Strengthening University and Community Capacities:

Models for Engagement and Education

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines ways in which low literacy and essential skill levels, and access to education, have profound implications for community health and are inextricably linked to other social determinants of health. It explores possibilities for forging new and innovative ways for excluded individuals and communities to participate meaningfully in university-based education, specifically with respect to Simon Fraser University and Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood. The thesis examines a number of theoretical and methodological approaches from various disciplines, including public health, public policy, adult education, critical and indigenous pedagogies, and communication for social change; gives an overview of relevant examples of university-community engagement activities; extracts key lessons learned from a case study of community engaged programming that occurred at Simon Fraser University in 2011/2012; and concludes by making recommendations for strengthened efforts on the part of the university to sustain collaboratively developed community-engaged programming.

Keywords: Community university engagement; community capacity building; social determinants of health; community-engaged programming; critical and indigenous pedagogies; communication for social change

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List of Acronyms

CCB	Community Capacity Building
CEP	Community Education Program
CFP	Call for Proposal
DTES	Downtown Eastside
LES	Literacy and Essential Skills
LGBTQ	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer
PHA	Person with HIV/AIDS
SCA	School for Contemporary Arts
SDOH	Social Determinants of Health
SFU	Simon Fraser University
SRO	Single Room Occupancy hotel
STOP	Seek and Treat for Optimal Prevention
TLC	Teaching and Learning Centre
UBC	University of British Columbia
VPA	Vice President Academic
VPER	Vice President External Relations
WHO	World Health Organization

1. Introduction

Vancouver residents have access to some of the most sophisticated medical and community interventions in the world, and yet large mainstream institutions such as universities, health authorities and various levels of government remain unable to engage in a sustained way with people who experience the most poverty and vulnerability. Because of a variety of factors, not least of which are ongoing stigmatization and discrimination, these community members are denied adequate housing, food security, and stable relationships with a variety of community supports. This results in situations that jeopardize individual and community health in ways that most Canadians would associate with 'third world' conditions. For example, strategies and information that have been proven to reduce HIV transmission, and medical drug regimens that vastly improve quality and length of life for HIV positive people, are not easily available to all because these interventions require a high level of stability in other areas such as consistent access to nutritious food and stable housing.

One appealing response to these problems is to create innovative communication campaigns that somehow reach communities and individuals who are struggling, and impart the information that they are lacking in ways that are understandable and accessible. But this begs a number of serious questions. Low literacy and essential skill levels, and access to education, have profound implications for community health and are inextricably linked to other social determinants of health. It is extremely difficult to create and foster effective communication strategies intended to

improve social determinants of health in marginalized urban communities without addressing underlying factors related to access, literacy and stigma.

To this end, I am interested in forging new and innovative ways for excluded individuals and communities to participate meaningfully in university-based education while acknowledging that this may entail expanding the definition of what 'university-based education' means. To accomplish this, those of us within the academy must engage in an authentic effort to broaden our own approaches to teaching and learning; we must embrace a practice of truly reciprocal learning. This project is interdisciplinary, and includes theoretical and methodological approaches from public health, public policy, adult education, critical/indigenous pedagogies, communication, and more.

It is critical in exploring these types of relationships and activities that we keep desired outcomes clearly defined. For the purposes of this work some outcomes might be:

- Empowerment and enhanced leadership capacities of previously disempowered community members;
- Enhanced community capacity to respond effectively to community-identified challenges;
- Increased ability for socially excluded individuals and communities to set their own trajectories and create lives and communities that they desire and define;
- Improved relationships between community and university stakeholders;
- Contribution to scholarship about adult education and social change communication;
- Reciprocal learning; and
- Strengthened approaches to teaching and learning across the university.

Borrowing from development and participatory communication theories and approaches we can learn much. Although Canada is not a developing nation by any definition, there are communities, both urban and rural, that experience the kind of poverty, marginalization, and colonial legacies that are often found in so-called "developing" or "underdeveloped" nations (White, 1999, p. 22). Working with communities on the margins of power requires a steadfast commitment to guarding against the traditional development discourse, a discourse that defines people and communities in terms of how they compare and relate to western ideals (White, 1999, p. 22). In North America and Europe a popular catch phrase to describe this work over the past decade has been 'community capacity building'. Indeed, the accredited SFU program that is described in detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis is called the *Certificate in Community Capacity Building*.

Some question whether the term community capacity building and the accompanying policy literature actually represent a new trend. Gary Craig argues that while this term is now used globally, especially related to urban policy and social development, it is in practice difficult to distinguish from community *development* (2007, p. 335)*.* He further argues that the widespread use of community development cum community capacity building represents a continuing failure of governments to renounce a deficit model of communities, one in which communities lack the knowledge and strengths to effectively engage in their own capacity building, and that the approach helps to *obscure* structural reasons for poverty and inequality (p. 335). While the concept of strengthening or building community capacity in ways that empower individuals and communities with the knowledge and skills to identify and respond effectively to

community challenges remains a key theme throughout this thesis, Craig's work is an important reminder to be vigilant against rhetorical or cynical use of this language.

John McKnight's musings in his collection of essays, *The Careless Society: Community and its Counterfeits,* are apt here, albeit somewhat romantic. He laments the disappearance of real community capacity to address human suffering and community problems, replaced by professional and paraprofessional experts — everyone from doctors to social workers to lawyers to grief counsellors — who, by their very existence, signal that individuals and whole communities are, in fact, unable and unqualified to even identify, let alone fix, their own problems. People are defined less as citizens and more as clients (1995, p. 60).

The ultimate objective of this thesis is to enhance our understanding of ways to collaboratively develop approaches, structures and initiatives that enable and support communities to define issues of importance to them and then identify and implement appropriate responses. It is important to recall that while the poverty and some conditions (such as HIV infection rates) in Canadian inner-city neighbourhoods (specifically Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES)) rival those of 'developing' countries, there are important differences in the causes, contexts and cultures. Canada has universal health care, and British Columbia has an existing, if inadequate, welfare or social assistance system in place (see Jean Swanson's book *Poor Bashing: the Politics of Exclusion* (2002) for a compelling argument of why social assistance rates, minimum wage rates, and other structural inequities entrench and reinforce poverty and accompanying poor health in Canada and Vancouver).

Issues faced by urban dwellers in the global south or in rural Aboriginal communities in Canada, such as access to clean drinking water and adequate waste management, do not generally pose problems for Vancouverites. However, other challenges such as inadequate affordable housing and meaningful employment opportunities pose a real and ongoing threat to community health and place the Downtown Eastside community firmly on the low end of the Canadian gradient for relative socioeconomic status and, therefore, health. Most importantly, the deep and entrenched social exclusion that community members experience as a result of poverty, stigma and lack of relevant and meaningful educational opportunities is unhealthy, unethical, and unnecessary. Ultimately, the core of the work explored in this thesis is social change, and specifically how education and communication can contribute to increased social justice in urban communities.

After a brief discussion of method, Chapter 3 of this thesis presents a discussion of key terms, including 'university', 'community', and 'engagement'; and Chapter 4 offers a comprehensive and detailed literature review that examines relevant work related to stigma, adult education, university-community programming, social determinants of health in urban populations, and critical and indigenous pedagogies.

Chapter 5 is an in-depth case study of a pilot program called *Literacy Lives* that was offered at Simon Fraser University in 2011/2012, including an overview of some of the historical context for community-university engagement, specifically related to Simon Fraser University and our position as an insider/outsider vis-a-vis Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood. Thirty-three learners were recruited through six community organizations to participate in a 26-week program during which they attended classes at SFU's Harbour Centre location and carried out community project work. The

community organizations all served clients or members who were vulnerable to HIV, including women-at-risk, youth-at-risk, gay men, Aboriginal people, and people who use injection drugs. The project serves as an example of successful community-engaged programming, and also offers a number of lessons regarding how (and how not) to undertake a project such as this one, including some of the inherent pitfalls in internal and external negotiations. I have also included a section on the potential impact of approaches used in *Literacy Lives* on teaching and learning practices across the university.

Chapter 6, *Moving Forward: Recommendations and Conclusions*, examines both opportunities and challenges to success at SFU, including specific recommendations for continued and strengthened university-community-engaged work, informed by and integrated within a robust, interdisciplinary theoretical framework. Moving this agenda forward requires that stakeholders representing a wide range of constituencies engage in sustained dialogue and action. My aim is to contribute to a growing body of scholarly work that recognizes and values diverse ways of learning and knowing, and places increased social justice and community health at the heart of communication and education initiatives developed for and with socially excluded urban communities.

2. Research Strategy and Methodological Approach

The research strategy for this thesis incorporates three primary methods: 1) a search, review and synthesis of relevant scholarly literature; 2) an overview of various policy documents and an examination of theories and practices espoused by various educators and practitioners; and 3) a case study of the *Literacy Lives* project, which took place in Vancouver, Canada from 2010-2012[1]. The research and methodological approach was often non-linear, but the genesis was in my observations and experiences as manager of the *Literacy Lives* project while in my role as program coordinator in the Community Education Program, situated within the Office of Lifelong Learning at Simon Fraser University.

The *Literacy Lives* project and its relevance to this thesis is described in detail in Chapter 5, but a brief explanation is needed here in order to explain methodological approach. The project was developed as a response to an observed gap in the learning continuum available to vulnerable adults who have historically experienced exclusion from mainstream education. A great deal of rich and valuable peer driven programming exists at the community level, in which community members can gain training through a community-based service organization to act as a 'peer support worker', or a 'peer

[1] The Literacy Lives project, including community consultations, curriculum development, the pilot offering of the Certificate in Community Capacity Building, and the summative evaluation and project wrap-up took place between June 2010 and September 2012. The pilot offering of the certificate, during which learners participated in a 26-week program at Simon Fraser University, took place between September 2011 and March 2012.

educator', or a 'peer researcher', or some other similar designation. Learners gain valuable skills and experience but not often on a level that is recognized or respected outside of their small community networks. Similarly, Simon Fraser University and other post-secondary institutions have, at times, offered programming for residents of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (for example) that creates excitement and a desire for further learning, but with no meaningful opportunities for continuing education. The projects or programs effectively dead-end, which can lead to feelings of disappointment and alienation, particularly for learners who have only ever had negative experiences with formal education (examples are described in detail in Chapter 5, section 5.1). On the other end of the educational spectrum, there are virtually limitless undergraduate and graduate programs available to those with the backgrounds and resources required to access them.

The aforementioned gap exists between these two ends of the spectrum — peer driven community programs at one end and university credit programming at the other. College-based Adult Basic Education (ABE) courses, and programs that assist adults to complete secondary school graduation or achieve their Graduation Equivalency Diploma (GED) are, of course, extremely important components of a robust educational continuum, but those programs do not always meet the needs of a group of learners who have been systemically and systematically excluded from meaningful interactions with the education system. *Literacy Lives* intended to demonstrate that different methods and pedagogies were (and are) required in order to create effective educational programs that help bridge gaps in the learning continuum for vulnerable adults and, ultimately, contribute to meaningful social change. These methods and pedagogies, for the purposes of this thesis, can be referred to as the pedagogy of community capacity

building, which is tied to strength-based forms of community engagement, and to critical pedagogy, where it is understood and acknowledged that learners bring knowledge and experience to the arena. This is discussed further in Chapter 4, section 4.2.3.

The *Literacy Lives* project was funded by the Government of Canada, through the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES) at Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). The project included a pilot offering of Simon Fraser University's *Certificate in Community Capacity Building*. The curriculum of the certificate is framed around learners identifying, planning, implementing and evaluating a community project that addresses something about which they, the learners, feel passionately. In the case of *Literacy Lives*, all learners were recruited from communities that experience vulnerability to HIV, and all learner projects addressed HIV, community health and community literacy in some form.

Learners were recruited with the help of staff at six community-based organizations that were chosen for their demonstrated excellence in service to communities impacted by HIV. Learners participated in an application process that included a written application form and an in-person interview with community-based staff. Learners who were selected demonstrated strong community leadership qualities; possessed the ability to write at approximately a grade ten level; and experienced multiple barriers to accessing regular university programming on their own (financial need alone was not considered an eligible barrier for the purposes of selection).

Learners attended class twice per week at Simon Fraser University's Vancouver campus for 26 weeks from September 2011 to March 2012, and also carried out project work in community settings. The curriculum included topics such as proposal writing,

budgeting, and tools for evaluation, as well as areas such as HIV and human rights, community protocols and community asset mapping, and leadership and resiliency[2]. Thirty-three learners were initially accepted into the program; 21 graduated with the *Certificate in Community Capacity Building.*

The curriculum design and content included input from: community members from learner communities (Aboriginal people; women at-risk; youth at-risk; gay men and other men who have sex with men; and people who use injection drugs); social service providers who work directly with people in those communities; educators, curriculum designers and adult literacy practitioners; and many others. In addition to drawing on over 100 years of combined relevant professional experience, the core project team — which included a director, manager, community liaison, curriculum developer and evaluator — undertook over a year of community consultations that included over 300 meetings (individual, small group and large group) with relevant community stakeholders in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and Downtown South, as well as those in various HIV communities and literacy communities. The end result is a curriculum that attempts to encompass many of the theories and approaches described later in this thesis (critical and indigenous pedagogies, for example). It also encompasses or represents some of the tension inherent in situating this work within a hierarchical mainstream institution (Simon Fraser University), with support from a mainstream funder (the Government of Canada).

Documents that were created during the course of the project, and that I reviewed and synthesized for the purposes of this thesis, include: meeting notes from

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[2] The full curriculum is available at http://www.sfu.ca/community/literacylives.html.

the over 300 meetings mentioned above, many of which I attended as project manager; quarterly reports to the funder, which I prepared; weekly reflective notes kept by classroom staff, which included a lead instructor (formerly the curriculum developer) and two classroom facilitators/tutors; notes from weekly meetings with eight community-based coordinators; feedback surveys completed on a regular bi-weekly basis by learners; transcripts of midterm and final interviews conducted by project evaluators with learners, project staff, and project partners; a final narrative report to the funder, prepared by project evaluators; and a finalized program guide and curriculum. As project manager I did not often attend classes myself, but met regularly with classroom and community staff.

As noted above, the research strategy for this thesis also includes a review of relevant scholarly literature, policy documents, funding guidelines, and experiences and descriptions of promising work undertaken by others in similar areas. Much of this work was conducted using Simon Fraser University's online library resources, Google Scholar searches, and database searches on Web of Science, EBSCO and others. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of the project, search terms were varied, and included "community capacity building", "community development", "community", and "community engagement"; "social determinants of health", "urban social determinants of health", "literacy as social determinant of health", "urban health", and "healthy cities"; "community-university partnership", "adult literacy" and "adult education"; "popular education pedagogy", "indigenous pedagogy", and "critical pedagogy"; and "communication for social change" and "education for social change". Broad key themes and approaches in the literature review include: dialogue and negotiation; the construction of memory and history; and structural systemic inequities that exist in

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current socio-political contexts. This thesis is also informed by previous research that I have conducted for papers related to HIV and community response, as well as work I have undertaken professionally related to various pedagogical approaches for engaging with under-served communities.

To strengthen my understanding of the practices and experiences of others working in this area, I conducted interviews with two stakeholders whom I have identified as key informants. The first is Judy Smith, the Director of the Community Education Program in Lifelong Learning at SFU. The second is Ethel Whitty, the Director of the Carnegie Community Centre in Vancouver. Both women bring a considerable amount of experience and expertise to this analysis, from different perspectives. Finally, I have relied on my professional experience and expertise in negotiating with various partners and collaborating organizations, both internal and external to the university, and in developing collaborative programs with marginalized communities through my ten years of work in the Community Education Program, housed within Lifelong Learning at Simon Fraser University. I have redacted all identifying elements in order to protect the confidentiality of individuals involved, except where I have explicit permission to share identifying information.

3. Key Terms

It is of critical importance that we attempt to define some key terms at the outset. In particular, the terms 'community', 'university' and 'engagement', and the relationships between them, need to be analyzed and elaborated. Framing our terms can help to guard against this language being deployed as a rhetorical and cynical smokescreen for top-down, structurally inequitable solutions to community-based 'problems'. Of particular interest is avoiding the common pitfall of defining communities by their problems or deficits, instead attempting a strengths-based approach. What follows is a very brief definitional treatment and exploration of the salient aspects of these terms.

3.1. Community

'Community' is a highly malleable and contested term. One way in which the term is typically used refers to a geographical community defined in terms of space and/or place. This use does not, however, adequately recognize the reality that there may be conflict or tensions "between different interests within spatially defined communities" (Craig, 2007, p. 338). Geographically defined communities are often contested spaces. Communities can also be formed through identity affiliation (religious, socio-economic status, gender) or through a shared commitment to a specific issue, such as an environmental cause (Craig, 2007, p. 338). At times, all three of these definitions might intersect. Community is often used within development contexts to mean poor or disenfranchised groups, although this categorization is problematic within the

development paradigm as it engenders a deficit-based, western hegemonic approach to richly varied communities.

