium.

### **Film and Video: The sociological background**

Since its inception in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the precursor to video - film – has been used to carry information about distant places to help understand local experience (Crocker, 2003). Unlike print media or radio, the power of film lay with its ability to reach people without the normal constraints of literacy or language. Many early filmmakers focused on creating films that documented the social experience of people in their community or cities. In this sense, filmmaking has always been used for sociological purposes, to provide “information about distant social and political forces that affect local social experience” (Crocker, 2003, p. 124). Moreover, filmmaking has always carried with it a potential to democratize the public sphere in a new way. In many ways this is a function of the way film technologies can capture community expression and disseminate the information to a large public audience.

If film offers these possibilities, filmmaking equipment has not often been readily available to the general public prior to the last twenty to thirty years. Until this time, filmmaking activities were largely restricted to an elite minority who either worked in the film industry or in mainstream television. As such, creating community media with video did not emerge as a movement until the mid 1960’s. At this point, access to video equipment was limited to populated areas such as large, Western, urban centres because video technology was still relatively expensive and cumbersome to use. Because of this, there were only a handful of non-professional filmmakers who used video as a means to capture day-to-day life around them. For example, in Canada, a small group of young filmmakers made documentaries about rural Canadian life (Burnett, 1991; Crocker, 2003; Druick, 2007), while small-scale experiments with video emerged in the art-scene in New York (Halleck, 2002). In

some ways, initial artistic explorations with video can be understood as manifestations of larger counter-culture practices that were resonant throughout the 1960's and 1970's. In many instances, these videos drew upon and reflected the social upheavals occurring at the time around issues of race, class, gender and sexuality. In this sense, these videos often contained social critiques that resonated with the "counterculture of the 1960's and 70's" that became central to promoting public access to community media and cable television (Higgins, 1999, p.625). However, these videos were part of a long tradition of using film to address sociological and economic issues. What was different in the 1960's was the potential of this emerging platform to illustrate the issues facing community members, in an increasingly *accessible* way.

### **Experiments, Showcases and Sharing through Community television**

The artist Nam June Paik has often been cited as the first independent artist to work with video as a means to capture everyday life around him and show his videos in experimental workshops (Boyle 1990; Halleck, 2002). He worked in New York City and his early videos capture some of the emerging features of community media. In them, he aimed to represent depictions of life in a different way, namely focusing on subjects who were often, if not always, discounted in mainstream media images, such as homeless people. The action of creating this kind of video produced the effect of challenging mainstream media. The physical "look" of the video had a disrupting relationship in comparison with the "look" of mainstream media images seen on television.

If Paik's experiments offered one example, related kinds of work were also taking place in other locales, including smaller Canadian cities. In Vancouver, BC, for instance, while documentary realism had long characterized Canadian film-making, Larry Kent was one of Vancouver's first filmmakers to shoot feature-length fiction films using a realistic style within a fictional narrative to capture life on the streets of

the downtrodden area of downtown or life as it evolved in a friend's apartment (Spaner, 2003). Although Kent's films were fictional, they again depicted stories in places that mainstream media cameras rarely ventured, thereby exposing a different perspective on life in Vancouver. Indeed, illustrating these "local" and often marginalized perspectives increasingly began to emerge as a central component of community media practice, especially where public access television was available.

"In the late 1960s and early 1970s, two emerging technologies (portable video equipment and large channel capacity cable television) were viewed as having the potential to address a variety of societal inequities in North American and European societies" (Higgins, 1999, p.625). During this time, in fact, the public increasingly had access to new found technology that could shed light on the media making process, thereby empowering non-professionals to take up the work of creating media and broadcasting it. For example, the American community media organization TVTV made news broadcasts that challenged traditional voice-over style narration by modelling them on cinema verite style film, where the camera acted as a fly on the wall (Boyle, 1990). They wanted to do so to challenge hierarchical storytelling where the "expert" of the story is the reporter, and the subjects of the story are objectified. In order to change the perspective of the story, the producers of TVTV used artistic aspects of filming in their productions to interfere with the image of what mainstream news media should look like. In the process, they created news broadcasts that captured the reporters and audiences interacting on a more equal playing field with one another. Their pioneering efforts reflect the intersecting goals and features of aesthetic film style and broadcast media.

Other footage distributed through community television varied. For instance, in a more artistic way, some people chose simply to film a steady camera shot out of a window to capture a piece of street for hours at a time, while others staged dramatic plays depicting "real" life situations within their towns (Goldberg, 1990). In addition to playing with various filming techniques, video artists also found themselves filming news broadcasts in a different style. Initially, this happened by broadcasting amateur



artistic footage or creating amateur programming like a community news programs. For example, in Canada, Barefoot Television was a community access station that encouraged people not only to shoot their own footage, but to produce their own television shows, including in-house variety shows or new programming (ibid). In this way, issues that were facing the community that may be overlooked by mainstream media outlets could be broadcast to local people. In Canada, local programming was largely supported by the federal government agency, The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). The CRTC is an independent public authority in charge of regulating and supervising Canadian broadcasting and telecommunications (CRTC Website, 2010). In general, the CRTC has strict regulations to encourage Canadian content on Canadian air-waves. As a result, by 1972, over “100 cable systems in Canada were offering a community channel to their subscribers” (Goldberg, 1990, p.15). In Canada, the advent of community television contributed to the goal of having Canadian content on Canadian airwaves. The overarching goal of these stations, however, was to reveal a different interpretation of events to the public in a way that wasn’t happening through mainstream avenues (Boyle, 1990; Hazen & Winkour, 1997; Halleck, 2002). Their attempts to provide more equal representations of the public is a hallmark of community media that is present today.

## **Media Democratization**

Involving the public in these bold new ways of media production resulted in challenging mainstream media. More than just illustrating issues, or using film or video as a social critique, people were now getting involved in expressing their opinions about the issues facing their communities and later distributing this work through community television stations. Increasingly during this period those often marginalized from artist practices had access to “porta-pac” portable video technology, as prices decreased in an effort to market to the general public (Boyle, 1990; Jankowski, 1995; Halleck, 2002; Fleetwood, 2005). As a result, alongside and

often in conjunction with the growth of community access television, we see during this period a process of media democratization. Those long excluded from media creation, in other words, were given the tools to produce their own video work, often for the first time. The idea behind these developments was to open up a space in which the audience and producer became interchangeable (Rosler, 1990, Burnett, 1991; Halleck, 2002, Lewis, 2006). The field of media practice was growing into something that the general public could participate in, on a more frequent and engaged level. From the perspective of radical media activists, what justified these developments was a sense that an oppressive mainstream media and the culture of silence it induced needed to be transformed through campaigns for public media access (Lewis, 2006). Community media practitioners wanted individuals to have more opportunities to express their voices about the issues facing their communities, instead of being dependent on the mainstream media to describe what was happening to them. Video production seemed to offer this possibility; through this newly emerging technology, the public had an opportunity to voice itself in a powerful new way.

At least in part, this optimism was premised on the idea that video shot and captured by “amateur” videographers could be shared later with the public. This new wave of media production thus represented a new form of communication that, at the very least, opened the *possibility* of understanding and consuming information that was different from past practices. Lili Berko (1990) has argued that within this context, community-access videos acted as liminal devices that introduced new ways of “being” that contradicted or bent the conception of social norms. This is to say, these broadcasts acted as devices to disseminate information which disrupted the perspective of how journalism *should* look, as practiced by mainstream public and commercial broadcasters. The attempt to create access to tools of media production for an otherwise untrained person was thus an effort to democratize the public sphere on behalf of the activists and community members who worked in fledgling community media organizations.

## **Community Video: Addressing Community Development**

In this sense, community media practitioners were partly responsible for creating a new framework for involving the public in fostering a new paradigm of information sharing. Their activities were supported by a growing criticism from governments and academics alike that Berrigan refers to as “one- way communication flow(s), centralized decision making and a view of the community as passive and non-contributory” (as cited in Howley, 2009, 16). Since the end of the Second World War, Western nations had been grappling with ways to address development issues such as poverty, education and health through developmental communication in developing countries and in rural areas of Western nations (Howley, 2009). It was recognized that in many instances, communities outside of Western, urban centres of power were often prescribed strategies to develop their community that were not applicable to their needs. For example, the 1965 Economic Council of Canada’s Report on Poverty in Canada (CRPC) “was essentially a document on urban poverty in central Canada that simply projected its findings onto rural Canada” (Crocker, 2003, p.126). It did not recognize the issues facing Canadians in rural areas, and it didn’t capture the breadth and scope of poverty facing some Canadians, such as lack of information and organization. As such, and coupled with mounting criticism from academics that community development communication strategies failed to properly address the needs of local communities outside of urban centres of power, it was increasingly recognized by government officials, policy makers and the public that new practices were needed to bridge communication in a different way, including developing small, local information sharing capacity for people in rural areas. As such, community media practices became an attractive method through which a more equal exchange of information between governments and the public was thought possible. For example, Donald Snowdon, a researcher with Memorial University in Newfoundland (MUN) believed that the CRPC report had not adequately described or understood and therefore could not address the social inequalities facing people

living in rural Canada. He recognized the potential of using community media practices and approached the head of the Canadian War on Poverty Program with the suggestion that they fund the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) to explore and illustrate the issues facing Canadians living in rural Canada (Crocker, 2003; Howley, 2009). The National Film Board of Canada is a public agency that produces and distributes films and other audiovisual works which reflect Canada to Canadians and the rest of the world (NFB Website, 2010). Within a year, The Challenge for Change (CFC) program was established and its first project was to explore the issues facing a small, rural Canadian town called Fogo, in rural Newfoundland. The CFC program was, in part, a response from the Canadian government to more effectively deal with issues of community development and poverty in the country. As such, the creation of this program marks a moment in time when government, not just artists or activists, recognized the potential of community media practice with video as a strategy for community development through enhanced democratic engagement and information sharing amongst citizens.

### **The Challenge for Change Program**

The goal of the CFC program was to provide people living in rural Canadian communities with the opportunity to transform their lives by using media production as a vehicle to convey problems and issues to government officials. The intention was to give people from a local community “the opportunity to define and represent their social problems” (Crocker, 2003, p.125), by giving them access to media equipment. This project fulfilled the NFB’s overarching goals of producing films to introduce Canadians to various social problems affecting the population as a whole. What set this project apart, however, was its aim to involve community members in the actual process of film-making. Stephen Crocker explains, “The promoters of this project at the NFB and MUN gave film and video equipment to isolated communities so they could create a collective image of themselves and their social problems” (Crocker, 2003, p.122). Over half of the population of Fogo depended on welfare and the

population was spread out among ten municipalities in relative isolation from one another. Given these geographic and economic circumstances, the hope was to enable the residents of the community to use video as a means for thinking through their living situation, so that this situation might be transformed in the future.

A central feature of the design of this project was having a “field-worker” who acted as a mediator between the film crew from the NFB and the townspeople. This facilitator was to be neither a social worker nor a filmmaker. Rather, the role of the field worker was to guide communication between groups, helping to lead discussions at screenings and bringing the films to other communities to reflect on the common problems of rural living (Crocker, 2003). Another hallmark of the productions was the feedback process. During the editing process, the filmmakers would screen the raw footage to the community, in order to generate a response. Upon completion, the films were taken back to conferences where they were screened and used as the focus of discussion between government officials, academics and representatives of the community. Government officials then responded through short videos that were later screened back on the island. Eventually, it was believed that the Fogo community formed a successful fishing cooperative, in part because of the CFC program. The program was recognized as an important example of early participatory film-making that over-turned traditional top-down communication frameworks by involving the public in a horizontal structure of information sharing from locals to government officials.

The CFC program was a landmark program which served as a powerful example of how community involvement in media production has the potential to transform communities in relation to their daily struggles (Burnett, 1991, Burnett, 1996; Higgins,1999; Cocker, 2003; Druick, 2007, Howley, 2009,). At the same time, it is important to note that particular challenges were apparent in the program, challenges which continue to have a bearing on how community media production work is undertaken today. For instance, although the Fogo community participated in the creation of various films, these works were mainly conceived and produced by the

three or four well-educated young white men who came from far away urban centres to work with members of the Fogo community (Druick, 2007). Ultimately, their presence worked to shape the films in such a way that they would make sense to other elite, white audiences, namely government officials, across Canada (Burnett, 1996). In addition, the directors of the films only spent a few months living in the Fogo community. The assumption that strangers could enter a strange, unknown community for a small period of time and “get to know the locals” to the extent that their stories could be told in an honest manner is somewhat naïve, if not outright mistaken (Burnett, 1991). Added to this, questions have been raised as to how these initiatives could be perceived as radical. After all, the filmmakers held most of the control and their political activism was coterminous with their access to state funds (Druick, 2007). Finally, while there was never any study of the long-term effects of the CFC program on this community, or other communities that later participated in similar projects with the NFB (Burnett, 1991), it has now become clear that the development of the fishing cooperative on Fogo Island may not have been a direct result of the program (Crocker, 2003). As such, it remains unclear how effective it was in providing people with access to media production as a means to transform their living conditions.

### **Community Media Practice: The inspiration behind Participatory Communication**

Despite the uneven results of this early project, the CFC program reflects how institutions, universities, and the public were mobilizing to involve themselves in exploring new pathways of communication amongst one another. Of course, the growth of community media took shape in relation to larger social developments that had been ongoing since the end of the Second World War. Indeed, just as independent artists had been creating community media videos as a way to invigorate public dialogue on social issues, by the early 1970's large institutions and organizations such as the World Bank and the UN were recognizing the potential for creating community videos as a tool within a larger strategy to improve quality of life

through participatory community development (Howley, 2009). Since the 1970's, international organizations, local agencies, and governments across the world have adopted participatory approaches to foster community development, and participatory approaches are now considered commonplace (White, 2003; Howley, 2009;). These initial explorations with community media have opened up methods for international organizations to work with people in a participatory way in the hopes that that may empower people through the process of knowledge sharing on a horizontal level. It had been recognized that top down, one way communication flows had not been successful in the area of community development (Berrigan, 1979; Osolnik, 2005; Howley, 2009). A new paradigm for community and social development was thus emerging, and the use of video technology and community media practices were important elements within these developments. In part, community media making with video had opened the door to creating participatory communication practices that held the potential to reach marginalized voices. In this sense, the goals of participatory communication were two fold; first, "participatory communication raises the community's awareness of its own resources and talents as well as its capacity to alter or transform some aspect of daily life, [second, it also] encourages communities to act in concert and to do so in a deliberate, conscious and self-perpetuating fashion that builds and maintains social relations over time" (Howley, 2009, p.184). Although community media operated in various venues and forums, its potential to bring people who had been traditionally marginalized into a dialogue was increasingly recognized as a powerful aspect for the enhancement of community development in general.

More specifically, it was the *process* of acting with video technology and the act of creating the message that was considered to be integral to participatory communication. Ultimately, participatory practices valued process over product. It is useful to quote Howley at length here:

Community media is not "simply" a matter of opening up the channels of communication to nonprofessional media makers. Rather,

community media's raison d'être is to facilitate two-way communication within the local community. In doing so...community media enables groups and individuals to enter into a public discourse, thereby supporting popular participation in decision making processes and promoting a greater sense of individual and collective agency in directing the community's growth and development.. -*Understanding Community Video*, Kevin Howley, p.16

Community media practices not only involved the public in a new way of information sharing, in a short amount of time, practitioners increasingly recognized the power of the process of creating video as having the most potential to empower individuals to transform their lives (Berrigan, 1979; Burnett, 1996; Higgins, 1999; White, 2003; Lewis, 2006; Howley, 2009). Of the various texts that influenced this new paradigm for community enhancement, Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) is often cited as the primary theoretical influence in community media practice (Lewis, 2006).

### **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**

Freire was a Marxist scholar who insisted that the under class would need to take control of the tools of the elite in order to transform the relationships of power shaping their lives. As such, his book explained practices that could enable people to empower themselves in order to “unmask domination and mobilize liberation” (Cote, Day & dePeuter, 2007, p.6). He believed that once people were mobilized, they might rebalance the world into a reflection of genuine compassion and equal exchange.

Towards these ends, Freire's project centered on the principle of dialogical interaction as fundamental to the work of creating free expression. Essentially, he believed that the world is unbalanced because only a few people have power, and many people are never heard. In order for this to change, people must recognize that this is happening and develop the capacity to voice themselves. According to Freire, authentic knowledge formation happens as a result of critical reflection, and through the experience of a dialectical process of collective expression (Freire, 1970). With this in mind, Freire examined the education system in Brazil as a starting point to



explain the problems of widespread poverty that were affecting citizens in South America's largest nation. What he found was an education system that *prescribes* knowledge through "an act of depositing" where "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (Freire, 1970, p.72). But the problem is these practices create a passive citizenry who are likely to doubt their capabilities to transform their own living conditions. As such, Freire introduced "problem posing" education as a solution to the "banking concept" of education (Freire, 1970, p.73). Freire argued that problem-posing education could break vertical patterns of domination by engaging in a process of dialogue between teachers and students where all sides learn and grow. "Banking education...attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness," while problem posing education "strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality" (Freire, 1970, p.81). Freire believed that by restricting people's pursuit of knowledge on their own terms it restricted people from pursuing their fundamental humanness. He argued that one could see this manifest among marginalized people who are regarded as incompetent and lazy (Freire, 1970). In order to transform one's life circumstance, however, Freire argued that marginalized populations needed to first realize how those in power prescribe knowledge. Freire wrote that people should derive power from the ability to "perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves: through this they can come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation"( Freire,1970, p.83). A process of consciencization is thus considered to be integral to enabling marginalized populations to start a process of contributing their knowledge to their own development, instead of being forced to use the information of oppressors to inform their living.

