THE PEDAGOGY OF PARTICIPATORY VIDEO

Project Thesis Final Paper

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www.whatisjungle.org

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1   RELATION TO ACADEMIC PROGRAM

This project and its various elements are very much a reflection of the course-work I have completed, the professional experiences I have had, as well as the Professors whose guidance I have received during my time in the Communication and Culture program.

Several courses in particular stand-out in both their relation to and inspiration of my final project. First, Amin Alhassan's class on Communication and International Development was influential in that it was the first exposure I had to Paulo Freire and his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000). This text is central to my entire project and it is likely that my final project would have taken a completely different direction without it.

What this class also provided me with was a lens with which I came to view my own work. What has become apparent after my experiences with working in "at-risk" Toronto communities, is that many of issues related to international development (issues which Freire spoke of) are highly relevant to communities right here in Canada. Based on this, many of the communication projects that are used in international development (based around radio, TV and video for example) are projects that are also highly useful when put into practice in the developed world.

Another class that provided me with a framework to build my project was David Skinner's class on the Political Economy of Communication and Culture. By discussing issues such as media democracy and concentration of corporate media power in our highly globalized world, my project is able to speak to the possibilities of grassroots, community media, being produced by and for local residents. My project, and others like it, are able to stand in contrast to the capitalist mode of production where the final product for sale holds such a commanding role. Grassroots media

projects are much more process-oriented where people are able to learn by doing and participating, not necessarily by consuming.

Directly related to the applied portion of my project is a class taught by Chris Cavanagh on Popular Education for Social Change. This class has provided me with many different points of reference in which to situate my project. Chris, with his over two decades of popular education experience, was instrumental in helping me design the applied portion of my project. His guidance and his class provided me with a new way to look at Freire as well as many other scholars who have sought to put Freire's lofty ideas into real-world practice.

Lastly, my time working with Judy Rebick as her Graduate Assistant has been an invaluable experience. Besides the fact that Judy introduced me to Chris and was my advisor during my field placement where the partical portion of this project was performed, Judy's passion for social change has always been at the forefront of my project. My reasons for wanting to return to academic life after three years away was to try and find a way to combine my academic and professional backgrounds – film/video production and politics – in order to create social change. Although Judy's professional and academic experience is not directly related to the educational and video aspects of my project, her desire to create social change is the same goal that I had of my project.

2 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of my MA thesis project is to examine the possiblities of fostering a critical sensibility amongst Toronto urban youth by use of popular education activities and then to put these critical skills to work in the form of documentary production. I was able to perform this practical aspect of my project as part of a field placement in the Spring and Summer of 2009. During this placement I

was able to provide youth (aged 14-19) in the Lawrence Heights community of Toronto, Ontario, Canada (colloquially known as "Jungle") with both the critical and technical skills necessary to create a documentary about their community and the issues that exist therein. Having these videos in hand, I am now able to reflect on both the process and the theoretical grounding of my fieldwork (which is done in this paper) as well as create an interactive and virutal home for the videos created last summer and any more that, in the future, might come out of the model that I implemented (www.whatisjungle.org).

With my primary objective in mind, the greater, long-term, goal of my project is to help youth become more engaged with their community and begin to ask questions about their, and other, so-called "at-risk communities". I do not intend on this project being the final say on such an objective. Rather, it is only the beginning of a larger objective to help foster a positive sense of community in neighbourhoods negatively portrayed in the media and to help these residents become more civically engaged in order to create social change.

There are two central learning objectives that this project aims to address: how to help develop critical thinking skills in youth and how can youth use video to demonstrate their critical skills.

This project and its objectives are the culmination of both my MA and also my BAH (Film Major, Politics Minor), where my goal has consistently been to find a means to constructively combine both film/video and politics in order to bring about positive social change. For the Communication and Culture MA program specifically, where critical media skills of a wide variety are the focus, this project has the potential to speak to the ways that people absorb, interact with and eventually create media of their own.

3   OUTLINE OF FIELDWORK

The field component of my project took place in the Summer of 2009 at an organization called *Leave Out Violence* (LOVE) as part of the fulfillment of a field placement credit done for the Communication and Culture MA Program. While at LOVE, I had the opportunity to create, implement and oversee a six-week documentary program with a group of youth from the Toronto community known as Lawrence Heights, or "Jungle". The program was comprised of three sections. The first section was created around the writings of Paulo Freire and sought to give the youth the necessary critical skills that would be required to make an effective documentary.

In the second section we discussed the nature of documentary, and what types of questions and issues the youth might like to explore in a documentary of their own. The youth were then sent out into their community and interviewed a variety of residents, youth and community workers about an issue or set of issues of their choosing.

In the final section the youth put all of their skills together and edited their footage into two different short documentaries. The youth had complete control of how to edit their videos — which interviews to include, what "found footage" to add, how to narrate it and musical selections to be added. What came out of this were two very nuanced short videos that problematized the term "revitalization" and how many outside the community (especially politicians) see this as the cure-all for the issues that exist within Lawrence Heights and other "at-risk" communities.

The final section of the fieldwork culminated with a screening of the two documentaries that was open to all residents of "Jungle". The screening was

attended by a mix of parents, friends, community workers and even representatives of local Members of Parliament (MP).

The two videos that were produced during my fieldwork can now be accessed at www.whatisjungle.org and should be viewed in conjunction with reading this paper.

4   THEORETICAL POSITIONING

In order to situate the practical portion of this project within a historical and theoretical context, it is necessary to position my fieldwork within the two academic areas of central importance to my research: Popular Education (PE) and Participatory Video (PV). Popular Education, particularly the writings of Paulo Freire, were central to the "critical" aspect of my fieldwork where I aimed to guide the youth in developing and enhancing their critical skills in order for them to make an effective documentary. Once the youth were able to develop a set of questions about their communities, they were then provided with the necessary technical skills required to present their questions and issues visually in a documentary format. This is the Participatory Video aspect of my project.