Of course, communities cannot be considered in abstraction from their historical and social context. Community is about meaningful connectedness among persons (Somerville, 2011, p. 7), and strong communities exist when there are combinations of strong and weak ties amongst community members that allow for effective deployment of resources (Somerville, 2011, p. 29). Peter Somerville (2011) looks to Martin Luther King for his definition of a "beloved community": one in which each individual is free to fulfill her or his highest potential, but only through membership in a just community where resources and power are distributed in a way that enable individuals to realize their potential and where every member respects and values every other member (p. 39). While this is a rather abstract conceptualization for our purposes, it gets at the underlying vision for this work, and I find it to be a useful touchstone.

I will endeavour, for the purposes of this writing, to be specific whenever speaking of community or communities. My general interest lies in exploring ways in which historically under-served or under-represented communities can engage with university-based education in ways that are meaningful or transformational for both the community and the university. Community, in this case, means people and groups who experience systemic and structural exclusion from mainstream institutions because of factors that include stigma, low literacy, and poverty.

3.2. University and Community: A Practical Consideration

Contemporary universities are typically considered emblematic of an elite form of higher education. To participate in a modern university education has signalled membership in (or aspirations to membership in) affluent and powerful social or political formations. The resources required for gaining admission to a university leave participation in a university-based education out of reach for many.

Universities at their best undertake research that contributes to new knowledge and train students to be critical thinkers. But increasingly there is a growing recognition that universities have much more to offer in the form of contributing to their communities, and that there is a need to leverage the economic and social capital of the university to contribute to positive social impact if the university is to remain relevant and vibrant into the future.

Situating social change work within a publicly-funded post-secondary institution provides numerous and varied affordances, including: the ability to rely on a wide variety of resources that are not easily available in the non-profit or business sectors; the ability to draw together in partnership a diverse set of people and organizations who recognize a university's brand; the ability to access funding opportunities that require academic participation; relatively easy access to a wide range of academic expertise and knowledge; and the ability to grant credentials (degrees, diplomas, certificates) that are well recognized, respected and coveted. However, there are also a number of challenges associated with attempting to do community-engaged work from within the institution. The first major challenge is, in plain language, that of baggage: universities have a long and complex history of engaging with marginalized communities, notably through research that has at times been harmful for communities. University-based

researchers participating in community-university collaborations may find it difficult to adopt convincing approaches, and new perspectives can be overshadowed by the work of others that have come before, for better or worse. Community members and organizations often see the university as a monolithic and unified entity, and assume that there is a much more intentional, strategic, and widely shared approach across the institution than is actually at play.

A second major challenge that is a familiar and oft-cited impediment to new and/or expanding university initiatives is that of resources, or funding. Developing and offering programs in partnership with impoverished communities is extremely challenging without sustainable funds to support the work. Most Canadian universities have insufficient endowments to provide financial security for long-term initiatives, relying instead on annual public funding allocations. Grant competitions offer limited-term funding with many constraints on how the funding can be used. In most Tri-Council community-university research funding competitions in Canada, researchers and community organizers are expected to participate without remuneration, and some competitions require matching funds from community organizations[3].

A third and final challenge is that of the performance evaluation criteria used by senior administrators to evaluate university faculty for tenure, promotion and salary review: research, teaching and service. 'Community service' is only one type of service and sometimes may be less valued by comparison with other types of service activities,

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[3] The Tri-Council Agencies are made up of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). They are a major source of research funding for post-secondary institutions in Canada.

such as service to the university or service to the academic community (in the form of participation in peer assessment of scholarly publications and adjudication committees of grant agencies, for example). Community service is not well recognized or incentivized in decision-making related to tenure, promotion and salary review at SFU, and community-engaged work can very quickly become career limiting for academics seeking a tenured position as a university faculty member.

It is important to understand the complexity of perceptions of the university and the work that it does, as well as the precarious nature of universities and workers within them. As with community, I will endeavour to be specific and descriptive when speaking about the university, and to avoid vague generalities.

3.3. Engagement

In this thesis the notion of engagement with community means that community connections are strengthened, and that individuals feel and articulate that they have the relationships, skills and knowledge that enable them to participate in their community in ways that are meaningful to them. Above all it must be community-led and/or responsive to community-identified needs. *Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement* defines community engagement as "people working collaboratively, through inspired action and learning, to create and realize bold visions for their common future". Staff at the Canadian-based non-profit organization conducted a literature review to deepen their understanding of community engagement. They discovered, unsurprisingly, that "approaches to community engagement vary depending on the level of engagement one is trying to achieve" (Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement, c. 2003, p. 4).

Based on their review of the literature, they adapted a useful model of the range of engagement, pictured below.

PASSIVE	REACTIVE	PARTICIPATIVE	EMPOWERMENT	LEADERSHIP
Local residents and organizations are informed of issues by external organizations	Local residents and organizations provide input into the priorities and resource use of external organizations	Local residents and organizations influence the priorities and resources of external organizations.	Local residents and organizations work in shared planning and action with external organizations	Local residents and organizations initiate and lead, with external support, on issues.

LEVELS *of* ENGAGEMENT

Adapted From: Hashagen 2002 and Sydney Department of Planning 2003.

Figure 1.   Levels of Engagement

Retrieved from www.tamarackcommunity.ca on July 20, 2012.

Obviously, the panels describing empowerment and leadership represent a deeper level of engagement, but it should not be assumed that the panels on the left side of the graphic (describing passive and reactive engagement) represent poor quality engagement opportunities. In many cases, sharing information or creating opportunities for community members to give input into planning processes, for example, represent appropriate levels of engagement. It should also be noted that these levels must not necessarily proceed in the order depicted above. However, part of the argument put forward by this thesis is that without creating more opportunities for empowerment and leadership in socially excluded communities, universities risk reinforcing the deeply inequitable conditions that have made communities vulnerable in the first place. In this thesis I will refer back to this graphic to illustrate which kind of engagement is being discussed. When it is unclear what kind of activity we are considering, I have used 'interaction' as a generic term to indicate any contact between the university and historically excluded communities.

3.4. Literacy and Essential Skills

One of the key factors in current understandings of literacy is that it is a continuum — adult literacy practitioners no longer refer to literacy and illiteracy as binary opposites, because all adults are considered to have some degree of literacy. Further, literacy no longer simply refers to the ability to read and write. Adult literacy programming in Canada is now focused on strengthening a suite of skills referred to as 'literacy and essential skills' (LES). LES include the knowledge, abilities and confidence to participate fully in our lives. LES are skills needed for life, work and learning; provide the foundation for learning all other skills; and are used throughout daily life in different ways and at different levels of complexity. The nine literacy and essential skills, as defined by the Government of Canada are: reading text; document use; numeracy; writing; oral communication; working with others; continuous learning; thinking skills; and computer use (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012).

According to the Canadian Literacy and Learning Network (2012), almost half of all Canadian adults (48%) have low literacy skills; 55% of working age adults in Canada are estimated to have less than adequate health literacy skills; and fewer than 20% of people with the lowest literacy skills are employed. Also noted by the non-profit organization, less than 10% of adults ever enrol in an adult literacy program. There are clearly not enough appealing options for increased education and engagement in Canadian communities.

Of course, notions of what constitutes an adequate or satisfactory level of literacy cannot be separated from social, political and historical contexts. Demands and expectations regarding literacy use in both our personal lives and our workplaces are shaped in large part by an individual's culture (Freebody & Luke, 1990, p. 7). In a call

for renewed and reinvigorated health education responses that include an expanded notion of health literacy, Don Nutbeam (2000) elaborates on a useful model of literacy that encompasses three distinct categories. The first is "basic/functional literacy" which consists of fundamental or basic skills in reading and writing that allow an individual the ability to function in everyday situations (p. 263). The second category is "communicative/interactive literacy", which includes more advanced cognitive skills that can be combined with social skills to allow individuals to actively participate in activities, create meaning, and apply knowledge to new situations (p. 263). The third category is "critical literacy", which allows individuals to apply critical analysis to situations, and to therefore exert greater control over their lives and trajectories (p. 264).

It should be noted that these categories do not necessarily build upon one another, although they are certainly related. For example, an individual may have what is considered a low level of functional or basic literacy as measured by their reading and writing skills, but have advanced critical literacy skills, which are conceptually aligned with 'empowerment' and 'leadership' (as above in the Engagement spectrum), and also with what Paulo Freire called *conscientizaçao,* or critical consciousness (which is explored more fully below in Chapter 4). The World Health Organization (WHO) explicitly states that "health literacy is critical to empowerment" (Nutbeam, 2000, p. 264). It is clear that initiatives that work to strengthen all three of these literacy categories along a wide ranging continuum are required to effectively contribute to increased community health.

3.5. Social Determinants of Health

Social determinants of health are the economic and social conditions that influence the health of communities and individuals. Perspectives focusing on social

determinants of health can be traced back to Freidrich Engel's studies of the health conditions of the working class in England in the mid 1800s. Social determinants of health include poverty and socio-economic status, food security, housing, and social exclusion (Raphael, 2004, p. 1). The *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion* (a foundational document of the *Healthy Cities* movement described in more detail in Chapter 4, below) identifies the prerequisites for health as peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable eco-system, sustainable resources, social justice, and equity (World Health Organization, 2012). A list that is perhaps more grounded in people's everyday lives was compiled by the organizers of the *Social Determinants of Health Across the Life Span* conference, hosted at York University in 2002. They identified 11 key social determinants of health that are grounded in empirical data and have clear policy relevance to Canadian decision makers and citizens. They are: Aboriginal status; early life; education; employment and working conditions; food security; health care services; housing; income and its distribution; social safety net; social exclusion; and unemployment and employment security (Raphael, 2004, p. 5).

The social determinants of indigenous health, as outlined in a report commissioned by the WHO include: poverty; education; housing; self-determination; culture; land, environment, environmental stewardship; gender; and family and child welfare (Nettleton, Napolitano, & Stephens, 2007). Each one of the issues listed above correlates to an enshrined human right in one of the documents considered part of the International Bill of Human Rights.

The recent focus (over the past 25 years or so) on social determinants of health can be understood partly as an oppositional paradigm to the often ineffective health promotion campaigns and public health interventions of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s,

which focused on encouraging people to change individual risk behaviours without taking into account structural and systemic inequities that impact health. While individual risk behaviours are of course an important influencing factor in health outcomes, it is now widely accepted that social, economic and environmental factors play a hugely significant role (Nutbeam, 2000, p. 260). Specific aspects of social determinants of health, including stigma and education, are explored more fully below in Chapter 4.

4. Strengthening Capacities: Contextual and Theoretical Groundings

This chapter is a review of critical and informing theoretical and methodological approaches. The first section focuses on current initiatives, approaches, and contexts, including a relevant example of a communication campaign focused on effecting social change; an overview of some of the current realities surrounding access to education in Canada; a description of a new project that seeks to shape Vancouver as a 'Healthy City'; and a discussion of historical and current initiatives that work or have worked to strengthen university-community engagement both locally and internationally. The second section shifts to a review of key theoretical underpinnings for this work, including an examination of what the scholar Arjun Appadurai refers to as "epistemological exclusion" (2000, p 2); reflections on stigma and education as social determinants of health; and an examination of key pedagogical theories and approaches.

4.1. Current Initiatives and Approaches

4.1.1. It's Different Now

Complex and entrenched problems such as inadequate housing, food insecurity, and widespread substance abuse are difficult and seemingly insurmountable challenges faced by people working to create healthy and equitable urban environments. Nowhere in Canada is this more obvious than Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood. Notorious as the poorest urban postal code in Canada (Skelton, 2010), a number of

groups in the neighbourhood experience disproportionate rates of HIV, Tuberculosis and Hepatitis C infections due to systemic and structural inequities including poverty, lack of food security, lack of stable housing, racism, colonialism, sexism, homophobia, stigma related to injection drug use, stigma related to HIV, and lack of access to appropriate health care. These groups include Aboriginal people, gay men and other men who have sex with men, youth at-risk (including queer-identified and street-involved youth), women at-risk (including victims of sexual violence and women of colour), people who use injection drugs, and prisoners or former prisoners (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010).

As observed in the introduction, Vancouver residents ostensibly have access to some of the most sophisticated medical and community interventions in the world, and yet large mainstream institutions such as universities, health authorities and various levels of government remain unable to engage in a meaningful and sustained way with people who experience the most poverty and vulnerability. One response is to create innovative communication campaigns that aim to somehow reach communities and individuals who are struggling, and impart the information that they are 'lacking' in ways that they can 'understand'. The idea is that if we could find a way to creatively and effectively impart information about HIV prevention and transmission, for example, or about adequate nutrition, communities and individuals who are struggling would shift their behaviours and become healthier. The problem, of course, is that any attempt to change individual risk behaviours without concurrent and complementary attempts to change systemic and structural inequities is at best inadequate. This is illustrated by the example of the *It's Different Now* campaign, which was underway during the period covered by the case study of the *Literacy Lives* initiative in 2011-2012.

It's Different Now was a communication campaign that was launched in September 2011. At the time of writing, in January 2014, the campaign still had an active website and social media presence. The campaign was sponsored by the *STOP HIV/AIDS* pilot project, an initiative funded by the Government of British Columbia in partnership with Vancouver Coastal Health, Providence Health Care, Northern Health, the Provincial Health Services Authority and the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS. As stated on the campaign website, "*STOP HIV/AIDS* is working to expand HIV testing, treatment, and support services across BC. The end goal for everyone involved, every day, is to end this disease" (STOP HIV/AIDS, 2012). The campaign was launched with the aim of increasing routine HIV testing and reducing the stigma associated with HIV by sending the message that HIV is now a manageable disease and that regular testing is a part of good preventative care for all adults. In 2011 the campaign featured large eye-catching bus stop ads that never mention HIV, and a significant social media presence. In July 2012 the campaign shifted gears and launched a video online that compares the fight to eradicate HIV to various rights movements in the 20th Century, including the civil rights movement and the women's movement.

Figure 2. ***It's Different Now campaign image***

Note: Retrieved from *It's Different Now* campaign Facebook page (ItsDifferentNow.org, 2012).

Elizabeth Pisani might take issue with this campaign. The epidemiologist who worked for a decade on HIV and then garnered widespread praise for her 2008 book *The Wisdom of Whores* cautions against "pretending, for political reasons, that HIV threatens everyone equally" (p. 160). She is a strong and convincing advocate for campaigns that focus limited resources and energy on the most at-risk populations. Not only does the *It's Different Now* campaign cast a wide net, it can be argued that it is *most likely* to reach those who *least need* to be reached: middle class, heterosexual couples (such as the one featured in the image above) are not considered to be at high risk for contracting HIV in Canada. Further, it is not difficult to imagine that individuals or communities with low literacy, or living in poverty (or both), who *are* considered to be high risk (such as the groups identified by the Public Health Agency of Canada and listed above) might have difficulty engaging with this campaign, not least because it

requires recipients to be knowledgeable and savvy regarding use of web-based and social media.

In fairness, the campaign is just one aspect of the *STOP HIV/AIDS* initiative, which includes a significant research component, as well as an extensive point-of-contact testing and treatment program whereby street nurses work directly with difficult-to-reach community members (such as people with concurrent disorders living in single room occupancy hotels (SROs) in the DTES) to increase testing rates and to support HIV positive patients in maintaining drug regimens. The whole project is predicated on the evidence-based concept of 'treatment-as-prevention':

> *Although highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) has transformed HIV infection into a chronic, manageable condition for many of those who engage in care, this life-saving treatment remains under-utilized in British Columbia. Research from the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS has shown that nearly 40% of those who died of HIV-related causes in BC between 1997 and 2005 never accessed HAART. HAART can also be a powerful tool for HIV prevention. By suppressing the virus to undetectable levels in appropriately treated individuals, HAART decreases the probability of HIV transmission and helps curb new infections.*
> *(STOP HIV/AIDS, 2011)*

While this is an exciting and ground-breaking approach to HIV treatment and prevention, on its own the *STOP HIV/AIDS* initiative and accompanying communication campaign cannot address the systemic inequities that have led to high HIV infection rates in certain populations.

Predictably, poverty, low literacy and essential skills, and lack of access to education have profound implications for community health and are inextricably linked to other social determinants of health. As discussed in the introduction, it is extremely difficult to create and foster effective communication strategies intended to improve

social determinants of health in marginalized urban communities without addressing underlying access, literacy and stigma issues. The processes by which individuals acquire, maintain and enhance literacy and other essential skills occur within a deeply inequitable socioeconomic context. Economic insecurity and low literacy levels limit opportunities to participate in democratic society, contributing to deepened social exclusion (Shalla & Schellenberg, 1998, p. 9). Equitable access to public education can help to ameliorate this, but Canada's track record to date leaves much to be desired.

