

**ALTERNATIVES THROUGH VIDEO**

Video as a Tool for Popular Education Among Appalachian Young People

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## INTRODUCTION

My first exposure to the concept of popular education came while I was working for a volunteer home repair organization in eastern Kentucky. I found myself extremely uncomfortable with the power dynamics inherent in programs which bring outside volunteers into poor Appalachian communities. After spending three years doing just that, I read Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed and found it to speak directly to many of the issues with which I was struggling.

That summer marked the beginning of a period of reflection during which I left Appalachia to attend seminary. In the course of my theological studies I continued to reflect upon, explore and expand my understanding of social change.

I was able to test my theories against reality when I spent two years in the Philippines working with community organizers whose ultimate goal was to bring about social revolution. In 1986 I returned to Appalachia with a commitment to working with the young people who actually *lived* in poor communities to help them to do something about their own situation.

Over the next six years I experimented with various models for raising consciousness and leading young people to action. My work kept leading me back to Paulo Freire. This paper is an attempt to reflect upon the work that I undertook with Appalachian young people within the context of the theory upon which it was based.

**PART I**  
**POPULAR EDUCATION -- FREIRE STYLE**

**Reality**

Paulo Freire was born and raised in Recife, Brazil, one of the most extreme areas of poverty and underdevelopment in the Third World. Although he came from a middle-class family, he experienced the poverty and hunger around him first-hand during the depression of 1929. When the listlessness of hunger caused him to fall two years behind in school, many of his teachers diagnosed him as mentally retarded. These experiences affected him deeply and at the age of eleven he swore that he would dedicate his life to the struggle against hunger.

True to his vow, he attended law school to become a labor-union lawyer among his country people in the slums. It was in the course of his work there that literacy training became one of his major interests; and over a twelve year period he developed a critique of traditional methods used for literacy education.

In the early sixties Freire became involved with the Popular Culture Movement (PCM) while teaching history and philosophy of education at the University of Recife. Dominated by students, the Popular Culture

Movement was an attempt to reform and democratize Brazilian culture by raising class-consciousness and increasing the popular vote. One of PCM's strategies was to facilitate dialogue on themes such as nationalism, development and literacy, often employing visual aids to dramatize the issues under discussion. Freire decided to experiment with using the same type methods to do literacy training. Since only literates were allowed to participate in elections, literacy education was central to all efforts towards reform in Brazil; and when a friend of Freire's became Minister of Education, Freire was appointed to direct a national literacy campaign based on his initial experiments. The plan was to establish 20,000 discussion groups who would meet for a three month period with 30 participants each. In this way 20 million Brazilians could be taught to read. Cuba, which had almost eliminated illiteracy through a national campaign of their own, provided the model for the program.

At the time, Freire was a liberal educator interested in the democratization of Brazilian society through social and political reform. However, Freire was almost immediately accused of promoting revolution by the spreading of subversive ideas through his method. The subsequent exile of himself, his wife and five children from their homeland may have moved him to the more revolutionary point of view found in his writings. Freire and his family took refuge in Chile, where he finished his account of the literacy method used in Brazil, Educacao como Pratica da Liberdade. While there he also directed a national literacy program that won an UNESCO award for successfully eliminating illiteracy among the Chilean adult population.

Eventually Freire moved to the United States and then to Geneva, Switzerland where he established the Institute of Cultural Action and continued to write and speak extensively about his theory of empowering pedagogy for liberation and transformation (Elias 12-18; Collins 5-24).

## **Theory**

### **What is popular education?**

**Banking method** In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire begins with the premise that no education is neutral or value-free. The process of education either serves to maintain the status quo by teaching the values, and thereby protecting the interests, of the ruling class; or it is designed to develop the power of thinking subjects to expel the myths created and perpetuated by the status quo and to create anew on their own behalf -- to liberate.

Freire asserts that traditional forms of education are of the first order. He describes traditional education as the 'banking method' in which students are seen as empty vessels to be filled with the knowledge and insights of the teacher or expert. In this approach there is little credence given to the experience, creativity or initiative of the student. In fact, manageability and passive acceptance are the primary traits rewarded.