4.1   Popular Education

The primary theoretical foundation for the first or "critical" phase of my practical work is Paulo Freire and the critical education theories he espoused in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000). At the most basic level, what Freire's and my research share in common is the belief that for long-term social change to happen, a revolution in education must occur. Although much of Freire's practical work after *Pedagogy* dealt with adults, there is much in his theories that can be applied to my project, focusing on youth.

The first and perhaps most important theory of Freire's that I sought to examine in my fieldwork was the concept of "banking education" and more accurately, how to overcome it. In this style of education, the teacher-student relationship is characterized by a top-down formation. Freire states of this form of education that, "the teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable...worse yet, it turns [students] into "containers"...to be "filled" by the teacher"[1]. This relationship blunts the creativity of the students and discourages questioning of the status quo, thus upholding the oppressor-oppressed dichotomy.

The youth I worked with all lived in, or near to, the Lawrence Heights or "Jungle" community. Prior to the summer, I had never heard this nickname, nor had I ever walked the streets of this neighbourhood. The only knowledge I had of the Lawrence Heights community was that it was deemed an "at-risk" or "priority" Toronto neighbourhood by city officials and I was only even aware of this fact due to it being referenced as such in the mainstream Toronto media. If I was going to help the youth I worked with learn about their neighbourhood from a critical perspective, then I had to learn with them and have as few preconceptions as possible. As Freire states, "[educators] must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them"[2].

To begin to work towards overcoming the banking model, I attempted to put some of Freire's ideas about "problem-posing education" to work. Having first given myself the goal of not presupposing anything about any of the youth or any aspect of their community (which Freire identifies as a critical first step[3]), I felt somewhat prepared to help foster an environment conducive to the "praxis" which Freire

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[1] Paulo Freire, <u>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</u> (New York: Continuum, 2000) 71-72.

[2] Freire 75.

[3] Freire 79.

describes as a central goal of "problem-posing education". The goal of Freire's work throughout much of his life was to help "the oppressed" overcome the oppressor-oppressed relationship by means of liberation. Liberation, Freire says, "is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it"[4]. Thus, action and reflection must both be central to a "problem-posing education"[5].

In practice, Freire explains that the "problem-posing" method should look as follows:

> ...the problem-posing educator constantly re-forms his reflections in the reflection of the students. The students — no longer docile listeners — are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own. The role of the problem-posing educator is to create, together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the *doxa* is superseded by true knowledge, at the level of the *logos*[6].

In order for me to understand and gauge where the students were at with their thinking about issues of violence and oppression in their lives and community, I used a series of documentary films during our meetings. The films were to serve a dual purpose: to introduce the documentary tradition to the youth, but also to get the youth talking about and reflecting upon a variety of different issues in the films and how those issues relate to their own lives. Not only is this reflection key to "praxis", the use of visual aids as "problem-posing" devices is also a key didactic tool in the Freirian tradition. Although in *Pedagogy* Freire discusses newspapers and television as visual tools, the impact of the documentary films that I used (discussed below) are much the same: "This practice helps develop a sense of criticism, so that people will

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[4] Freire 79.

[5] Freire 79.

[6] Freire 80-81.

react to newspapers or news broadcasts not as passive objects of the "communiques" directed at them, but rather as consciousnesses seeking to be free"[7].

The documentary film that I came to rely on most while working with the youth was a 2009 Canadian film entitled *Invisible City*[8] by director Hubert Davis. Not only did the film take place in Toronto, several of the youth in the class had personal connections to the characters in the film.

Davis's film deals with life in Regent Park and begins to discuss how life might change (for better, or worse) due to the current revitalization that is taking place there. The Regent Park neighbourhood is characterized by a high rate of poverty and unemployment, and is home to a largely immigrant and marginalized population. It experiences a higher rate of violence, crime, drug abuse, and social ills compared to many other Toronto communities. Moreover, the average income for Regent Park residents is approximately half the average for other Torontonians[9].

In short, what revitalization aims to do is create a mixed income housing development to replace the public housing development that has existed there for over 50 years. The idea is that by mixing incomes, as well as reconfiguring the street patterns to connect the neigbhourhood to neighbouring ccommunities, the high crime rates will begin to fall.

After the youth screened Davis's film, an emotional discussion occurred and continued over several days. The issues that the youth raised were all of central importance to both the film and their lives. Issues such as family, especially broken families, and how a lack of education and jobs can lead to families falling apart, were

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[7] Freire 122-123.

[8] Invisible City, dir. Hubert Davis, perf. Ainsworth Morgan, film, NFB, 2009.

[9] Sean Purdy, "'Ripped Off' By the System: Housing Policy, Poverty, and Territorial Stigmatization in Regent Park Housing Project, 1951-1991," Labour/Le Travail 52 (2003): n. pag. Web. <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/llt/52/purdy.html>.

all raised. Moreover, on a strictly documentary fundamentals level, the youth were beginning to understand what types of questions needed to be asked of people in order to investigate a particular issue.

With this in-class critical phase of my fieldwork complete, I was then able to move on to the second, practical phase, which involved the youth putting their critical skills to work by making a documentary of their own. It is important to note that although the in-class portion of the program did end here, we continued our critical discussions of the community based on the interviews we would record throughout the production phase.

Before situating my project within the writings of two academics important to the PV tradition, it is useful to first comment on the nature of the applied section of my project in light of Antonio Gramsci's writings on education, as well as a concept related to all of Gramsci's work: hegemony. Before unpacking Gramsci's position on pedagogy, his concept of hegemony must first be understood as the two are inextricably linked.

Peter Mayo, a scholar who has attempted to find a link between Freire and Gramsci, explains that hegemony, in a Gramscian sense is a "social condition in which all aspects of social reality are dominated by or supportive of a single class"[10]. Domination and support are not meant to be visible in every day life; rather, for hegemony to be successful, these two pillars are best-left unseen and understood as being taken-for-granted. In order to overcome an oppressive hegemony and those benefiting from it, education comes to play a crucial role. Mayo explains that,

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[10] Peter Mayo, Gramsci, Freire & Adult Education: Possibilities For Transformative Action (London: Zed Books, 1999) 35.