According to Freire, transformation is not dependent on exerting one's own opinion in a new context. Rather, social transformation is thought to occur as a result of praxis. Praxis is the collective action of reflection/action. When everyone has

engaged in a process that enables them to understand that they are experts in their own knowledge, it opens a space where everyone is equal to freely exchange ideas. This space is where dialogical praxis can occur to create authentic knowledge. Freire believed that *collaborative expression* had the most potential to lead people *to take social action*. He argued that dialogue, as the function of knowledge production, must occur as an interaction between all acting participants within an experience. “Authentic education is not carried out by “A” for “B” or by “A” about “B”, but rather by “A” with “B”.”(Freire, 1970, p.93). Social transformation thus relies on a transformation of power, where all voices that have been oppressed can finally be heard. The emphasis on collaborative expression is integral to political action. It is the attempt to make everyone’s voices heard in order to create a more equal and just world.

### **Theatre of The Oppressed**

Freire’s book laid the ground for writers and activists interested in using educational programming in the name of greater emancipation. Inspired by his work, Augusto Boal published *Theatre of the Oppressed* in 1979 which offered a dynamic curriculum that brought together art practices in non-traditional learning sites for the purposes of promoting social change. Drawing on and in many ways extending Freire’s work Boal used theatre as a way to construct literacy programs in South America during the 1970’s. His point was to demonstrate how learning and social change might be achieved once people were given the resources (ie; literacy and access to cameras to make photo diaries and create art) that were traditionally beyond their reach.

At root, Boal’s theatrical formula worked to engage audiences in the performance piece itself, as a means to practice liberatory pedagogy. Boal’s theory about the emancipatory potential of performance work was a departure from other forms of traditional theatre. In this sense, in addition to Freire, Boal was also drawing on the work of the playwright Bertolt Brecht (Boal, 1979). Brecht believed that traditional theatre was oppressive to the public because the performance of drama

and tragedy in a traditional narration formula elicited catharsis from the audience in the form of an emotional empathetic reaction to the characters on stage. Brecht contended, however, that this cathartic reaction left audience members emotionally charged, but ultimately passive and disabled from taking action, because the power of decision-making ultimately remained in the control of the fictional characters onstage. Both Brecht and Boal reconceived theatre by creating plays that aimed to empower audience members to think critically about the action taking place on stage in relation to their own lives and social milieus. The point was to inspire the audience to take political action beyond the realm of theatre, in the context of audiences' everyday lives.

To accomplish these ends, Boal introduced what he called “a Poetics of The Oppressed” with the direct goal of inciting revolutionary action amongst the Brazilian people. This was a form of theatre that he believed could engage audiences in such a way that they would perform and express their own ideas on their terms and through their own creativity. In theatre workshops, the audience was encouraged to stop performances if they felt like an injustice had occurred. An audience member could then step into a character on stage, and change the outcome of the play. In this way, “The spectator is encouraged to intervene in the action, abandoning his condition of object and assuming fully the role of subject” (Boal,1979, p.132). Through this process, Boal contended that the audience is enabled to produce knowledge that they are expert in, thus transforming the social context (Freire, 1970). The person that was once an object of knowledge, or objectified to knowledge, is thereby made the subject of his or her own knowledge, a process that results in two effects: it develops a sense of agency within the person, and it transforms the body of knowledge itself in such a way as to hold new meaning. Through this, Boal and others influenced by his work contended that participants are enabled and empowered to resist their oppressors and change their worlds.

## **The MacBride Report: A new paradigm for communication approaches**

Placing the tools of communication technology into the hands of the marginalized and allowing them to voice themselves was the aim for many media practitioners who were influenced by Freire and Boal. Not only did community media allow people to share information, it was increasingly understood to have the potential to empower individuals to take control of their own affairs and transform their living conditions. Towards these ends, throughout the 1970's, numerous community media organizations pursued projects that aimed to give the disenfranchised a voice (Burnett, 1996). For example, the Alternate Media Center was founded in New York to serve as a political epicenter for grassroots projects and advocacy about community broadcasting (Stein, 2001). In England, Nigg and Wade explain that the Community Action Centre was founded with the stated objective of making “video skills available to as many individuals and groups as possible, so that a user’s group would develop around the equipment, capable of carrying out their own projects” (as quoted in Fountain, 2007, p. 41). Meanwhile, the founders of the Challenge For Change Program continued to produce films for twelve years in Canada and were eventually asked to continue their community media projects in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Uganda and Guyana, which they did into the early 1980’s (Crocker, 2003). Community media was thus swiftly emerging as an effective and simple way to share information and empower people toward social change in the 1970's.

In part, the urgency reflected in community media projects led to a call for an evaluation of small-scale communication projects across the world. Eventually, UNESCO would take up this task with the aim of making a list of suggestions from what it discovered (Osolnik, 2005). Ultimately, this work would lead to the MacBride report, which was released in 1980 (Ayish, 2005; Ivie, 2005; Osolnik, 2005; Raboy, 2003, Trend, 1997). The report described the work that had been happening within small groups around the world that were striving to enhance communicative

measures within communities. The report not only took stock of current communicative strategies, however, it also served as a template to reorient development policies for the advancement of human rights around the world. More than just an evaluation, the report also included a commitment to the development of democratic self governance through policies that meant to strengthen the ability of communities to “understand common and individual needs through speaking, writing, listening, watching and assembling” (Ivie, 2005, p.62). The MacBride Report signaled the emergence of a new political framework, in other words, one which conceptualized media as a platform to enable democratic engagement across the world with the aim to better human life.

The MacBride report was the first major document of its kind to recognize that global communication and media systems were linked to the overall structure of the international political system. In order to address human inequality, the report argued, the function of media itself would need to be reconceived for it to operate differently within the public sphere. The report took note of the “negative, one way information flow” from rich countries to poor countries, and in national contexts, from a centre of power that extended vertically downwards (Osolnik, 2005, p.9). It argued that the dominance of Western conglomerates’ over the transnational production and distribution of images, and of communication technologies and networks more broadly, contributed to inequality in the global information order. For the rights and freedoms of individuals to be upheld, democratization of the structure of media was thus considered necessary in order to preserve and augment individual freedoms. Conceived in this way, media could act as a tool to develop growing ties of human fellowship. The report suggested that media could and needed to serve social and cultural development, and should not be used to aggravate existing inequalities in the interest of narrow sectarian interests. Building community media programs therefore came to be seen within international institutions of governance as a way to develop community and combat poverty. As a result, the report called for the regulation of Western media in countries that were vulnerable to the bombardment

of outside production (Ayish, 2005). In addition, a declaration was made that nations must reach “prior agreements concerning direct satellite broadcasting to the populations of countries other than the country of origin of transmission” (Trend, 1997). By limiting the flow of outside media from the West, the intention was to develop the cultural identity of the nation on their own terms through their own information systems.

In order to enforce these regulations, the report recognized that a fundamental shift in the conception of communication itself would need to be addressed. As such, the most radical recommendation from the report was that freedom to information laws should be enriched into a framework of “communication rights” where “the freedom of press (and freedom of information) was enriched with the right to communicate, the right to accept and spread information and to be informed” ( Osolnik, 2005, p.8). By locating the act of communication within a human rights discourse, the goal was to draw attention to the idea that communication itself was an inseparable component of the ability to live freely. In order to promote global democracy, the MacBride report stated that access to information systems would be needed to transform global power relations (Padovni, 2005). As such, the report argued that the public should have access and training to use media to communicate to enable the public to participate in democratic decision-making (ibid). It also recognized the significance of smaller organized groups of community media to balance national or centralized media systems. The development of communications media in a grassroots or alternative form was thus seen as a prerequisite for meaningful democratic engagement (Carrol, W & Hackett, R, 2006). The report not only listed a set of recommendations to regulate existing media structures, it then re-conceptualized the use and potential for media communication in people’s daily life around the world.

## Challenges and Issues with Community Media

If this was the promise of community media by the late 1970's, other issues were also becoming significant in a way that challenged the notion that community media could effect change. For instance, community media pioneers were often portrayed as if they all had the same intentions of democratizing the public sphere through community-based media. However, many of the producers were simply trying to get a career in mainstream media or filmmaking in New York and later, Hollywood (Sturken, 1990). Additionally, while the movement is sometimes remembered as a coherent whole in which the goals of video practitioners were politically unanimous, it now seems clear from the amateurish nature of the filming and the frequent forays into experimental art that the intentions of early community media producers were not always the same. In the case of the group Videofreex, for instance, their goal was simply to collect as much amateur footage as possible, without any political motivation other than to broadcast a lot of footage (ibid). As well, due to the disorganized and anti-establishment nature of the community media movement, the general public may not have desired this kind of work in the way some activists and scholars have claimed. More significantly, others have argued that this form of media production only succeeded where a strong sense of community was already present and “little to make things better” happened in communities that were short on social capital in the first place (Jankowski, 1995). Indeed, the failure of community media projects to address the structural changes needed to improve social inequities was, and continues to be, recognized by researchers of community media practice (Higgins, 1999). As such, it still remains unclear if, how, and for how long, social transformation occurred as a result of community media practices during the 1970's.

At the same time, the publication of the MacBride report represented a coherent list of suggestions that held the potential to create more equal representation and fairness by using the strategies that media activists had been employing over the past decade. Despite the criticisms and hesitations around the

potential of community media practices, as Berko (1990) has pointed out, these initiatives opened up a space where top-down media practices could be disrupted. Thus, community media seemed to be finally coming into its own. The future of developing community with media in the pursuit of developing a civil society thus seemed to be on the cusp of realization.

### **1980: Changes in the political economy**

While a hopeful period, then, the questions and challenges that marked community media practice were reflections of larger tensions in the political arena in the early 1980's, mainly surrounding the question of how democratic society could be achieved. The activities in community media in the 1960's and 1970's had been informed by social, political and economic policies and guidelines of the post Second World War era. During that time, Western nations had experienced a period of unprecedented economic growth within a Keynesian economic framework (Wilson, 2004; Lawrence, 2006). This economic framework encourages the state to invest in public institutions as a means for promoting social, economic and cultural development on a national scale. In Canada, this meant the creation, growth and investment in public education and the public healthcare system, among other initiatives (Wilson, 2004). Community media practices were located within this political-economic context, but were also part of a movement that questioned the capacity of a centralized state to address the public good. In many ways in fact, counter-culture activities and participatory educational projects had been borne out of a frustration with large state institutions that were seen to be ineffectual in developing people's capacities to manage and control their own affairs. Complicating these sentiments, the alternative socialist world that many had predicted would be the inevitable outcome for western nations at the end of the 1970's was plagued by its own tensions and contradictions (Harvey, 2007). As a result, after the partial failure of efforts by governments of various political stripes in the West to use state intervention as a means for managing social inequalities and the need for economic



growth within capitalist economies, one response which increasingly came to shape government policy in the 1980's was to free up markets to stimulate economic growth (ibid). Politicians began to embrace a new paradigm to govern, in other words, one which privileges individual freedom and limits government intervention in the public's affairs as the best way to promote a "marketplace of ideas" (Stein 1998; For a more detailed description see Hayek (1960, 1962) and Friedman (1962)). This theory of democracy is often referred to as neo-liberalism and it is rooted in classical liberal democratic theory (Raboy, 2003). This shift in perception came into place for a number of reasons, although it was deeply influenced by the economic problems of the 1970's.

In brief, by the end of the 1970's, unemployment was on the rise in many Western nations, and government officials were concerned about how to stimulate the economy. Neoliberalism was embraced by western nations, including Canada, because it promised to stimulate the economy by scaling back the role of government and encouraging individuals to have as much freedom and ability as possible to prosper economically. Secondly, people had become disillusioned and suspicious about the capacity of governments to be the agent of change in society. Neoliberalism emphasized personal freedom over the bureaucratic policies that were dictated by government and other traditional hierarchical institutions. By capturing the ideals of individual freedom and framing them as part of a larger attack on the interventionist state, capitalist interests could be restored (Harvey, 2007). The response to this economic and political unrest was to shift attention to the way individuals could pursue their own desires, interests and needs in the context of markets that were increasingly seen to be the basis for freedom and development. Thus began a new political and economic era characterized by deregulation, open markets, competition and entrepreneurship. It is useful to quote Harvey at length here.

Sectors formerly run or regulated by the state [were] turned over to the private sphere and deregulated (freed from any state interference). Competition—between individuals, between firms, between territorial entities (cities, regions, nations, regional groupings)—[was] held to be a

primary virtue.... Privatization and deregulation combined with competition, it [was] claimed, [could] eliminate bureaucratic red tape, increase efficiency and productivity, improve quality, and reduce costs, both directly to the consumer through cheaper commodities and services and indirectly through reduction of the tax burden.  
– David Harvey, 2007, p.65

Under neoliberalism, the enhancement of personal and individual skills was thus seen as a method for communities to become more prosperous. In such a framework, human productivity is equated with one's ability to enter the market and gain employment. "The ability to be more productive overall, should garner higher living standards...Continuous increases in productivity should then deliver higher living standards to everyone" (Harvey, 2007, p.64). As such, all aspects of social life begin to bend toward the aim of demonstrating productivity in the market. In practice, this meant that throughout the 1980's, we see the reorganization of social activities in such a way that the sense of what makes a civil society begins to shift towards the ability of citizens to be productive in a market place, to the extent that *every* activity begins to acquire market value. Following this logic, any and all activities in the public sphere are readjusted to carry the burden of demonstrating their productive value. Demonstration of productivity is considered to be necessary for any organization or person to be viable.

Towards these ends, guided by neoliberalism, the power of the state needed to be diminished in its capacity to manage public affairs. Where community media is concerned, one of the first impacts of the new political economic agenda was in relation to the MacBride report. As noted earlier, the MacBride report recommended that governments regulate the actions and growth of large, influential media corporations. The United States, along with Britain, reacted negatively to these recommendations, however, because the proposed regulations included limits on foreign media ownership. These regulations were attacked as limits to growth and prosperity. In response, the British and American governments argued that by complying with recommendations from the report it would limit the capacity of their

commercial and public media companies to broadcast internationally. The promise of the neoliberal project was that citizens would be given more access and choice of media within an unlimited market and decentralized state (Raboy, 2003). The U.S and Britain argued, however, that UNESCO itself was acting in a manner that inappropriately limited their economic and political affairs. In response, the United States attempted to discredit UNESCO by accusing it of partisanship (Trend, 1997). When this strategy showed only marginal success, they promptly withdrew from UNESCO in protest (Osolnik, 2005; Oshiochru, 2008). Ultimately, the withdrawal of the U.S and Britain from UNESCO had a severe impact on the organization's ability to impact the field of communication (Osolnik, 2005). As such, recommendations from the report were never enacted into formal policy.

### **Neoliberal Policy Changes in Canada**

With more specific reference to Canada and community media developments, as the role of the state was curtailed, public funding for government sponsored institutions and social programming was drastically cut back. Under the Mulroney government, for instance, the institutions that were diminished were universal health programs and social security benefits (Armitage, 2003). The Canadian government downsized its federal social welfare funding and the result was that social services were diminished in every province (Wilson, 2004). These changes were implemented as part of a broader set of policy changes the aim of which was to dismantle national barriers to global capital and international trade. Indicative of this, the Mulroney government signed the Canada-US Free Trade Accord in 1988 which, in combination with tax and service cuts, opened Canada's markets to international trade while diminishing the role of the government as a tool for development and for fostering health services, education and other public services (ibid). Because the neoliberal project considers access to the market as central, the Canadian government also advocated for the diminishment of unions and labour laws in order to liberate capital and investment (ibid). Within this new political climate, for our purposes it is crucial

to note that the goals of community development were re-orientated away from the empowerment of individuals to equally participate in community activities towards encouraging individuals to gain skills for the emerging flexible workplace.

Symptomatic of these changes around the world in the late 1980's, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) issued a report entitled *Education and the Economy in a Changing Society* (Gaskel & Rubenson, 2004) on how to stimulate growth in light of the new economic era. This report would be pivotal in Canada. At root, it argued that the development of new technology would create the demand for skills development. In combination with the introduction of a new labour market, Marginson highlights their suggestion that “the key appears to be [in] the ability of people to cope with changes and to turn them to advantages in the future” (as quoted in Gaskel & Rubenson, 2004, p.10). In consideration of the shifts in the economic model, the OECD no longer called for a general expansion of public education but recommended major reforms to the nature of public education and its responsiveness to labour market needs. The OECD noted “the need for a more adequate introduction to jobs, careers, and the world of work in schools and familiarization with and command of information technology” (OECD, 1989, p.30 in Gaskell, 2004, p.10). In particular it emphasized the need for better school-to-work transitions for young people.