While Canada does have universal free primary and secondary education, and subsidized post-secondary education, many communities are not able to enjoy the full benefits of participation in that education because of systemic and structural inequalities. One need only look at the high school completion rate for Aboriginal students in British Columbia as compared to the general population to get a sense that our education system is not equally accessible to all students: A 32 percentage point gap exists (47% versus 79%) between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the proportion of students that complete grade 12 within six years of entering grade eight (Heslop, 2009, p. 2). So how can we nurture and support better access and increased options for education in vulnerable communities?

Any intervention that only addresses one part of the system is insufficient (World Health Organization, 2011, p. 39). Traditional communication campaigns (public awareness initiatives), no matter how clever, run the risk of either generalizing the message so broadly as to make them virtually meaningless to the most vulnerable groups, or of individualizing the problems faced by socially excluded people and communities without addressing or even acknowledging the fact that poverty, and more specifically, income inequality, is the single greatest contributing determinant of poor

health (World Health Organization, 2011, p. 9). Communication scholars, practitioners and allies would do well to join initiatives to strengthen education across British Columbia and Canada. Such an effort can only contribute to our collective ability to strengthen community response to a suite of factors contributing to overall community health. By failing to acknowledge systemic discrimination, and by missing opportunities to co-develop creative responses with affected communities, we are literally preventing vulnerable groups from accessing appropriate and available community services, and, in doing so, are reinforcing the oppression and exclusion that made them vulnerable in the first place.

4.1.2. Healthy Cities

One response to urban challenges has been the *Healthy Cities* movement, which began in the 1980's in the World Health Organization's Europe Regional offices. It has been variously described as a project, a movement and a vision (Baum, 1993, p. 31). Some Canadian cities (in Ontario and Quebec) joined the movement as early as 1984 (World Health Organization, 2003, p. 8), and the movement was formalized in the *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion* in 1986 (World Health Organization, 1986).

Vancouver seems to have arrived late to the game, launching a new initiative in 2012 entitled *A Healthy City for All: Vancouver's Healthy City Strategy 2012-2020* (City of Vancouver, 2012). The initiative recognizes that while Vancouver is doing very well on many measures of health and wealth, especially when compared to cities elsewhere, specifically in the global south, there are people in our city who are not thriving, and who are not able to take advantage of the many resources available (City of Vancouver, 2012). The initiative purports to build on "previous and current efforts to address urban

health issues through prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and regulation/ enforcement" (City of Vancouver, 2012), which makes it the direct — if unacknowledged — descendant of Vancouver's much lauded 'Four Pillars' approach to substance abuse issues (MacPherson, 2000). As of August 2012, the City of Vancouver and partner Vancouver Coastal Health were working to develop a formal commitment to "enhance our collaborative efforts in seven priority areas: Healthy housing options; Food security and sustainable food systems; Early care and learning; Active living and getting outside; Healthy services; Social connectedness; and Healthy built environment" (City of Vancouver, 2012).

The primary focus of the *Ottawa Charter* and the *Healthy Cities* movement is to address social determinants of health (SDOH) by making changes to policy and infrastructure in ways that reduce social, economic and environmental inequities. Many health education and promotion programs in the 1970s were effective "only among the most educated and economically advantaged in the community" (Nutbeam, 2000, p. 260), and the recent focus on SDOH in health interventions represents a more sophisticated, nuanced and evidence-based understanding of the complex determinants of health. However, this focus may have downplayed the importance of health education, especially education programs that include increased critical health literacy as an intended outcome (Nutbeam, 2000, pp. 260-1). The risk is that action on SODH by governments and health authorities, without accompanying community-engaged health education programs that strengthen critical literacies and therefore community empowerment and leadership capacities, may have "the unintended consequence of leading to structural interventions 'on behalf' of people — health promotion which is done 'on' or 'to' people, rather than 'by' or 'with' people" (Nutbeam, 2000, p. 267). The next

sections will explore possibilities for these types of community-engaged programs more fully.

4.1.3.   *Community-University Engagement*

Another suite of responses to challenges faced by urban communities comes from post-secondary institutions. Many Canadian universities have a long tradition of community engagement and service. As Henry Marshall Tory, the founding President of the University of Alberta, remarked in his inaugural convocation speech (1908): "The modern state university is a people's institution. The people demand that knowledge shall not be the concern of scholars alone. The uplifting of the whole people shall be its final goal" (quoted by B. Hall, personal communication, June 20, 2012)[4].

The three pillars of academia are often described as Research, Teaching, and Service (the latter of which usually encompasses Community Engagement, or Community Service, or some other similar third tenant as possible service activities). However, because of a number of external and internal pressures, notably government priorities (and therefore funding allocations), and tenure requirements for faculty members, which place greater value on research and publishing, followed by teaching, and then service with community service as a distant (or non-existent) element of the third criterion (often ranked below service to the university or the scholarly community), the Service/Community Engagement pillar often falls to the wayside. It is useful as a

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[4] Bud Hall, Professor and Director of the Office of Community Based Research at the University of Victoria, made reference to the Henry Marshall Tory quote at a presentation at Simon Fraser University on June 20, 2012, entitled *Challenging the Architecture of Knowledge: Community-Based Research and Higher Education in Canada and Around the World.*

public relations device, but occupies a peripheral place in the political economy of contemporary Canadian universities.

However, there are some notable historical examples we can look to in Canada for inspiration about community-university initiatives with positive track records, including the pioneering (and continuing) adult literacy work of Frontier College; and the Antigonish Movement, which focused on adult education through economic cooperation and ultimately became the Coady Institute at St. Francis Xavier University. Interestingly, while both of these institutions or movements have been lauded for their work to increase the political and economic power of their original constituencies, there have also been significant critiques of the imperialist nature of the projects. Unsurprisingly M. M. Coady, in his 1939 book *Masters of Their Own Destiny: The Story of the Antigonish Movement for Adult Education through Economic Cooperation*, discusses the many successes of the initiative (he was Director of the St. Francis Xavier Faculty of Extension at the time). Extension staff and faculty at this small university in Antigonish, Nova Scotia worked directly with fishermen, factory workers, farmers and coal miners, among others. The movement was ground-breaking and ahead of its time in many respects, notably in that it advocated a learner-centred approach (p. 1) and that it led directly to the creation of numerous credit unions, cooperative fish-packing plants, stores and farmers' marketing associations (p. ix). Coady, however, is explicit in his assertion that it would be "a serious mistake to assume that the St. Francis Xavier program is promoting or encouraging class strife…. We are confident that our program is in conformity with the fundamental ideas of a Christian democratic society" (p. 2).

Writing 65 years later, Pierre Walter unpacks some of the hegemonic assumptions associated with adult education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (as

evidenced in Coady's commitment to support "fundamental" Christian democratic values). Frontier College's early work was focused on bringing literacy and citizenship education to labouring immigrant men on the resource frontier. Walter notes the literacy work promoted:

> [T]he view that one language-of-power, English, and the culture, social mores, values, race, gender, and religion of its male Anglo-Canadian speakers were superior to all else. The imagined Canadian community was in fact not only national in dimension but imperial…. In the building of empire, education taught students to divide and order the world according to imperialist racial and ethnic lines (and thus ironically for those students who did not themselves conform to the proper race, class, and gender to try to imagine a national community to which they might never hope to belong).
>
> (Walter, 2003, p. 43)

This analysis is still important and relevant today, and there are a variety of pedagogical approaches, discussed below, that can help frame efforts and approaches related to work with excluded communities so that those efforts do not simply reinforce and recreate the colonial and imperial projects that they purport to ameliorate.

Efforts by post secondary institutions to engage with and contribute to communities have, of course, evolved, and there are a number of national and international networks that exist to help university and community stakeholders share and mobilize knowledge[5]. Most of these initiatives and networks are focused primarily on either community-based research or community service learning. This thesis argues that

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[5] National examples include *Research Impact*, which links knowledge mobilization structures across Canada, and is based out of York University; *Community-Based Research Canada*, linking academics and communities in research, notably through a bi-annual conference known as the Community-University Expo; the *Canadian Association for Community Service Learning*, based at Carlton University; and the *Community Engaged Scholarship Partnership*, which explores faculty policies across Canada and is based at the University of Guelph. International networks include the *Global Alliance for Community Engaged Research*; *Le Talloires Network*; *Global University Networks for Innovation*; *PASCAL International Observatory*; and *Campus Community Partnerships for Health*.

a third area of engagement must be community *education* if universities are ever to fulfill their promise and responsibility to serve all of society. Examples certainly exist, but rarely in a way that sustainably promotes community empowerment and leadership as described in Chapter 3 in the discussion of engagement, above. In a sense this work could be seen as an updated, more community-driven, and more radical version of the work started in Canada by the Antigonish movement.

The most salient example of university-based community engagement initiatives for our purposes is driven by Simon Fraser University's strategic vision. The 2012 document states that SFU's goal is to be "the leading engaged university defined by its dynamic integration of innovative education, cutting-edge research, and far-reaching community engagement." Further, the university aspires to be "Canada's most community-engaged research university" (Simon Fraser University, 2012h, p. 2). While the document is vague with regard to how this ambitious goal might be operationalized, one of the immediately observable outcomes is that there is a perception in the community that SFU is committed to developing and *resourcing* community-engaged programming, as defined by the community. There is a real risk of disappointment and disillusionment on the part of the community as the dissonance between vision and reality set in. The reality (depending on one's perspective) is that the university is not currently in a financial position to fund, or is currently unwilling to prioritize providing funding for, community-engaged programming. However, there does seem to be a genuine desire on the part of a number of members of the university administration, including the president, to operationalize the vision. It seems, therefore, to be an ideal moment both in the City of Vancouver and at Simon Fraser University to leverage the goals and aspirations of a large number of stakeholders and contribute to the overall

health of our city by creating new collaboratively developed community-university programmatic responses that engage in meaningful ways with and enhance the capacities of both vulnerable communities and the university as a whole.

4.2. Theoretical Groundings

4.2.1. *Epistemological Exclusion*

The scholar Arjun Appadurai gives a nuanced analysis of the current divide between academia and 'community', noting "social exclusion is ever more tied to epistemological exclusion" (2000, p 2). He also notes that there is growing concern that "discourses of expertise that are setting the rules for global transactions, even in the progressive parts of the international system, have left ordinary people outside and behind" (2000, p. 2). Appadurai characterizes globalization as being about a world of things in motion. More so, it is about the flows of objects, persons, images and discourses which are in "relations of disjuncture" (2000, p. 5), meaning that all of these flows have different paths, speeds, origins, endings, inter-relationships, and so on. According to Appadurai,

> *[I]t is the disjunctures between the various vectors characterizing this world-in-motion that produce fundamental problems of livelihood, equity, suffering, justice, and governance…. [For example:] Media flows across national boundaries that produce images of well-being that cannot be satisfied by national standards of living and consumer capabilities; flows of discourses of human rights that generate demands from workforces that are repressed by state violence which is itself backed by global arms flows…. [G]lobalization… produces problems that manifest themselves in intensely local forms but have contexts that are anything but local.*
> *(2000, p. 5)*

This takes on a certain urgency when we consider a related concept, which is that of implosion, or, "forces that fold into neighbourhoods the most violent and

problematic repercussions of wider regional, national and global forces" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 193). This phenomenon can be observed in Vancouver's DTES in the levels of violence, drug addiction, and mental illness faced by residents. The community did not create these contexts; instead, the neighbourhood has been acted upon by larger forces, such as increasing scarcity in mental healthcare resources, and the legacies of the residential school system in Aboriginal communities. However, the challenges faced by some community members are in many ways self perpetuating (for example, mental illness can lead to illicit drug use, can lead to street crime, and so on) and are compounded by the epistemological divide, which further contributes to deepened social exclusion.

Appadurai makes a broader call to action for academics from the West (specifically from the U.S.) to invite dialogue with and become curious about scholars and methods from other parts of the world, especially those who are profoundly involved in social change work, in order to build a robust international and democratic community of academics who can support what he calls grassroots globalization. He notes that often those who work for and with socially excluded, impoverished communities "lack the means to produce a systematic grasp of the complexities of globalization" (2000, p. 18) and are therefore limited in their abilities to effectively mobilize and move their agendas forward.

Implicit in his work is the acknowledgement that the Western research paradigm actively devalues and excludes different ways of knowing. His ideas have broader implications and applications: Not only should academics and academic institutions in the West open themselves up to new ways of knowing and researching but they should also use the knowledge and networks gleaned to build new pedagogies, in the Freirean

tradition (2000, p. 17). These new pedagogies could, in turn, lay the foundation for new forms of dialogue between academics, activists, and policy makers and lead the way to new ways of teaching and engaging directly with local communities, with the intention of creating relationships and pathways that foster reciprocal learning.

Appadurai identifies two concurrent and paradoxical phenomena created by globalization: The first, addressed above, are the disjunctive flows that cause acute social problems; the second is the role of imagination, which encourages an "emancipatory politics" (2000, p. 6) and contributes to increased social well being. Imagination is identified as one of the defining collective experiences of a globalized world characterized by mass media and mass migration. It may follow, therefore, that some of the potential in creating opportunities and spaces for new pedagogies, research methodologies and community-engaged programs within the academy lies in tapping into and releasing dormant or stifled imagination, with the recognition that "imagination and agency are far more vital to group mobilization than we had hitherto imagined" (1996, p. 145). This is linked to the assertion in the conclusion of this thesis that socially excluded communities already possess the capacity to shape and define their own parameters (capacity being closely related to Appadurai's conception of imagination and agency). What they sometimes lack are the specific skill-sets and the academic insider-knowledge of epistemological frameworks — and therefore the legitimacy — required to do so.

Until we are able to bridge the epistemological divide and create a broad spectrum of opportunities for vulnerable communities to act as leaders and change agents, we will not address the health inequities so prevalent in urban environments.

4.2.2.   *Stigma and Education as Social Determinants of Health in Urban Populations*

It is clearly beyond the scope of any one intervention to effectively ameliorate the effects of poverty, but it bears repeating that the poorest people in the world have the poorest health, and that at all levels of income, health follows a gradient: the lower the socioeconomic status, the poorer the health. "Social injustice is killing people on a grand scale" (Marmot, Friel, Bell, Houweling, & Taylor, 2008, p. 1661).

Although not included in the definitions of social determinants of health noted above in Chapter 3, *Key Terms*, stigma is itself an important social determinant of health, and is of particular relevance with respect to the communities that we are discussing. I have chosen to elaborate more fully on stigma and education because these are areas in which a community-university programmatic response might have a direct and positive impact.

Stigma

Stigma relates to any number of attributes, circumstances, health conditions, and social groups, but the foci of the considerable recent literature on stigma have been on race, sexuality/gender, HIV/AIDS, and mental illness. Increased academic attention coincides with an international trend for governments, NGOs, and professional organizations to allocate considerable resources towards efforts to reduce stigma and its negative effects (Livingston, Milne, Fang & Amari, 2011, p. 5), but only recently has research begun to evaluate the effectiveness of these diverse interventions and strategies (Livingston et al., 2011, p. 4).

In Erving Goffman's foundational work, *Stigma* (1963), it is noted that stigma occurs when there is a noticeable discrepancy between an individual's *virtual* social

identity (the normative expectations that we place on individuals) and their *actual* social

identity — that is, they possess certain attributes that make them *less* desirable (p. 2-3).

He goes on to note that "the term stigma [refers] to an attribute that is deeply

discrediting…. [but what is required is] a language of relationships, not attributes…. "(p.

3). Stigma, therefore, is "a special kind of relationship between attribute and

stereotype…." (p. 4). Stigmatized individuals are regarded as inhuman, and as such are

subjected to various forms of discrimination, leading to reduced opportunities and

chances (p. 5).

In contemporary literature there is ongoing debate about the nature and scope

(that is, the definition) of the concept of stigma (Corrigan, Kerr, & Knudsen, 2005, p. 180;

Livingston et al., 2011, p. 5). Link and Phelan provide a useful framework for defining

stigma in their 2001 article *Conceptualizing Stigma*, arguing that stigma exists when a

number of interrelated components converge:

> *[P]eople distinguish and label human differences….*
>
> *Dominant cultural beliefs link labeled persons to undesirable characteristics—to negative stereotypes….*
>
> *Labeled persons are placed in distinct categories so as to accomplish some degree of separation of "us" from "them"…. [and]*
>
> *Labeled persons experience status loss, exclusion, rejection and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes.*
>
> *(p. 367)*

It should be noted that stigmatization is further contingent on access (or lack of

access) to social, economic, and political power that allows the components listed above

to unfold (Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 367). Throughout Goffman's work, what is clear is that

stigmatized individuals can experience, to greater or lesser degrees, terror, anxiety,

tension, guilt, embarrassment, self-contempt, isolation, shame, and deep ambivalence

about themselves and the stigmatized group to which they belong (Goffman, 1963). A further burden of putting others at ease often falls to stigmatized individuals, as well as an expectation to navigate the fine balance between understanding how 'normal' to appear, and where the limitations of general acceptance based on that appearance of normality lie. "A *phantom acceptance* [provides] the basis for a *phantom normalcy"* (Goffman, 1963, p. 122), and vice versa.