"[Gramsci] argued for the provision of a broad education, with a strong humanistic basis for all children"[11].

One of the key links between Gramsci's writings on education and my research is the production, or second phase of my fieldwork. In Gramsci's view, less emphasis is needed on in-class critical education (as Freire proposes) and more emphasis on teaching applied skills in a critical manner in order to overcome hegemonic relationships. Such skills, Gramsci claims, are key to the "Common" or "Creative" schools he envisioned. The different emphasis that Gramsci and Freire place on where critical education should occur, likely has much to do with the audiences they were writing for. For Gramsci, in Italy in the 1920s, his audience was the working class who by and large had at least some form of basic in-class education. Freire, on the other hand, was writing for Brazilians specifically and all of Latin America more generally, during the 1970s. During this era in Latin America (and arguably still today) there was only a small working class and thus Freire's audience was the large "non-class" of people, mostly with no education at all. What matters in the end though is that both Freire and Gramsci share the same goal – to provide people with the tools to change *their* world.

This question of focus – critical skills versus practical skills – is where my project and the fieldwork I performed are situated. Although the critical education aspect of my project is the primary focus, in-class education alone cannot do the job of helping to foster critical minds. There needs to be a practical application, or action, for the critical skills learned in the classroom. The second part of praxis — action — is what the second part of my own project revolves around. Mayo states of Gramsci that "the notion of praxis that comes across in his writings is one that entails an

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[11] Mayo 36.

absolute fusion between education and the world of production...he revealed a fascination of forms of art that stressed the relationship between human beings and industry"[12]. Although the "production" that Mayo refers to is more akin to factory production, the film/video production techniques that I helped impart to the youth that I worked with speak to the same fusion of art, education and practical skills that Gramsci addresses. The skills developed in the workshops allowed the youth to "talk-back" to the typically mono-directional media (TV, film, newspaper or otherwise), by providing them with an outlet to raise critical questions and even some solutions of their own.

Due to their idealism and the broad social changes that they envision, both Freire and Gramsci have been subject to criticisms about their theories on education. Freire, who is highly theoretical in much of *Pedagogy*, has been accused of not being practical enough to be applied in the real world. Liam Kane, in *Popular Education and Social Change in Latin America* explains how some of Freire's critics have claimed that, "teachers are just ordinary people (not the ideal envisaged by Freire) who often struggle to promote dialogue in groups". He goes on to state how, "in most cases [Freirian efforts] oppose encouraging action against the real oppressors as this can lead to depression and an increased sense of powerlessness, if it is not successful, or, indeed repression, if the action is taken at a tactically inopportune moment"[13]. By using the appropriate and even inspiring didactic tools, my project demonstrates that fostering dialogue is not entirely involved with the "ideal teacher" standing at the front of a class. It is about finding ways to relate to participants with materials that are of interest to them. Moreover, as my project also demonstrates, having the youth create

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[12] Mayo 52-53.

[13] Liam Kane, Popular Education and Social Change in Latin America (London: Latin America Bureau, 2001) 49-50.

something as the culmination of the process provides them with a profound sense of achievement. Although they may not completely topple the oppressor-oppressed relationship or counter hegemonic flows with their videos, they are taking the important first steps in a long-term personal and community-based project.

Gramsci's critics fall on the opposite end of the spectrum of Freire's, in that some have labeled his views on education reform as being too conservative. Harold Entwistle, cited in E.D Hirsch Jr's *Reality's Revenge: Research and Ideology*, draws a direct comparison between Freire and Gramsci and criticizes the latter when he states the following:

> Like other educational progressivists, Freire rejected traditional teaching methods and subject matters...He called for a change of both methods and content — new content that would celebrate the culture of the oppressed, and new methods that would encourage intellectual independence and resistance...Gramsci took the opposite view. He held that political progressivism demanded educational conservatism. The oppressed should be taught to master the tools of power and authority[14].

Perhaps somewhat overstated in the perception that Gramsci only sought to teach power and authority, the focus that Gramsci gives to technical skills may lead some to question his revolutionary vision. Believing that Gramsci may be unfairly criticized for being too conservative, Morrow and Torres suggest in *Gramsci and Popular Education in Latin America: From Revolution to Democratic Transition* that Gramsci's "Common" or "Creative" school, though potentially effective, "needs to be supplemented with a more critical conception of the technical "knowledge"[15]. This is precisely the mindset I went into my fieldwork with — technical skills, though certainly of value, must necessarily be preceded by the development of critical skills. In this

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14 E.D Hirsch Jr., "Reality's Revenge: Research and Ideology," Arts Education Policy Review 99 (1999): 3.

15 Raymond A. Morrow and Carlos Alberto Torres, "Gramsci and Popular Education in Latin America: From Revolution to Democratic Transition," International Journal of Education and Development 21 (2001): 340.

respect, my project seeks to bridge the gap between Freire's apparent lack of method and Gramsci's apparent lack of critical foundation.

4.2 Participatory Video

Having situated the two phases of my fieldwork (a critical and an applied phase) within the work of two critical educational theorists, it is necessary to now place this work within the context of Participatory Video research. The first and most obvious place to begin this is by considering my work in light of Don Snowden and Colin Low's "Fogo Process". Snowden and Low in many ways laid the groundwork for the PV field that would evolve in the decades after them, primarily in development work in the global-south. The reason that the Fogo Process has been continually researched and implemented is primarily due to the fact that the original incarnation was successful in achieving a degree of positive social change.

In 1967, the people of Fogo Island in Newfoundland, Canada were faced with the harsh reality of a majority of citizens living below the poverty line and 60% of the population depending on welfare to survive[16]. In addition, due to the growing obsolescence of the fisheries industry, the community was also facing the very real prospect of being resettled to mainland Newfoundland. Unfortunately for the people of Fogo, they were not given a say in how poverty was affecting their community nor were they directly consulted about the proposed resettlement.