Students are seen as objects who receive, rather than subjects who act or think for themselves.

**conscientizacao** Popular education, or *conscientizacao*, is of the second order. According to Freire, it is “the process by which people not as recipients, but as knowing subjects achieve a deepening awareness of both the socio-cultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality through action upon it” (Cultural Action for Freedom 27). John Elias defines it as the “total process of becoming aware of the concrete situation in which one lives, understanding how that situation came about, how it might be changed, and then acting to change it” (137).

Popular education is people learning -- about themselves, their peers, and their lives -- all within the immediate context of their communities, and their world. It is people learning through interaction -- interaction with their peers, their teachers and their surroundings. And it is people learning by doing -- then reflecting upon what they've done -- and then doing it again, only better. Popular education is the “critical intervention of the people in reality” (Freire Pedagogy 38).

### **Raising Critical Consciousness -- Individual Development**

Whereas banking education attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness, popular education strives for the emergence and raising of consciousness. According to Freire's theory, a woman's level of

consciousness is determined by her view of her existence in the social world and her ability to change it. Freire describes four levels of such awareness or consciousness -- intransitive, magical, naive and critical (Elias 134-37; Hope et al. 58-60).

**intransitive consciousness** Intransitive consciousness is found in societies where the only awareness is that of 'the present' and all energies are directed towards meeting biological needs for survival. Most societies today have moved beyond intransitive consciousness.

**magical consciousness** The concept of magical consciousness is more relevant to a discussion of Freire's methods. Magical consciousness is marked by a fatalistic, deterministic view of oneself and the world. Freire describes a "culture of silence" where "rather than being encouraged and equipped to respond to the concrete realities of their world, they (the poor) were kept submerged in a situation in which such critical awareness and response were practically impossible" (Pedagogy 11). Says Freire, it is not so much the condition of the poor that saddens him but their capacity to accept it. And so in a state of magical consciousness there is an unquestioning acceptance of one's lot in life as well as of the explanations of those in power as to why (e.g., the poor are lazy and therefore undeserving). These negative ascriptions are internalized and cause feelings of inferiority, lack of self-confidence and habits of submission leading to further self-depreciation. Ultimately, a woman with magical consciousness sees her socio-cultural situation as 'givens' and believes that forces beyond her control determine her reality.

**popular consciousness** When a woman begins to see reality as a problem and herself as part of solving it, she is developing what Freire terms 'naive' or 'popular' consciousness. She is becoming aware of herself as a force in the world with the ability to change and affect her own existence. This "breakthrough from passive apathy to initiative is considered by many the most crucial factor in the process of transformation" (Hope et al. 1: 40). She begins to see herself as having some control over her life and realizes that her socio-cultural situation is determined by people, not omniscient forces beyond human effect. However, she still looks for simple or 'magical' solutions and can be easily swayed or manipulated by propaganda and popular leadership. Often by identifying with a charismatic or popular leader she may come to feel that she herself is active and effective when in actuality she still has not taken full responsibility for her own situation.

**critical consciousness** Through a continuing process of action and reflection, or praxis, she is able to begin to understand the complexities of her situation and realizes that she is crucial to the process of both 'knowing' and 'acting.' She realizes and accepts her responsibility to determine her own socio-cultural situation -- her future -- and that of her community. She begins to display self-confidence and receptivity in discussions as well as the increased ability to reflect critically upon her own reality. She becomes aware that she is aware, and is then able to critically reflect upon that awareness. She has reached the level of awareness that Freire describes as critical consciousness.

### **Group Dialogue --Leadership Development**

“Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication” (Pedagogy 64). Another central tenet of Freire’s theory is the idea that coming to critical consciousness or ‘knowing’ is a social activity to be achieved in cooperation with other people through dialogue. And by dialogue Freire does not mean everyday conversation. Authentic dialogue requires commitment, humility, faith in the human vocation to become more fully human, mutual trust and hope. Authentic dialogue also requires a commitment to engage fully in critical thinking. Only through such authentic dialogue will a woman move to a committed involvement in the struggle for her own liberation.