### **HRSDC Programming: Specific policies to ensure job skill enhancement with young people**

In response to these recommendations and to the larger move toward a neoliberal policy environment, by the early 1990's, Canadian social programming through various community development platforms was oriented toward the development of employment skills among populations that were considered to have barriers to employment. Youth were a specific target of these initiatives. According to a study published in 2004 by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), unemployment and homelessness with youth has risen steadily since the

late 1970's (HRSDC, 2004; Lawrence, 2006). HRSDC is a department of the government of Canada that oversees policy development and program creation that supports Canadians in making choices that help them live productive and rewarding lives, and improve Canadians' quality of life (HRSDC website, 2010). The youth labour market has been increasingly volatile, and youth have not been able to find stable employment until they are in their thirties (HRSDC, 2004). Where once high school drop outs or disadvantaged youth could find unskilled employment in the resource industries, such as farming, forestry, and mining, this market has shrunk in the last twenty years, while a high turnover, low wage service industry has emerged (Lawrence, 2006). At the same time, youth "are still largely seen as disengaged from organized efforts to lead and represent their communities" (Soep, 2006). These factors are all recognized as barriers which limit youth from engaging with community activities. There is substantial concern, then, for marginalized youth to develop skills that will allow them to lead full lives. As such, "(a)lmost everywhere, progress is being sought in childhood development and care, access to education and training" so young people can better participate in the labour market (National Canadian Council on Welfare, 2007) Symptomatic of this, in order to enhance the economic viability of communities, social programs and funding have been created to enhance the skills of youth who are at risk of unemployment.

By the 1990's, in light of these circumstances, the Canadian federal government decided to refocus its mandates on developing programs to foster school to work transitions. To achieve this, the Canadian government introduced Youth Employment Strategies (YES) in 1997, a program delivered by Service Canada, an agency funded by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC website, 2010). They specifically created a branch of YES called Skills Link, to assist at-risk youth to enter the job market (Lawrence, 2006). The definition for "at risk youth" is vast but according to the Skills Link website it can range from youth who suffer from addiction, to ethnic discrimination, to lack of focus or interest in employment (Skills Link website,2010). Youth who fall into this category have often

fallen away from mainstream education and could be considered to lack skills that are taught in public education. In order to address the numerous barriers that could challenge youth's employability, community-arts programming has emerged as a valuable resource to foster learning with at risk youth.

The community artists of the 1970's had not completely disappeared and in order to survive many repositioned their work as a platform to develop job skills. During the 1980's, the cooperation of social service agencies and artistic collectives became more common to fulfill employment-skill enhancement mandates from the government and other funding bodies. Steve Goodman (2002) discusses as much when he notes that, "The 1980s saw a shift away from community empowerment and critique to a focus on... "marketable skills" and industry jobs, through vocational training, most crucially including training provided by nonschool institutions" (Goldfarb, 2002; Goodman, 2003 quoted in Soep & Chavez, 2005). While arts funding across Western countries was drastically reduced during the 1980's, ironically, neoliberal policies inadvertently presented a new way for artists to get involved in traditional social work activities. Art groups worked with social service agencies, and vice-versa because using the language of developing community capacity through creative job training schemes was critical to their survival (Levine, 1997). This language not only needed to demonstrate measurable outcomes, but also creative and innovative methods to develop employment capacity in individuals. By incorporating art and media education into service delivery, social service agencies had a broader ability to garner funding. As such, by the 1990's, community development centres were incorporating a wide range of community arts programming to enhance skills to make a person more viable in the market.

Over the last few decades, research has illustrated that community-arts based practices can work effectively as means to introduce at-risk youth to opportunities to increase their sense of agency while developing their own knowledge and expertise (Brice-Heath, 2001, Greene, 2003, Goldbard, 2006, Gadsen, 2008). Aside from acting as an outlet for expression, however, social development programming needs

to foster skills that will be required in the new information economy. The global economy is an information economy that requires a digitally literate citizenry (Selwyn, 2003). Since the 1990's, a general thrust to instill computer skills in young people has occurred in every segment of education as the need for a skilled work force in technological labor has increased (Trend, 1997). This recognition is behind community based media projects that recognize that “the value and class association of a technical education [has] shifted dramatically as media technology [has become] a respected and even an essential component not only of education but of everyday life” (Goldfarb, 2002, p. 78). As prices have decreased with digital media technology, community development agencies and community media collectives can both finally afford to invest in a broad range of equipment. In addition, the Internet has emerged as a dynamic new space of communication and interaction that holds the potential for new ways for non-professional media producers to access and circulate their work. It is of note that access to, and the low cost of this media technology, is in part due to changes that have occurred in the globalized market. The decentralization of the media is responsible for the overwhelming access to and use of media, which can be used in participatory, two-way communication (Lorimer, Gasher & Skinner, 2008). For our purposes, what is crucial about these developments is they have set the stage for the dramatic growth of media production with youth as a method for invigorating community development.

### **Community Media: Somewhere between job skills and democratic engagement**

Given this backdrop, what seems to be true today is that community media practices with youth can be found in any number of areas and spaces, due in part to the proliferation of access to technology. An overview of the field conducted by the U.S.-based Stuart Foundation (2006) defines youth media as “media conceived, developed by youth and disseminated to others.” However, it is still largely difficult to classify the broad range of media activities that youth are engaged with in terms of community-media practices. In part, this is because, “It has mainly developed outside

of the ‘eye’ that forms part of the mainstream education system that examines learning and schools in great detail through education faculties in universities and the research sections of government departments” (Sefton-Green, 2006, p. 8). Although it is difficult to calculate exactly how many such programs are underway, community media programs for youth occur everyday all across North America.

As media educators have increasingly needed to incorporate production skills into their curriculum, the goals of community media projects have become more firmly rooted in developing critical vocational skills among youth (Goldfarb, 2002). For example, looking at a handful of descriptions from community media programs for young people in BC today, nearly all of them emphasize how their programs will build skills in youth to use later in life. The Gulf Island Film and Television School, for instance, promises to train youth in skills to make them viable employees in the film industry, while Youth in Media, strives to prepare youth for “employment in the growing field of environmental communication” (Youth in Media website, 2010). Goldfarb (2002) argues that although projects attempt to be consciousness raising exercises, “agendas of workforce preparation... are nonetheless intended outcomes of the curriculum” (Goldfarb, 2002, p.72). Due to the increasing pressure for community media programs to act as vocational training programs for youth who face barriers to employment, the practices within these programs are being influenced by the overwhelming attention placed on fulfilling goals of job-training.

The problem is that neoliberal economic objectives are informing and in many instances, undermining the way democratic engagement is fostered through community media projects. Indeed, neoliberalism creates a certain mindset, or collective imagining of what it means to operate in the world as a civic agent. At root, this framework suggests that all human activity has a marketable value. That is, every action is seen to have a marketable outcome, which in turn, limits our capacity to conceptualize the meaning of social activity. In other words, social activity is only meaningful if it has a marketable outcome, or productive value, and the notion that it



wouldn't is senseless. This logic has penetrated our understanding of the world to the effect that many people now see this economic structure to be wholly natural and "commonsense" (Harvey, 2007). Under the logic of neoliberalism, every action should have a marketable outcome of success or failure to the extent that civil engagement is increasingly assessed based on its degree of how useful it is in the market. But by assuming that all social activities should produce an economic result, this distorts how we approach our relationships to our world. We become at risk of limiting our public imagining to a world that is defined by the power and authority of market-based behaviour itself. Where civic engagement is concerned this means that it increasingly becomes senseless to pursue endeavours that do not deliver economic results. As a result, it begins to make increasing sense to pursue only those ventures that deliver private return on investment.

In addition, the assumption that there is capacity within every community to work through its own issues is problematic. The framework of neoliberalism "contends that each individual is responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and well-being, and does not account for social inequalities" (Harvey, 2007, p.65). This dictates that "the marginalized increasingly deal with the burden of their own oppression, which ignores the larger inherent inequalities among social structure" (Lee, McGrath, Moffatt & Usha, 1999, p.16). In terms of social welfare, the disenfranchised are considered to be responsible for their conditions, if not for how they arrived at that point, then certainly for how they intend to change their living situation.

Of course, access to media-making in community media programs still holds the potential for youth to enter a public dialogue. "In all matters linking youth to democracy, the media figure centrally" (Soep, 2006). Media is a particularly salient activity to enable youth to engage with democratic activities and ideas (Giroux, H.A, 2001; Kellner, D. 2001; Kelly, D.M., 2006; Soep, 2006; Poyntz, 2008). Media making can foster a process of enhancing democratic engagement and there has never been more opportunity to participate. However, in terms of community media programs

that work with at-risk youth, facilitators increasingly find themselves working between the opposing goals of trying to nurture young people to engage in democratic practices while simultaneously having to organize these activities through the lens of job-training objectives characterized by contemporary neoliberal policy environments. The question is, can they do it?

### **The problem with community media programs today**

Today, community media projects act as spaces where youth approach political issues while being trained in skills that can assist them in gaining employment. As such, youth who participate in these programs have the opportunity to be exposed to a range of skills, from critical thinking to working on a computer. Although the Canadian government addresses issues of poverty and community development by encouraging young people to develop a range of skills through programs like these, the neoliberal policies that inform these programs demand that the outcome of these projects are employment related. It is imperative to note, that in Canada, the outcomes of these projects must be employment related. Indeed, any community-based intervention program that uses HRSDC funding needs to demonstrate employment related outcomes in order to continue funding (Lawrence, 2006). Employment related outcomes are considered to be the most crucial measurement of a successful program. Moreover, because HRSDC is the primary funding body for all incorporated, community non-profit organizations that aim “to achieve a wide range of policy objectives, including knowledge transfer,” the effect of HRSDC's policy regime regarding the priority of job training has been significant across community development organizations (HRSDC website, 2010). This is problematic because as Loree Lawrence (2006) has argued, such strict employment outcomes do not recognize the other developments that occur during these programs, therefore putting such programs in jeopardy and ignoring the developments that could potentially lead to improving the lives of at-risk youth. Lawrence notes further that focusing on other outcomes would be useful for the

Canadian government in order to recognize the potential for arts programs to improve the lives of at-risk youth. However, I believe that the issue of vocational training and moreover, the occurrence of working within a neoliberal framework has more serious implications than the neglect of “other” outcomes. I believe that the neoliberal project informs *all* of the outcomes of these projects, in the sense that all of the outcomes are influenced by the ambition of fulfilling neoliberalistic aims. That is to say, there are no “other” outcomes that are innocent of neoliberal objectives. I believe that neoliberalism imposes a set of ideas on youth participants about what they should achieve within these programs that have negative impacts on how they think of themselves in terms of democratic and civic engagement. In other words, I argue that working within the mandates of these programs orients the participants in such a way as to neglect the goals of democratic engagement in favour of placing importance on developing individual skills. My concern is that through the program itself, the ultimate outcome for the participants is that they develop an understanding of the value of community media production through a neoliberal lens; as an activity that serves a selfish ambition of self-development, where it is only beneficial to pursue community media production as an activity that can deliver these results. As such, I question the impact that these programs have on participants considering the framework that they are required to uphold. The question I then ask is: Can community media programs as they are delivered now preserve the space for young people to enter a community dialogue? If so, how is this achieved?

In order to respond to these questions, in chapters two and three, I examine what happens in a media project in a mid-sized Canadian city to assess how the program impacts youth participants. In particular, I ask what happens in community media projects with youth, and how it enables them to practice community in a new way. In order to do so, I look at a community media program for at-risk youth called Kaleidoscope. It was largely funded by Service Canada, through Skills Link. It is my hope that these observations and suggestions may assist proponents of social change

to clarify, in their minds at least, what they believe they are trying to accomplish and how they may do so.

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

I will now describe the research methods that I used to explore Kaleidoscope, a community media program that was funded by Skills Link through Service Canada. I describe how I used qualitative research methods to guide my study, specifically by informing my perspective with critical ethnography and a case study approach. I then look at the ways that I collected data in my field study, such as through interviews and note-taking. Finally, I describe the objectives of the program and the people involved.

### **Qualitative Research**

In order to examine my research question, I grounded my research methodology in qualitative methods. Qualitative research is informed by multiple methodologies that produce diverse knowledge (Hesse-Biber&Leavy, 2004). With this in mind, I used a variety of methods that pursued qualitative responses from participants by engaging in conversation, observation, participation and interviews in order to find meanings to assist me in understanding the nature of community media production.

Qualitative research has evolved as a form of data collection over the past century. Norman Denzin and Yvonna S.Lincoln (2005) have given a historical trajectory of eight different paradigms that have evolved over the past hundred years to inform qualitative research. According to Denzin and Lincoln they are, objectivist and positivist, modernist, blurred genres informed by multiple theoretical orientations, crisis of representation, post-modernism, post-experimental inquiry, methodologically contested present, and now, the fractured future. The eighth moment that we are presently experiencing is concerned with moral discourse and invites social sciences to open a space to have a critical conversation about

democracy, race and community. They point out how qualitative research has been responsive to criticisms from cultural studies that have rightly observed that early qualitative research created inappropriate constructions of others. As a result, they identified a shift between the past “objective approach” to the current “post positivist approach” where researchers act creatively and use a multiplicity of theoretical implications to inform their work. Amanda Coffey (1999) has argued that the outline of historical stages that Denzin and Lincoln have created is limited, however, because it has assumed that this trajectory evolved without the current tensions that mark our current approaches. According to Coffey, their claim is problematic and creates a disservice to research because it implies that previous research was inadequate and simplistic. She argues that the neat packaging of each category doesn’t adequately recognize how researchers have always dealt with intellectual tensions within their studies, and goes so far as to say that this disrespects earlier researchers who paved the way for where we are today, a place, implied by Denzin and Lincoln, as “teeming with contested ideas”. It was with caution therefore, that I moved into this research paradigm that has been hailed as diverse and variable. I tried to remind myself that research has always been a contested arena, and that simply recognizing it now as such does not mean that we should applaud ourselves for embracing more clever and diverse research as compared to research from the past. In my research process, I tried to remember that research continues to be an evolving process, with many missteps along the way.

Current qualitative approaches stress the use of a multitude of approaches to inform research, and promote critical reflection on behalf of the researcher. Researchers should act reflexively and reflect on their own positions within the research process at all times, as to not become overly confident in their abilities or to lose sight of what’s happening in their study. A common way to acknowledge a post-positivist approach is for researchers to position themselves within their work and recognize personal values that inform their approach (Creswell, 2007). In order to locate my own study within the writings on qualitative research I have needed to

consider the nature of my research, my personal life, and the relationship of this work to my position in the university. Coffey encourages researchers not only to acknowledge ourselves, but also to recognize how the experience of doing field work makes the researcher explore her own personal and emotional identity as a human being (Coffey, 1999). As a result, I recognized that my approach was informed by my own personal beliefs about social justice and my skepticism over the nature of current community development practices. I admit that I have reservations about the capacity for government-funded organizations to balance injustices in communities, and I tried to keep this in mind when I engaged in my field study. My position was not only informed by my research as a graduate student, but primarily from my experience as a video program facilitator for a year and a half.

Prior to engaging in my fieldwork for my thesis, I was involved in creating a community video project for a large youth centre that promotes community development in Vancouver's east side. It was during that time that I became interested in community media development in general. In 2007, I worked at the centre as a video producer and co-ran a media program that facilitated youth media productions. While building this program, I used guidelines that operated from a core value, shared amongst my co-facilitator, the organization and myself that everyone's voice mattered in the program and that it was of utmost importance that every effort was made to include everyone in decision-making about our projects. As such, prominence was placed on using collaborative practices between the other facilitator, the participants and myself. It was on reflecting on my experience, however, that I began to question the methods that I used to build and facilitate the program.

During my experience as a facilitator of that program, and as a graduate student at Simon Fraser University (SFU), I became familiar with the concept of Participatory Action Research, a leading methodology used by researchers and international organizations alike as a grassroots way of empowering marginalized people to gain control over the resources of their own communities. Kurt Lewin coined the term "action research" in 1952 as a way to describe participants

collectively researching their own experiences (Kemmis, 2008). PAR is grounded in radical practices where researchers work alongside subjects and create knowledge in a collaborative manner. PAR is an attempt to break the monopoly of knowledge by explicitly working with vulnerable populations (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). The methods of PAR therefore focus on dialogue, storytelling and any other way that people can present knowledge on their own terms, sometimes in artistic ways. In many cases, anything that happens within a PAR project can be interpreted as the creation of local knowledge. (Kapoor, 2002). To many scholars, this approach has not only been beneficial, it has become the leading paradigm in social and geographic research today (Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007).

As prices in technology have decreased, organizations and researchers have increasingly turned to media such as video to enable people to voice themselves. Participatory video is a means to enhance communication and technical learning skills between and for local people, while empowering them into taking action in their own communities to improve living condition (White, 2003).

After reflecting on my experience as a facilitator, however, I began to question the practices and the methodology that I had used to guide me in the program mainly because my experience did not produce my expected outcome of creating an equal, sharing learning environment. Instead, I grew skeptical of claims from the literature, the academic theses and the programs themselves that this methodology has produced such an environment. That is not to say that I did not believe that important forms of community engagement occurred in these programs. I simply began to believe that they do not necessarily materialize as a result of the collaborative practices that they claim to use. As such, I resolved to immerse myself in a different methodology for my thesis, and abandon PAR as my research framework. In order to do so, I needed to ground myself in a new methodological framework to investigate a new field study.



## Critical Ethnography

I knew I would need to operate within qualitative research, so doing an ethnographic study appeared to be a good choice in terms of allowing me to immerse myself in my field research without having to live up to the emancipatory expectations of PAR. The core of ethnographic activity is to understand life from another person's point of view (Spradley, 1979) and it is limited when it is understood as simply a means to collect data (Pink, 2007). Ethnography should be recognized as data *construction* rather than data *collection* (Shroeder et al, 2003). "*Ethnography* is a particular research perspective that is characterized by an epistemological commitment to explicit and holistic interpretation from a bottom up perspective, an empirical interest in first-hand exploration and an application of multiple, mainly qualitative but also quantitative, methodologies" (Shroeder et al, 2003, p. 64, *original italics*). However, the open-ended nature of ethnography can be taken up by some scholars to be used as a way to transform research into a tool for social justice. Some understand that this interpretation of how to conduct research is a political revolt against positivistic approaches of the past, and name it critical ethnography (Foley, 2008). For my purposes, I did not attempt to use critical ethnography as a political tool to attempt to unearth social injustice. I did, however, take into consideration some of the valuable guidelines that critical ethnography has to offer in terms of practical approaches to subjects.