It was with this situation in mind, that Colin Low, part of the National Film Board of Canada's social change project *Challenge for Change*, visited Fogo Island in 1967 with the hope of making a documentary about the impoverished community. Upon his arrival Low teamed up with Don Snowden, a professor at Memorial University of

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[16] Stephen Crocker, "The *Fogo Process*: Participatory Communication in a Globalizing World," <u>Participatory Video</u>, ed. Shirley A. White (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003) 128.

Newfoundland. Snowden had been angered by a 1965 Economic Council of Canada report that discussed poverty in the country as though it were uniform, or strictly exhibited urban characteristics. In order to reverse such thinking, Snowden had planned on making a series of films about poverty in rural Newfoundland to combat what he referred to as a, "poverty of information and organization"[17]. Thus, when Low announced he was coming to Newfoundland to work on his *Challenge for Change* project, the two immediately started working together. What began to emerge from the partnership was not a filmmaking project in the traditional documentary sense, as the process transformed into a pioneering project in PV.

Although the people of Fogo were not directly involved in the physical shooting of the documentaries that arose out of Snowden and Low's collaboration (28 films produced in total), the reception and feedback from the community were central to what today is known as the "Fogo Process". After the films had been processed and edited, they were brought back to Fogo Island and shown as part of a series of community screenings. Members of the community who saw themselves and their friends on film for the first time were mesmerized by the screenings and the discussions that took place after the screenings were no less empowering. H. Anthony Williamson in *The Fogo Process: Development Support Communications in Canada and the Developing World* explains that through the screenings, "many saw for the first time that they in fact had knowledge, skills, strengths, and a lifestyle which were of value...individuals seeing themselves in the films experienced an increase in self-confidence not only in the value of their own lives, but in their power

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[17] Crocker 126.

to express themselves and to do something about them"[18]. And do something they did, as the community began to organize and resist the proposed resettlement. Once everyone realized that they were all in a similar position (due to the traveling film screenings, similar to Agitprop of Soviet fame) members of the community became more inclined to work together for positive social change that would benefit everyone.

Eventually the Fogo films were sent to the government of Canada and were also well received there. In fact, the Minister of Fisheries also sent back a video response to the people of Fogo and the "feedback loop", that became a hallmark of the Fogo Process, was in place[19]. The people of Fogo eventually did resist resettlement and went on to form their own fisheries cooperative. How much the films helped in this process is uncertain, but they certainly opened channels of communication that had not previously existed.

In this respect, it is the "channel opening" that relates most to my project. The community screening that occurred at the end of my fieldwork, involved both the youth video-makers and members of the greater "Jungle" community. My intention with the screening was to have the community comment on the videos and to create a dialogue on the issues raised (the main issue raised being a proposed revitalization for "Jungle", similar to that taking place in Regent Park). Furthermore, the website that I have created (www.whatisjungle.org) to be an online home for the videos will allow this debate to continue, by welcoming more videos and comments about issues from within the community. All of this is very much in the tradition of the Fogo Process.

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[18] H. Anthony Williamson, "The Fogo Process: Development Support Communications in Canada and the Developing World," Communication in Development. ed. Fred L. Casmir (New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corp., 1991) 272-273.
[19] Crocker 128.

One area where my work and that of Snowden and Low's does differ is in the amount of user involvement throughout the process. Although Snowden and Low did involve the people of Fogo in their process, they did not hand over the camera and other video-making tools to them, as I did with the youth I worked with. Although the reason for this is likely due to the technical limitations of video-technology that Snowden and Low faced at the time, the fact that I was able to hand over the production process to the youth entirely, further demonstrates the ways in which my fieldwork sought to challenge a banking style of education. The youth in the class were not the "subjects" of the documentaries (although some did speak on camera), they were very much actors in the entire process.

In his essay *Eyes See; Ears Hear*, Snowden comments on interactive education by stating, "exchange learning involves the interchange of information, ideas, techniques and knowledge through interactive as opposed to one-way communication"[20] (www.fao.org). This type of learning is clearly central to both Freire's *Pedagogy* (written several years after the Fogo Process) and continues to live on today as one of the primary tenets of PV.

Also in relation to *Pedagogy* and my fieldwork, is how Snowden and Low attempted to breakdown the student-teacher divide. By working directly with the residents of Fogo to identify issues that were central to their lives (as opposed to what outsiders might identify) Snowden and Low were able to breakdown the teacher-student divide and create an experience that was enlightening and eventually effective for both parties. Snowden states the following of the Process:

> In this form of learning teachers become learner/teachers and those who are traditionally regarded as learners become teachers as well. This process enables the exchange of views, opinions, information and knowledge with a

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[20] Don Snowden, "Eyes See; Ears Hear," <u>Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)</u> (July 1999) n. pag. Web. <http://www.fao.org/waicent/faoinfo/sustdev/cddirect/cdre0038.htm>.

specific objective in mind, such as improving understanding, creating group consensus, and pointing ways to effective actions[21].

This statement speaks both to Freire's vision, and to the goals of informed interaction that is critical in overcoming all types of oppression. It also reflects the nature of my fieldwork in how I was able to learn from the youth about their community, the youth were able to learn about video-production from me and the entire community was able to learn about issues from a youth perspective during our community screening.

A more contemporary practitioner of PV, and someone who speaks more to the method I applied during the production phase of my fieldwork, is British academic David Gauntlett. The "video methodology" that Gauntlett outlines in *Video Critical: Children, the Environment and Media Power* is in large part a response to the weaknesses of traditional media effects research. Gauntlett outlines his problems with traditional effects studies as follows:

> Beyond bald assertions that particular kinds of effects *will* be produced by the media, supported by perhaps the notion that particular actions are 'glamourised', the media effects hypothesis has nothing to draw on apart from its empirical claims. Simply put, the thesis makes little sense, and without decent evidence to contradict this, the basic effects model has little justification. Very difficult and fundamental questions, about how merely seeing an activity in the media would be translated into an actual *motive* which would prompt an individual to behave in a particular way, are wholly unresolved, and are generally not even addressed[22].