### **Social Transformation -- Community Development**

Freire also states that to be authentic, dialogue must presuppose action -- action towards the transformation of ourselves and of society. By its very definition the process of *conscientizacao*, or “learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of our society”(Pedagogy 19), cannot be separated from political action. And, for Freire, ‘action’ means radical, liberating, transforming action which challenges and changes the existing structures of our society. To ‘know’ is to act, and to ‘act’ is to act for the good of

oneself and one's society, because, says Freire, "to affirm that humans are persons and as persons should be free and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality is a farce" (Pedagogy 35). Therefore, all education must be directed towards developing the power of thinking subjects to act on their own behalf. And, as Richard Schull points out in the introduction to Pedagogy of the Oppressed, "the development of an educational methodology that facilitates this process will inevitably lead to tension and conflict in our society.

### Action

#### As Implemented by Freire

The following is an account by an ex-priest who worked with Freire in adult education in South America of Freire's approach put into action:

Freire would go to a village and enter into conversation with people. He would ask them to help him to observe the village life. He would have them help him take pictures of scenes of village activities which were familiar and common to most villagers. The villagers would then come together to see the pictures. Freire would ask them to describe what they saw in detail, writing words under the pictures as they reflected on what they were seeing and feeling.

Then Freire would question the villagers about the contradictions in the explanations which they were giving about why things were the way they were. For example, in one village, the people described the harvest as being very

poor. Freire asked them “why?” Some of the villagers said: “Because the land is tired.” Freire then asked them why some of the land seemed to be very productive and other parts of the land seemed tired. They explained that the rich farmers had fertilizer and they didn’t. Freire then asked them how that was the case. The questions and answers continued, leading to issues related to their life situation. The topics discussed ranged from those which were primarily theological political or economic in nature to those which were basically philosophical in nature.

Frequently, villagers gave fatalistic answers. Freire would always come back to the contradictions which the people themselves had exposed. The people then began, as a result of this process, to think for themselves and to become aware of alternative ways of viewing and coping with what had seemed to be insurmountable problems for themselves and their communities.

In the process people learned to read, to care, and have a sense of worth. Freire called what happened to them *conscientizacao* (conscientization)(Farmer 1).

### **As Implemented by Adult Educators**

In addition to literacy education, Freire’s approach is relevant and applicable to the more general field of adult education. One such implementation of Freire’s approach is found in the Adult Learning Project (ALP) as described by Kirkwood and Kirkwood. The ALP developed a ten-stage process of adult learning leading from participatory research to curriculum design to community action.

The first step in the ALP process is called Secondary Source Investigation and is the gathering of statistics and background information about the community in which the educator/facilitators plan to initiate an

adult education program. The second step is called Primary Source Investigation and involves observing everyday life in the community and interacting with people in the course of their daily routine. The third step is to Find Co-investigators who are local people willing to become part of the research team and will then compare findings with the professional educators. Step four is to carry out Co-investigation in which the research team conducts interviews and identifies common themes emerging from the community interviews. Step five, Making Codifications, is the process during which the research group decides which are the most significant themes emerging from their study -- usually typical and problematic situations in community life -- and then create pictorial representations of those themes.

Step six is called Decoding and involves the rest of the community in describing what *they* see in the pictures, or codes, and then entering into dialogue about the content, relevance and implications of the codes. In step seven the professional and community researchers join together to develop a learning curriculum from the previous discussions. Step eight is to implement Learning Programs which are group dialogue sessions lasting eight to ten weeks. At each session a pictorial code is presented, followed by group reflection, a resource person then makes a presentation, which is followed by more dialogue. The hope is that either community or personal action will grow out of the dialogue sessions leading to step nine, Action Outcomes. New Investigation is initiated during step ten which begins the cycle all over again.