Critical ethnography is research that is accessible to the public, and unfettered by academic jargon. Foley suggests that researchers incorporate a dialogic style of interviewing subjects (*ibid*). In response to these guidelines, I designed my interview questions to reflect a conversation style so that my participants could confirm or retract meanings about their understanding of the work they are engaged in. I attempted to be as open and understanding in my interactions with all of the subjects. That being said, as I made my way through my research questions with participants, I had little success in this area. Most of my participants seemed uninterested in drawn out conversations about the nature of video production. In many instances, I thought

that the participants had little understanding of the concepts I wished to discuss. At other times, I felt like I was putting words into my participants mouths, or at risk of putting off the participants by suggesting terms or concepts that were not immediately within their vocabulary or mind-set.

Other researchers in their prospective fields have observed similar sorts of research challenges. The virtues of openness and sympathy on behalf of the ethnographer have been challenged by postmodern researchers, but they still remain standards of how “the true ethnographer should deal with his or her informants” (Fine, 1993, p. 272). Ethnographers are supposed to be sympathetic to their subjects, but of course, this may be impossible. Disliked individuals vanish from the ethnographic landscape, and are often not included in the final data (Fine, 1993). This inevitably has a distorting effect on the conclusions. Nonetheless, the strength of the illusion of what good ethnographers are doing allows ethnography to be pursued without hesitation, when in reality, it is an act of faith by everyone involved that the research itself will produce fair and valuable results.

Considering the problematic nature of conducting ethnographic research towards the aim of capturing broader understanding, it is recommended that critical ethnographers work in a self-reflective manner. This makes sense considering the nature of the critical ethnographic activity of creating a dialogical framework in which to operate with field subjects. In other words, when it is difficult to make sense of something, it is normal to reflect on the experience to try to come to terms with it. But researchers should be wary not to mistake the reflection process with the process of discovering new data. Although Foley (2008) urges researchers to use reflexive practices in their research that are “confessional, theoretical, intertextual, and deconstructive” (Foley, 2008, p.288), researchers should also remember to ask themselves whether these tactics are constructive to the overall process of discovering new information from the subject’s perspective.

The stress that Foley puts on reflexivity was problematic to me because it encourages researchers to pursue knowledge in an ethical and inclusive manner to the

extent that the process could lose sight of finding useful outcomes. The process is at risk of becoming a political agenda for the researcher to enable everyone to have a voice in the research. As I quickly discovered in my own work in critical ethnography, however, it was sometimes not possible to “have a dialogue” in the way that some theorists would argue is so crucial to this work. This is because not all of the participants come from the same background, or agree on political or social issues in the same manner, if at all. In other words, some critical ethnographers may approach their research with the idea that they are discovering information for a better social good, and that everyone involved in the process is on board. By assuming this, however, some researchers could be at-risk of entering a dangerous territory that is, ironically, the exact place where critical ethnography would like to lead us away from.

In her critique of critical ethnography, Anita Patai (1994) has rightly problematized the political position in critical ethnography that as researchers and research subjects we are all engaged in a struggle for resistance. Patai criticizes critical ethnographers for their personal investments in doing “political” work, at the cost of overlooking whether the people involved in the “work” are all in agreement over what the issues are. According to her, traditional scholarship can be deemed inadequate in the face of self-scrutiny. Findings therefore only become relevant based on the personal process of self-reflection by the researcher, rather than on valid attempts to interpret meaning from the data. As such, researchers should remind themselves that the field is a complex space, and the agenda to fulfill a social good may not emerge from doing critical ethnography.

Despite my hesitations around this research paradigm, I believe critical ethnography has much to offer. Within my research I acknowledged that my history informed my work, and it is my inclination to agree with many of the suggestions made about critical ethnography. In addition, I did attempt to be as self-reflexive as possible, by poring over my notes, and re-thinking some of the assumptions I had made about what was happening in the program, by checking this with the participants themselves, either in informal conversation or later, in the exit interviews.

Certainly, I was challenged by a few of the youth participants in one of my core assumptions, and I revised my conclusions in lieu of those conversations. Nonetheless, I found that the claims made by some critical ethnographers to be problematic in terms of their approaches because they simply did not account for the outcomes and experiences I had during my fieldwork. As a result, I found it useful to rethink my research as located within a third space where I could use a reflexive but a straightforward approach. This space existed between critical ethnography and a case study approach.

### **Case Study**

Using a case study approach allowed me to remain focused on my research subjects, and think about their daily events on a practical level. The intent of ethnography is to understand how a culture works, whereas a case study approach is used to illustrate an issue (Creswell, 2007). By locating my approach between critical ethnographic activity and a case study I could organize myself in terms of gathering and analyzing data. Case studies have clear boundaries, usually defined by time and geographical space, and use multiple sources of inquiry for data collection (ibid). By taking into consideration both methodological frameworks, my hope was to locate myself in the tension between positive science and reflexive science. Michael Burawoy (1991) created *the extended case method* in a similar manner. Burawoy was concerned about researchers throwing away positivist approaches over the seductive draw of post modernist methods in research (Poyntz, 2008). He offered a reminder to think critically about both angles while conducting fieldwork. Researchers should anchor themselves to the dialogue that occurs between researcher and participant and to the theory that has led them there in the first place (Burawoy, 1991). With this in mind, I attempted to act reflexively in order to remind myself that even with the best of intentions, my approach may not serve as an emancipatory process. In addition, I kept precise and detailed observations from which I will draw patterns and conclusions. Then, I went over my data numerous times during my time in my field

study to constantly remind myself about it and think about what was happening in the entire process. For example, I would look over my notes from the past week, and reflect on what was happening. Then I would have an informal interview with a participant, and discuss my ideas about what I believed was occurring. I would take more notes during that interview, and then compile them along with my other field notes about the events of the past week. Finally, I checked my data against research in the field, in order to develop a theory about how community is realized and understood and how participants feel more included in a sense of community within this group. This research angle kept me clear in my goals and hopefully allowed me to gain insight into my ideas.

## **Complexity**

Finally, despite my stated desire to keep my field study focused, I wish to speak briefly of the most influential idea about research methods in general that guided my thoughts throughout my entire research process. From the beginning of my experiences of working through a Participatory Action Research framework to constructing a critical ethnographic/case study for my fieldwork, my overall tendency was not only to question the methodology itself, as I have done with critical ethnography and PAR, but also to question the whole nature of research itself.

At the heart of research lies the impulse to generate answers. But this impulse does not always adequately take into account the complex nature of our social existence. Urry and Law (2004) argue that social science would be better served if methods in social science embraced complexity as a way to operate in the present day. “Complexity entails a wide array of innovative notions that would take social investigation a long way from conventional linear analyses of structure or action/agency ”(Urry & Law, 2004, p.400). Multiple effects can occur on a system and multiple reactions can happen. “If many social and material relations are unpredictable and yet irreversible then research that uses observations taken at a single point in time-space will be representationally inadequate (Urry&Law, 2004,

p.401). In other words, we need to acknowledge that research may not lead us to the place we hope to go.

In light of this, I always tried to approach my research, indeed my entire process, with open eyes. By reminding myself about what Law and Urry have said about complexity it allowed me to move forward, at the very least, with a sense of humour about my own assumptions about the work I was doing. In fact, it reoriented me to better develop my relationships towards people in the program rather than focusing too blatantly on discovering results. Peter Reason (2008) makes a point not to emphasize the importance of finding conclusions or answers, and argues that the basic function of research is to enhance relationships. “In inquiry as in life, the basic call is to act intelligently, sympathetically, and creatively together to enhance the quality of our relationships with each other and our world” (Heron&Reason, 2008, p.378). In this light, whatever experiences happen because of the research do not have to be considered “findings” but rather as dialogues where knowledge can be created. It is my hope that this is what I accomplished in the four-month period that I worked with Kaleidoscope in Vancouver.

### **Knowledge and Expertise**

In accordance with my chosen methodological approach, I wrote myself into the research and I took note of my own reservations about what was happening, based on my perspective as an informed outsider. With this in mind, during my time in my field study, it became apparent to me that I had significantly more knowledge about the history of community media production than any of the participants. Only two of the Kaleidoscope program facilitators had any substantial involvement with media practices, and neither of them had any knowledge in terms of current media practices used by other community organizations here in Vancouver, or elsewhere. To a certain extent this may have led to a re-occurring phenomenon that I had not anticipated in setting up this fieldwork that is, I was often considered to be an expert

of sorts by the staff. I now believe that it was also because of my privileged role within the group that this occurred.

## **Program Setting**

The City of Vancouver recognizes that youth face barriers to community involvement due to a number of factors. They claim that mainstream media often portray youth in a negative light and there is rising concern from educators, parents and youth themselves that youth are increasingly involved with high-risk activities (City of Vancouver, 1995). As such, Vancouver has made a commitment to improve the lives of Vancouver's youth by creating opportunities for youth to "develop new skills to achieve personal success and fulfillment" as well as "facilitate youth involvement in community affairs and decision making that impacts youth" (City of Vancouver, 2008). In order to reach these goals, local community development organizations can apply for government funding from federal agencies that can specifically assist youth.

The Mennonite Central Committee for Employment & Community Development (MCC) is a faith-based, international community development organization. It began by providing aid and relief overseas through the church, but in recent years, has developed local programming as well (John Dawson, Presenter, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008). For example, in Abbotsford, B.C, they ran a program during 2004 that helped youth gain valuable volunteer experience in their communities. During that program, facilitators encouraged the youth to capture the stories of the people with whom they worked with camcorders. The facilitators believed that this had been a very successful aspect of the program and MCC decided that they would try to create a community media program for youth. MCC could only provide a small portion of the funding towards the initiative so they applied for funding from the federal government of Canada through Skills Link. In order to understand Skills Link's objectives it is useful to quote from their website:

Skills Link is a funding program that assists youth who are at greater risk of not making a successful transition to the workplace and establishing themselves within the labour market. The assessment of risk encompasses a broad range of social, economic and demographic factors. The criteria for being at risk as stated on their website are: high school non-completion, person with a disability, Aboriginal origin, visible or ethnic minority, health, drug and/or alcohol-related problems, residing in a rural or remote location, single parent, low levels of literacy and numeracy, language barriers, street involvement, contact with justice, child welfare or social assistance systems, homelessness, or at risk of becoming homeless, lack of social supports (family, friends or community supports) and poor self-and/or behaviour-management abilities.— *Skills Link Website, 2009*

Through the Skills Link funding, MCC was able to create a community media program called Kaleidoscope. The Kaleidoscope program was a sixteen-week community video program aimed at assisting at-risk youth in developing employability skills. The program was divided into eleven weeks of training followed by five weeks of internship. The program usually has twelve youth participants, two full time facilitators and three part time media/film facilitators. The project that I was involved in had leftover funding so they had fourteen youth participants. The program was designed for at-risk youth participants to explore the community in which they live and how they fit into it by creating video projects. All of the participants were paid eight dollars an hour for their work in the program. Kaleidoscope provides video production skills, work experience, and training in areas such as communications, problem solving, computer skills and teamwork. They stated on their website that:

Through Kaleidoscope, participants will gain both skills for the job market and will experience a shift in perspective. They will learn the leadership and technology skills required by today's employers and the hope is that they will enter the world of work or go back to school with a clearer picture and motivation for the future, and the part that they can play. The program develops a greater understanding of community and the participants place within it.

- *Kaleidoscope website, 2009*



Two programs used to run nearly simultaneously. One is based in Richmond, a city on the border of Vancouver, BC and a region that makes up part of the Lower Mainland. The other operated in Vancouver although their office was actually located slightly outside the boundaries of the city. I had the opportunity to work with the Vancouver office, which closed its doors after our group completed its work due to funding cuts. The Vancouver office could draw participants from across the Lower Mainland however, so roughly half of the participants lived in Vancouver proper, while the rest of the participants came from other communities in the Lower Mainland.

Within the Kaleidoscope group there were three First Nations youth, one youth who was experiencing homelessness, one Persian-Canadian, one Arab-Canadian, one Greek-Canadian, one youth who was born and raised in Eastern Europe, with a total of eight male participants and six female participants. For the purposes of my thesis, the names of participants have been changed. There was one female facilitator and one male facilitator and three male camera facilitators. Mary was one of the main facilitators. She is a forty five year old woman who had experience working with youth. She expressed that she had some interest in camera work, but her primary function was to work as a life coach. She assisted the youth participants to think about goals, work in a team, and write resumes. Kevin was in his fifties and had completed a Bachelors Degree in Education in the 1970's. He had worked in various youth employment programs over the years. They were both there everyday to work with the youth. Gary was the primary camera and media instructor, and was older than both Mary and Kevin at sixty. He was a self-taught media instructor. His primary experience was based on his time publishing a small newspaper in a remote island town off the coast of British Columbia. He had also had considerable experience working in the prison system in BC for a number of years. Based on that experience, he had become convinced that action needed to be taken in the lives of at-risk youth in order for them to have a chance to avoid being placed in the federal judicial system. In recent years, he had come across a large resource of cameras and

editing equipment and had taught himself how to use the equipment and created his own company. He then connected with a MCC director about using his resources to the benefit of the community. MCC had been working as a community development program with volunteering and had recently started to explore the idea of capturing community people's stories on camera. When Gary came along they rightly seized the opportunity to revamp their community service projects with the aim of including media production as part of the program. Finally, Kaden acted as a part time facilitator for the group. He was twenty-nine years old, falling into the age category of youth himself, and had come into the program through sheer coincidence because of a random meeting with Mary years before on a camping trip. He had no prior interest or training in social work and was solely focused on enabling the participant's abilities around camera and editing skills.

In addition to the facilitators, there were several youth participants who worked in the program that I will speak about at length during research analysis. Peter was twenty-five years old with manual labour experience. He lived outside of Vancouver. He had acted in amateur films produced by his friends and expressed early in the program that he was interested in developing his editing skills to assist his friends in making these films. Joan was twenty-four years old and highly artistic. She expressed that she had interest in acting and anything else related to artistic creation. She lived in Vancouver. Maya was a twenty year old First Nations young woman who wanted to learn more about camera work. She lived outside of Vancouver. Blake was the oldest participant (who eventually revealed to me that he had lied about his age to meet the age requirement to enter the program). Apparently, he turned thirty-one years old in the program. He had spent his twenties working in a factory in Ontario and wanted to become an actor. He had considerable experience with music and enjoyed uploading music onto his personal web pages on MySpace and FaceBook. Jake was a twenty-five year old young man. He had attended some college, but he didn't complete it. He was a bit of a philosopher, and became one of the more popular participants in the group. Finally, there was John, who completed less than a

month of the program. He was incredibly articulate and political for his young age of twenty-two, but he was also homeless.

All of the participants were invaluable to me in terms of describing what happened during the process of the program, but I will limit myself to describing the developments around these youth for the sake of space. In order to explore my research I will situate myself within the field study by discussing my own position within various contexts that arose over the course of my time there. It is my hope that I can deconstruct various moments that arose as part of the process of the program in relation to the participants I have mentioned. I will now outline the research tools that I used for my field study

## **Questionnaire**

I created a questionnaire to use as a form of data collection. Surveys have the advantage of being able to collect large amounts of data and describe relationships between variables in an effective manner (Schroeder et al, 2003). Their biggest weakness lies in their inability to capture the gap between what people say and what they do in their practices. As such, it is useful to have other forms of data collection, such as participant observation, as a way to test the validity of responses. My intention with this survey was to have a document that assisted me in categorizing attitudes toward media and employment at the beginning of the program and at the end of it. My hope was to discover if there were any significant transformations in people's attitudes by comparing responses from it to the responses I collected at the end of the program in an oral interview. In my final analysis, I found that having the questionnaires was helpful in identifying and clarifying the participants' experiences with media prior to entering the program.

## **Secondary Data**

I looked at secondary data, such as reports or feedback forms that the program facilitators used to describe the outcomes for the program. I sought out

forms that were qualitative in nature, because I was looking for language that described the action that took place in the program. At times, it was difficult to locate the forms or find the time for the facilitators to go over them with me. My objective was to conduct an inquiry into the documents that were given to the facilitators. I looked for language from Service Canada that encouraged the facilitators to describe what was happening in terms of measurements. For example, I looked for guidelines that specifically asked the facilitators to describe how the participants' "self-esteem" was increased or how the participants' "technical skills" had increased. In terms of guidelines or suggestions for describing increases in performance or skills, I found that there were basically none. For the most part, the facilitators used a narrative style to describe the activities of the program, month by month. The descriptions were simple and straightforward and the facilitators usually didn't connect the descriptions to any form of measurement. I had wanted to discover if the descriptions that the facilitator's used to illustrate what is happening in the program could be framed by the language of progress reports that have been created for this program. In the end, this was not my finding.

During my time in the program, I became aware that the facilitators wanted to film "progress reports" made by the participants, as part of their learning exercises. I tried to observe how the facilitators constructed the scenario in which the participants give their feedback about the program on video. I wanted to watch the videos at a later time and analyze them alongside the other data I collected (I speak about that process at greater length later in this chapter). However, the group never realized this process, so I did not conduct any of these observations.