Essentially what Gauntlett argues, particularly in the case of children, is that it is not as easy as stating that what people see on television will cause them to act in a similar way. For a better understanding of how youth react to and understand media images, they need to be given a chance to utilize that same media to express themselves. This is where Gauntlett's video methodology comes into play.

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[21] Snowden <http://www.fao.org/waicent/faoinfo/sustdev/cddirect/cdre0038.htm>.

[22] David Gauntlett, <u>Video Critical: Children, the Environment and Media Power</u> (London: University of Luton Press, 1996) 8.

Gauntlett explains that, "these non-adults are treated sympathetically, as victims — they know not what they do — but are simultaneously disempowered from having any participation in the discourses about themselves"[23]. In order to overcome this non-participation by non-adults, Gauntlett worked with several groups of children, aged 7-11, across working-class sectors of Leeds, England and provided them with the tools to help them create their own videos on the subject of the environment. By working *with* children, as opposed to simply documenting children, Gauntlett attempts to break down the student-teacher divide. This strategy makes it more likely that an assessment about youth's critical capacity is based not on questionnaires and numbers, but on real-world experiences.

Gauntlett went to seven different schools across Leeds and at each school worked with a group of 7-8 children, randomly selected (he avoided selecting "gifted" children) over the course of 5-6 weeks. In the first week, Gauntlett introduced himself to the youth, led several discussions about what the youth knew about environmental issues and what their level of concern about these issues were. The remaining weeks were used for teaching the youth how to use the camera equipment (which Gauntlett points out was picked up very quickly) followed by the actual production of the videos. Upon completion, Gauntlett found that even for this relatively young age group, there was a high degree of aptitude when it came to grasping the basic skills and being creative with the video-technology. Gauntlett makes the following observations of his method:

> The video-making process gave the children a voice not only to provide considered answers, but to set their own questions. They were even able to use the persuasive vehicles of humour and satire to make their points...In terms of media literacy alone, the method gave children a unique key with which to break apart traditional

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[23] Gauntlett 3.

expectations, and demonstrate their wit and discrimination in media use[24].

With these child-produced videos in hand, Gauntlett was able to make a nuanced examination of the critical capacity of youth that broke away from the traditional quantitative methodologies.

Reflecting on these traditional research methodologies, Gauntlett writes that, "whilst effects studies have traditionally based their approaches on a 'seek and you shall find' model, the video project researcher celebrates their own inability to predict what will happen — a 'risk' worth taking"[25].

Although effective, there is one crucial gap in Gauntlett's work, that my fieldwork sought to address — a critical foundation. Gauntlett's video methodology fails to provide the youth he works with with the proper critical skills prior to providing them with the technical skills. Yet Gauntlett criticizes the youth's videos for not looking past what individuals can do to help the environment. He explains that this view echoes the sentiments consistently expressed by the mainstream media; that if we all sacrifice a little in our own lives, we could help save the environment. Although he commends the children for noting the changes they could make in their own lives, he goes on to state that, "this was not tied to a parallel need for eco-unfriendly *institutions* to mend their ways in a similar fashion, nor even much of a recognition that such institutions may be a bigger problem than the ecologically lax acts of individuals"[26]. A "problem-posing" education prior to the production phase may have raised such issues and allowed the youth to make a more nuanced set of videos and is indeed the critical skill set I was aiming for as part of my process.

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[24] Gauntlett 9.

[25] Gauntlett 93.

[26] Gauntlett 142.

It is on this previous point that I am situating my work in relation to Gauntlett. Although his video methodology does allow for youth to "talk-back" to the media in a creative way (a goal that I share), it is not enough to simply hand over the technology to the youth without first providing a critical framework. Had Gauntlett spent more time on a discussion of the issues instead of devoting the bulk of the time to production, the youth would have had time and opportunity to more fully consider other issues affecting the environment — who is truly at fault and how big institutions (i.e. government and industry) can and should be playing more of a role in fixing the problems in addition to what individuals can and should do.

5   METHODOLOGY

The summer documentary program that I created at LOVE was a six-week program that was divided into three, two-week sections. I met with the youth twice a week, for four hours each day, over the six weeks. The first stage or Phase One involved the in-class "critical pedagogy" aspect of the process where the youth were encouraged to speak openly and honestly about themselves and their communities. Phase Two was the field work/production stage where the youth went out into the chosen community (Lawrence Heights a.k.a. "Jungle") to do a series of interviews and collect various shots of the neighbourhood. The final stage involved the editing process that culminated with the youth using Final Cut Pro to put together their documentaries. Following the completion of the films, a public screening of the films in "Jungle" occured where the youth were able to speak freely about their experiences in making the videos as well as answer questions from those in attendance about their videos.

5.1 Phase One – Popular Education

Entering the program the first section was the one I was most unsure of; leading this type of critical discussion and how to go about putting it in place were completely uncharted territories for me. Having a knowledge of the ideas of Paulo Freire is one thing, but implementing them is clearly another. Just how can one begin to breakdown the student-teacher divide? The staff at LOVE were very accommodating and let me do what I needed to do to find answers to this and the other questions I was investigating.

The program began on June 30, 2009 when twelve youth from Lawrence Heights and surrounding communities came in for our first meeting. The group at this point consisted of eleven girls and one boy. The group was ethnically diverse; the youth themselves or their parents were born in a variety of countries including India, Jamaica, China and Kenya.

During this first encounter I tried a series of "ice-breakers" that were intended to help the youth to become more open and learn more about each other. As the program progressed, the ice-breakers came to take on a role similar to the "problem-posing" techniques as outlined by Freire. One example of an ice-breaker that was used throughout the program was called "the football". In this activity, a football covered with a variety of questions, including such things as "one thing no one knows about me", or "what could I do to make my community a better place", was tossed around the room with everyone taking a turn. Much like a real football game, however, each participant had the option to pass the ball or hand it off if he or she did not feel comfortable sharing.