### **As Implemented by Others**

There have been numerous applications of Freire's thought by traditional educators, and many of the innovative approaches found in public schools today can be attributed to Freire. Moreover, many community organizers have translated the ideas and concepts introduced by Freire into workable models for individual and community development. For example, The DELTA program (Development Education and Leadership Teams in Action) combined Freire's theory with human relations and organizational development methodology to train over four hundred community leaders in Africa between 1974 and 1982, eventually reaching over 50,000 Kenyans (Hope et al. 1: 5).

The Highlander Folk Center in Appalachian Tennessee created its own concept of popular education in the 1930's, first to address the severe exploitation of Appalachian communities by coal companies, then to strengthen and integrate the southern labor movement, then to further the civil rights movement, and most recently, to train community organizers in poor Appalachian communities.

So it was with many models as resources that I began to collaborate with a number of Appalachian community groups and institutions to develop programs of popular education with young people in depressed Appalachian communities.

**PART II**  
**POPULAR EDUCATION -- ALTERNATIVES THROUGH**  
**VIDEO STYLE**

**Reality**

**-- in Appalachia**

For seven years I worked with young people in low income Appalachian communities, helping them to examine the needs in their communities and to develop their individual and collective ability to address those needs and effect positive change. During that time the situation, not only with young people but in all of Appalachia, only got worse.

According to statistics from the Appalachian Regional Commission, since 1980 two-thirds of Appalachia's counties have experienced economic decline because of high permanent unemployment not reflected in 'official' unemployment rates and loss of jobs. The poverty rate in Central Appalachia grew to nearly twice the national average. Fifteen Appalachian counties reached rates of child poverty higher than forty six percent (the highest in any American city) meaning that one-third to one- half of all preschool children in Central Appalachia live in poverty.

Approximately one-half of all West Virginian babies are born into poverty and neither a full-time minimum wage job nor public assistance will keep families out of it. One fourth of the children in Kentucky live in poverty as do two-fifths of all one-parent families. In Tennessee, twenty-six percent of the children are poor; fifty-five percent of female headed households with children under six live in poverty; and a family who receives both Aid to Families with Dependent Children and food stamps still has an income that is barely fifty-four percent of the poverty level.

Although each Appalachian community in which I worked had its peculiarities, there are a number of factors which were consistent from one to the other:

- high unemployment rate
- high drop-out rate
- high substance-abuse rate
- high suicide rate
- chronic poverty

**-- for Appalachian Young People**

During the same time-frame, the teenage pregnancy rate soared. The dropout rate for high school students in West Virginia reached twenty-five percent. Throughout the country young people turned increasingly to drugs and alcohol as a way out, and the situation in Appalachia was no different. Young people in Appalachian communities were told over and

over again, "there's no hope for you here; there's no future," and had every reason to believe it.

A fifteen year old Cherokee girl wrote:

One lonely night as I lay in bed I hear a door slam, and the sound of a woman cry. Suddenly I hear my mother's voice "help, help," it cries. I quickly run to her rescue. Then I scream as I see him hit her not only once but several times, once in the face and twice in the stomach. I scream once more as she falls to the floor. He turns and looks at me as I begin to run to the bedroom. I grab the gun and as soon as he walks through the door I pull the trigger. He falls to the floor with a crash . . .

Hers was a true story. Most young people with whom I worked came from low-income backgrounds and were from dysfunctional, abusive and/or alcoholic families. Some had been passed around within the system from institution to foster home back to institution. I worked with young adults who were mentally and physically handicapped; teenage single mothers; high school drop-outs, and young adults with drug and alcohol problems. Most of them had long ago been forgotten by the system and had very little contact with positive role models or healthy activities.