## **Interviews**

In my research about interviewing I came across various useful ways for approaching my role as an interviewer. Most importantly, I approached my role as a story collector. This is to say, following Kvale (1996), I approached my work as an interviewer through the metaphor of travelling or mining. The traveller is on a

journey and will return with stories, while the miner digs for treasure at a certain site. At first, the metaphor of being a traveller resonated for me, because I felt it reflected my outlook on life. Upon deeper reflection, however, I decided that the miner metaphor was more compatible with the work I do. Travelling and storytelling feels natural to me, but I wanted to challenge myself with a different metaphor to guide me. The idea of being a “miner” was inspirational to me because it forced me to work harder at digging up clues, follow-up on questions, and attend to details. In this way, it also resonated with the case study approach/ critical ethnographic approach I wanted to pursue.

In order to conduct good interviews, the interviewer should attempt to establish the trust of the interview subject. It is of utmost importance for trust and confidence to be present to ensure quality data collection which is empowering and useful to all those in an interview (Heyl 2001; Coffey, 1999). Using a holistic ethnographic approach, interviews are co-constructed by both interviewer and interviewee. As such, it is important to ask descriptive questions, express ignorance and confirm answers with the interviewee as to the meaning of what has been said (Heyl, 2001). Listening respectfully, and trying to convey that the researcher means no harm is equally important to empower those telling their stories (ibid). The instructions regarding how to conduct a good interview, however, assume that participants will be well-informed, helpful, perhaps eager to assist in the research process. The problem is this does not account for instances where a dialogue will not “empower” everyone involved. The challenge is that this can lead to an awkward situation.

For example, in one interview, I encountered a situation that I had not been prepared for. During my interview with the director of the program I began to suspect that he was giving me “the right” answers to my questions regarding community engagement. This was due to the fact that during our interview he would pepper his responses with comments of how supportive he was of my role in the program to assist them to develop better “measurements” to provide for funders. As

a way to lead him out of feeding me responses that I felt were prescribed, I asked him whether he believed the participants developed a sense of hope from the program, and whether he thought that was a good thing. Having listened to him talk for nearly an hour almost strictly in terms of the merits of the program being good for youth to gain employment, asking this question was my attempt to have broader conversation for me to draw from later. In my mind, I believed that I was following the guidelines that are encouraged in critical ethnography to “co-construct” data, by following an intuition on my part to try to coax a deeper response from my subject. Unfortunately, I believe I may have turned my interviewee off. He seemed uncomfortable with my question, and responded awkwardly. This confused me because I had believed that asking him for a more personal opinion would allow the interview to move into a deeper level, but instead it seemed to have carried the opposite result. As a result, our conversation continued, haltingly and jerkily, until we came to a point where I became lost for words, and the director returned to a more comfortable position of discussing the program in terms of its merits of employability.

Upon reflection, I realized that although I had read numerous articles that urged the researcher to “gain the trust” of the participant, I had nothing to really guide me to do so. As a young woman interviewing an authoritative man who was twice my age, the interviewing suggestions had not assisted me in this situation. I believe that the director had other thoughts and opinions on the nature of his program. However, I realized that in that moment, at least, I had no capacity to ask him anything that would reveal any of it to me. I believe the interviewee felt like my line of questioning was frivolous, and he continued to respond to me in a way that was unhelpful for me to understand the complexity of the program. This situation illuminates the limits that I experienced in doing critical ethnography. While authors from the field of critical ethnography claim their work embraces holistic, diverse and post-positivist approaches they still assume, in the positivist position, that researchers check their identities at the doors of the university. It is assumed that critical ethnographers operate from a “privileged/reflexive” role, but in fact, as a young

woman, I was not in that position at all. Perhaps this is why I have found some of this literature unhelpful in my practical work as a researcher. Researchers bring their whole life to the interview table, and ethnographic interviewing techniques should account for this in a more reliable manner.

Perhaps then, the metaphor of being a traveller better describes my process after all. Being a miner had led me to hit a rock that will not budge. As a traveller, at least I could return home with a story that described the process, in the hope that at a later time it would reveal something hidden to me at that time.

### **Interview Set-Up**

It was my intent to set up an interview scenario that would enable me to ask questions on two tiers. My introductory questions reflected some aspects of narrative and oral history research, as to find out personal information about the subjects. I asked questions that allowed the respondent to describe a story from their life and relate it to the work they were presently doing. It was my hope that these types of questions would allow my participants to feel more comfortable and help me to gain their trust. For me, it allowed me to gain some perspective in their lives, and later, in the analysis stage, to see if there were any common factors between people who enter the program.

The second tier of questioning was meant to probe the program itself. For example, did the participants believe that being in the program was enabling them to better engage in community? What were these skills? How did the program develop a sense of community for participants and what did they qualify as community in the first place? It was my hope that by using these two tiers of questioning I could develop a rapport with the participants while discovering some valuable information about their thoughts on the program.

I had two sets of interviews, at the beginning of the program and at the end. I decided to have two sets of interviews for a variety of reasons. First, I wanted the initial set of questions to serve as an introductory device between the participants and

me. Second, I wanted the participants to have an opportunity to reflect on their experience, and any statements they made in their previous interview. As such, I took time between interviews to review their first set of responses to have them available to me when I conducted the second round of interviews. It was my hope that the two sets of interviews would help me track any changes in their attitudes over the course of the program regarding media production, employment and civic engagement through community development.

### **Participant Observation**

Participant Observation is the most fluid aspect to the research, where one has the opportunity to interact with participants while observing what happens. It is central to ethnographic research (Shroeder, 2003). With this in mind, I tried to be as useful and as un-obstructive as possible by adhering to the rules of the program and to the guidelines of “professionability” that the program tried to promote. As a participant observer it is important to establish oneself as a helpful presence in the field (Angrosino, 2007). I believe that my presence was well received, as I was asked to conduct a workshop, and asked to supervise the participants in the absence of the facilitators.

While acting as participant-observer I kept field notes in a journal. Field notes act as a descriptive way to represent people, events and personal experiences. They are inevitably selective in their quality, and ultimately it is the researcher who frames the descriptions by describing what she feels is significant (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2001). For some, taking meticulous field notes is considered to be the central ethnographic endeavor while others argue that just being in the ethnographic space is the act of doing ethnography (ibid). For myself, I kept two journals to record my observations/field notes. One acted as a direct observation notebook that I kept in the day as I observed what was happening. In that journal, I recorded descriptive observations, such as generalizations about the program scene (Shroeder et al, 2003). I didn't keep any personal opinions about what was happening in it for two reasons.



First, I wanted to keep this notebook separate from opinions or summaries to keep it clear in its intention. Second, because I was writing around everyone, if anyone were to pick it up, I preferred to have it devoid of my own opinions of everyone, my relationships and personal information. As such, the second journal was a private notebook that I kept at home to reflect on my day, and my notes. The second notebook was there as a reflexive tool to remind myself that it was *my interpretations* of what was happening, to summarize the day and my opinion of it. I kept focused observations on specific moments from the day and reflected on them, and selective observations, where I began to look for relationships between variables.

In some circumstances, it is not possible to write everything down when something is happening, especially if the researcher is involved in a conversation with some of the participants. Simply walking around and chatting with people can be an effective way to gain trust with your subject group by not distracting anyone with your notebook. Jay MacLeod (2004) has spoken about how he relied on his own memory of conversations to be written down word for word at a later time. On the other hand, I didn't try to remember whole conversations from an earlier time, but I wrote down observations from earlier, if I didn't have the time to in the day. I did not believe that it would be a barrier to have my notebook with me, and this proved to be true.

I kept track of my notes, and reviewed them frequently. It is important to keep notes organized, in order to better reflect on the experience (MacLeod 2004, Angrosino 2007). In all honesty, this happened in a very unexpected way. During the months of my field study, I would wake up in the night with my own epiphanies about what I believed was happening in the program. I would write it down in my secondary private journal and begin to think about that idea during the day at the program site. I would begin to pay attention to this particular phenomenon and try to understand if the participants were being affected by what I believed to be occurring. In order to verify if they felt that they were being affected, I would ask them about it at a later time, either in an interview or during casual conversation.

## Video Collection

I also wanted to occasionally video tape the day's events. I believed that this would offer a way to record events that challenged me to have a slightly wider view than just note taking. When reflecting on a video, the researcher can perceive things that he or she may have missed in just note taking, and can reflect on a bigger experience, not just their notes. In my circumstance, it was particularly encouraged by the group's facilitators because they believed that it could allow me to collect data in a more "fitting" way in their program, rather than relying on a pen and paper. Being able to record video allows a researcher more breadth in their ability to be reflexive (Pink, 2007). Not only could I use my notes, but I could reflect on the experience of a certain day by looking at the video I captured on that day. Sarah Pink (2007) emphasizes the importance of using the recorded materials as a way to reflect and interact with other data collection methods.. She says that although it may be useful to code them and transcribe them, it is more important to use them in conjunction with other data collection in order to bring about a bigger, better and richer understanding of the field.

If this was my intent, in the end, I decided to record program events only very rarely. Indeed,. I filmed one event that turned out well, and the participants used my footage to create their own films. Nonetheless, I felt like that constantly filming the youth was awkward because it made me feel disengaged from their learning process. By presenting myself as someone already competent with filming, and more importantly, having the trust of the staff with the camera, I felt like using the camera would distance me from the participants as they struggled to learn the cameras themselves. In addition, I always felt quite active in their discussions, and I believed that bringing out a camera would also disable me from having conversations with them in the easygoing manner I had worked hard to establish. As a result, in the end, I only filmed the one event.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis is the most intellectually challenging aspect of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). I conducted a descriptive analysis by generalizing my data into common patterns (Angrosino, 2007). “A true pattern is one that is shared by members of the group (their actual behavior) and/or one that is believed to be a desirable, legitimate, or proper by the group (their ideal behavior)” (Angrosino, 2007, p.68). In order to organize the patterns, I created a coding schema to organize my data. Codes serve to “identify, classify and compare, sort and systematize your data so as to yield explanations” (Schroeder et al, 2003, p.98). The first level of coding is based on *topical* coding (Schroeder et al, 2003). I organized data by events, settings, and forms of interaction. Secondly, I created another round of coding that was analytical (ibid). Essentially, I looked for common responses from the participants in their interviews and embedded commonalities in my observational notebooks. This organized the data material to reflect coherent themes that emerged from the data.

<b>Coding Type</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Topical Coding	Specific events, settings, interactions, etc.	Filming video on location; social nights
Analytical Coding	Reoccurring themes throughout the data	Frustration with filming; discussions of creating social change through video production

As a method to ensure validity, I triangulated the patterns that emerged from different tools of inquiry, such as participant observation and interviewing and the questionnaires (Shroeder et al, 2003). Then, I reflected on the patterns that I saw emerge by asking myself if there were holes in the patterns, or where the patterns fall

apart (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In order to exemplify these patterns I concentrated on illuminating a few important moments that exemplify key moments in the study. For example, I thought about using an instance of when I did a narrative analysis with a subject and highlighted their experience of recognizing epiphanies in their own learning cycle. Embedded analysis looks at the use of metaphors that participants use to describe their interest in media (Creswell, 2007). As such, I tried to use a few specific metaphors to discuss the implications and meanings that participants bring to their understanding of media production. For example, one of my participants evoked the metaphor of organic farming and “the simple life” to media production. We discussed the issue at length in our interview, and we agreed that for him, “living the simple life” was a way to correct imbalance in a consumer world. He likened independent media production to being a similar way of correcting imbalance in the world, by providing honest and simple coverage of events, rather than saturated and glossy images. In my own experience, when I lack the ability to be clear in responding to others, I rely on metaphor to express myself. By looking for metaphors in the data, I attempted to look deeper into the conversations I had with my subjects.

### **Dialogic and Narrative Analysis in the Exit Interview**

In my experience of conducting the interviews, the entry interviews served as a form of data collection and as an icebreaker between participants and myself. However, my exit interviews were considerably longer (with each participant the average length of the first interview was ten minutes long, the average length of the final interview was twenty five minutes long). As a result, I decided that I wanted to specifically analyze the exit interview through a narrative analysis. Narrative analysis uses the content, topics, context and the telling of the narrative as a guide to reveal the participants’ key understandings of the moments leading up to the program and their involvement in it (Cortazzi, 2001). Narratives that recount epiphanies give the researcher an opportunity to view how the participants believes these events to be *relevant* in their own lives (ibid). As I explained above, I tried to use the entry

interviews as a way to verify the respondent's answers and have a dialogue with them about their previous responses. I went over the audiotapes from the entry interviews and the responses with the participants in the exit interview. For example, I asked them, what did you mean by this statement, why was this important to you? I tried to look for, along with them, epiphanies that they had about their own stories, or epiphanies that were embedded in their stories. By doing the analysis in this way, it reflects an ethical and holistic approach to my research findings. In regards to this approach, it didn't necessarily work in the way I thought it would. In some cases, I couldn't nail down any specific information from the entry interviews that I thought I could follow up on in the exit interview. Secondly, I felt that the participants had so much to say in their final interviews, that asking them about information from a past interview would throw them off in their ideas during the final interview.

Although it is my intent to discuss the trajectory of the participants that I have named earlier, I want to look at specific moments that arose within the program that I believe point to crucial understandings about what happened during the project. By deconstructing the moments, and looking at all of the components that inform a specific instance, it is my hope to bring deeper awareness to how this project operated in terms of enabling community through media development. For example, months later as I write this, it has only recently become obvious to me how privileged my role was within the program. Of course, the literature on ethnography had stated that this would be so, but I only began to grasp that in recent months, when I started my first job unrelated to my position as a graduate student (either as a facilitator of a video program or a Teaching Assistant at SFU). My new employment has allowed me to experience a context of work where I need to follow rules and procedures and where there is not a lot of ability or even a reason to question the work that I do, or the procedures that I follow. Also, I sometimes experience an overarching anxiety over my own job security. Considering that the program that I was working in was closing and that facilitators were undergoing staff eliminations, I am only now grasping that the discussions, conversations and interviews that emerged with the

staff were probably informed by these tensions that I am experiencing now outside of the academic world.

Earlier in my discussion about interviewing, I remarked on my interview with the director of the program that I felt that his answers were “prescribed” and that I felt frustrated by his inability to carry into a conversation about more risky subjects, such as hope. I could not at that time recognize the privileged position that I had as a researcher. Upon reflection, I finally realize that my position was privileged and this has released me from my frustration at not getting the answers or interview that I sought. Hopefully, this will allow me to more deeply examine all of the factors that influenced that discussion, so that I can finally bring light to it.

## **Theoretical Analysis**

Finally, I want to link the descriptive details of the categories that I present and link them to the issues that I see in doing media programs that are framed by neoliberal goals. This is part of a *theoretical analysis* where I will try to explain the existence of patterns, by considering them within existing literature (Angrosino, 2007). I will demonstrate how my findings relate to the interpretations of others, confirming what is already known or stimulating further research. The researcher reintegrates the world of one’s research into the theoretical one that the researcher is engaged in, or what Burawoy calls “reconstruction”, the final stage to the extended case method (Burawoy, 1991). This is the most exciting part of the research, where I tie everything back together to my original ideas, and open a new path to understanding about community development through media production.

Although I felt clear about my research goals and the limitations I was facing in constructing my data, I was still unprepared for all of the delightful and challenging steps along the way. As I reflect on the experience, my understanding has deepened about the issues that arose during my time with the group. It is my sincere hope that I have been accountable to the people who so graciously shared their opinions with me and to my findings. In addition, I hope that I will provide a clear and detailed analysis

in the following chapter so that my research can shed light on current community media development.

## Chapter 3: Program Analysis and Discussion

**If we understand that we have a place in the broader community, the community that we live, and if we understand how that might work for us then we take ownership in that community...If we build better citizens, then we build better employees. - Kaleidoscope Director, December 22, 2008**

In order to investigate my research question, I looked at Kaleidoscope, a community media program designed to provide at-risk youth with opportunities to build a relationship with their community and develop employability skills. In some ways, it could be argued that the program achieved all of its goals; however, the potential of community media production to promote democratic engagement was largely undermined by the employment related objectives that the program facilitators were required to uphold in order to secure funding for future programs. As such, many of the participants walked away from the program having understood community media production as an activity to benefit individual enhancement. The larger implication, here, is that the youth went through an experience that narrowed their perspective on the potential of community media production. This perspective served to inform the participants on how to value the activities and experiences of this program in their lives. In other words, they thought of the experience as a self-interested activity, with few other goals than to benefit their own self-development. As such, the potential of community media development is increasingly at-risk of being understood as an activity for individual benefit and self-interest, and it should only be pursued to achieve these goals.

In the first part of this chapter I will discuss the initial approaches and objectives of each interested party: 1) the facilitators, 2) the participants, and 3) Skills Link Canada. In the second part, I will explain how the facilitators repeatedly



encouraged the participants to perceive the act of community media through a lens of employment skills development and individual gain. As such, the participants largely approached community media production as an opportunity to benefit themselves in terms of enhancing their own skills, leaving any other possibilities unexplored. This occurred because the facilitators encouraged the participants to practice their filmmaking activities as “jobs” by simply assigning the participant's to complete certain tasks. In addition, the facilitators equated the participants' work area to an “office environment” and measured their activities on how well they conducted themselves “professionally” within it. Moreover, they related any film-related activity to employment, no matter what the nature of the activity. Finally, their community gala event was insufficiently funded for the program to achieve the goal of allowing the youth to voice themselves in their community.