After the ice-breakers on the first day, I began a discussion on oppression to see what youth understood about the term and to try and get them to see that each

of us have an oppressor and oppressed within. When asked in our talking circle what each thought the term oppression meant, a variety of answers were given. Some youth provided examples of oppressive events or situations, including the Holocaust, slavery and a variety of women's issues. Of course because of the age range in the group, some youth were not able to give a clear definition or example of the term and one youth even confused the term with depression. Not wanting to push the discussion too much on the first day, I ended the talk with what I felt was an appropriate dictionary definition of the term, which was, "prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or control".

With this definition and our discussion in mind, I screened a portion of the 1983 NFB film *Home Feeling: Struggle for a Community*[27]. The film is about the Jane and Finch community in Toronto and raised many of the issues I planned to discuss throughout the program, including community activism, police involvement, ghettoization and poverty. Remarkably, the 27 year old film has held up quite well with many of the issues raised still being relevant today. Unfortunately, the film did not hold the attention of several of the youth so the decision was made to stop the film about half way through.

Attempting to learn from the *Home Feeling* screening, during our second meeting I decided to show a much more popular and recent film and one that I hoped would demonstrate some fundamentals about putting together a documentary. The film was Michael Moore's 2002 Oscar winning documentary *Bowling for Columbine*[28]. Once again, this film demonstrated many of the issues that I hoped would become central in our class discussions, including violence, guns and the media.

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[27] Home Feeling: Struggle For a Community, dir. Jennifer Hodge and Roger McTair, Video, NFB, 1983.
[28] Bowling For Columbine, dir. Michael Moore, perf. Marilyn Manson, DVD, Alliance Atlantis, 2002.

Prior to showing the film, we did several ice-breakers that involved community, and how each youth felt they saw themselves within their own community. First, each youth drew what their communities look like (including schools, hangouts and "trouble" areas), and where in the diagram they exist in relation to the issues identified. Second, each youth wrote a list of terms commonly used to describe their community and then a second list using words commonly used to describe themselves. After the two lists were completed, the youth were to circle all terms that were common between both lists and then share the results with the group. The goal here was to get the youth to start thinking about how communities come to take on the reputations they gain and how people in these communities come to reflect the characteristics of where they live (for better or worse).

After this activity we began the film and I prefaced it by asking everyone to keep in mind the issues that Moore raises in the film and the stance he takes on each of these issues. By asking this I was hoping to get the youth to understand that documentaries, although purporting to be truth, are still made from someone's particular point of view and shouldn't necessarily be assumed to be completely factual. During the film several of the youth once again began to tune out and become distracted. Although I felt the film was much more entertaining and humourous than the previous day's film, it appears that many of the youth couldn't connect to what was happening and did not grasp the tremendous amount of sarcasm and wit that Moore utilizes. However, the youth did see enough to grasp some basic documentary fundamentals, which would be discussed during the following meeting.

The third meeting began with a very effective ice-breaker called "timeline". What this involved was having each youth create a timeline that ended with each of them

arriving at LOVE. The goal was to show what events led each youth to come to LOVE and why these events were important. The experiences shared here were quite revealing, as many youth recounted some very intimate stories about violence in their lives, including experiences with friends and family. One girl shared a story of when she was shunned by many of her close friends during the SARS outbreak because her parents are from China. Others shared stories of both bullying and being bullied. It was rewarding to see that, consciously or not, the youth were beginning to share stories of oppression.

Following this revealing discussion, we moved on to a more formal discussion about documentary techniques and what to look for when watching and subsequently creating your own documentary. I identified six key points for understanding a documentary, including:

1.   What is/are the issue(s)?
2.   What position is taken on the issue(s)?
3.   What is the goal of the film?
4.   Who are the main characters?
5.   What is the main action of the film?
6.   How is editing used to create meaning?

I used these six points to talk about *Bowling for Columbine* and many of the youth could identify at least one issue raised in the film and what they felt was Moore's take on that issue (i.e. gun control and the idea that Moore believes in enhanced control laws in the US).

We finished the class by brainstorming a list of ideas/issues that could be used as the basis for our own documentaries. Many good ideas were raised, including family, violence, youth, and gangs. I could tell that the youth were beginning to understand and get excited about what I was hoping could be achieved during this

program, however this excitement was taken to a whole new level during our next meeting, which was a field trip to the National Film Board of Canada (NFB).

At the NFB, the youth and I screened a Canadian documentary entitled *Invisible City* by Toronto based filmmaker Hubert Davis. The film follows two young boys over a two-year period as they grow up in Toronto's Regent Park. Following the film we had a discussion about the issues raised by the filmmaker and how the youth connected with it. This was a very engaging, and at times intense, discussion as several of the youth had family or friends who had or continue to live in Regent Park. Moreover, some of the youth had also spent time with one of the main characters of the film, an educator named Ainsworth Morgan. The film also inspired several youth to relate the issues of violence and gang involvement back to their own communities.

During our next meeting, the final of phase one of this process, the youth continued to share their thoughts on the film and to identify the issues that the film raised. The main issue we discussed was family and particularly how families function with one parent. The lack of fathers in general was a bit of a sore spot for many in the group. Based on this discussion, we continued to add to our growing list of topics for our group documentaries.

In the second half of this class I gave a brief talk on story-boarding in order to get the youth to begin to think how they might want to structure their documentaries. Divided into three groups, each team had varied success with the activity. It seemed that each group knew how to accurately identify an issue that might be used to create a documentary and how to visually represent it (using pictures from magazines) however the narrative structure (i.e. having a solid beginning, middle and end point) was somewhat lacking and for those who did have one, it seemed to mimic that of

Invisible City's. Each team did seem excited about the following week when they would begin to use cameras and begin filming their own documentaries.