Overall the young people with whom I came into contact suffered from

- dysfunctional family backgrounds (many had spent the majority of their lives within the system)
- few if any caring and supportive adult relationships
- mental, physical and/or sexual abuse
- high risk of drug and alcohol abuse (many were already abusing)

- low self-esteem
- few if any opportunities to be exposed to people or ideas outside their immediate context
- few if any opportunities to reflect upon their personal lives and experience in a non-threatening, non-medical and yet potentially helpful setting
- very little if any opportunity to learn to function productively within a group
- no avenue to be heard within the larger community or even within their own living situation

It was within this context that I began to look at video technology as a tool for attracting, motivating and engaging young people in the process of popular education.

## **Theory**

### **Why Video?**

Popular education is not new to Appalachia. Neither is the use of video technology in community development work. The Highlander Center as well as other Appalachian organizers have used video technology as a tool for communication within and amongst disenfranchised communities for many years. John Gaventa likens the use of video in

Appalachia to Freire's method, "like Freire's use of written symbols in political education in Latin America, this use of electronic images in articulating, reflecting and connecting with others can become part of a 'conscientization' process among the powerless" (222). He also describes some of the power of video, "it can give a certain validity to the ideas and concerns being expressed, and give confidence to those expressing them" (222).

I found that another significant power of video is its initial appeal and recruiting value. The video process is attractive to young people who have not been reached or motivated by other programs or traditional methods of education because 1) it is very visible, immediate and hands-on; 2) it centers around electronic media which appeals to many who would never be attracted to the group dialogue process by itself; 3) it happens on *their* turf; and 4) each of them has equal opportunity to be a 'star' or 'expert' concerning their own experience.

The process required to actually produce a video offers an imaginative and creative outlet through which young people are suddenly allowed to "have their say" and to see significant results from their efforts. At the very least they see a finished product they were a vital part of producing; and experience being a valued member of a collective peer process.

The purpose of Alternatives through Video was to introduce participants to the video-making process in the context of working for community change. To do so, I, with others, developed a two-week residential project during which participants engaged in on-going group dialogue and community analysis as they conceptualized, wrote, filmed and

edited a video program focusing on needs in their community and the role that each of them could play in addressing those needs and bringing about change.

### **Rural Development Leadership Network (RDLN) Field Project**

My RDLN field project was to expand that concept into a year-long program which would involve more people in the community and promote a deeper analysis of both the community situation and the potential to work together for change. Following are the goals and objectives for the projects that I designed and implemented over a four year period with youth and adults living on the Cherokee Indian Reservation in Cherokee, North Carolina, in Ivanhoe, Virginia and in Keystone, West Virginia.

#### **Goals:**

- A) motivate young people to take on an active role in community change efforts
- B) provide an avenue for young people to make their voices heard in the community
- C) move young adults into a leadership position in addressing their own needs
- D) serve as a catalyst for the creation of community-based projects for young people
- E) enhance on-going community and leadership development efforts

- F) put video technology and expertise into the hands of people involved in community-based change efforts in Appalachia
- G) bring youth and adults together in mutual efforts for community change

**Objectives:**

- A) hold a series of leadership development/media training workshops in a selected community focusing on 1) interpersonal interaction, 2) group process, 3) community research and analysis, 4) story development, 5) written and oral communication skills, and 6) basic camera and editing skills; resulting in the topic and theme for a video program.
- B) conduct a two-week residential session in order to film and edit the video program developed during the workshops
- C) coordinate planning of community follow-up to issues raised during previous processes or for programs desired as a result of the video
- D) bring participants from this series of sessions to a commitment to be involved in planning and carrying out future programs in their own or other communities
- F) hold annual reunion events for past participants in order to create a network of young activists in the region

My ultimate goal was to establish an ongoing leadership development/media training program for youth and adults that could be integrated into long-term community development efforts in Appalachia.

### **Action**

Following is the plan of action I designed and followed in order to accomplish the goals and objectives of my RDLN field project.

#### **Plan of Action**

**Initial Phase** The initial phase was the process by which I originally made contacts and built a level of trust with the community, recruited initial participants and brought key contacts to a comprehensive understanding of the program itself and its potential to enhance leadership and community development efforts. My activities in this phase were to:

- develop a network of interested people in the community  
through on-going telephone contact and a series of meetings
- identify appropriate adult leaders in the community who might  
serve as co-leader for the duration of the project
- hold a recruitment/introduction session for potential participants

See Appendix A for more details about the initial phase of setting up a local project.