In the last part of the chapter, I will explore the impacts of the program on the participants. In general, the criteria for success as described in the guidelines from Skills Link set the tone for how community media production was realized in practice in the program. This resulted in undermining the participants' ability to conceive of community media production as a space to voice themselves, and made them think about the activities as self-serving. In addition, it limited the variety of participants to be admitted to the program in the first place. As such, some of the most vulnerable youth were left behind by the program and not allowed to enter the dialogue at all. In order for community media production programs to preserve a space for democratic engagement, I suggest that the criteria for successful community development programming be reformed to embrace a more complex way to evaluate the outcomes of these programs.

### **The Kaleidoscope Program: Building Better Citizens, Building Better Employees**

On the surface, Kaliedoscope seemed to be a job-training program, using community media production as a platform to develop employability. For example,

the facilitators described community media production as an effective way to teach job skills. They said that of all creative mediums to work with, video production was inherently the most effective at assisting with the development of “soft” employment skills. Mary explained:

In the process of producing a video they have ... all the important work skills that they need to learn like communication, teamwork, problem solving, time management, forms, paper work, absolutely every aspect of a job besides budgeting which we do touch on a bit and you know, the value of time...Every aspect is covered in terms of a project.  
(Interview, December 18, 2008)

According to the facilitators, media production could expose the students to a range of challenges that would allow them to learn how to be more effective employees. Kevin explained:

Apart from hard technical skills that we provide our participants around media and information technology, the very nature of working together in a project allows them to develop and enhance their communication skills, their interpersonal skills - such as being a good team player, and understanding what compromise and concession is, understanding the differences in communication behaviors...And we do give them that opportunity to fall flat on their face, initially, by not meeting milestones because there's no greater lesson or vehicle for learning about project management than for a project to go off track because time and milestones haven't been reached. (Interview, December 19, 2008)

When I first met the participants, they gave me the impression that they were equally focused on attaining better employment, and as such, the emphasis on job-skills training was important to them as well. This was because they seemed dissatisfied with the employment experiences they had had to date. For example, Joan said:

I've shuffled through odd end jobs three months, four months, a year here, there. And got to that point where I don't want to do that any more, I want a career and I need something that's challenging.  
(Interview, January 7, 2009)

As such, the internships were of significant value to the participants. Many of them told me in their preliminary interviews that they were hoping that they could become connected through the internship into a film-related workplace that would keep them after the program. Although they were repeatedly told that this program should not be considered a bridge to a film job, all of the participants named film skills as the single thing they wished to learn in the program and all expressed a hope that they could somehow land an internship (and through that, a job) in the film industry.

The reason the youth seemed interested in a film industry job was because they seemed deeply frustrated by their present employment opportunities. Although the youth had been selected because they met the criteria of youth who face barriers to work, the participants told me that they didn't have any problems finding work, and in fact, a few of them had held the same job for a number of years. Although finding employment did not seem to be an issue, they revealed to me that they were deeply unsatisfied by their past work experiences. As I discussed in Chapter 1, the job market for young people has changed in the last few decades into a low wage service industry, exactly the type of employment history that many of the youth described. As such, when I re-examined my entry interviews with them, I began to realize that they were actually looking for a way to become involved in more meaningful work and to avoid working in yet another uncreative, monotonous job. Meaningful work meant different things to different people, but it seemed to be connected to social responsibility. One of the participants, John, explained what it meant to him:

I think a good job is something that is beneficial to society, to people. And doesn't have a corrupt basis for example, many corporations. A good job is something, you know, where you have an honest day's work and at the end of the day you feel like you've accomplished something and you go home to your family... I'm not a very materialistic type of person, so I don't really like the idea of working for money, I don't like the idea of money being a necessity. I'm more turned off by jobs where I basically go into that system. (Interview, December 19, 2008)

The desire to have a meaningful job or a socially conscious career appeared to be of importance to many of the participants and this objective seemed related to finding work in the arts and media. For Blake, he had already had a position with a major car manufacturer in Ontario for over eight years but had quit to pursue his dream of working in the music or film industry in Vancouver. He believed that working in a creative field would liberate him from having to work in a corporate system:

Everybody's held jobs that they get up at 7 in the morning and thought aw shit, I don't want to do this. And I've had those jobs and that's why I moved from Ontario to Vancouver, knowing that there's just a ...big arts scene in general here and that's what I want to pursue so when I get up in the morning I'm doing something I like and its creatively challenging....There's so many jobs in a corporate world where people are making 60 or 80 grand a year, and they fucking hate it. Money isn't everything, you know. Personal comfort and just, being comfortable with what you're doing, being happy should be the priority, then the money should come after. (Interview, December 19, 2008)

Many of the participants, like Blake, equated creative and artistic work as more socially responsible, and as such had involved themselves in Kaleidoscope in order to create community media. John spoke eloquently about the potential for media to be a tool for social justice.

I think a lot of people in my age are seeing issues but don't necessarily know how to express the voice for change. For me personally, the reason I wanted to get into this, it's a number of reasons, I feel like I'm more equipped to be artistic, all the way back from when I can remember, so it just feels like the right mode to make change. I'm very passionate about a lot of issues, I think there's a lot in this world that needs to be changed, culturally, there's a lot of couch potato mentality. I think visual stimulation would be a very good means of getting people to think differently, to get them to think about things in a different light...It makes it a good path to bring about change, video. A lot of the information I've learned for me, just as much as any way, it took video to bring that awareness, it reaches a lot of people if it's done well. (December 19, 2008)

As I began to reflect on the responses of the participants, I began to realize that they recognized the potential of community media production to give them a meaningful experience, which is precisely why they had joined Kaleidoscope, and not a straightforward job-training program. The lure of the Kaleidoscope program was that the program promised to provide the youth with an opportunity to voice themselves through community media production.

Just as the desire to have an experience that would allow them to have an impact in their community was resonant with the participants, the facilitators also believed that the program could offer the participants a rare and valuable opportunity to engage in their community in a meaningful way. Fundamentally, the facilitators recognized that community media holds the potential to transform a person's relationship to their community by allowing them to voice themselves. As such, the facilitators agreed that one of the most important goals of the program was to “[give] marginalized youth who have no voice, voice” (Gary, Interview, February 18, 2009). In order to allow for this process to happen, the Director told me the philosophy that guided the facilitators in allowing the youth to voice themselves. He said:

**One of the philosophies that is really important to us is that this needs to be their voice, so we're cautious with how we guide that process, if we guide it at all. (Interview, December 22, 2008)**

They explained that the way to encourage youth to voice themselves was to stand back and allow the youth to think through their own ideas and come up with their own message. They explained that it was a delicate balance for the facilitators to mediate between stepping in to give the youth direction, and backing away to allow the youth to work through their own production and ideas. Gary explained to me that the process was sometimes frustrating:

**What a balance between having your thumb on it and standing back and letting them do it. And yah, sometimes you go home so frustrated you want to kick the walls, or at least I do. I've seen other programs, other facilitators, and the involvement has been way too much, and my end assessment is that I don't think that the youth were involved at**

all...giving voice to marginalized youth is an ideal, and you can't do that if you control what they do (Interview, February 18, 2009).

Other facilitators further explained why it was crucial for the facilitators to stand back and allow the youth to voice themselves. Allowing the youth to have this experience not only allowed them to express themselves, but enabled them to engage more effectively in their community. One of the facilitators believed that youth were prescribed knowledge by the media. For him, this left youth feeling powerless and passive in their community. Kevin believed media production was crucial to empowering the youth so they could contribute to a public dialogue on social issues. He explained how:

I would like to see them become a producer - become a content provider...Putting the tools into their hands, we're giving them the ability to be content producers...[So they] take ownership of what's happening in their community. Acting locally, becoming aware of issues; it's to move them away from helplessness, ineffectiveness (Interview, December 19, 2008).

These remarks and the ongoing conversations I had with staff indicated to me that the facilitators strongly believed in the potential of media production to enhance the youth's ability to engage democratically in their community by voicing their own concerns. By approaching community media with youth in this way, the goal was to facilitate the youth to take new roles as agents of social change.

On the surface, Kaleidoscope seemed to be a job-skills program; however, when discussing the objectives of the participants and the facilitators, the goal of enhancing community involvement and the voice of the youth emerged as the predominant desired outcome of the program from both facilitators and the participants alike. The delicate balance of providing both job-skills training and enhancing community voice through community media development would ultimately be upset by the mandates which were outlined by Skills Link Canada. As such, the program was limited in its ability to preserve a space for the youth to voice themselves in the community.

## **The Skills Link Program: Community Media Production for Skills Development**

The idea for the Kaleidoscope program was originally developed by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) as a small program where youth were encouraged to collect stories from community members with video cameras in order to better understand the community and their own place within it. They received positive feedback about the initial pilot program and were encouraged to expand on it by applying for funds from the Service Canada program, Skills Link. Skills Link seemed to be a good fit because MCC was working with marginalized youth and Skills Link seemed to support youth who were in need of developing a range of skills in order to join the labour force. “Skills Link participants are youth at greater risk of not making a successful transition to the workplace and establishing themselves within the labour market” (Skills Link Website, 2009). Although considered a job-training program, Skills Link emphasized the importance of developing other skills, such as community leadership. From their website they state:

The development of life and employability skills through community service is often appropriate for young people who face greater barriers to entering the labour market, and who are not yet ready for a work experience with an employer. The intervention provides participants with an opportunity to develop skills and apply them as a member of a team while providing service to others. In serving others, participants are provided not only with a venue for applying new skills but also a means to experience personal development and growth. They contribute to the building of better, stronger communities by addressing issues of local concern and fostering a greater awareness of community needs. This experience enables them to strengthen their sense of accomplishment, self-reliance and self-esteem.  
-Skills Link website, 2009

The goal for at-risk youth to develop a sense of place within their community was reinforced by visits from a Service Canada representative during the program and at the final community gala event. Each time she visited the participants, the first question she asked was how the program had helped them feel more connected to their community and how it had helped them act as better citizens. In fact, in her

conversations with the youth, the representative did not ask how the program was assisting them to find better jobs, or if they felt if they were becoming better employees. As such, there seemed to be a genuine concern from Service Canada and Skills Link, indicated by their stated goals to the questions they posed to participants during the program, to foster a sense of community and citizenship for the participants through community media development.

Although Skills Link seemed to value the importance of community development, as I discussed in Chapter 1, the ability to become active in the labour market is considered crucial for communities to become prosperous and deliver higher living standards for the individual. Therefore, the importance they placed on succeeding in the work place was also of great significance. For example, the participants were paid an hourly wage for their time in the program. The facilitators were careful not to use it to instill a sense of responsibility to the program, but nonetheless, it was an obvious component of the program and getting paid on time, getting direct deposits into bank accounts and especially keeping track of hours was constantly discussed by all the program members. The fact that the participants were all being paid for their time in the program acted as a constant reminder that their experience was not a voluntary experience, with a stipend at the end. It was a work experience that they were being paid for. In addition to being paid, the participants were promised a five week “dream” paid internship. It was up to them to solicit different organizations across the city to secure a position in whichever job they wished. The idea was for the youth to not only go through a training program, but to experience being in a “dream” job; however, the program did not have a directory of suitable community or media positions available and finding any internship, even if this were simply flipping burgers, would be acceptable. The emphasis of the program was not on finding community related employment, then, but instead on finding any type of employment.

Finally, the success of the program was dependent on demonstrating that indeed, youth would successfully enter the labour market after completing the



program. The program needed to graduate 85% of the participants from each cohort who in turn would need to find employment or go back to school within three months. If these criteria were not met, the funding for the program could be discontinued.

Although Skills Link seemed to encourage community development by way of encouraging the youth to participate in the community, the way that they distributed their funding within the program and measured the success of the program significantly emphasized job skill development. Because the funding of the program was heavily focused on skills development and achieving employment related outcomes, the practices of the program unfolded in a way that ensured that job-skills training goals were met, often at the neglect of the other goals of community media development.

### **Creating Videos: Practicing Job Skills**

During the program, the participants were given the task of making three short community videos, and producing a larger collaborative film. In the first week, the group worked together and discussed parameters to be followed for the duration of the program such as being on time and listening respectfully. By the second week the participants were training on the camera equipment and were faced with the challenge of dividing themselves up into three groups to make short community videos within an allotted amount of time. In order to decide what topics would be explored, the facilitators asked each participant to elect an issue to be explored in a community video project. In the spirit of allowing the youth to voice themselves, the facilitators made it clear that any topic was free to be explored and the participants spent an afternoon debating topics for the films. Through a process of elimination, the original fourteen ideas were pared down to three: one) following the careers of paramedics as they assist people in crisis; two) environmental issues facing birds of prey in urban environments; three) exploring youth participation in activities and sports in their community.

In order to organize the experience of film-making, the facilitators encouraged the participants to choose roles in which to carry out their video projects. Many participants gravitated toward an area of interest, and this was encouraged in the group. Assigning roles on a video project is a common practice in many community video projects with youth (Poyntz, 2008). It is important for youth to have an opportunity to carry out a specific role within the film-making process in order to organize their activities in the film-making process while it unfolds through the cooperation of various actors. However, at Kaleidoscope, the facilitators sometimes related the roles that the youth took to jobs within the film industry. As Mary explained:

Some youth do make up or hair or fashion...So besides (having) every aspect of employment of a job, the film industry has pieces of every industry that you can think of within it. So they learn whatever job they're interested in. (Interview, December 18, 2008)

Whether the youth took a role based on a “real” industry job or not, the facilitators seemed to conceive of the participants' experience in their roles as “practice” for a real job. For example, interviewing a subject in the film was discussed as something of value because it allowed the youth to experience asking questions of strangers, as they might in a call-centre job. However, by thinking about their film-making experience like a “job”, the participants were limited in their possibilities for using film-making as a practice to voice themselves in the community. I will explain this further by comparing two examples within the program.

### **Group One: Birds of Prey**

One day, I followed the team that was filming the community video on the environmental dangers posed to birds of prey. All of the participants had chosen roles prior to going out on the shoot; for example, one young woman had chosen to be the interviewer, while another participant was the camera person. Throughout the day, I watched all of them struggle to maintain these roles during the shoot, sometimes complaining about how they could do the other person's job better, and

sometimes saying that they had no idea what they were supposed to do in their role. Most of the members felt resentful and angry with one member, while he dominated the camera without much precision. Their frustration and ambivalence toward their project seemed to extend into their editing process, where the group members abandoned one member to cope with all of the editing.

This group was encouraged to think of the time spent filming as “doing their job”. It was as if the facilitators had felt that allowing the participants to uphold themselves in their “jobs” was enough to support them in accomplishing the task of voicing themselves in their collaborative video. In fact, “practicing” a job seemed to be the goal of the exercise. However, during the filming, the participants consistently repeated to me that they didn’t feel like they were a part of the film-making process and in their final interviews, every member spoke of how their message did not come across in the way they had wished, and how it had been a frustrating time.

### **Group Two: Youth Recreation**

After a long day of filming another video, this time about youth activities in the community, a different team ended up filming quite a lot of B roll footage. B roll footage is footage that is used throughout a film when narration is happening, or to demonstrate something visually that an interviewee is talking about. Unlike the Birds of Prey group, this group had the opportunity to work with a different film facilitator named Kaden. He was a younger, part-time facilitator who worked as an independent movie director in Vancouver. Unlike the other facilitators, including the main video facilitator, he had attended film-school in Vancouver and had also been working in the Vancouver film industry for nearly 10 years. He had no experience as an employment skills instructor, nor was he in any way asked to fill that role. Instead, he had been asked by the organization to help the youth specifically with camera skills when the main video facilitator wasn’t available. In other words, he was an external contractor who felt no pressure to fulfill the employment-related mandate of the program; therefore he did not encourage the participants to think about their time

spent filming as a way to fulfill “job” duties. Rather, he encouraged them to simply have a fun time.

As a professional filmmaker, he seemed more at ease with guiding the youth in taking risks with the equipment and with their roles. In fact, he encouraged the youth to switch up their roles as much as possible. He took a more active role in advising them on going after random interview subjects, as well as how to position the camera. He explained to me that he just tried to teach the youth how to use the cameras in the way he had learned, by running around with the equipment and shooting as much as possible, so they could learn from their mistakes. Due to his position within the organization, he was under no obligation to relate the experience of creating a film to practicing a job. As such, I believe that the group he worked with had an experience where they were more successful at voicing themselves in the community because they hadn't thought of the exercise as a 'job-training' experience.

That evening, the participants spent the night in freezing temperatures and for the first time, all rotated roles comfortably. Peter, who had firmly expressed his dislike for being in front of the camera, and had remained comfortably behind one all day, eventually conducted an interview with a random parent in the crowd. With Peter off the camera, one of the less technically inclined female participants who had not yet had a chance to film seized the opportunity to experience this aspect of production. The group had a lot of fun in the park, and I eventually left them there still filming hours after our normal finishing time.

The following day, Mary expressed her delight in how much fun the youth had had with Kaden the night before. Not only did the youth have fun, but something else happened as result of the shooting: early the next day there was an opportunity to do a spontaneous shoot outside the office. When the request for a student to shoot the scene was made, the two female members from the Youth Recreation group immediately raised their hands. Prior to their experiences with Kaden they hadn't displayed any interest or confidence in using a camera on their own. However, with their new found ability they volunteered to go downstairs and complete the

shoot themselves. When they returned, Peter and one of the female participants from his group gathered the tapes from the day before to begin to edit. They worked together side by side for a week, while the other groups remained frustrated and uncommunicative about who should have control over the editing of their piece. The Youth Recreation group remained cohesive and shared their workload until the completion of their film, and later told me that they felt they had gotten their message across.