5.2   Phase Two – Production

Because of LOVE's location, our time constraints and the connections many of the youth had to the area, the decision was made by consensus to focus the group's documentaries on "Jungle". This small public-housing community is afflicted with many of the same social issues facing another notorious Toronto neighbourhood, Regent Park. Because of these issues, in 2005 "Jungle" was classified by the city of Toronto as one of thirteen "priority neighbourhoods" throughout the Greater Toronto Area[29]. Also, as we would soon come to learn in our production phase, "Jungle" is now slated for the same revitalization currently taking place in Regent Park.

Before beginning our foray into "Jungle", we first did an ice-breaker called "paper-bag movie". The objective here was to give each youth a chance to be interviewed, be the interviewee and be the camera-person in order to see which youth felt comfortable with which positions and also to give them a chance to learn basic camera functions. This activity was very successful and upon completion we divided the youth into groups based on who would perform the roles of camera-person, interviewer and director.

After this activity, I tried to give each group some structure so that they knew what they should be filming in order to put together their final movie. The key elements I identified included:

1.   3-5mins of interview footage (i.e. 1-2 interviews with different people)
2.   3-5mins of B-Roll (i.e. random footage of the neighbourhood, kids playing, establishing shots, etc)
3.   3-5mins of action (i.e. community/social workers working with youth, parents

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[29] "Building Strong Neighbourhoods" <u>United Way Toronto</u>: n. pag. Web.
<http://www.unitedwaytoronto.com/whatWeDo/neighbourhoods.php>

speaking to children, etc)

4.   3-5mins of "found footage) (i.e. YouTube clips of news footage or archival footage about the community or issue in question)

Although each group had an idea of what issue in "Jungle" they would be examining, I assured them it was all right not to know completely, because often documentaries don't take shape until the editing process begins.

As a group, we made our first trip to "Jungle" to begin looking for good B-Roll material and to try and find some community residents who might be willing to speak on camera. The only boy in our group, a resident of "Jungle", led the group for most of the afternoon. I thought it would be a good idea to head to what I thought was the main park of the community based on looking at a Google map. However the young boy said that this park wasn't actually a part of "Jungle" it was what he referred to as "Jew-ville". He said "Jew-ville" was the more affluent surrounding area and that kids from "Jungle" would come there to steal basketballs and bikes amongst other things. Unwittingly, the young boy had just described the division of the public housing community from the greater community area that I had read about only days prior[30].

Once we entered "Jungle" (which appears to be accessible only by one winding street and several catwalks) it was indeed as though we had entered a different world. As soon as we crossed through the catwalk, the setting was very run down, people seemed to have a distrust of outsiders and there was little semblance of outdoor activity. Despite this eerie atmosphere, there was still some impression of a "community" — painted street poles with positive messages, as well as a park bench with similarly uplifting words.

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[30] In addition, the youth had also reproduced the perception that all Jewish people are wealthy

I was hoping to split up into groups at this point and wander the area, however, the young boy advised how that might not be the best idea, so we staggered our three groups, one ahead of each other.

Many of the youth were shy to approach strangers with cameras, so I attempted to do the approaching when we saw a mother and son walking towards us. The mother was very adamant that her son be interviewed, but he refused because he said he had been in trouble with the police before. After this encounter, much of the group was feeling down on our luck and we realized that we wouldn't be able to get any interviews after all.

At this time, we passed a house just on the other side of a catwalk that looked directly into "Jungle". The owners of this house were an older Caucasian couple that were willing to be interviewed, but not have their faces on camera. The youth got very excited and were all crowded around the couple asking the questions they had prepared. During the interview the woman explained how she and her family had lived in the house for several decades and had seen "Jungle" become what it is today. She discussed the issues and violence in the area as though it were miles away, yet in reality it was no more than 50 feet.

Prior to meeting with the youth on the following day, I realized that because of the hesitation the majority of the community had to speaking on camera I was going to need to take a more proactive role in helping the youth find their interview subjects. I started calling some of the community centres in "Jungle" and eventually spoke to a man named Awale Jama who worked at a division of Frontier College inside the "Jungle" community. Awale agreed to let the youth come by the centre and assured me that people there would feel more comfortable talking to cameras because it would be a known environment and less intrusive than a group of

strangers walking around with cameras. This meeting would take place the following week. In the meantime, we went to several other community centres, community health centres and libraries in the area so that the youth could continue working on their interviewing and research skills.

In addition to these interviews with community and social workers, I also encouraged the youth to interview each other and to take the cameras home to interview their friends and family on what life is like in "Jungle". After watching the footage over the subsequent days, I saw that the youth were really starting to grasp just what types of questions were necessary in order to get at the heart of an issue. Some typical questions used were "what does family look like in "Jungle"?", "how would you make "Jungle" a better place?", and "how do you see "Jungle" changing in the next five years?". By asking these questions and doing our research we soon discovered the revitalization that was set to begin in "Jungle". This topic of revitalization quickly became a central issue for all three groups.

On our last day of filming we went to see Awale at his community centre. Awale, as well as a community resident/community activist of almost forty years named Eva Tavares, both spoke on camera and gave in-depth and informative answers to the youth's questions. Awale also took us on another tour of "Jungle" where we were able capture some more useful B-Roll material. After this final outing to "Jungle" it was now time for the youth to enter the final phase of the program and start editing their work into short documentaries.

5.3 Phase Three – Post-Production and Final Screening

For the post-production work, I debated between the more beginner program iMovie or the more advanced and professional software Final Cut Pro. I was confident in the youth's ability to learn the latter software and they quickly proved me

right. Within only a few short hours the youth were going through all of their tapes and successfully logging, capturing and digitally organizing all of their shoot footage.

Over the next two weeks the youth continued to work tirelessly on organizing and then editing their footage. What started as three groups had became two at this stage, as several youth dropped out towards the end of the program for various reasons. This actually worked out quite well because space, computers and hard-drives were all limited. Of the two groups, one consisted of several of the older youth in the class and the other included the younger half.