Stigma must also be considered in terms of the different ways in which it is experienced and manifested. The literature articulates three levels. The first level, self stigma, exists at the individual level (Livingston et al., 2011, p. 7). People may constrict their social networks in anticipation of rejection, which leads to isolation, unemployment and lowered income, further leading to lowered self-esteem and self-efficacy (Corrigan, Kerr, & Knudsen, 2005, p. 180). The second level, social stigma, exists at the group level (Livingston et al., 2011, p. 7) and refers to "the phenomenon of large social groups endorsing stereotypes about and acting against a stigmatized group" (Corrigan, Kerr, & Knudsen, 2005, p. 180). Finally, the third level, structural stigma, exists at the systems level and refers to the rules, policies, and procedures of private and public entities in positions of power that restrict the rights and opportunities of people who are members of stigmatized groups (Corrigan et al., 2005, p. 557; Livingston et al., 2011, p. 7). The distinction between these three interacting levels of stigma is important for understanding, explaining, and building strategies to change stigma (Corrigan, Kerr, & Knudsen, 2005, p. 179).

Stigma compromises health outcomes and can have negative impacts on other social determinants of health such as increased poverty and housing instability (Livingston et al., 2011, p. 9). Complicating matters, some stigmatizing attitudes,

especially related to behaviours that many perceive to be individual choices, such as substance use, are "widely accepted, culturally endorsed, and, in some cases, enshrined in policy (e.g., criminal law)" (Livingston et al., 2011, p. 7).

So what is to be done to ameliorate the negative effects of stigma experienced by communities that already bear a disproportionate share of the risks associated with poverty and poor health? According to Link and Phelan:

> *[A]ny response must be multifaceted and multilevel. It needs to be multifaceted to address the many mechanisms that can lead to disadvantaged outcomes, and it needs to be multilevel to address issues of both individual and structural discrimination. But second, and most important, an approach to change must ultimately address the fundamental cause of stigma — it must either change the deeply held attitudes and beliefs of powerful groups that lead to labeling, stereotyping, setting apart, devaluing, and discriminating, or it must change circumstances so as to limit the power of such groups to make their cognitions the dominant ones.*
>
> *(2001, p. 381)*

More specific recommendations include supporting and empowering people who experience stigma to participate in advocacy and leadership roles, (reducing self-stigma) (Livingston et al., 2011, p. 27); public protest, public education campaigns (with some clearly defined parameters), and initiatives that facilitate interaction and one-to-one contact between the general public and the people experiencing stigma (reducing social stigma) (Livingston et al., 2011, p. 28); and advocating humanitarian values and human rights principles with the ultimate goal of shifting attitudes of groups and individuals who wield power and influence, thereby enhancing human rights for people who experience stigma (reducing structural stigma) (Livingston et al., 2011, p. 29). Any effective programmatic response must carefully and deliberately weave together multifaceted and multilevel approaches in order to make a robust and lasting contribution.

Education

  I have already noted above that low literacy levels and structural barriers to education have profoundly negative effects on opportunities to participate in democratic society, contributing to deepened social exclusion (Shalla & Schellenberg, 1998, p. 9) and that fewer than 20% of people with the lowest literacy skills in Canada are employed (Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, 2012).

  If we acknowledge that wealth/poverty is the single most important (and all-encompassing) social determinant of health, it is clear that low education levels correlate with poor health, especially in urban settings. The World Health Organization's Commission on Social Determinants of Health has found that living in poverty denies people access to education, causing or exacerbating social exclusion, and leading to worse health and greater risks of premature death. Social exclusion, which can result from a multitude of factors such as racism, discrimination, stigmatization, and unemployment, also *prevents* people from participating in education or training, and gaining access to services and citizenship activities (Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003, p. 16). It is a vicious cycle in the truest sense.

  This thesis argues that not only do we need to create more access and opportunities for socially excluded individuals and communities to participate in existing educational models (and especially post-secondary educational models), but that we need to shift the methods, theories and approaches we use in the academy to create *new forms* of meaningful, co-created community-university education.

  Socially excluded urban communities in Canada, such as those found in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood, currently experience multiple barriers

to post-secondary education, including lack of money required to pursue university-based studies. More importantly, however, community members often hold a deeply entrenched (and totally reasonable) mistrust of educational institutions that have historically committed and continue to commit a wide range of wrongs — from teaching and reinforcing that children and adults are somehow unable to learn if traditional forms of education are not effective for them; to treating individuals and whole communities as objects for research (Menzies, 2001, p. 21; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2007, p. 6); to acting as agents of the church and state in a project that can only be described as cultural genocide during Canada's deliberate and protracted development and use of the Indian Residential Schools system[6].

Clearly, there is much room for improvement, and, therefore, much in the way of opportunity to create innovative and responsive programs that invite previously excluded individuals and communities into collaborative partnerships with post-secondary institutions. There is much to be gained from all perspectives, and very little to be lost if the work is done with integrity. Some of the key methods and approaches that should inform this work are outlined in more detail in the section on pedagogy, below.

4.2.3. Pedagogical Underpinnings and Approaches

What is referred to here as the pedagogy of community capacity building is emerging as a well-respected approach for creating meaningful engagement opportunities between universities or other mainstream institutions, and communities that have historically been excluded from participating in so-called higher education. The

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[6] For an eloquent, if watered-down, acknowledgement of the evils done in the name of assimilation, see the Government of Canada's Statement of Apology, issued in 2008).

concept is gaining widespread acceptance and understanding, but has existed for decades, rooted in popular or critical education theory and the idea that education and pedagogy are inextricably linked to politics. That is, education is not politically neutral, and should be advancing the interests of all people (Besso & Lemay, 2012, p. 15).

The pedagogy of community capacity building is tied to strength-based forms of community engagement, and to critical pedagogy, where it is understood and acknowledged that learners bring knowledge and experience to the arena (as opposed to what Paulo Freire called the "banking" concept of education, in which the student is viewed as an empty "account" to be filled by the teacher (Freire, 2000, p. 172)). However, the pedagogy of community capacity building also posits that academic institutions have knowledge and skills to share, and that we have a need to acknowledge and address the power differentials between those admitted to communities of 'higher learning' and those excluded.

I have included below an overview of the most salient pedagogical approaches that inform and shape this approach. They overlap, integrate, and complement each other.

Popular and Critical Pedagogies, and Dialogic Approaches

Popular education came out of struggles for social justice and a desire from communities to shape their own realities. It has been a strong tradition in Latin America since the 1930s, and is still used around the world in many contexts. Paulo Freire is unquestionably the most influential theorist of popular education. His theories, which are sometimes called critical pedagogy in North America (although there is debate amongst

academics and practitioners about this conflation), have profoundly influenced literacy programs throughout the world.

Popular education is often defined as a form of adult education that encourages learners to examine their lives critically and to take action to effect social change (Yoo, 2007, p. 76). Although it may assume diverse forms, popular education usually involves a cycle described as "action/reflection/action" or "practice/theory/practice" (Kerka, 1997, p. 3). There are a number of characteristics of popular education that distinguish it from more traditional or mainstream forms of education. Notably, popular education is political, participatory, and reflective (Yoo, 2007, pp. 77-79).

Popular education pedagogy encourages what Freire called *conscientizaçao*, or critical consciousness (Freire, 2000, p. 44). It focuses on generative themes (community-identified issues of critical importance) and problem-posing education as methodological underpinnings (Freire, 2000, pp. 63, 79). Denzin and Lincoln note that:

> *Critical pedagogy subjects structures of power, knowledge and practice to critical scrutiny, demanding that they be evaluated "in terms of how they might open up or close down democratic experiences" (Giroux & Giroux, 2005, p. 21). Critical pedagogy… hold[s] systems of authority accountable through the critical reading of texts… and the promotion of critical literacy (Giroux & Giroux, 2005, p. 22).*
>
> *(2008, p. 8)*

Popular education is both a philosophy and a methodology that "seeks to bring about more just and equitable social, political, and economic relations by creating settings in which people who have historically lacked power can discover and expand their knowledge and use it to eliminate societal inequities" (Wiggins, 2011, p. 43). It aspires to give learners access to critical discourses that will allow them to deconstruct hegemonic and colonial paradigms (Macedo, 2000, p. 24), not only through the

intellectual content of their educational experiences, but in the overall educational experience and approach (Youngman, 1986, p. 105, cited in Wiggins, 2011, p. 43). Above all, popular education is hopeful (Freire, 2000, p. 84).

The demonstrated success of popular education/critical pedagogy approaches in engaging with socially excluded communities renders it a vital touchstone and resource in the development of any programmatic response to the deeply inequitable social conditions described earlier. It is worth noting that Freire might have opposed my use of the term 'socially excluded'. As Donaldo Macedo writes in his introduction to the 30th anniversary edition of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: "Imagine that instead of writing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire had written *Pedagogy of the Disenfranchised*. The first title utilizes a discourse that names the oppressor, whereas the second fails to do so…. Language like this distorts reality" (Macedo, 2000, p. 20). The passively worded term 'socially excluded' fails to name the perpetrators of exclusionary practices: the oppressors, in Freire's terminology. This thesis intentionally avoids use of language that is perceived as overtly political (such as 'oppressed'), because it can be alienating to potential allies and sometimes antithetical to stated objectives for social change. However, it must also be acknowledged that this is a fine balancing act. It is important to guard against efforts to co-opt or dilute social change work to the point where it becomes merely a rhetorical exercise, or, worse, a tool for maintaining and strengthening a neoliberal agenda that continues to exclude (oppress) the most vulnerable among us.

Dialogue is key within a popular education framework (Freire, 2000, p. 65), as is the concept of praxis — the cycle of reflection and action that can lead to social change (Freire, 2000, p. 66). Popular education makes both teachers and students into learners: "critical co-investigators in dialogue" with each other (Freire, 2000, p. 81). Building on

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Freire's focus on dialogue, we can turn to David Bohm's foundational work, specifically as outlined in *On Dialogue*. As Bohm asserts, dialogue is about the flow of meaning, and the creation of shared meaning — of something new that was not there before the dialogue began (1996, p.6). In a dialogue, "everybody wins if anybody wins" (p. 7). Dialogue in this conception is about working to suspend assumptions and opinions (p. 20) in an effort to get to a point where there is no need to be defensive, and where we can move more creatively and collectively in a new direction (p. 26).

While Bohm laid out a very specific framework for dialogue that does not include advocating for any one perspective, his approach has something in common with the distinction between interests and positions as laid out in *Getting to Yes,* the seminal negotiation text that came out of the Harvard Labour Project: "Your position is something you have decided upon. Your interests are what caused you to so decide" (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991, p. 41). The authors make the point that often in negotiations the parties' problems appear to be a conflict of positions. As more attention is paid to positions, less attention is devoted to meeting the underlying concerns of the parties (p. 4). When underlying interests are addressed, more creative solutions or "wise agreements" are possible (p. 43).

This is salient in our consideration of increasing access to the university: Do the interests of the community align with the interests of the university? Is there a lack of will, or/and therefore, a lack of funds? Is there a true desire on the part of the university to engage with the community as outlined in the SFU strategic plan (Simon Fraser University, 2012h)? Or does that only mean on our own terms and at times and places that are convenient and strategically advantageous for us, and that meet our stated (or unstated) positions (rather than interests)?

In *Dialogue* (1998), Linda Ellinor and Glenna Gerard write about the realization that in the practice of dialogue the heart and soul of the process are wholly interdependent with the structure; that the skills and capacities for dialogue must be learned and practiced. Those skills and capacities include: suspending judgment; identifying and suspending assumptions; listening; and inquiry and reflection. Because dialogue is difficult to define simply, they suggest contrasting it with the more familiar paradigm of discussion and debate. Borrowing from Bohm, the authors suggest the following:

Table 1.   Dialogue vs. Discussion/Debate

Dialogue	**Discussion/Debate**
Seeing the *whole* among the parts	Breaking issues/problems into *parts*
Seeing the *connections* between the parts	Seeing *distinctions* between the parts
Inquiring into assumptions	*Justifying/defending* assumptions
Learning through inquiry and disclosure	*Persuading, selling, telling*
Creating shared meaning	Gaining agreement on *one* meaning

Note.   Adapted from *The Conversation Continuum* (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998, p. 21).

The use of dialogue, as described in the table above, represents a significant paradigm shift vis-à-vis cultural norms in both socially excluded communities and many university settings. This framework also acts as a reminder for those interested in advocating for a certain position: advocacy, in dialogue, should not be used with the intention of forcing the group to come around to one's own predetermined perspective, but rather to build shared meaning and possibly shared solutions (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998, p. 25).

The potential of a dialogic approach in this case is two-fold: first, as an effective model that can inform and transform community-university programmatic responses, and

second, as an approach that can help to strengthen a case for such programs within the institution. I have explored the second area more fully in Chapter 6, *Moving Forward.*

Indigenous Pedagogies

The editors of the *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* argue that "decolonizing inquiry involves the performance of counterhegemonic theories that disrupt the colonial and the post colonial" (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008, p. xi) and ask, "(h)ow do we move the current generation of critical, interpretive thought and inquiry beyond rage to progressive political action, to theory and method that connect politics, pedagogy and ethics to action in the world" (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008, p. xii) ?

Any process that seeks to engage members of a powerful and elite institution such as a mainstream university and members of marginalized and socially excluded communities must necessarily explore these theories and issues. When we narrow the focus specifically to Simon Fraser University (SFU) and surrounding communities, the concept becomes all the more salient. SFU is located on unceded traditional Coast Salish Territory, and while the institution has invested considerable effort into creating programs that are relevant and accessible to Aboriginal communities, the results are uneven. This is acknowledged at high levels of university administration, and there are many attempts at increasing Aboriginal recruitment and retention, but these attempts do not yet go far enough in their efforts to address colonial legacies and to decolonize the institution.

Indigenous, Aboriginal and First Nations pedagogy is based on the understanding that every person (Aboriginal or not) is unique in his or her learning abilities, learning styles, and knowledge base. Knowledge and skills are not what some

possess and some do not; they are resources and capacities that create the context and texture of life. Knowledge is not a commodity, but a living process. The first principle of indigenous pedagogy is that experiential learning is key (Battiste, 2002, p. 15).

Indigenous pedagogy values a person's ability to learn independently by observing, listening, and participating with a minimum of intervention or instruction. According to the Aboriginal scholar Marie Battiste, much recent scholarly work has focused on the importance of diverse methodologies to address the needs of Aboriginal students. However, this work does not examine the culture of educational settings, specifically what counts as knowledge and truth (and what does not). "They do not study what, or whom, the curriculum and pedagogy represses, excludes or disqualifies. Nor do they examine who continually benefits from education and how these students are consistently rewarded and nourished in schools where white privilege is normalized" (Battiste, 2002, p. 16).

In his analysis of critical race theory and indigenous methodologies, Christopher Dunbar notes that a number of indigenous scholars have postulated that in order to understand "the impact of colonialism on research methods one only has to look at the way First Nations are indoctrinated by Canadian universities" (2008, p. 91). He outlines the mainstream approach in which "the dominant society requires that we all speak English, write research papers and exams assessed on specific criteria outside of our indigenous worldviews, and learn what others decide we should know… (Bailey, 2000; see also Cajete, 2000; Hampton, 1995; Martin, 2001)" (Dunbar, 2008, p. 91). This approach establishes the dominant group's knowledge, experience and culture as the universal norm and represents an insidious and self-perpetuating entrenchment of the colonial project that created the unbalanced power relationship in the first place.

Members of the dominant society control the structure, content, processes, and staff within universities, "and they consciously or unconsciously reinforce the marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems" (Dunbar, 2008, p. 91).

In her discussion of the question of indigenous academics operating within the academy, Sandy Grande asks, "is it possible to engage the grammar of empire without replicating its effects" (2008, p. 234)? In answer, Grande describes "Red pedagogy", an "indigenous pedagogy at the cross roads of Western theory — specifically critical pedagogy — and indigenous knowledge" (p. 234). Grande describes Red pedagogy as "a space of engagement. It is the liminal and intellectual borderlands where indigenous and nonindigenous scholars encounter one another, working to remember, redefine, and reverse the devastation of the original colonial 'encounter'" (p. 235). Many individuals in the academy have deep understandings of the importance of not replicating the effects of empire in their work but this does not seem to have percolated throughout the institutional culture. This point is of critical importance in an exploration of how new community-university alliances and programs might contribute to improved community health and empowerment and to a strengthened academy. Any programmatic response that does not carefully examine the legacy of the "helpful Western colonizing Other" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 67) risks recreating and reinforcing hegemonic Eurocentric discourses. Indigenous pedagogy can help us to contest the complicity of the modern university with neo-colonial forces (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 12).