### **Comparative Outcomes**

These two examples illustrate some very important issues. Both groups were given ample time to think of a message that they wanted to share with the larger public. However, during the actual film-shoot it seemed as though the Birds of Prey group were encouraged to think about the filming experience as a “work” experience. For example, they were reminded of their duties such as being asked if the “right” person was on camera or if the director was managing everyone effectively. However, the participants told me that they didn’t learn the camera skills they had wanted because they felt that one of the participants hadn’t shared the equipment, nor was this encouraged due to the assignment of his role. In addition, they didn’t develop any relationships with the interviewees; in fact, their main interviewee seemed frustrated by their ambivalence toward the project. Finally, they all felt disconnected from the process and later, they all told me that they hadn’t gotten their message across in the final product. The focus of group one had been predominantly on practical job-training and this had effectively frustrated their ability to voice themselves.

The second group, on the other hand, were not put under any pressure to uphold standards of professionalism or to imagine that they were practicing a job. They had the freedom to randomly switch roles during the night shoot. For this group, the goal of the filming experience had been about making a great video and collecting the best footage possible to convey their message. The experience of the

second team resulted in better learning outcomes and a better sense of connection amongst one another and the community. The relationships that they were able to build with the community were evidenced by the fact that three of the five participants were successful in attaining internships through connections they made during the film-making experience. Finally, all participants in the Youth Recreation group confirmed that they felt that they had gotten their messages across through the video.

Although the Youth Recreation group felt they had voiced themselves through their project, they remained the only participants who did. The idea that film-making should be about individual enhancement was extended into the way that all of the participants approached their large group film project. After the three community videos were filmed, the entire group was asked to take on a larger scale project. Again, everyone suggested different topics and through a process of elimination, they selected the topic of consumerism and advertising. Everyone chose roles, and a writing team was formed to create the storyline. The plot revolved around the journey of one woman's experience with her addiction to shopping. The experience of shooting the film was framed as a work experience, with everyone acting in different roles, such as director, editor, make-up and actors.

In many ways, the subject of the film had been a rich breeding ground for dialogue about consumerism. However, it seemed like the goal of doing the filming was to complete tasks on time, and less about using the experience to reflect critically on the message of the film. The shooting of the film moved between being fun and impromptu to being tense and chaotic, as group members acted disrespectfully to one another while others scolded each other for not being "professional" enough. Again, the facilitators directed the youth to conceive of the process as a "work experience" where everyone should uphold their roles and complete their tasks. As such, the participants thought about the film-making practice as one to enhance their own skills while any other possibilities were largely left unexplored.

Ultimately, the participants seemed frustrated during the film-making process, and when I interviewed the participants about whether they felt they had gotten their message across in the film, only the participant who had come up with the idea and acted as the main writer responded that she felt she had. The participant who had been the director said that he felt that he might have gotten his message across, but it was hard to say. Many of the others confirmed that they hadn't felt involved in the production at all. One of the participants laughingly told me that he had been so disinterested by the topic of the film that he didn't even know what it was about. In other words, he didn't care about the process or the final product because he had only perceived it as a space to fulfil his own task rather than an opportunity to build relationships or express his own voice.

### **Community Film Events: An Opportunity to Network**

Not only was filming focused on how it could relate to employment, the facilitators connected almost all activities in the program to employment, even if the activity wasn't necessarily employment related. For example, the facilitators discussed the video production process itself as a method for networking to secure better employment. Some of the participants were successful in securing internships, and later employment with some of the people they'd met through their community videos. Of course, the goal for the participants to find interesting internships was important for the facilitators, but my point is that the impulse to relate all program activities back to employment seemed to overwhelm all other possibilities for what these activities could mean. This demonstrates how the objectives of neoliberalism extended into every activity within the program and began to influence the way the participants discussed the activities of the program. For example, when the facilitators invited the participants to attend a monthly Women in Film discussion I remember Mary telling me that she thought it was good for the participants to go there and listen to other filmmakers speak. She explained that these experiences could open the participants up to talking about social issues facing women and being addressed by

women filmmakers in the community. At the same time, however, she also described these locations as places to “network” with other filmmakers in the hopes that the participants might land internships. Indeed, many of the participants returned from these sessions describing how they had learned new things, but also discussed these workshops as an opportunity for them to “get themselves out there” in order to secure an internship. This is an example of how the youth began to evaluate and measure the program's activities in terms of how they might enhance their own individual gains, specifically related to employment centred outcomes.

### **Employment Focus and Democratic Outcomes in the Office Environment**

Employment skill development was not only encouraged in regard to the filmmaking process and activities, but also in the way the participants’ engagement in the program was measured. Indeed, whatever activity the participants seemed to be engaged with was usually measured by how well it was executed in relation to a job. For example, the participants were expected to adhere to normal work parameters such as being on time and taking breaks at the appropriate time. Designated break times quite frequently interfered with the creative flow of the projects, but nonetheless the facilitators almost always insisted on breaks because this is how “standard” employment environments operate. Even though the facilitators wanted to allow the youth to explore the issues that they had chosen for their films, it seemed that the value of their time spent on projects was measured by how well the participants conducted themselves within a “work” environment. As such, their activities within these roles seemed to be measured by how “professional” they were, how accurately they carried out the duties of their daily role, whether they arrived on time and whether breaks were taken at the prescribed times.

However, the participants often rebelled against this “office” mentality which in turn resulted in them creating a space that allowed them to engage democratically in the community. Even if the youth were reminded to “get back to work” they were



certainly not monitored at all times to make sure this was being done. As I discussed earlier, the facilitators were vigilant about the necessity for the youth to express themselves and this sometimes translated into facilitating brainstorming sessions where the participants were encouraged to pick their own topics. This belief also guided the facilitators' interactions with the youth that were hands off and respectful of their privacy. As such, the participants were given a lot of time to spend working on their videos at their own discretion on computers in their own private computer lab. The participants sat in an entirely separate room from the facilitators' office space, where they were often left for hours to edit, film and do anything pertaining to their projects. Within their private computer lab, the participants had the freedom to get to know each other on a more personal level and used much of their time exploring their own interests on the Internet. Although each participant was given a new Mac or PC desktop computer to enable them to learn how to edit, I monitored what they were doing and for the most part they spent the majority of their time on YouTube or Facebook. The program facilitators discouraged these activities because they were deemed inappropriate for a work-place environment, but I believe that they were significant to the participants in terms of developing their capacity to engage democratically in the community.

For instance, early in the program, John watched a large amount of the footage about the pro-Palestinian protests occurring across North America in December 2008, primarily on YouTube. At the time, there were several protests held in Vancouver over the weekends and he attended them avidly. He would return to class on Monday and watch all of the footage captured elsewhere and in Vancouver and add comments and engage with online dialogue either on YouTube, or on Facebook. At one point he began to get excited about filming an upcoming protest and had pitched an idea regarding the protests for the final group project (which ultimately was not selected). John had wanted to contribute to a dialogue by way of video. It wasn't enough for him to make comments or watch other's footage. For him, being able to contribute footage of a demonstration seemed to be of utmost

importance as a way to contribute to a larger dialogue. The ability to contribute media as a mode of discussion seemed to be of significance in the other participants as well.

When the community videos were finished, the most important thing for the participants to do with them was to put them online. Facebook was the single most accessed web site and it was how all of the participants chose to communicate amongst one another, even while they were sitting across the aisle from each other. Leading up to the completion of the short community videos, several students had posted their personal B roll material up on Facebook. These students were reprimanded by the facilitators because they were told that they were in breach of copyright and risked getting in trouble from head office. Nonetheless, several students made numerous attempts to put all of their work up on Facebook despite the risk of copyright violation or other issues. For them, they believed it was the most important gesture they could make in terms of displaying their talent and sharing the information to the larger public (although Facebook allows you to protect your identity so that only people you know personally can look at your site, every single participant with a Facebook account, save one, had an open account for anyone on Facebook to see). As soon as one of them would post a video, the others would watch it from their own pages amidst squeals and giggles of excitement. There was something very exciting about logging into your own Facebook site and watching your work on another person's page. The desire to post B roll, and eventually the short and longer films, was similar to John's desire to post footage from the protests around Vancouver. Simply put, they believed that posting online on Facebook was a crucial way to engage in a dialogue about social issues.

Posting videos and clips provided a high degree of legitimacy towards their ability to contribute to a larger conversation. To shed light on one of the reasons why, I spoke to Kaden, the part time media facilitator, who also had an open Facebook page. Kaden was adamant about the importance of putting your work online, not only as a tool to get noticed, but as a way of interacting in a dialogue.

So I just create my own world, but I try to do it responsibly ...that's the dialogue of putting it back out there ...it's kind of amazing that its being done by everybody, casually, people having conversations via videos and photos, being able to watch stuff online... (Interview, February 8, 2009)

Although there are many implications about the development of online communication, I do not have the space here to discuss it. Instead, I want to focus on how these online activities seemed to inspire the participants by opening them up to opportunities to enhance their dialogue around film and social issues not only online but at live events in the city.

### **Reimagining Identity with Social Media and Community Involvement**

Through Facebook, Kaden invited the participants to various film viewings and gatherings around Vancouver. Specifically, the Tuesday night film club, the monthly taping of Kaden's cable television show, and the monthly gala movie night became social nights for the participants. Even though Kaden had a small role as facilitator, he acted as an influential presence in the program by staying connected to the participants online and inviting them to film events around town. These events were accompanied by the other events promoted by Kaleidoscope such as the monthly Women in Film breakfast discussions and the premiere screening of a past participant's work. Although it was difficult to assess what the impact of attending these events was with every participant, about halfway into the program I noticed a change in Maya's conversations about film because of her engagement with these activities and her online discussions on Facebook.

Maya had entered the program with no other expectation than to learn camera skills in the hopes of gaining experience to pursue her dream of wildlife photography. Young and bubbly, Maya did not strike me as particularly interested in political issues or filmmaking. In my interaction with her, she was always cheerful and paid a lot of attention to her online friends, as well as the other participants around her. She was

one of the participants who developed the most relationships with others in the program.

One morning I walked into a lively conversation about the participants' activities from the previous evening. They had attended a film gala "social night" through Kaden's Facebook invitation, at a hip little bar in a trendy area of Vancouver with other filmmakers and actors from Vancouver. Instead of a traditional theater setting, films were played in a bar, where you could drink and mingle after the screenings. They told me in great excitement about the films they had watched. Maya recounted that she believed one of the films was superior to the others for stylistic reasons, while others argued with her about her opinion.

Over the course of the program I watched how Maya learned from other participants in the program to post videos downloaded from YouTube and share them with other people on her Facebook page. Previously, she had only been able to share photos. During the progression of the program, the participants began to share YouTube sites back and forth with one another of upcoming movies and documentaries over Facebook. When this started happening, I noticed that Maya actively joined in with the conversations online or in the computer lab about films. They would also discuss people they'd met at the film nights and try to locate their work online and watch it together. As a result of these experiences, Maya's role within the group changed because she started to be able to contribute to a dialogue about film and social and political issues in a more advanced way than prior to entering the program.

When I spoke to the facilitators about the personal use of Facebook and YouTube, however, it was viewed with unease. They said that they had thought about blocking the sites, but hadn't because they wanted the youth to take responsibility for their own time and be treated like adults. Often, the facilitators would walk into the computer lab, see them on Facebook, scold them for wasting time and remind them that this conduct would never pass in a real work environment. However, I believe the use of Facebook had a positive effect in developing the participant's sense of

democratic engagement. To me, it increased the participants' knowledge of new films and documentaries because it enhanced their exposure to them and their ability to discuss them. It also acted as a space where they learned about other filmmakers and attended film events in the city. For example, a participant watched an aspiring director's film through Facebook and MySpace and eventually connected with her and became her intern during the internship. Finally, the participants told me that they had been so inspired by what they were encountering online that a group of them were considering creating a film festival that could be accessed through Facebook.

The pervasive use of Facebook made me suspect that a primary reason the youth continued to engage with the program was for the opportunity to demonstrate all the creative work they were doing via Facebook. It seemed that only a few of the participants had really embraced the video production process. For the most part, the youth seemed awkward in their attempts not only to film, but to set up interviews, write the scripts, carry the lights and so on. However, all of them seemed to really enjoy uploading their footage and working for hours making tiny films made from B roll to post on Facebook. I asked them if it they felt like the community gala was important or if sharing videos through Facebook was enough to share their messages in the community. They all asserted that having a public gala was more important than posting their work online. Nonetheless, the ability to make tiny films and post them online for their friends to see was undeniably significant because it helped them redefine the way they interacted with one another and the community. As such, they not only connected with other people in the film community, they themselves imagined how as "content-producers" they might be able to create an online space in which to display their messages.

## **Community Gala**

Although the students and the facilitators placed a lot of value on the final community gala event, the funding of the program so heavily favoured skills

development that the event very nearly didn't happen. The gala was the final event of the program where participants had a chance to show their videos to the community. Kaleidoscope only had \$100.00 for all of it, including advertising, refreshments and rental space. The participants told me on numerous occasions that the gala event was very important for them, so they were disappointed when they discovered that there wasn't a lot of funding for the event. Typically, the program was forced to attempt to locate a suitable and free space to host the event. As the date was drawing near, and finding a suitable venue seemed unlikely, Mary informed me with relief that they had been offered a free space by a Vancouver community centre. Unfortunately, the location was unrelated to where the youth lived, worked or filmed any of their community videos. Although the gala went ahead, community involvement and exposure was considerably lower due to the location and lack of advertising.

### **Impacts and Outcomes: Lessons Learned in the Kaleidoscope program**

As I have demonstrated, the focus that Skills Link placed on employment put pressure on the Kaleidoscope facilitators to frame nearly all program activities as employment-related. Acting responsibly in a team environment, finding interesting internships and ultimately finding a good job are all very important, but the tendency to relate all filmmaking activities to employment-related practices seemed to overwhelm the potential for democratic engagement. Whether using a workshop with local women filmmakers to network, creating a film as a way to practice a job, or being measured on how “professional” the participants acted within the program, all of these experiences had an impact on the perceptions the youth held of community media production.

#### **(1) Impact: Community Media practice as a place for individual skill enhancement**

Unsurprisingly, as I reflected on the experiences of the participants, I recognized that the over arching goal of individual enhancement had become the

primary lens that the participants had used to evaluate the program, and their own activities. The consequence or implication for this, however, is that the aim of enhancing job skills had made them think about their film-making activities in terms of how they could benefit themselves. For example, in terms of the videos they made, many participants walked away from their experiences without building any relationship to the community through their projects, nor did they express that this was a problem. In other words, they perceived their own involvement in community media production as something to shape their own development, rather as something that could have an impact on the community. In addition, they described the filming activities and other outside activities increasingly from a self-interested perspective. For example, they assessed the Women in Film workshop in terms of how it was beneficial as a place to “network” and they sometimes described their frustration with the program’s inability to connect them with better jobs. Lastly, when I asked them why they believed it was important for youth to be involved in community media production, many of them responded that it was only important if an individual wanted to learn film skills to take into a job, or use later as a hobby. Many of them didn’t discuss the potential of community media production in terms of it being a place to have a dialogue, to share ideas or to be heard.

The consequence of running the program in this way was that many of the youth walked away from the program thinking about community media production only in terms of how it could develop individual capacity. In other words, the focus on enhancing individual skill undermined the participants' ability to understand the potential of community video making as a democratic expression of their voice, and as a means to have an impact in their community. This is problematic because, in fact, instead of having an experience that opened their eyes to an opportunity to express themselves or use community media as a tool for social impact, this experience closed, or narrowed their perspective on the value of these activities. For these young people, the value of practicing community media production its ability to develop their individual skills, while any other potential for these activities was lost.

## **(2) Impact: Community Media Production as a place for voicing yourself in the community**

Nonetheless, some of the participant's did have a meaningful and socially conscious experience because, inadvertently, they were introduced to a series of opportunities to discuss film with various people, including friends, other participants and outside filmmakers either online or in person. Despite the frustration they had experienced in making films, they had nonetheless engaged in a common activity that they could discuss with other people in a new way. It seemed that the act of making videos, although impeded by the constant pressure to frame these acts as job-training, were also legitimate attempts to bring awareness to social issues. For example, Maya created a film about the importance of paramedics. She herself had been in a near-fatal car collision and had only been saved due to the immediate response of paramedics. Her film drew attention to how paramedics are first responders in crisis situations, but are often undervalued and underpaid. As I discussed in Chapter 1, the importance of community media production is to draw awareness to issues of local concern, and Maya's film was a successful attempt do so. The experience of being involved in the act of making a community video lent some participants, like Maya, legitimacy in their conversations with other filmmakers and actors at the film nights that Kaden invited them to. The production of these videos gave the participants a platform to start conversations with other filmmakers who they may not have interacted with otherwise. It allowed Maya to engage socially with a larger capacity to discuss film and media. Throughout the program, I observed other participants who regularly attended the events and I watched how they developed a new interest in film and a new capacity to discuss film itself. As such, by not only making films, but also having social nights to discuss film with others, it allowed the youth to engage in the community in a more meaningful and socially significant way.