**Design Phase** Based on the information gathered in the initial phase I worked with my co-leader(s) to design a series of workshops to be held in the community focusing on

- interpersonal dynamics and relationships
- group process skills (including negotiation & consensus decision-making)
- community research and analysis
- story development
- written and oral communication skills
- basic camera and editing skills

My hope was to involve as many people in the community as possible in the workshops so that by the time we were ready to start the production process, the whole community would have helped to conceptualize, research and write a video which they would then be ready to film and edit.

**Implementation Phase** The implementation phase played out quite differently in each of the three communities which I will discuss later.

**Evaluation Phase** I designed and facilitated both written and verbal evaluation processes. Each event and session was evaluated as an individual activity and as a component of the twelve month leadership development/media training process. The criteria for evaluation centered on how well we were achieving the overall goals of the field project as well as the goals for the individual activity. Participants and community contacts were all involved at appropriate points in the evaluation process.

**Follow-up phase** During the follow-up phase I sought to determine the current situation in the community, the reactions of the community to the project, the reaction of the community to the finished video, the level of interest and motivation of the young people who were initially involved and the degree to which others in the community were now interested. My activities during this phase were to

- hold a follow-up session with the community co-leader which included:
  - an in-depth evaluation
  - planning for a follow-up session with the participants
  - brainstorming for future possibilities
- hold a follow-up with the youth participants which included:
  - an in-depth evaluation
  - a discussion of future possibilities
  - identification of those interested in being leaders-in-training during future projects
- devise a plan with the project participants to hold a series of showings of their video each of which included an intentional process to elicit community reaction and discussion
- bring together all past video project participants for a grand showing and reunion event during which they reflected on the process, shared what had happened as a result of the project in their own lives and in their communities, and brainstormed ideas for improving the process and expanding the program

**Reflection Phase** At this point in the process I met with my RDLN field advisor and other appropriate contacts in order to process the information gathered from the follow-up meetings, evaluations and showings.

**Documentation Phase** The final phase of the field project was to translate the twelve month model into a written form including a well-developed rationale, a description of the program and activities as a whole, step by step plans for carrying out each individual activity and, finally, documentation as to what actually happened in the lives of the participants and in their community as a result of the entire process.

### **Approach**

The processes designed for both the workshops and residential projects were participatory and based on Freire's theory of beginning dialogue with the experiences and worldview of the learner. See Appendix B for examples of the actual exercises used during the projects and workshops.

## **Reflection**

In the course of four years I worked with three different communities to implement part or all of my plan of action. In Ivanhoe, Virginia we held one two-week residential project. In Cherokee, North Carolina we held a two-week residential project and a series of workshops over a twelve month period. In Keystone, West Virginia we held an initial two-week residential project, a series of workshops over a six month period and then a second non-residential project.

Based on these case studies I will reflect upon the entire process in relationship to the three aspects of Freire's theory described previously: individual development or the raising of critical consciousness, leadership development or group dialogue, and community development or social transformation.

### **Individual Development**

**Building self-esteem** In all three communities the video process contributed to the individual development of those who directly, and sometimes even indirectly, participated. We were able to involve young people who had never before been a part of anything, or when they had, had failed or dropped out. But *this* time they succeeded, causing each participant to grow in terms of awareness and self-confidence. "Now they

can't call us dumb hillbillies anymore," said one West Virginia participant when interviewed about their project on a local T.V. news show. In Cherokee, our Native American participants grew from being silent and withdrawn observers to being fully involved, sometimes even passionate, members of the crew.