Feminist pedagogy in some ways provides a linking framework for popular, critical and indigenous pedagogies; it provides an historically situated example of a critical pedagogy in practice. Feminist conceptions of education are similar to Freire's pedagogy in a variety of ways, and feminist educators often cite Freire as the

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educational theorist who comes closest to the approach and goals of feminist pedagogy. Both rest upon visions of political and social transformation; and underlying both are certain common assumptions concerning oppression, consciousness, and historical change. These ideals have influenced teachers and students in a wide range of educational settings, both formal and informal (Weiler, 1991, p. 450).

Feminist pedagogical theory also offers some critique of popular or critical pedagogy, asserting that it lays claim to universal truths and makes assumptions of a collective experience of oppression, while not adequately engaging with issues of racism, gender, and patriarchy (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008, p. 9; Weiler, 1991, p. 450). This thesis argues that insights from indigenous and feminist pedagogies can enrich and strengthen a popular/critical pedagogical approach, and that combined these methodologies can contribute to increased and improved opportunities for meaningful and practical community engagement.

Elsewhere in this thesis are a number of references to 'decolonizing' the academy. This means creating ways to incorporate the indigenous pedagogical approaches outlined above, as well as the practices described in Chapter 6 in the section entitled *Pedagogy in Practice.* In addition to incorporating the pedagogy described above and below, decolonizing the academy means working towards a full paradigm shift at the university that would engender teaching, research, assessment, administrative, and cultural practices that place indigenous knowledge systems and epistemologies on par with Western knowledge systems and epistemologies, as opposed to making them into "objects of study, treated as if they were instances of quaint folk theory held by the members of a primitive culture" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 6). This is by necessity a slow, multilevel, and multifaceted process. This thesis argues

that the decolonizing project can be strengthened at SFU by collaboratively developing and sustaining community-engaged programmatic responses. That is, ongoing programs that are designed with and for socially excluded communities, and that actively work to create ways for those communities to define and strengthen their own trajectories, in partnership with the university.

5. Theory in Practice: *Literacy Lives* Project

The *Literacy Lives Certificate in Community Capacity Building* pilot program was offered at Simon Fraser University in 2011/2012. Thirty-three learners were recruited through six community organizations to participate in a 26-week program during which they attended classes at SFU's Harbour Centre location and carried out community project work. The organizations all served clients or members who were vulnerable to HIV, including women-at-risk, youth-at-risk, gay men, Aboriginal people, and people who use injection drugs[7].

The program curriculum was based on planning, implementing and evaluating a real community project that focused on something learners were passionate about, with literacy and essential skills embedded throughout. This approach was based on the planning team's experience and theorizing that adults are more motivated to learn when that learning is embedded in, and directly applicable to, issues that are of critical importance to them and their communities. In this case, all of the projects focused on HIV and social determinants of health, because that is what was of critical importance to this community.

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[7] As noted above in Chapter 2, learners were selected through a competitive application process. Selection criteria included demonstrated community leadership qualities; the ability to write at approximately a grade ten level; and multiple barriers to participation in post-secondary education.

The ways in which construction of memory influences narratives of history and current contexts is an area that has received much scholarly attention. It is relevant here insofar as this project is located at a nexus of webs of relationships, histories, memories, and shared experiences in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. In *Between Memory and History: Lex Lieux de Memoire*, Pierre Nora argues that "(h)istory is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it" (1989, p. 9). This is certainly the experience or perception of many marginalized and colonized communities.

Jay Winter offers a similar perspective on memory and narrative, noting that*,* "(s)tate agents…have an evident interest in legitimating narratives; very often that is what they mean by 'collective memory' — stories that polish the cultural credentials of their claim to power" (2006, p. 53). On the other hand, "many ethnic groups and disenfranchised minorities have demanded their own right to speak, to act, and to achieve liberation or self-determination. And those stories almost always entail the construction of their own stories, their own useable past" (p. 54). Identity politics become "a set of narratives [that challenge history] penned by those trapped in a Eurocentric and imperialist sense of what constitutes the past" (p. 55). In light of this, it is worth exploring in some detail the context in which the project was undertaken.

5.1. Context — Past and present

Simon Fraser University and Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) have a rich history of engagement. As discussed above in Chapter 3, engagement can range from activities best described as *passive*, to activities that ultimately lead to and stem from the *empowerment* and *leadership* of socially excluded communities. Often, different

types of engagement build upon one another, and all can lead incrementally to strengthened capacities for the university and the community. It is of critical importance for the purposes of this thesis to consider some past and current examples of community-university engagement. This history creates the context in which any future dialogue about and action towards increased, sustained programmatic responses will take place.

The DTES is often described as Vancouver's poorest postal code (Skelton, 2010), and has a disproportionate number of Aboriginal residents. It is also home to a large number of people who struggle with mental health and substance use problems, often concurrently, and has an extremely concentrated number of social service agencies (including a number of faith-based organizations). A great deal of money (government and private) flows through the neighbourhood to support these services, amid a certain amount of scepticism from residents about the nature of 'poverty-pimps' (i.e. individuals and organizations, such as social workers, who rely on what is referred to as the poverty industry for their income). Because the DTES is home to so many poor and struggling people, it has become a beacon for numerous categories of stakeholders who wish to serve/fix/engage/profit from involvement with the poor and downtrodden — stakeholders with divergent intentions and uneven results.

Universities are one such category of stakeholder, and within any given university there are many players, as explored above. This layered and complex context impacts the ability to effectively engage in dialogue within the institution and with community, and must be carefully considered when contemplating any new course of action.

SFU's downtown Vancouver presence began in earnest in 1989, when the campus at Harbour Centre opened its doors. According to the website for the 20th Anniversary Celebration of SFU's Vancouver campus:

The realization was profound that the university could flourish only through partnership with the community and those who governed it, but partnerships are built on the perception of mutual benefit. To develop a shared agenda, which would be the foundation of many ongoing alliances, SFU came down from the mountain and began the ongoing conversation with community, government and business leaders that continues today.
(Simon Fraser University, 2009)

The Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue opened in 2000, followed by the Segal School of Business in 2007, and finally the Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, located at the Woodwards development, in 2010 (Simon Fraser University, 2012b; Simon Fraser University, 2012c; Simon Fraser University, 2012e). While I am specifically interested in sustained community-engaged *programming,* a range of activities including community project work, research, and SFU's presence in the Woodward's development are relevant[8].

5.1.1. Community-Based Projects

SFU's Office of Lifelong Learning (formerly the Office of Continuing Studies) was one of the first major departments to house a large portion of its operations at the downtown campus, and the unit has a long history of community-engaged projects in the DTES. Examples include:

[8] It should be noted that while the activities of 'projects' and 'programs' can be virtually identical, in this thesis I have generally used the term 'project' to refer to episodic or ad hoc activities, and 'program' to refer to ongoing or sustainable activities.

- *Healing Communities*, which brought together staff from 20 community-based organizations in the Downtown Eastside to participate in a series of six weekend retreats over two and a half years (from 2003 to 2005). The purpose of this collaboratively developed program was to promote greater effectiveness, sustainability and collegiality among community leaders and front-line poverty workers in Vancouver.

- *Fast Track to Employment (FTE),* a training program designed to connect unemployed people to local industry. FTE became a self-sustaining non-profit agency, and was then absorbed into Building Opportunities with Business Inner City Society (BOB), which was developed under the auspices of the Vancouver Agreement.

- *History of Sex Work: Vancouver*, a community art and historical research initiative created in partnership between a group of Vancouver-area sex workers and Simon Fraser University. The project aimed to offer alternative perspectives and create diverse lenses (such as labour and human rights) through which to engage with the sex worker community in Vancouver, by examining the rich history of that dynamic community since the incorporation of the City.

All of these projects (and others like them) were successful by many measures, in large part because community members were meaningfully involved in the development phases — that is to say, each of these projects addressed critical needs that were explicitly identified and brought to the fore by community members. In this way, they are examples of engagement that approach the area of 'empowerment' in the above pictured spectrum (section 3.3). However, they all failed in one significant way, which is that they represent episodic and ad hoc attempts by the university to engage with the community, based on sporadically available funding and resources, and did not offer credentials, relegating them to the lesser-than status of 'community-based', rather than being considered 'real' university programs. None of these projects continue today, and none ever had a viable plan for sustainability. The risk in undertaking initiatives like these is that while learners or participants gain critically important skills and confidence, too often the experience gained is not recognized outside of the learners' own

community networks or organizations. This can lead to feelings of deep frustration and alienation, especially for learners who have seldom experienced education as a positive or affirming process. The university thus has participated in educational initiatives that are functionally "dead ends", offering even the keenest and most successful participants nothing to allow them to continue their quest for learning opportunities.

Of equal importance, these programs can become evidence of the unsustainable nature of some approaches to community-engaged work within the university, making it ever more difficult to build a case for a more robust and sustained effort. The insider/outsider status of Lifelong Learning within the university exacerbates this problem because of the unit's responsibility for and focus on non-credit programming, which is less prominent, even under-valued, at the university.

5.1.2. Research

Of course, one of the main activities of a university is research. There are any number of research projects that have taken place within and around the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver under the auspices of SFU, UBC, and other post secondary institutions. Some of it falls into a category that many in the community refer to as 'drive-by' research. That is, the relationship is perceived to be one-sided: researchers come in as outside experts, take something (a personal story, a community's history, blood for testing, etc.) in exchange for a small honourarium, but do not invest the time required to develop lasting relationships that would enable them to create a research project that enriches all stakeholders. There are many reasons for this, not least the time and resource constraints placed on academic researchers by funding parameters. There are very few research grants that allow researchers the relative luxury of paying community-

based research assistants a wage (much less a living wage), for example, or of spending long periods of time building relationships with community leaders or key community organizations in order to ensure that the research serves the needs of the researchers and also of the community in meaningful ways. While many calls for proposals (CFPs) from large Canadian funding agencies such as the *Canadian Institutes for Health Research* or the *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council* include mandatory questions about how communities will be engaged or consulted prior to undertaking the proposed research, in reality the time and money constraints contained within the CFP make adequate consultation difficult.

There is certainly a great deal of interest on the part of the academy in pursuing and strengthening community-based research methodologies, but even well intentioned practices can have uneven impacts for vulnerable community members. For example, in HIV research a standard practice now is to include 'peers' on the research teams. These are usually HIV positive community members who are given some training and then employed as research assistants to collect data. They obtain skills, part-time contract-based employment and, hopefully, at some point in the future, contribute to research findings that lead to improved policies and services for their communities. However, the employment income they gain can compromise their social assistance payments, and participation as community-based researchers can have the effect of alienating them from the rest of their community, because of a perception, for example, that they have access to confidential personal information. While these practices have obvious benefits for academic researchers (e.g. they gain access to data that they might not be able to obtain without the help of the community-based research assistants), as well as for community members, there is some distance to go before we see a model of research in

the social sciences that is based on truly equitable and ethical partnerships between academic and community stakeholders.

All of the above is compounded by the historical power imbalances inherent in interactions between representatives of mainstream institutions, such as a university, and members of marginalized communities. Even in studies that are well resourced, planned and implemented, one of the unintended results can be that harm has been done to vulnerable community members. Examples of this include:

- NAOMI: The North American Opiate Medication Initiative (NAOMI) included recruiting people who were addicted to heroin to participate in a study that provided daily pharmaceutical heroin to those who had demonstrated resistance to methadone replacement therapies. The study was an attempt to demonstrate that heroin maintenance treatment would allow participants to become more stable and less likely to engage in street crime, among other things. When the study ended, the pharmaceutical heroin was no longer available, and many participants returned to street-entrenched addiction cycles (Addiction Treatment Forum, 2012).

- At Home/Chez Soi: This study involved recruiting mentally ill and addicted people who were homeless to a project which randomly assigned some participants to receive supported housing, including drug treatment options, psychotherapy, cooking classes, etc. The aim was to explore the effectiveness of a 'housing first' model (as opposed to a model that requires individuals to be sober and stable before they are eligible for government subsidized housing). When the study ended in 2013, participants were allowed to remain in their homes, but funding for many of the supports that had made it possible for them to succeed in the housing were removed. Funding for the housing itself may be withdrawn in 2014 (Culbert, 2013).

This is not intended as an indictment of the academic researchers who led or participated in these studies. The projects highlighted above incorporated many of the most progressive and best practices currently in use with regards to vulnerable communities, and are included because they represent the best of community-based social sciences research. The people who undertook this research are without exception

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passionately dedicated to contributing to positive social change and impact through their work. They have been outspoken critics of government decisions that fail to protect vulnerable community members, and vocal advocates for evidence-based public policy.

It is, however, intended to highlight the structural limitations and precarious nature of community-based research, which is highly dependant on shifting political priorities and the concomitant precarious state of funding. It does not mean that this research should not be undertaken, but rather that there should be increased and sustained efforts on the part of funding agencies and public institutions to create long-term responses and infrastructure to support work devoted to alleviating seemingly intractable social problems — responses that enable and nurture community leadership in the areas of research, education and social services.

Difficult social problems, such as those present in the Downtown Eastside, have inevitably attracted the attention of a diverse array of scholars. As a final note for consideration, one of the side effects of this is that representatives of various communities in the DTES (sex workers, injecting drug users, Aboriginal peoples, people who are HIV positive) have begun to perceive themselves as "the most researched community in history", or some similar assertion, with all of the potential for negative impacts that come with being at the epicentre of scrutiny in such research. Whether or not this is empirically verifiable is irrelevant for the purposes of this thesis research; the perception is what matters in this case. Any effective engagement effort requires at least a basic understanding of this history and context.

5.1.3. Woodwards

Debates about the redevelopment of the space formerly occupied by a Woodward's department store on East Hastings Street in the core of the DTES became a lightening rod for housing activists in Vancouver in the 1990s and 2000s who fought to have the building designated for social and supported housing. The fight included "the occupation known as The Woodwards Squat, or Woodsquat, which unfolded between 14 September and 14 December 2002 in Vancouver" (Vidaver, 2004, p. 7). *THIS IS NOT A POEM*, excerpted from the compilation *Woodsquat* is a powerful indictment of the privileged by one of the squatters:

> *Yu Cannibalites, yu legislative assembly, are all*
> *educated*
> *privileged*
> *smart*
> *as whips,*
> *yu know*
> *yu know*
> *yu can devour all the resources of the poor.*
> *you know when times get tough the tough get time.*
> *let them eat cake at the Sisters of Atonement.*
> *stop traffic at Terminal and Main*
> *and polish yur windows.*
> *scare you so bad yu have to put them in jail and*
> *forget about them.*
> *when they cry out in loneliness and starvation and pain*
> *gas them and sell them for parts*
> *or chop them up as meat,*
> *cook them for soup*
> *can it,*
> *and sell it as Campbell's and*
> *enhance the now much-dwindled Public's coffers,*
> *its glorious*
> *bottom*
> *line*
> *(Gadd, 2004, p. 17)*

The Woodwards squat seemed to be the final catalyst for spurring government into converting the abandoned department store into much needed social housing. In

2003 the City of Vancouver acquired the land and began plans for redevelopment (CBC News, 2008). The end result is a development that is a mixture of some very high-end market housing (e.g. 2 floor penthouse condominiums worth over $1 million in two private towers) alongside social and supported housing run by PHS Community Services Society (formerly the Portland Hotel Society) as well as commercial space and artist-run space. Many in the community support the Woodwards development, but many also feel that the development represents broken promises (for more social housing units and more space for community-based organizations) and that it is the vanguard of destructive gentrifying forces in the neighbourhood (Oommen, 2012).

It is within this context that SFU's School for Contemporary Arts (SCA), in the Goldcorp Centre for the Arts situated in the new building complex on the site of the former department store, now operates. There is a perception in the community that Downtown Eastside community members are not welcome in the Woodwards development (Oommen, 2012). In contrast, an official SFU news release from 2010 quotes SCA Director (at that time Owen Underhill) saying the school will offer "community partnerships, training programs, non-credit courses and targeted jobs for Downtown Eastside residents" (Simon Fraser University, 2010). The School now houses the Vancity Office of Community Engagement, which is "involved with producing public talks, community partnerships, accessible education opportunities and SFU student placements with community organizations." The office is currently involved in such activities as offering a variety of courses for inner city residents (Community Journalism 101, Contemporary Arts 101 and Cultural Democracy 101); a Social Justice Discussion Series in partnership with Pivot Legal Society; and a community ticketing program that

gives out over 1000 complimentary community tickets annually to events at the Goldcorp Centre for the Arts (Simon Fraser University, 2012g).

When we consider the engagement spectrum discussed above in Chapter 3, it seems likely that the way residents of the DTES experience the Woodwards development, and SFU's presence, on an everyday level, is in the range of activities described as passive, reactive or participative (as opposed to those described under empowerment and leadership). These activities are of critical importance in that they contribute to positive community and individual change, but there are also *gaps* of critical importance in SFU's sustained programmatic response to community-identified needs.