Although the final products were perhaps not the fully developed documentaries that I had originally envisioned, they turned out to be quite successful examples of the way that young people see community and the issues present in a given community. Not surprisingly, the older youth created a more nuanced documentary that included an intelligent discussion on revitalization, the appearance versus reality of so-called "at-risk" communities as well as a "word-play" which included asking interviewees to recite the first word that came to mind when told a series of words, including "Jungle", violence, community and youth[31].

The younger group, although not working at the same level as the other group, did manage to create an informative documentary that attempted to show where the name "Jungle" originated as well as demonstrating the differences in how "Jungle" and non-"Jungle" residents view the area[32]. Much of the B-Roll and photographs that the youth took were used and laid overtop of the interviews, to create very professional looking pieces.

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[31] What is Jungle?, dir. Cindy Tan, perf. Eva Tavares, Video, LOVE, 2009.
[32] A Lost Community!, dir. Seantae Nicholls, perf. Paulos Gebreyesus, Video, LOVE, 2009.

The final component of the program was to hold a community screening of the films in "Jungle". This event took place on September 3, 2009, at the Lawrence Heights, Barbara Frum Toronto Public Library. The idea behind this screening was to give the videos a chance to do what they were meant to do — raise awareness, create dialogue and hopefully lead to positive change as a community, as well showcase how the youth of their community observe and interpret a variety of issues.

The event was open to all residents of the area as well as the participants of the films, the youth and their parents. A representative of the local MP, Joe Volpe, was also in attendance.

At the conclusion of the screenings, the youth all gathered at the front and were asked a variety of questions from the audience, ranging from the revitalization, the choice of interview subjects and what they think the future holds. There were a few moments in which I felt I might have to step in and field a few questions, but in the end the youth were able to at least provide some answers to all the questions asked.

The dialogue that was fostered at this event can now hopefully be carried forward by a similar discussion of the two videos on the website I have produced for this project (www.whatisjungle.org) and that might also be home to similar discussions on other videos that are produced by the youth of the "Jungle" community.

6 EPILOGUE

Since the completion and screening of the two youth documentaries, there has been an on-going dialogue between myself, LOVE and several of the community residents/activists who participated in the youth's videos. Although many of those who attended the screening in September 2009 provided positive feedback about the films, there was still the sense that because the project was initiated by an outsider

(myself, via LOVE) the videos were not entirely reflective of the attitudes of all "Jungle" residents. Aiming to rectify this, Eva Tavares (featured in both youth's videos) contacted LOVE and myself to say that, inspired by the youth videos, she and her community centre would like to make another documentary about "Jungle", initiated by community residents, with our help (I am now a part-time employee at LOVE).

Hoping to begin recruitment of members of the "Jungle" community to help work on this new and longer documentary, I attended a community dinner in January 2010 at the Lawrence Heights Community Centre and once again presented the youth's videos to the community members who attended. A lively discussion followed the screening where many in attendance provided their own thoughts on the origins of the name "Jungle" and voiced a number of concerns they have about revitalization in general. One resident commented that they are rarely asked their thoughts on the upcoming revitalization or their neighbourhood in general and typically only hear about their community in a negative light.

Another important factor in the need to create another documentary at the grassroots level is the fact that at the end of February 2010, the city of Toronto revealed the details of the much discussed revitalization plan. Set to begin in early 2011, the plans are massive, to say the least. The proposed revitalization would include the demolition of all existing public housing units, the renovation of the two bordering subway stations and alterations to the Allen Expressway that currently disects the community[33].

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[33] Denise Balkissoon, "Plan to Re-Create Lawrence Heights Unveiled." <u>Toronto Star</u> 25 Feb. 2010: n. pag. Web. <http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/article/771584--plan-to-re-create-lawrence-heights-unveiled>

As was noted at the January 2010 dinner I attended, the most pressing concern people have about the revitalization is where will they live while the construction involved with the revitalization is occurring and what type of neighbourhood and home will they be returning to when the revitalization is complete. These are all questions that Eva, and the community residents involved with the upcoming documentary project, aim to answer.

Working under the name *The Lawrence Heights Residents Culture and Arts Group* (LHR-CAG) the LOVE and Lawrence Heights partnership now has preliminary funding in place from the Toronto Arts Council and the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) for a feature length documentary made by and for residents of the community. Production of this documentary is set to begin this coming 2010 summer.

7 CONCLUSION

Any work that involves working with real people in the real world with the goal being to create social change, should never be seen as being complete. Should a measurable degree of social change be realized due in part to the work of an academic, filmmaker, teacher or social worker it should only indicate that work must continue at an even greater pace.

Social change is, or at least should be seen as, a dialectical process. What one generation or group of people sees as progress can be completely different from what another envisions. Thus, change has no single end result and therefore work must continually be built on other successful endeavours. Change is new people, new goals and new strategies — all of them being right and wrong at any given point in history.

My modest bit of research is thus only one step towards imagining how to create tomorrow's generation of leaders and civically engaged citizens. Given my background in political studies, film studies and television production, I have contributed what I know the most about and can pass on to today's youth. Participatory education and video are both great resources to help engage youth, but they are by no means the only ones. Once any process is demystified and is introduced to a group of people (with a critical framework, of course) the results can be astounding.

And the results are not even the most important part of the participatory practice. Indeed what mattered most at the end of my time with the youth from Lawrence Heights was the process itself. The process of thinking critically about oneself and one's community; the process of learning to ask critical questions others in your community; and the process of putting both of these together into a visual narrative. All the youth who participated were thrilled with the final result of their work, but what they were most satisfied with was that they simply were able to participate in a process that had previously been entirely foreign to them.

Imagine for a moment a world of participatory youth engineers, architects, urban planners, farmers, computer programmers and so on. Critically engaging youth early in their lives and introducing a wide variety of critical-practical skills of communication, which they are often told are the only the domain of "professional adults", will inevitably lead to a more educated and engaged population. Should this occur, the final and most important participatory act of them all may also increase — democracy.

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