The raising of self-esteem was not just limited to the crew. Every single person in the community represented knowledge valuable to the video-making process. Our 'stars' included pregnant teenagers, the staff of community groups, the local United Mine Workers president, rank and file miners, welfare recipients, police officers, gang members, high school students, alcoholics, community clinic staff, social workers, parents, teenagers, the very young, the very old . . . so if nothing else, once we finished a video there were many more people within the community who realized that what they had to say was worth listening to, and even filming.

There was even a great deal of interest by those being filmed or interviewed to become involved in the overall process. For example, some of the gang members who were interviewed on the streets of Keystone expressed interest in participating in the next project in Cherokee.

**Raising critical consciousness** The participants also moved to new levels of awareness about their lives and communities. We created exercises designed to illuminate and integrate the knowledge and experience of each participant, both on a personal and community level, into the overall process. The collective knowledge of the video crew then provided the basis from which they developed their theme and story-board. The job of the leaders was to help them to broaden and deepen that

knowledge in order to develop an analysis which put their experience into a local, national and global context.

In Ivanhoe, I worked with a community organization which recruited young adults who were not interested or touched by its other programs to participate in the video project. This seemed ideal in the sense that most people in the community had some level of community awareness because of the work of the organization. The video participants, who had heretofore felt disconnected from the community organization, used the video as an opportunity to express their desire for more of a say in decisions affecting its programs and direction. They were actually challenging the fact that the organization was primarily controlled by one charismatic individual. The overall organization seemed stuck at a level of development which Freire describes as following and identifying with charismatic leadership to the detriment of individual responsibility. The video crew was expressing a more critical consciousness. However, instead of recognizing the role that they had played in empowering these young adults even to understand that they *could* have a say, the leaders of the community organization reacted defensively and further isolated the video crew. Since I had no contract with the community organization and no official understanding regarding follow-up, I was not able to support the video crew once the video was completed. It was this project that motivated me to devise the twelve month plan which would include preparation and follow-up as an agreed upon part of the program so that the possibilities for raising consciousness would not be limited only to the direct participants.

## Leadership Development

**Dialogue** The West Virginia project provides a good example of how group dialogue moved participants from one level of consciousness to another. McDowell County, West Virginia, which includes Keystone, was once a thriving coal producing area boasting a large African-American and immigrant population who worked the mines. The area continues to have the largest percentage of Black population of any rural central Appalachian county, and at the time of our video project was into its tenth year of economic depression with one of the highest unemployment rates in the region. By 1990, one half of the children in McDowell County lived in poverty (Appalachian Regional Commission).

When we began the project, the participants had only a vague awareness of the extent to which the coal industry had affected their lives and situation. As they began to interview folks in the community they identified the issues of unemployment and the shutting down of the mines as common themes which they wanted to include in their video. Since there was also a major coal strike going on in nearby southwestern Virginia during the time of the project, we also were able to interview the miners and young people involved in that struggle.

As the crew began work on their script and narrative, they were forced to try to fit all the pieces together so that their story or video would make sense. We split into small groups and asked each group to create a story out of the interviews we had done. One group's analysis was that the reason Keystone suffered from poverty was because of massive

unemployment which was the fault of the United Mine Workers union because strikes had forced the coal companies out of business. By the end of the project they saw things differently, but only through an extensive and on-going process of gathering information, theorizing, dialoguing with others (including 'experts'), and then going through the cycle again.

The same deepening of understanding happened around the issue of teen pregnancy. Initially, there was a great deal of judgment and condemnation directed towards 'girls who got themselves pregnant'. However, through dialogue enhanced by the fact that we had a pregnant teen as part of our crew, the group moved to a much healthier and complex understanding of the issue than the attitudes they had expressed when we first began our process.

**Group Process** Built into all of the exercises was the expectation that participants would teach each other and that both youth and adults would be challenged to continually improve and expand upon their leadership skills. Participants would have to learn about working collectively and functioning together as a group which is not something most had been able to do in the past.