The Rashomon-effect, at least a version of it, certainly is a factor in dealings between the community and the university. Named after Kurosawa's film *Rashomon,* in which a crime witnessed by four individuals is described in four mutually contradictory ways, the Rashomon-effect tells us "fact and interpretation are inextricably linked" (Anderson, 2012, p. 8). It consists of the "conjunction of difference of perspective and plausible accounts, with the absence of evidence to elevate or disqualify any version of the truth, plus the social pressure for closure on 'the question'" (Anderson, 2012, p. 8). Is it true that residents of the Downtown Eastside feel excluded and isolated from opportunities to engage with SFU; or is it true that SFU is actively creating opportunities for education and civic engagement for those very residents; or is it true that SFU is only interested in the *appearance* of community engagement rather than the act? The answer is that all are true, to varying degrees, at various times. The real question is how to move forward from these multiple understandings of truth to arrive at shared meaning, and the theories and practices explored above can help create a framework to do so.

5.2. *Literacy Lives* Project: An Insider's Account

The idea for the *Literacy Lives* project began in 2008, when the Community Education Program (CEP) in Lifelong Learning at SFU hosted a public dialogue on World AIDS Day that involved many members of the HIV community in Vancouver. That event sparked discussions between myself and my colleague William Booth, former Executive Director of AIDS Vancouver, about how there are a large number of people in Vancouver who are vulnerable to HIV and who, because of a complex and varied range of barriers, experience difficulty accessing and adhering to treatment. We wanted to create a program that would nurture and support a cohort of engaged, knowledgeable, and skilled community members who would then be in a better position to support their families, friends and neighbours — those people in their communities who are struggling, and who are not making the connections and getting the support that they need in order to create and/or sustain healthy lives.

In 2010 we received funding from the Government of Canada's Office of Literacy and Essential Skills to develop and pilot a curriculum that would seamlessly embed literacy and essential skills training into existing community health initiatives. Initial project partners were the Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation, the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV AIDS, the Pacific AIDS Network, Decoda Literacy Solutions (formerly Literacy BC), and the BC Centre for Disease Control.

5.2.1. Engagement — External

The proposed model involved learners receiving training and then practising what they had learned in real world settings, under the mentorship and supervision of

community health workers. During 2010 and 2011 the project team[9] engaged in a lengthy and comprehensive community consultation process, gathering input and learning from the vast experiences and resources that the community, including social service providers, medical experts and practitioners, educators, and people with lived experiences as Persons with HIV/AIDS (PHAs), has to offer. We learned that despite some initially supportive conversations, our proposed model was not going to work because it would create too much of a burden on staff in community-based health programs (for example, Vancouver Coastal Health's Street Nurse program, or Vancouver's safe injection site, InSite, run as a joint venture by PHS Community Services Society and Vancouver Coastal Health Authority). In response, the planning team proposed a design whereby people selected as learners would participate in a university-based program at SFU's Harbour Centre location (as discussed in more detail below). The curriculum would be framed around learners identifying, developing, implementing and evaluating a community project that addressed something about which they felt passionately in the areas of HIV and community literacy. We already had a framework within which to work: the Certificate in Community Capacity Building (CCB) had been developed by CEP and passed by SFU's senate in 2005 as a flexible program designed to accredit some of the rich learning that occurs in community contexts and that is so often not given the recognition it deserves. Our partners and networks in the community were supportive of this change.

A key part of the revised model was the learner recruitment and support mechanism. Learners were recruited through six collaborating organizations that had

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[9] The project team was comprised of Judy Smith as Project Director, Shanthi Besso (myself) as Project Manager, William Booth as Community Liaison, Jo Lemay as Curriculum Developer, and Megan Frazer and Heather Nyberg providing administrative support.

been chosen because they served the groups of people with whom we wanted to work, and because they had excellent reputations and were well respected in the community. The specific selection criteria developed by the planning team was that collaborating organizations should:

- Have the organizational and administrative capacity to take on the project;
- Be trusted and credible in community;
- Be doing front-line work that has a connection to health;
- Have identified literacy as a strategy/priority;
- Be willing to collaboratively develop and implement the project;
- Have a demonstrated ability to develop and maintain strong partnerships;
- Work with groups of people who experience vulnerability to HIV[10].

The organizations which we ultimately approached and developed collaborative relationships with were: Health Initiative for Men, Maximally Assisted Therapy Program at Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, PHS Community Services Society, Positive Women's Network, Vancouver Native Health Society, and YouthCO.

Each organization had specific needs and wants vis-à-vis their participation in the project. The foundation of the partnership model was that each organization was to identify and assign a staff member who would dedicate approximately one day per week to the *Literacy Lives* project for one year, giving input on the curriculum, recruiting learners for the pilot program from their client or member bases, and then supporting those learners as they made their way through a 26 week curriculum. SFU, through project funds, would pay for the community staff time, as well as an administration fee in acknowledgement of the overhead costs incurred by the community organizations. We

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[10] Adapted from my notes of a planning meeting that occurred on November 18, 2010.

knew from experience that participating in similar projects had seriously compromised the ability of community organizations to carry out their stated mandates, because staff time and other resources in these organizations are so limited and stretched, so this model was our attempt to mitigate that potential damage, and also to recognize in a concrete way the experience, expertise and relationships that we were leveraging through our partners and collaborators.

The negotiations were not without drama. A number of times prior to signing Memoranda of Understandings (MOUs) with SFU the Executive Directors of various organizations told me that they would not be able to participate in the project for a number of reasons, or that their participation was contingent on certain criteria being met, only to change those positions either because of concessions on the part of SFU, or on the part of another collaborator, or simply through having the time and space to reflect, learn more, and shift their own position. For example, at one point we were under considerable pressure to create a women-only cohort, the news of which led to further pressure to create a gay men-only cohort. This particular debate carried forward after the MOUs were signed. By this time continuing and project staff at SFU and the six community coordinators (as we called them) from the collaborating organizations had begun working as a team, and the disagreement threatened to have a serious, negative impact on our ability to work together effectively. Ultimately, negotiations led to mixed cohorts.

The negotiations described above offer insights into ways of developing strategies for forging effective community-engaged programming. Twenty-one of thirty-three learners graduated from the pilot program with SFU's Certificate in Community Capacity Building, and there were numerous success indicators, including increased

employment and further pursuit of education, which are significant to the learners, to SFU, and to the funders. This project was a success by many measures, including the fact that for learners, the pilot program involved a 'real' university-based program, during which they were invited into the institution and made to feel welcomed. The program led to a recognized credential (specifically, a non-credit Certificate approved by SFU's senate), and provided them with a host of transferrable skills and experiences that they can take forward. However, the project's ultimate and lasting success is still uncertain. Attempts to find funding to offer new iterations of this fully developed model have been unsuccessful to date. This is explored in further detail in Chapter 6, *Moving Forward*.

Some fundamental pre- or co-requisites are key for doing meaningful and effective community-engaged work, in collaboration with community-based partners. They include:

- **Money**. This includes money to pay for administrative staff time, instructional time, community consultations, learner supports, and community partner time.
- **Time.** Adequate and ample time to design, consult, build relationships, re-design, re-consult, and strengthen relationships.
- **Flexibility.** Funders, partners and staff must all be sufficiently flexible and open to shifting and emerging needs and ideas. This is very much related to the dialogic principles and practices of listening, setting aside assumptions, and going into a process without a fixed or pre-determined outcome.
- **Combination of dialogic and negotiation approaches**. Dialogic approaches are required to get to the place where it is possible to negotiate with trust. For example, in the *Literacy Lives* project many details were left unsaid in the MOUs with collaborators, because relationships and understandings had been developed using dialogic approaches, and there was a strong foundation for mutual trust. On the other hand, details relating to money, time expectations, and specific deliverables were clearly negotiated and put into writing to make sure expectations were clearly understood and to satisfy legal requirements.

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- **Strong relationships.** This refers to the building and maintaining of relationships both internally and externally. In the case of *Literacy Lives*, having a dedicated Community Liaison Manager (William Booth, mentioned above) who was already intimately familiar with the HIV community in Vancouver and was willing and able to make suggestions and broker relationships made this process exponentially easier.
- **Partnership**. This refers to equitable partnerships, where people and organizations are adequately compensated (either financially or through other means, such as public recognition) for their contributions, and where decision-making is collaborative.
- **Clarity of roles.** A collaborative or dialogic approach does not mean that decisions are arrived at through consensus, but it is possible for team members to misconstrue this until a situation arises where it becomes clear that there is, in fact, a hierarchy at play. Making this clear from the beginning can help to mitigate the challenges in maintaining the fluidity of a collaborative approach within a hierarchical system (the university).
- **Anti-oppressive framework.** This means actively working to acknowledge that oppression exists based on "race", gender, ethnicity, sexuality, place of origin, and other factors, and to shift power towards inclusiveness, accessibility, equity and social justice.
- **Integrity and transparency.** This may seem obvious, but when working with communities who have ample reason to distrust, it is crucial to follow basic practices that include: following through on stated plans; explaining clearly and as soon as possible if and when plans have to change; being open about reasons for doing things in any given way; and being honest if there are things that one cannot share because of privacy or confidentiality concerns.

I have included a few quotes taken from transcripts of the *Literacy Lives* project evaluator's interviews with partner and collaborator representatives. They illustrate some of the ways in which the approaches and practices described above created trusting relationships, allowing the pilot project to work much more effectively with socially excluded community members in a university setting. These quotes are typical in their

content, but also in that they refer to actions taken by 'universities' or 'SFU' as opposed to any specific unit or individual. As the quotes indicate, community members and organizations often view the university as one unified entity (an observation discussed in Chapter 3), and that it is necessary to consider broader socio-economic contexts as well as the impact of work that has gone before when forging new partnerships.

> *This is how universities should act. A way to really engage in the community and not be like an ivory tower institution or like a gatekeeper…. To have the university filling that role was great to see and it showed the abilities that they do have when funding is available and there are people there to apply it.*
> — *Partner, final evaluation interview.*

> *We appreciated how much SFU put the emphasis on community for this…. They were very good about working through kinks…and involving us in the structure. We appreciated how much effort was put into it.*
> — *Partner, final evaluation interview.*

> *We were pleased to find that our role as a partner was respected and the consultation and planning process was meaningful. Our input was sought and implemented in almost every case…. We definitely felt that we were in an equal partnership and our contribution was respected. Our experience removed previous concerns that academic issues would dominate over the pragmatic when partnering with a university.*
> — *Partner, final evaluation interview.*

> *I was very impressed when SFU approached me and explained that they wanted to create a meaningful project as a new neighbour in the community. The presence of a university in the middle of a community can either be intimidating or welcoming. SFU decided to be welcoming in taking on this project.*
> — *Partner, final evaluation interview.*

5.2.2. Engagement — Internal

The story of how this project was navigated within the university offers some important insights as well. Examples of negotiations that were required internally include discussions that were held with Harbour Centre security and operations staff to ensure that learners were not challenged about their right to be on campus. This was based on previous experiences working on the History of Sex Work project when project participants were sometimes followed and questioned, because SFU security personnel were concerned that they were looking for things to steal, or that they were going to use illicit drugs in the washrooms. One of the steps we took to mitigate this potential challenge during *Literacy Lives* was to issue student identification cards, which is not a standard practice for non-credit programs.

The cards themselves led to another series of negotiations. Several of the learners in the pilot program did not have valid government identification and because of this they were told that they could not pick up their new SFU identification cards because they could not prove their identity. The argument that CEP put forward to the Registrar was that it was incumbent upon the university to release the cards because they were of huge symbolic and practical significance for the learners, and that it should not be more difficult to prove one's identity to obtain an SFU student card than it is to vote in a Canadian election. The Registrar agreed, and the cards were released.

These examples of challenges in negotiating access to the campus are salient because they point to a persistent culture at the university that quietly communicates messages about who does and does not belong. No one staff person or department was trying to be obstructionist, and in fact colleagues in various areas of the university went to considerable trouble to help navigate through policies and procedures that were

getting in the way of implementing the project. The problem, as outlined above in the Chapter 4 section, *Indigenous Pedagogy*, is that the policies and procedures are so entrenched and so steeped in historical Eurocentric colonial cultural practices that it is hard to know where to begin to undo exclusionary practices in any kind of systemic way. I will attempt to make some constructive suggestions in Chapter 6, *Moving Forward*. Before that, however, it is worth exploring how some of the theories and pedagogical approaches explored in Chapter 4 can work in a practical way when applied in a collaboratively developed community-engaged program, and to then further explore what implications this might have for teaching and learning throughout the university. In other words, could a robust and meaningful commitment to community-engaged programming strengthen both the community and the university, in a demonstration of reciprocal learning at its best?

5.2.3. *Pedagogy in Practice*

What does it look like in practice when we incorporate aspects of indigenous and critical pedagogies into a community-engaged, classroom-based program, developed with and for socially excluded people? What are some ways to implement Freire's concepts of dialogic, popular education and praxis within an institution that in many ways embodies and reinforces the colonial project in its daily activities? What are some

potential impacts on learners and on the community and the university at-large? These are some of the questions that we grappled with as we designed *Literacy Lives*[11].

Program Model

The *Literacy Lives* curriculum was designed to work with cohorts of learners that have a wide range of experience, knowledge and literacy levels. It was therefore of critical importance to hire a robust instructional team to ensure that diverse learning needs could be met. The classroom team during the pilot program included a full-time lead instructor and two part-time tutors/classroom facilitators, all of whom had experience and training in working with diverse and vulnerable learners; anti-oppressive education practices; and curriculum development (the lead instructor was also the curriculum developer for the project). Community-based coordinators (staff members from collaborating organizations) also played an important role, spending time in class on a rotating basis. Because the curriculum was highly participatory and experiential, and learners were engaging with challenging content related to social justice and the politics of health, it was also very important that classroom staff had training in creating and maintaining safe boundaries in emotionally charged classroom environments (Besso & Lemay, 2012, p. 13).

The learner recruitment or referral stage was key, as we knew how important it was to engage with learners who could gain the most and who had the best chance of succeeding in the type of supported and creative learning environment that we were

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[11] For the section entitled *Pedagogy in Practice* I have drawn from the *Introduction* to the *Certificate in Community Capacity Building* curriculum that was developed for the *Literacy Lives Project*. The document is available online and is cited in-text and below in *References*. I have also drawn on conversations with Jo Lemay, the curriculum developer and lead instructor for the project. I am grateful for her creative and critical approach to this work.

attempting to create. In other words, we wanted to avoid, as much as possible, setting learners up for failure. Community coordinators were largely responsible for recruitment during the pilot, and the recruitment phase took approximately three months to complete. Community coordinators promoted the program widely within their networks, specifically targeting groups and individuals who they thought would be a good match for the program. Interested community members submitted written application forms, which they completed without assistance, as this was the only filter we used for assessing applicants' writing abilities. The entire project team then created a shortlist for each collaborating organization, and the community coordinators interviewed shortlisted candidates. Applications and transcripts of interviews were submitted to project management for approval (Besso & Lemay, 2012, p. 13). As project manager, I made the final selection decisions, with oversight from the project director. This was both to satisfy due process within the university (an SFU staff person had to be ultimately responsible for acceptance into an SFU program), and to insulate community coordinators from any feelings of negativity experienced by unsuccessful applicants. Applicants were, by definition, clients or members of the six collaborating community organizations, and community coordinators provided regular support to those clients and members. It was of critical importance that trusted relationships between community coordinators and applicants to the program were not compromised or jeopardized by a rejected application.

The planning team had identified a number of criteria for 'ideal' learners for the program. They were to be people who:

- Were passionate about creating positive change in their communities;
- Had demonstrated some form of community leadership; and

- Were ready for a challenge or a next step in their learning process.

As described above, applicants were drawn from diverse communities that experience vulnerability to HIV, and included Aboriginal people, women at-risk, youth at-risk, people who use injection drugs, and gay men.

The program was offered over 26 weeks of class time from September 2011 to March 2012. Learners attended two three-hour classes per week. One class was a large-group format where all 30 learners came together weekly, often to learn from a guest facilitator. The other class was a small-group format with cohorts of approximately 10 learners each, also meeting weekly. Learners were expected to dedicate 11-17 hours per week to the program, including time in class, time with tutors, and time spent on homework or project work in the community.

Learners in the program were facing a variety of challenges and barriers to attending class, including a lack of basic resources. We provided lunches and snacks, transit passes and childcare stipends where needed, and honoraria for attendance, in recognition of the intense work that learners were engaged in and of the crucial contribution they were making to the development of the program.

The pedagogical approaches explored in some depth above were in many ways embedded into the core curriculum, which is framed around the experiential process of identifying, planning, implementing and evaluating a real community project that addresses an issue of critical importance in leaners' communities. Several additional tools and strategies were employed during the pilot program to bring these practices to life in the classroom.

Many Voices in the Room

Rather than emphasize the role of the instructor as knowledge-holder, the emphasis was on exchanging learning and viewpoints with the learners, as well as with other staff members and community members. This began on the first day of class when learners and staff co-developed, through a learning activity, a *Group Agreement* that would guide their classroom philosophy, protocols, and behaviour. The first week also included the beginnings of what would become a repeated exploration of human rights, which helped to set the tone for some desired tenets of the program, including a commitment to the consistent inclusion of diverse voices and experiences. Many learners said they were unaware that they had so many rights, which was an illuminating and sometimes painful realization. The discussions of human rights gave the class an internationally recognized framework to use as a touchstone throughout the program, and helped to set a tone of personal self-worth and collective responsibility (Besso & Lemay, 2012, p. 16).