### **(3) Impact: Reimagining Facebook -Engaging, Discovering and Dialogue**

Through the experiences of making their own films, posting them online, finding out about film nights and attending them, the participants' personal Facebook sites were re-imagined into pages for dialogue, exploration and critique. The pages weren't just being used for catching up with friends or posting funny photos or playing games. The participants' Facebook pages became a place to discuss film and documentaries that spurred conversations about social responsibility and inspired a desire to connect with other people in the film community. During the last week of the program, I watched the participants in front of their computers as they jumped from working on their own B roll footage, to helping their friends with editing, to providing critique, or sending another video to each other. This final week mirrored the same kind of interaction that had been displayed weeks earlier in the B roll video shoot, and the platforms they had created on Facebook.. They weren't just discussing their weekends, they were providing advice on the projects they were working on. They seemed to genuinely care about their films and about their colleagues' opinions. Their new insight had been informed by the events they had gone to, the discussions they had engaged in, but also because they themselves had experienced making films. This experience was invaluable to the participants in allowing them to enhance their ability to think critically about the world, if not practice a new way of speaking about art and film in general. As such, I believe that it was a positive presence for the participants to expand their learning about video making and the filmmaking community in Vancouver. Ultimately, Facebook was reimagined as a space to engage with the film world, to the extent that half the group actively discussed creating a film festival which could be accessed through Facebook. These activities demonstrated the potential of community media making as a democratic activity, by allowing the youth to share, learn and most importantly, voice themselves in an empowered way in their online community.

#### **(4) Impact: Back to School**

The program did inspire a number of participants to seriously consider returning to post-secondary education. I believe that the idea of going back to school was influenced by their experience of becoming dialogue-makers, but also by the environment of Kaleidoscope itself. At various points in the program, the facilitators would conduct workshops and invite guest speakers to address the program. With these “classes” in mind, the participants told me that they had sometimes thought of Kaleidoscope as school and conversations with past participants confirmed this as well. For example, in my preliminary interviews with Blake, and in my overall interaction with him, I never got any hint that he was thinking about school as a future option. However, when I interviewed him at the end of the program he revealed to me that he had considered Kaleidoscope to be an academic environment, which had inspired him to go back to school.

Because I've been out of the academic world for a long time...being here was very refreshing... I wouldn't mind going back to school and maybe taking another movie course or something relatable or maybe longer...maybe a year course yah I am thinking about it. Its funds that's going to be difficult cause a lot of the courses are expensive... I've realized that I've missed being in school...very refreshing and very enriching, amazing I would put it... now I know what've missed, I didn't really realize it, even years ago I was thinking I won't go back to school-I'll just work there's no point in going back to school-but now after this program, it's brought me to a different perspective. (Interview, March, 24, 2009)

Blake's response was similar to that of other participants. It seems as though the program had the effect of easing the uncertainty around post-secondary education for some participants. In fact, it seemed to have inspired at least four participants to go to film school, or take more courses in film. By the end of the program, all three of the First Nations young women had actively discussed applying for a First Nations film-making program through a local Vancouver university.

Despite the emphasis placed on individual skill development, and the outcomes that this produced, the program did allow the participants to enhance their democratic engagement in community. I had originally believed that all of the outcomes of the program would all serve the aims of neoliberalism, for example, I thought the youth would emerge from the program more inclined to think about their own personal gains rather than the community as a whole. However, many of the participants practiced a new way to engage with people, which indicates that the program was ultimately successful in its ability to preserve a democratic space for the youth. This was because the program used community media production as a way for the youth to voice themselves in the community and contribute to a larger dialogue online and elsewhere, while being exposed to a range of ideas that led them to thinking about a new range of possibilities for themselves in their community, for their community.

### **(5) Impact: How Neoliberalism Excludes the Most Vulnerable Voices From the Dialogue**

Perhaps then, the most troubling finding I made was how this program excluded the most vulnerable youth from this experience. As I discussed earlier, the program was designed to support at-risk youth in gaining employment; however, many of the youth told me that they had all held jobs for a long time, and did not feel that they held any significant barriers to work. Many of them spent money on lunch and coffees on a daily basis, got tattoos and in fact, I later learned that one of the participants was the son of one of Vancouver's most prestigious families. Through the questionnaire I issued them, I learned that the majority of them had personal computers, laptops, ipods and video game consoles, and all of them had direct access to these gadgets if they didn't own them.

Based on these findings, I commented on how well-adjusted I found everyone to be and I questioned the facilitators about how they assessed the “barriers” of the participants. Mary and Kevin explained to me that there were varying degrees of

“risk” placed on each participant. They admitted that most of the participants fell into a relatively mild category of risk, because the program was not equipped to take youth who had multiple barriers. Although the program was aimed to draw multi-barriered youth to teach them employment skills, the facilitators were not provided with the resources to support someone with a great number of barriers. The program had no ability to support those needing housing, addiction or personal counselling. Ultimately, both facilitators agreed that it had to be up to the participant to make it work and they couldn’t provide much more. Mary explained:

**They have to be ready to make a commitment and stay put. Its just timing, they have to be ready for it. (Interview, June 26, 2009)**

As I discussed earlier, the facilitators needed to demonstrate an 85% successful employment rate, or funding for the program would be discontinued. Due to the unpredictable situations of multi-barrier youth, the facilitators needed to select youth who would be likely to make employment related outcomes if they were going to be able to continue the program at all. Without better support for the youth, the facilitators had learned to draw from a higher pool of candidates in order to keep the program going. Lawrence's (2006) study of HRSDC programs found similar findings when she discovered that facilitators in an artistic, job-training program funded by Skills Link chose to place their youth in jobs and schools where they were unlikely to succeed long-term simply in order to achieve the short-term employment-related outcomes. For the Kaleidoscope facilitators, they chose to select candidates from a less risky demographic of youth in order to achieve the employment-related outcomes because they could be confident that the youth would be able to achieve employment upon graduation. By keeping the program going, they felt that they could at least still try to always provide an opportunity for one or two youth who fit the target demographic in a more accurate way.

For example, they brought in John, a young man who exhibited signs of drug use, behavioral mood swings and who revealed to me that he had a spotty history

when it came to work. He said that he did well in interviews, but could often lose interest in working if it was boring to him.

**Prior to here, I might not have the best work history..it depends on my level of commitment. (Interview, December 19, 2008)**

In the beginning, John contributed to conversations in the group but began to come later and later to class, or not at all. He was the one participant who was experiencing homelessness. Eventually he revealed to a facilitator that he was sleeping in a public library during the day to keep out of the rain and wandering the streets or going to twenty-four hour youth centres downtown during the night. He would arrive dishevelled and tired. I remember speaking to Mary about him and she admitted her distress about his condition. As John's attendance become more and more erratic, she confided in me that she felt utterly helpless to assist him. Later, she described the reality of taking in youth with significant barriers:

**Usually when you take on someone that's homeless, the chances of them succeeding are really really slim...if they don't have a stable home it's hard to maintain a job and that's one of the first things we look at. So we took him on because we took on 14 youth so we could afford to lose two. Or one. So we were willing to take that risk. (Interview, June 26, 2009)**

The facilitators told me that they had always anticipated that he might not make it through the program, although all of the facilitators were determined to support his continued presence even if they were unable to offer him much more than a seat in the classroom. Midway through the second month of the program, John stopped attending the program altogether.

The way that these programs deliver success rates perpetuates the myth that short term job training can assist youth to gain long-term employment (Lawrence, 2006). The Kaleidoscope program further served to perpetuate the myth that marginalized youth will be included in an experience that will enhance their ability to voice themselves and be heard in the community. Although the facilitators wanted to help at-risk youth, the narrow employment-related outcomes that they were required

to uphold ensured that the most vulnerable populations, who could potentially gain most from these programs, were excluded.

Despite the focus on job-training, the youth who successfully completed the program all had at least some opportunity to act as social agents, if only in a small way. The experience of attending the events, and being able to discuss them online, had an impact on almost all the participants. “Youth media production creates a connection to something larger than oneself and one’s immediate world of interaction and experience” (Soep, 2006). The experiences of serving to enhance a dialogue around public issues and meeting other people interested in the same thing seemed to motivate the youth to feel involved in a different realm of possibilities, or as they said, being part of a different world.

The Kaleidoscope program ultimately served a group of youth who were already in position to encounter this type of experience in another area of life. This is not to diminish the barriers that the successful participants faced; however, the participant with the most fundamental barrier of all, lack of stable housing, was left behind by this program. Further, it was indicated to me by the facilitators that the only reason he had been allowed into the program in the first place, was because they had room to let one of two go. This decision to only accept a small number of multi-barrier youth was not an arbitrary decision made by the facilitators but was based solely on the criteria prescribed by Service Canada that they were obligated to fulfill. The facilitators were measured on how well they created a successful program or they themselves were at risk of losing their jobs. John was one of the more thoughtful and articulate participants in the group, but he didn't last long enough in the program to have a substantial experience. The requirement to demonstrate employment related outcomes will increasingly lead to people like John being excluded from these opportunities.

Community media production is meant to give people a voice, and allow marginalized voices to be heard in the community. Moreover, it is meant to provide an avenue to enhance a broader dialogue, to allow for people to engage

democratically in their communities. The irony is these programs are meant to preserve a space where at-risk youth are able to democratically voice themselves; however, because of the way these programs are assessed the most vulnerable youth are excluded. The “successful” results which occur due to this selection bias serve to perpetuate the myth that the Canadian government is doing its best in try to find equal opportunities for all young people to voice themselves. A space is preserved for people to voice themselves and engage democratically in community, but the gap is widening in terms of who may access that space. These programs are meant to “build better citizens”, and strengthen our communities but this cannot happen while the criteria for success rely so strictly on employment related outcomes. As such, the criteria for successful community development programming through HRSDC needs to be reformed.

## Conclusion

In this study, I set out to examine and illuminate the tensions which community media practices face when operating within the neoliberal framework which has become dominant economic perspective within Canada. Since its inception, community media has held the promise to liberate marginalized voices from being silenced, and thus its potential is associated with its ability to enable the democratization of the public sphere. Tools for creating community media have never been easier to access than today and creating videos and posting them online for the world to see is a relatively simple and straight-forward task. As such, local community organizations have rightly seized on the opportunity to start media programs that work with traditionally marginalized at-risk youth in order to empower them to voice themselves in their community. Despite the potential and increasing accessibility of community media production it remains unclear what the outcomes of these practices are. The tradition of community media has always carried mixed results, and present opportunities are no exception. As I explained in Chapter 1, various organizations and individuals have strived to use community media to allow people to voice themselves, but it is difficult to know if and how this has been successful. Competing interests in these activities have resulted in a variety of outcomes from a process that aims to assist people to voice their concerns and better inform the larger public about issues facing their community. Complicating these results today, organizations are increasingly under pressure to justify their programming by demonstrating how they act as vocational training programs. Under a neoliberal framework, community media programming needs to fulfill the goal of job training, at the risk of being unable to offer a space for democratic engagement. Furthermore, they are at risk of serving to perpetuate the goals of neoliberalism that tend to limit public activities to the realm of private interest. In order to investigate



how and why this could be true I examined a program that was operating under these exact conditions.

In Chapter 2, I discussed how I set up a field study to explore my question with Kaleidoscope, a community media program that worked with at-risk youth. I outlined the various tools and techniques that I would use to investigate my question, including interviews and note-taking. It was the notion of complexity, however, which ended up guiding me most thoroughly in my study, and allowed me to explain how and if the program acted in a way that would preserve democratic engagement. This happened in two ways. First, acknowledging the complexity of my study allowed me to consider random variables that I had not predicted in order to explain events, outcomes and impacts. As such, looking from different perspectives allowed me to discover how the program allowed democratic engagement to be preserved. Second, the notion of complexity illuminated the ways in which neoliberalism permeated this program in a way that I had not anticipated. Indeed, my discovery of the impact of the employment related outcomes extended past the participants' perceptions and practices, into how the program privileged less "risky" youth in the program itself, while it excluded the most vulnerable.

By examining the program in my third chapter, I had an avenue to clarify my own ideas about what happens and what doesn't in community media programs. I discovered that the overarching goal of enhancing individual skill informed the facilitators in how to encourage the participants to approach the act of creating their video. Encouraging the youth in this direction undermined the potential for them to voice themselves in their community because they thought about the experience as one that was supposed to serve their own development, rather than as an opportunity for them to serve the community around them, by sharing their message. Nonetheless, the youth managed to create an opportunity for themselves to practice in engaging in a broader dialogue and voicing themselves in the community by making use of the unpredictable variables in the program, such as being able to attend social film nights with local Vancouver filmmakers. As such, I believe that many of

them had an awakening to different possibilities, and achieved a sense that it was possible to take action in their community. This was probably the most significant outcome of all, and the most coherent across all of the participants: That they were empowered to imagine a different possibility for their own future, by listening, contributing and sharing in a community media production experience. These developments were always encouraged and supported by the facilitators as well. Even if the facilitators had been under constant pressure to link many program activities to employment, in private moments amongst one another they seemed genuinely happy to see the enthusiasm and new insight that the participants were gaining.

Although this was a positive development within the program, the danger of running these programs in their current form is two-fold. First, I believe that, in some instances, they serve to narrow the perception of the value of the potential of community media production into the realm of private interest. In other words, they serve to perpetuate an understanding that the potential of community media production is largely beneficial for individuals to develop their own capacities to enter the market or serve their own self-interest. The activity becomes a selfish one, rather than one that could potentially strengthen community and be a tool for democratic engagement. This demonstrates how neoliberalism contributes to fostering a certain mindset, through public activities and practices, where social activities are only meaningful if they serve self-interest, while the notion to participate in them for other reason is increasingly senseless. As such, a slow transformation is occurring about the understanding of what the value is of voicing oneself in the community into increasingly being understood as an act for individual gain or benefit, while the value of doing so as a democratic act is diminished.

Secondly, under neoliberalism, community development organizations need to be accountable to the government by demonstrating successful outcomes, like a business would. Social organizations have been forced to adopt business models that demonstrate success and accountability in recent times. The pressure to have measurable results that relate to the business world is a result of neoliberal policies

and practices, and this program serves as demonstration of how the most vulnerable youth are left behind by policies that demand measurements and success based on one's ability to work.

Because the program demanded that success was measured on the ability of the program to graduate youth into jobs, the program learned to pull from a higher group of youth. As such, the program cannot offer the opportunity for the most vulnerable youth to experience imagining a different possibility for the future. The most vulnerable of our populations need these opportunities the most, and yet they are excluded from these programs based on not meeting the criteria. These programs claim that they are part of a mechanism to ensure that all youth have equal access to building healthy relationships in their community and voicing themselves about the issues facing them, but multi-barrier youth are excluded from this process because of their inability to meet employment related outcomes. These programs serve to marginalize them even more by excluding them from these important and meaningful opportunities.

It should be noted that the experiences in this program *will*, in all probability, help facilitate the participants' growth in employability and as community members. In remembering my previous conversation about complexity from Chapter 2, I need to draw attention to the idea that it is difficult to see how and when the experiences that the participants had in the program will be used by them in the future. In essence, it is difficult to make this assessment, if any assessment at all, except to say that the program seemed to have a variety of impacts in terms of opening new ideas to the participants which will inevitably lead them to having different experiences in the future. The impulse to categorize and measure is not suited to assessing this program, because there doesn't seem to be any *immediate* consequences to demonstrate transformation. I believe that the experience of engaging in different conversations, watching social documentaries and discussing film in general with new people is a positive thing that will only allow the participants more ability to communicate with different ideas and people in the future. What these participants

carry forward into their lives and how they shape their community will undoubtedly be informed by this experience that left them inspired. The pressure to demonstrate successful, short-term, work-related results does not speak to the whole experience. In other words, the criteria is inadequate in terms of demonstrating successful impacts and outcomes of these programs. In order to understand how community media programs preserve a space for democratic engagement it is vital to examine these programs in a qualitative way which accounts for the complexity of the human experience.

The claim that this program recruits at-risk youth such as homeless youth, youth missing high school completion and single mothers, only adds insult to the reality of the situation. It is hypocritical of Service Canada to run programs for at-risk youth when clearly their employment outcome requirements ensure any program which wishes to continue cannot include more than a token number of at-risk youth. By pretending they are serving these populations, they hide the fact that they are not only acting non-transparently to the Canadian public, but serving to widen the gap between rich and poor, as the poor are increasingly left to manage their own problems. Service Canada receives the same documentation that I was allowed to look at, so I question how they are unaware that the “graduating” youth seem to be drawn from a relatively high pool of participants.

Ultimately I advocate for the continuation of these programs, including the Kaleidoscope program, as I believe they do provide a valuable resource for Canadian society. Although the actual production of the community video was impeded in its ability to provide a venue for the expression of voice, the overall environment of the program allowed the youth to connect to a world outside of themselves and more effectively engage in their communities. If Skills Link were to abolish their employment-related outcomes for these programs they would become significantly more valuable by allowing facilitators to focus more specifically on encouraging youth expression of voice and also by including greater numbers of multi-barriered youth in their programs. Current Canadian community media programs that operate under

HRSDC funding criteria are unable to serve youth who stand to benefit the most from the opportunities that community media production presents. As they are right now, current measurements of success are ineffective in terms of understanding the complex nature of the experiences and outcomes of the programs. HRSDC needs to embrace new, qualitative ways to measure the success of these programs that capture the complexity of the experiences of the participants. To not do so, is serving to diminish access into programs that could potentially be highly beneficial for vulnerable youth.

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