It is worth noting that there were learners who were resistant to these approaches because they were at odds with previously formed notions of what a university-based education looks like. For example, some viewed the *Group Agreement* exercise, which was focused on creating a mutually agreed upon definition of what constitutes respectful behaviour, as a patronizing exercise aimed at people who, it was presumed, did not know how to behave in an institution of higher learning. It was only after a considerable amount of relationship- and trust-building that the entire group came to understand that this exercise and similar ones throughout the program were in fact attempts to change the institution, not the learners.

Explorations of silence, reflection, pausing, and deep listening were also aspects of the learning environment. Initially, as in any group, there were individuals who took up a great deal of space in the classroom and those who did not talk at all. Staff encouraged learners who took up a lot of space to become curious about each person in the room and those who were uncomfortable taking up space to explore their voices. Through practices such as regular roundtables and check-ins, learners heard stories of the lived experiences of their cohort, leading in many cases to changed perceptions and attitudes. For example, longstanding homophobic views held by some learners were changed by listening to the lived experiences of LGBTQ classmates and facilitators, prompting learners to become active allies rather than oppressors (Besso & Lemay, 2012, p. 16).

Trust

Building trust with people who have repeatedly experienced both first-hand and vicarious trauma, often connected with educational institutions, is by necessity a slow and careful process. There were several ways that we worked to create trusting relationships with learners in the *Literacy Lives* project. Ultimately, staff built trust by being transparent, honest, and predictable, and by demonstrating the legitimacy of the work that educators and learners were engaged in together. Learners who successfully completed the program were awarded SFU's *Certificate in Community Capacity Building* which was a key outcome for this group of learners who were determined that their investment in the program result in real opportunities for meaningful employment and further education. Program staff also shared relevant job postings, worked to connect learners with broader networks, and wrote reference letters for each learner at the end of

the program in attempts to leverage some of the social capital that is available through association with a mainstream university.

The program included a large number of guest speakers and facilitators. This greatly increased the diversity of both content and learning approaches in positive ways, but also opened up the classroom to potentially risky topics and discussions. One of the first guest facilitators, who had not been adequately briefed beforehand, allowed a prolonged conversation about chemical castration as a treatment for sexual offenders to occur — in a classroom with a number of victims of sexual assault. That incident immediately set back the work that staff had been doing to build trust and threatened to irrevocably taint the program for a number of learners, a few of whom considered dropping out of the program immediately. Classroom staff and community coordinators held individual meetings with learners to help repair relationships, and new policies were crafted, including: every guest facilitator's presentation was vetted by program staff beforehand; each invited guest was required to sign a contract outlining their commitment to creating a safe classroom space; and advance warning was given to learners when staff thought that a particular session might include emotionally triggering content.

Other examples of the responsive approach that we took to program management include the learner leaving policy and the attendance and illness policy. In the first example, the planning team dedicated a considerable amount of time and energy towards creating a framework that could support learners through difficult transitions, and we put in place a large number of structural supports so that learners would be able to stay in the program even if they were struggling. We did not, however, plan for the possibility that learners might need to be asked to leave the program

because they were creating an unsafe environment for other learners or for staff (Besso & Lemay, 2012, p. 14). Ultimately, we did ask two learners to leave early on in the program. While this was extremely unsettling for both staff and learners, it was imperative to create and maintain a safe space for the remaining cohort.

In the second example, initially we had in place a fairly strict attendance policy that allowed learners to miss a maximum of 20% of classes, with stipulations about how often and how many in a row. While this was a good starting point, it became clear that attendance was not the only marker of engagement in the program. There were learners, for example, who were not able to meet minimum attendance standards for health reasons, but who were actively engaged in the learning process. In addition, because some of the learners had compromised immune systems, it was not responsible for us to incentivize attending class when sick. For these reasons we revised the attendance policy to allow for sick days and increased instructor discretion and flexibility (Besso & Lemay, 2012, p. 14).

Learner Evaluation and Feedback

To put into practice the pedagogical approaches espoused here, educational staff must simultaneously nurture and challenge learners, while maintaining high expectations and standards. In the *Literacy Lives* program the lead instructor continually invited and offered myriad and diverse sources of information, including a wide variety of authentic course materials and exercises as well as bringing in community-based experts to speak to the class from diverse perspectives. She also provided critical, anti-oppressive material that is often excluded from formal education, and trusted learners to engage with it and make up their own minds about its validity and usefulness. Emphasis was placed on learning opportunities that increased learners' self-esteem and that

avoided the punitive power dynamics many people are familiar with in educational settings (Besso & Lemay, 2012, p. 17).

Classroom staff emphasized the importance of struggling and taking risks in the learning process. They encouraged learners to embrace a practice of making at least ten 'mistakes' every day because this would be a signal that they were taking risks and trying new things. This approach needed to be reinforced often because it was in direct opposition to many learners' previous experiences in educational settings where successful *performance* rather than successful *learning* is valued (Besso & Lemay, 2012, p. 16).

Classroom staff employed a number of strategies to encourage success and share feedback and evaluation with learners, including:

- Cumulative assignments where smaller assignments built on one another towards bigger projects (with feedback given throughout);
- Expecting learners to work at their personal best (rather than towards some preconceived notion of excellence);
- Allowing learners to submit assignments in alternate ways;
- Explaining Standard English as a dialect that learners could employ strategically to communicate and gather support, as opposed to the 'right' way to speak and write;
- Regular feedback letters from the instructor on submitted work, emphasizing strengths in the work and suggestions for exploring further;
- Feedback letters from the instructor to the whole class at the end of major milestones emphasizing the strengths of the class as a whole;
- Informal oral feedback and encouragement on a daily basis.

(Besso & Lemay, 2012, p. 17)

At a couple of key points in the pilot program the instructor met one-to-one with learners to provide feedback. These meetings were collaborative in that learners added

perspectives on their own learning. The instructor wrote down notes during the meeting and both instructor and learner kept a copy. The instructor and learner discussed the learner's experience in the program, their strengths and achievements, their attendance and assignments, and planned the learner's next steps. The discussion allowed for the instructor and learner to identify and set a goal that would help the learners challenge themselves to try something new. It is important to note that when some learners were invited to a meeting with their instructor it brought up very negative feelings and memories of being in trouble at school. Ultimately, the combination of the approaches discussed above helped to shift these power dynamics and build trust, so that subsequent meetings became more comfortable and constructive (Besso & Lemay, 2012, p. 17).

No grades were given, because detailed oral and written feedback encourages collaboration instead of competition (Besso & Lemay, 2012, p. 17). This is foundational to indigenous, feminist, popular and critical pedagogies, and is at the heart of community capacity building, which was, after all, the focus of the program. Staff found that these methods supported high quality assignments and led to more engaged learners.

5.2.4. Impact on Learners

The *Literacy Lives* pilot project had significant positive impact on learners who participated in the program[12]. Learners in the program participated in two interviews with project evaluators (mid-term and final) and completed a total of eight written feedback forms at regular intervals during the 26-week program. In addition, staff at SFU and

[12] Data for this section was drawn from learner interview transcripts, and from the *Literacy Lives* Midterm and Final Evaluation reports compiled by David Ham and Catherine Cunningham-Dunlop, per the requirements laid out by the Government of Canada, the project's funder.

partner organizations participated in evaluative interviews. While an in-depth analysis and synthesis of the hundreds of pages of transcripts that resulted from the project evaluation is beyond the scope of this thesis, the passages below include a helpful summary and some excerpts of salient points.

Learners reported that they had gained significant concrete knowledge and skills through the program, and staff members noted these changes as well. Some of the knowledge and skills that were acquired or enhanced in the program included a greater understanding of human rights and social justice issues; better and more in-depth knowledge about HIV prevention, transmission, and management; and an understanding of how policies and policy-makers work. Critical thinking, numeracy, writing and public speaking were all skills that were strengthened, as were the knowledge and skills needed to plan and implement community projects, such as interpersonal skills and teamwork; research and needs assessment; how to gather and analyze community input; and project development, management, and evaluation.

In addition to the more concrete knowledge and skills listed above, many learners spoke about personal growth they saw in themselves through the program. The staff also noted changes in the learners which were less quantifiable, but no less significant. Examples include gaining self-awareness and better understanding of how one's behaviour affects others; learning how to be less judgmental/more empathetic; working to combat entrenched prejudices that were held towards certain groups of people (e.g., drug users, LGBTQ people); and gaining confidence and self-esteem.

It is important to remember that the summary above inevitably masks many meaningful details. These quotes from learner interviews illustrate some of the personal significance of the changes:

> *I've learned that all of those social determinants of health play an incredibly powerful role in one human being's whole existence and what they can contribute to a society. So yeah, just seeing how even if you're born into a place of non-privilege and you're born into a place of poverty and addiction and all that kind of stuff. That with literacy and with knowledge, you can break out of those cycles.*
> *— Learner, final evaluation interview.*

> *Just being given the opportunity to come to such a beautiful building, to be educated … and to have some pride in that like, I go to SFU. There's just that sense of pride right off the bat that then triggers the snowball effect of being able to do other things in life.*
> *— Learner, midterm evaluation interview.*

> *I think the greatest thing was that there was the flexibility in the learning and teaching styles…. We did a lot of self-care and self-reflection. Reflecting back on my own personal journey, I was allowed to really be myself, and change when I wanted to change. No one said "You have to change like this. You have to do this." I was given that time to evolve and learn on my own pace.*
> *— Learner, final evaluation interview.*

> *To be able to say that we're proud SFU alumni is something I would have thought could never be achieved in my lifetime - even the next lifetime or the next lifetime or the next. But I'm eternally grateful and eternally, deeply honoured to have had this opportunity to grow.*
> *— Learner, final evaluation interview.*

5.3. Actualizing the Academic Plan: Implications for Teaching and Learning at SFU

The benefits and strengths of the *Literacy Lives* project seem self evident in light of the above. Offering such a program in a sustained and lasting way, always with an eye to being responsive to community-identified content areas and needs, and working

towards increasing the range and currency of such programs at Simon Fraser University and other post secondary institutions would be of substantial benefit to socially excluded communities. If this were the only criteria (and if resources were more easily available), we would increasingly see this kind of programming.

There are a number of additional strong arguments to be made for the university to engage in this kind of programming, and these arguments are outlined below in the section entitled *Reasons to Engage*. But one argument that is not made often or emphatically enough, and that warrants special attention here, is that these kinds of approaches to teaching and learning can have a very real and much needed impact on general practices across the academy. Commitments to diversifying pedagogical approaches and decolonizing the academy, as defined above in *Indigenous Pedagogies,* are not only important because they are the right things to do; they can play an important role in ensuring that the university remains (or becomes, depending on ones perspective) *resonant in* and *relevant to* the communities within which we are situated — to which we *belong*.

The Office of the Vice President Academic (VPA) at SFU has recently developed and released a five-year academic plan for the university entitled 'Engaging Students, Research and Community 2013-2018'. The document does not attempt to define or prescribe specific activities for any given faculty or unit. What it does do, however, is identify high-level priorities across the institution. The plan ties objectives to the goals outlined in SFU's Strategic Vision. As discussed above, the vision is "(t)o be the leading engaged university defined by its dynamic integration of innovative education, cutting-edge research, and far-reaching community engagement" (Simon Fraser University, 2012h, p. 2).

The university has identified three goals in support of this vision. I will discuss the first goal (Engaging Students) and the relevant supporting objectives and activities from the Academic Plan in detail here, and put forward recommendations for operationalizing and/or strengthening those activities. The second two goals, which are related to engaging research and engaging communities, are relevant to a discussion of SFU's new Community Engagement Strategy considered in the next chapter, *Moving Forward.*

> ***Goal 1: Engaging Students.*** *To equip students with the knowledge, skills and experiences that prepare them for life in an ever-changing and challenging world.*
>
> *(Simon Fraser University, 2012h, p. 2)*

The first objective identified in the Academic Plan in support of this goal is "1.1 Enhance the quality of education and student satisfaction" (Simon Fraser University, 2012d, p. 5). Of eight proposed activities in support of this objective, three are directly relevant to our discussion.

The first is "1.1.1 Provide more opportunities for faculty members to innovate and/or improve teaching methods, including leveraging opportunities for diversifying pedagogy (VPA)" (Simon Fraser University, 2012d, p. 5). Clearly the pedagogical theories and approaches discussed above, as well as some of the practices outlined in the preceding section, *Pedagogy in Practice*, could be adopted, adapted and applied to teaching practices across the university. For example, a commitment to training instructors in learner-centred approaches that value diverse voices and acknowledge students as experts in their own experiences would go a long way towards shifting the Eurocentric hegemony that is still so prevalent in the academy.

It is encouraging that responsibility for this activity is identified as residing with the VPA — primarily, the document goes on to explain, through SFU's Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) (Simon Fraser University, 2012d, p. 5). Adopting these approaches across the institution, as opposed to only in specific departments and units that are interested in and willing to put resources towards developing pedagogical diversity, is crucial if this work is ever to make real strides in decolonizing the institution and reinvigorating our relevance. What makes this work vulnerable, however, is that at this point in time instructor training and development through the TLC is voluntary.

Recommendation: Instructional training and professional development for faculty should be incentivized in a way that clearly signals that teaching is valued on par with research at SFU.

The second activity that has direct relevance is "1.1.4 Increase experiential learning opportunities. Students value opportunities to 'learn by doing' (Faculties and Departments)" (Simon Fraser University, 2012d, p. 6). The entire *Community Capacity Building* curriculum created during the *Literacy Lives* project is based around planning, implementing and evaluating a community-based project that addresses a critical need identified by the community about which the learner is passionate. The Academic Plan notes that while many faculty members have taken steps to make learning more experiential and applied in their course work, there is ample room to further develop opportunities (Simon Fraser University, 2012d, p. 6).

In developing and offering the *Literacy Lives* program, one of the most challenging and rewarding aspects for staff was ensuring that learning objectives were

met while leaving room in the curriculum to be quickly responsive to the learning needs of individual students based on their specific community projects and individual interests.

Recommendation: Incorporate responsive and experiential learning opportunities to increase student engagement across a wide array of classroom and community settings.

In activity "1.1.8 Programs for mature, returning and non-traditional students (Faculties and Departments)" (Simon Fraser University, 2012d, p. 7), the Academic Plan notes that "as there is growth in worldwide demand for educational credentials, we should respond by developing new credit and non-credit programs, particularly for those who have not previously seen universities as relevant to their personal development" (Simon Fraser University, 2012d, p. 7). Mature, returning and non-traditional students are often only interested in applied learning opportunities that they consider directly relevant to their professional development, in an environment that is respectful of their lived experience and expertise.

Recommendation: Broadly apply the pedagogical approaches discussed above in order to leverage SFU's opportunity, in an increasingly competitive educational 'market', to strengthen our appeal to mature and non-traditional students.

In "Objective 1.2: Improve Support for Students" (Simon Fraser University, 2012d, p. 7), also in support of the goal to engage students, one of the three identified supporting activity areas stands out as relevant. In describing activity "1.2.2. Improve access for under-represented communities (VPA, Faculties and Departments)" (Simon Fraser University, 2012d, p. 7), the document notes:

SFU has long been committed to making education more accessible, and puts considerable resources into this. Over the next few years we should focus on upgrading distance education and extension credit, creating partnerships with other institutions, and expanding non-credit activities for individuals for whom credit programs are not appropriate or relevant. We should also continue our efforts to increase the number of students from communities that are underrepresented, such as aboriginal and immigrant communities.

(Simon Fraser University, 2012d, p. 7)

In addition to increasing community-engaged programs such as the Certificate in Community Capacity Building in support of this activity, we should also be taking lessons learned from the program and applying them to credit programs for under-represented communities. For example, the practice of offering a dedicated support person or mentor as well as consistent tutors with whom students can build trusting relationships is very effective for helping students build and maintain momentum and confidence, and identifying and filling skills gaps to help ensure student success.

Recommendation: Opportunities for laddering (pedagogically diverse programs that help ladder or bridge interested students into credit programs) and scaffolding (additional learner-centred support for existing students) should be identified and developed across the academy.

The opportunities and recommendations identified above are not exhaustive by any means, but merely a starting point, and intentionally aligned with SFU's existing strategic documents, in the hopes of increasing their chances of uptake. It is important that the ongoing engagement and support of students at SFU motivate a wide variety of faculties, departments and individuals at the institution to adopt and incorporate diverse pedagogical approaches that actively work to align the stated vision and goals of our

institution with the day-to-day practices of educating students and contributing to our communities.

6.   Moving Forward: Recommendations and Conclusions

The work in this thesis suggests that a decisive paradigm shift is needed at the university to value and sustain collaboratively created community-engaged programming, in order to better serve a broader constituency of communities and learners, as well as to better situate the university as a vibrant and relevant institution into the future. There are clearly challenges to driving this shift forward, as well as some compelling reasons to do so, and some key opportunities to be leveraged at SFU.

6.1.   Leadership

It would be easiest if a call for increased and sustainable community-engaged programming were led from the top. Preliminary research into other institutions that have made community-engaged work a tenet of their ongoing mandate suggests that such initiatives cannot be successful or sustainable without support from the president's office. David Maurrasse, of Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, examined a number of case studies of US post-secondary institutions that are situated in or adjacent to inner-city communities, and that have created large-scale ongoing partnerships with those communities. In all of the cases that Maurasse studied, the various Centres for Community Engagement (whatever they may have been called at any given institution) reported directly to, and were priority initiatives of, the president (Maurrasse, 2001).

As noted above in Chapter 3, *Method*, two key informants were interviewed for this thesis: Judy Smith, Director of Community Education, Lifelong Learning, SFU, and Ethel Whitty, Director of the Carnegie Community Centre, which is often referred to as the 'living room' of the Downtown Eastside. In the interview with Ms. Smith, two questions were posed with regard to university leadership and accountability: "What are some concrete steps that might be taken to move towards the ideal [relationship between the university and the community]? Who needs to participate on behalf of the community and on behalf of the university to take these steps?" Ms. Smith responded that, "We're talking about a huge shift in the paradigm. It needs to be the president, the vice president, the deans. Small initiatives can't be sustainable without the upper levels buying in" (J. Smith, personal communication, November 20, 2012).

Similarly, and in response to the question, "What do you think are the biggest hurdles to increasing the variety and number of collaborative community-university programs?" Ms. Whitty noted:

> *Mandate of the university is probably the biggest barrier. And by that I mean what people are mandated to do, the parameters of their work, and whether they have freedom or not to stretch those parameters. Because people have jobs that they are responsible to, so unless people have some freedom and are told to do it – to engage community…. it's got come from the top.*
> *(E. Whitty, personal communication, November 23, 2012)*

In terms of the biggest hurdles facing collaborative community-university programs, Ms. Smith noted, "Fear. Fear of dismantling the university-entrenched belief in being the keepers of knowledge. I think it takes courage on the parts of individuals, programs, the whole university" (J. Smith, personal communication, November 20, 2012). Both women agreed that the rhetoric of community engagement can be a barrier

in itself, and Ms. Whitty noted that, in her experience, the university and the community seemed to have very different conceptions or understandings of what constitutes community engagement.

Ms. Whitty was referring specifically to a 2007 partnership between the Carnegie Community Centre and the SFU School for Contemporary Arts (SCA). The Carnegie was in the process of developing and producing a community opera, and requested help from the SCA. The fact that the SCA became an official partner of the project was key in that it made it possible for Carnegie to apply for the grant that eventually funded the initiative. But other help from the SCA that Carnegie had hoped for (in the form of training support for community members to design their own sets, costumes, libretto, etc) was not possible. In order to make undergraduate or graduate students available to support the initiative, SCA faculty members needed projects where the students could take the lead, so that they could complete work that was, in simple terms, gradable. There was no mechanism at the SCA for even a fairly straightforward *Community Service Learning* model to be enacted (whereby students volunteer in community settings for course credit). Faculty could not do this work themselves, except on a strictly volunteer basis, as there was no mechanism to reward or compensate SCA faculty members for community work. Eventually, the SCA made rehearsal space available at their Alexander Street studios, and added their name to the project. This was a critical contribution, but it points to the need for an enabling foundation that supports deeper levels of engagement and more mutually beneficial scenarios for both the university and the community.

Negotiation theory suggests that symbolic leadership from the president's office might be required in order for sustained engagement between a university and a

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marginalized community to occur. Leadership is important not just for symbolic reasons, but for practical reasons, for example, the notion of linkages: that "mediators with clout" (a president of a university, for example) can resolve internal conflicts by linking issues to other problems (Raiffa, Richardson, & Metcalfe, 2002, p. 482). A clearly signalled and *resourced* mandate from the President's office would have an immediate and significant impact on the ability to carry out sustainable work in this area.

It is instructive to consider UBC's Learning Exchange and UBC's Humanities 101 program. These initiatives, which are both based in the DTES, clearly surpass SFU efforts in terms of their sustainability; they are not one-off, ad hoc projects. The Learning Exchange operates a storefront drop-in centre on Main Street with regular hours, and Humanities 101 does annual intake for that program's non-credit courses. While these programs have limitations, their sustained efforts have created a trusted and predictable presence for UBC in the DTES.

6.2. Reasons to Engage

There are many reasons for a university to engage with historically excluded communities in an effort to co-create responses to community identified issues that are impacting community well being, many of which have been discussed or hinted at in the preceding pages.

Whether or not a university has a responsibility to work with and for marginalized communities is not a question with a straightforward answer. There are those who argue that the movement to democratize the university, or to make it more accessible, is wrong headed. Part of the concern is that the risks, which include the erosion of rare spaces

that nurture critical, intellectual reflection and research, untethered by 'real world' concerns, are too great. These concerns have merit, particularly in an era of increasing pressure to create 'practical' curricula and programs that produce job ready graduates; an era that ties government funding for new university programs to labour market analysis rather than intellectual creativity and excellence. However, these concerns actually strengthen the argument to create new forms of robust community-engaged programming that embrace and incorporate critical and indigenous pedagogies. Such a response can only serve to demonstrate the academy's continued relevance and ability to contribute to a wide range of communities. There is clearly more than one way of knowing and learning.

Moreover, the university has played an historic role in legitimizing colonial processes, particularly through sociological and anthropological qualitative research practices, and has therefore contributed to the *dis*crediting of entire cultures, pedagogies, discourses, and ways of knowing. As Denzin and Lincoln note,

> *The term research is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism (L.T. Smith, 1999, p. 1). L.T. Smith (1999) contends that 'the word itself is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary…. It is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism' (p.1), with the ways in which 'knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified, and then represented back to the West' (p.1).*
>
> *(Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4)*

The university therefore has an important role to play in creating space for indigenous, or subaltern, or otherwise 'othered' communities to (re)claim their places.

Ethel Whitty addressed the most convincing reasons or arguments for university-community engagement, noting:

You know, one of the first groups that ever measured outcomes was the residential school system. They had objectives. The objectives were to: produce English speakers; who were able to work at a trade; and who were Christian. And when their objectives were measured against their outcomes… they were successful.

We all live with those outcomes. And we know that if they had asked First Nations people what they needed, even if the question was couched in terms of what they needed in order to integrate with white people, they would have got a very different answer than residential schools.

And that is the value in asking people: you are just so much less likely to get it wrong.
(E. Whitty, personal communication, November 23, 2012).

There are a variety of other reasons for a university to engage in a sustainable way with historically excluded communities. They include creating a market for mainstream undergraduate studies (e.g., capacity building or bridging programs could act as feeder programs for undergraduate programs); and helping the university to cultivate a positive public image. These pragmatic reasons are important, but even more compelling is the opportunity to open up knowledge and community expertise that is otherwise unavailable to the university, to researchers, and to the general public; the possibility of contributing to positive social change; and the resulting increase in relevance and therefore longevity and security of the university.

The question is how does one frame these arguments within the university; how does one spark a process and gather allies, in pursuit of attention from senior administration and within a broader context of the community engagement processes already at work within SFU?

6.3. Opportunities

Returning to theories of dialogue and negotiation, any efforts to move this work forward must remain mindful and open to the motivations and interests of all parties. We must also keep in mind the enduring importance of allies in any dialogic or negotiation process, and remain open to the wisdom and insight offered by diverse voices. A strategic framing of issues that incorporates a careful consideration SFU's history of engagement with socially excluded communities, as outlined above, may indeed convince interested parties at the university that a concerted effort to work to increase creative community-engaged programmatic responses is desirable.

Some questions for consideration are: Who are potential allies and key stakeholders? How do we encourage the kind of open and dialogic process that will lead to the best outcomes for all? How do we strategically frame the issues to get the attention of those with power? While I am not yet in a position to answer all of these questions, there are a number of opportunities that might be leveraged.

6.3.1. *SFU Community Engagement Strategy*

In December of 2012, building on the *SFU Strategic Vision*, the Office of the VP External Relations at SFU circulated a draft of a three-year *Community Engagement Strategy*. The document defines community engagement (borrowing from the US-based Carnegie Foundation's definition) as "collaboration between the university and communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (Simon Fraser University, 2012f, p. 2), and is intended to create a pathway for operationalizing both the *SFU Strategic Vision* and the *2013-2018 Academic Plan*.

There are a number of opportunities to be leveraged within this brief document, but first it is important that we briefly revisit and become more specific about the definition of community engagement. In my experience, "mutual benefit" and "reciprocity" in this context often mean that communities get a piece of research that they are interested in and that they hope will help guide social policy, or community members get hired as peer research assistants, and university-based researchers get *access.* As discussed above in Chapter 5, these practices are indeed mutually beneficial, but what we are looking for here is something different, something that fundamentally shifts the university's approach to working with and for under-served communities. This means working to achieve the areas of 'empowerment' and 'leadership' on the above-pictured engagement spectrum, and, above all, working to ensure that community-engaged work is community-led and/or responsive to community-identified needs.

The Community Engagement Strategy identifies three community engagement priorities for the VP External Relations that are particularly relevant to this discussion. The first two relate to communication — they are to "Measure, Communicate and Celebrate" and to "Improve Community Access" (Simon Fraser University, 2012f, p. 5). This will be achieved, the document tells us, through a number of actions, including: the creation of an online community engagement portal that will act as a "highly visible 'storefront and referral site'" (Simon Fraser University, 2012f, p. 5) for external community members; and the hiring of a new Director of Community Engagement, a "resource and referral person based at SFU Burnaby" (Simon Fraser University, 2012f, p. 6).

The third priority addresses leadership. The priority is to "Leverage Signature Initiatives and Support Select Integrated Community Engagement Projects" (Simon

Fraser University, 2012f, p. 7), with the support of the Vice-President External Office in the form of staff assistance and help securing external funding. While the initiatives and actions linked to this priority for 2013/2014 do not include support for specific community-engaged programming of the type called for in this thesis, this clearly represents a window of opportunity.

6.3.2. TD Community Engagement Centre

Another concrete opportunity for consideration is the new (2013) SFU Surrey TD Community Engagement Centre. Located at the Surrey City Centre Library, the Centre represents a milestone for SFU in that it is the first physical space associated directly and primarily with (future) community-engaged programming at the university. The Centre is also important because it plays a part in the SFU Surrey campus expansion that is so critically needed in that city and that is so strategically important to SFU, not least because it is mandated by government funding priorities.

The mandate of the Centre is to serve immigrants and youth in Surrey, but the structure is as yet undefined, in part because the gift of $750,000 over five years from TD Bank, while generous, is also limiting. That amount could easily be eaten away by administrative staffing costs, leaving little for programming, and staff at the Surrey campus and in the office of the VPER are involved in efforts to source staffing resources from elsewhere in the university in order to free up those funds for programming. In the meantime, the Centre will act as a space for existing programming, such as the *Friends of Simon* program, which matches undergraduate students with secondary school students who need tutoring and mentorship; and various programs run by Lifelong

Learning, such as the *Digital Communications Certificate with advanced English training*, a government-funded program for Canadian newcomers.

Making community-engaged programming, as defined in this thesis, a core part of the activities of such a centre would be a first at SFU, and would potentially open up more space to do similar work at the Vancouver campus. The theories and approaches explored above with regards to Vancouver's Downtown Eastside community are not completely transferrable in terms of their applicability to youth and immigrant experiences in Surrey, but there are clearly important parallels. The pedagogies and theoretical groundings are sufficiently flexible, and combining efforts to strengthen community-engaged programming in both Surrey and Vancouver is compelling for a variety of reasons, including the economies of scale that might result.

6.3.3. Public Square

SFU has a long-standing history as a convener of public dialogues, through the innovative work of Continuing Studies' Dialogue Programs (for example, the Imagine BC project), the undergraduate Semester in Dialogue, Lifelong Learning's Social Justice Series, the Office of International Development's Diaspora Project, and many more individual and collective efforts. The convener mantle is now primarily held by SFU Public Square, a "signature initiative designed to spark, nurture and restore community connections, (and establish) Simon Fraser University as the go-to convener of serious and productive conversations about issues of public concern" (Simon Fraser University, 2012a). While the distinction between the roles of convener versus that of participant in a dialogue is an important one, the very existence of SFU Public Square, which was dreamed in part by the President's office, may represent an important opportunity. Could

Public Square play a role in convening an intra-university dialogue to explore these issues?

6.4. Next Steps

One concrete next step is to engage Public Square to serve as convenor of an intra-university dialogue, with the aim of exploring ways in which to create university-wide action. Another approach is to continue to have private (or, at least, smaller and more managed) conversations with interested players at the university with the intention of identifying and acting on specific ways to advocate for the work. Key stakeholders in either scenario would include staff in the Office of Lifelong Learning, at Public Square, at the Vancity Office of Community Engagement (SFU Vancouver), at the TD Community Engagement Centre (SFU Surrey), in the Office of the Director of Community Engagement (SFU Burnaby), in the Office of the Vice President, External Relations, in the Office of the Vice President, Academic, and so on. There are a number of avenues and opportunities for moving this agenda forward, and the probable best course of action is to pursue many pathways simultaneously, while being careful and respectful of colleagues' varying interests and responsibilities.

This work must be located within ongoing efforts to reframe or refocus all of the university's community engagement efforts, including community-engaged teaching and research. None of these things (especially from the public's perspective) operate independently from one another. Of utmost importance are community-identified needs. If a community needs a piece of research, or needs the name of an established university on a grant proposal, or needs an expert opinion, then that is what should be

available, and that is one of the functions that the newly proposed online community engagement portal might help to effectively carry out.

However, communities and individuals cannot be held responsible for demanding and designing programs and opportunities on their own. If universities want proportionately representational numbers of Aboriginal students in undergraduate and graduate programs (for example), it behooves us to create a flexible laddering system (in part through community-engaged programs) that has the ability to move individuals and communities seamlessly through the system, rather than to create programs that meet long-established credentialing parameters but do not actually fit the needs of real people and their real-world problems.

The model proposed in this work relies heavily on the rigor and reputation of SFU. However, what is proposed involves a radical and fundamental shift in how the university teaches to, assesses, and values various learning and ways of knowing. Ultimately, a strategic dialogic process will make it possible to create increased understanding and collaboration, and to identify mutually agreed upon goals. Goals should include increased desire and will on many fronts to co-create a wide range of programmatic opportunities for excluded and oppressed communities to engage meaningfully in a university-based education that is valued and recognized, and for universities to engage meaningfully in a reciprocal process of learning and growth in order to meet the needs of a broader range of constituencies, and to remain relevant and vibrant well into the future.

Paulo Freire, in his seminal work *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, addressed broad social change in a way that is particularly relevant to this thesis:

(W)hile to say the true word… is to transform the world, saying that word is not the privilege of some few persons, but the right of everyone. Consequently, no one can say a true word alone – nor can she say it for another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words.

(2000, p. 88)

Freire's perspective summarizes both the root and goal of truly transformative community-engaged work. It speaks to the fundamental tenets of the work, including inclusivity and collaboration. It also highlights the need to support those with less power in their efforts to develop the skills and legitimacy to speak their own words and transform their own communities.

Daniel Mato, in his reflections on social participation initiatives in Latin America, poses a number of questions, including: "How could research and practitioner practices contribute to the valorization and promotion of every form of indigenous knowledge in projects' design and implementation? How could our practices contribute to the accomplishment of grassroots communities' and indigenous peoples' own agendas" (Mato, 1999, p. 71)? I would add to these questions, how could our increased commitment to this work improve and strengthen our own research and teaching practices across the institution?

Some of the answers are to be found in the pedagogies and opportunities described above. This thesis has argued that there exists, in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood, a community that already has the strength and capacity to continue to meaningfully define its own parameters. What some community members lack are the specific skill sets, confidence, and *legitimacy* required to contribute to both their personal and community trajectories in powerful and lasting ways that strengthen overall community health. A mainstream university, working carefully within the

paradigms of popular/critical, indigenous and feminist pedagogies; lessons from international development, public health, and social change communication; leadership from the community; and a genuine and demonstrated desire and ability to engage in critical and reciprocal learning has much to contribute in the way of resources, knowledge, and caché. No single response can adequately address the pervasive and systemic inequities that exist, but the academy can certainly contribute a great deal more than current structures and programs allow, and in the process can help to ensure that it remains (or becomes) relevant and vibrant well into the future.

To borrow again from Freire: "Solidarity requires true communication… [and] only through communication can human life hold meaning" (2000, p. 77). What is required, as Freire knew so well, are the practical mechanisms to make "true communication" possible.

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