My experience in Cherokee provides the best example of the potential for the project in terms of group process. My entry point there was the Cherokee Challenge, a substance abuse prevention program for 9-13 year olds. The Challenge recognized the need for a program attractive to the young adults on the Reservation and so were very open to the video project idea. They were able to recruit individuals to participate who were too old for their other programs. A core group developed and continued

to meet for over a year. They named themselves the Tsa-La-Gi (Cherokee) Visionmakers, elected officers, discussed fundraising, helped to plan activities and gradually became leaders at some of the video events.

The major difficulty in Cherokee was that the Challenge staff were already overwhelmed with their pre-teen program and so were unable to provide the increasing amount of encouragement and support that the Visionmakers needed in order to continue. Even though everyone agreed that the young people had never responded to any other program as they did to this one, *I* was still the primary force that brought them together (and I live five hours away). It became clear that in order to keep a young group together there needed to be someone right there with the resources, time and energy to make it happen.

As an alternative I began to steer them towards regional and national leadership development programs in order to give them continued opportunities for dialogue and to further develop their leadership skills. I also partially developed a leaders-in-training program for those who had already participated in a project, shown leadership potential, and were interested in learning more.

## **Community Development**

**Moving participants to individual action** Most of those who participated in the projects were only peripherally involved, if at all, in any kind of community group previously; yet afterwards became part of a

growing network of young Appalachian leaders. Several participants chose to gain more experience by filming events and gatherings of Appalachian church and community groups, for which they were paid small stipends. By doing so, they were able to improve their video skills, while at the same time learning about the organizations and networks of which, hopefully, they would become a part.

After filming a gathering of the Southern Empowerment Project, one young man decided to participate in their grassroots organizing training. The training lead him to a job as youth organizer for the Piedmont Peace Project. A young Cherokee participant was asked to film a gathering of the Appalachian Women's Alliance, decided she wanted to join the Alliance and later wrote her story for publication in the *Appalachian Women's Journal* . Another group of project participants named themselves Hip-Hop Productions and attended an annual assembly of Appalachian community organizations. Several young people went on to participate in regional and national leadership development programs such as the Highlander Youth Institute and the California Youth Encampment.

**Moving participants to collective action** On a community level, the most successful project was the one which resulted in the establishment of a community center in Keystone, West Virginia. During that project the crew was told over and over again, "there's no future for you here -- there's no hope." The young people concluded that they would have to create their own hope. With the help of a local minister they used the video as an organizing tool to develop widespread community interest in addressing the needs of young people. Over a two year period the City

Council, the Department of Human Resources, the Ministerial Association, a community-based economic development corporation, and local United Methodist, Baptist and Episcopal congregations were shown the video at a series of community meetings. I was then asked by two local ministers and the director of a community-based project to facilitate a process through which the community could develop a plan for a community center. I brought together a committee of local youth and adults who eventually organized the Elkhorn Valley Youth and Community Center. The Center is now serving youth from three different communities and is continuing to gain support. They have used the video as their main fundraising tool and it has gained them significant recognition from several large charitable foundations and the West Virginia state government.

## CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the video production process lends itself well to the implementation of Paulo Freire's theory and methodology for popular education. The potential for the realization of individual, leadership and community development through a Community Video Project is tremendous.

The difficulties I encountered lay mostly with the issue of being an outside facilitator. Community dynamics are complicated and ever-changing. While there is a certain freedom derived from being on the outside of struggles in a community that might inhibit a project before it

ever begins, that same 'apartness' leaves a great deal of room for mistrust and misunderstanding. At some point ownership must be taken on by leaders in the community in order for the process to be wholly successful.

The other hinderance to the complete success of Freire's model is the fact that 'to know' *may not* necessarily be 'to act.' Freire would argue that authentic dialogue has not taken place if action does not follow, but my experience is that there are a myriad of other factors which also inhibit action toward social change, even when there is understanding and commitment among those involved.

However, all in all I believe Alternatives through Video to have been a success and a worthwhile model for others to consider implementing in their own communities.

**APPENDIX A**

**SETTING UP A PROJECT IN YOUR COMMUNITY**

## SETTING UP A PROJECT IN YOUR COMMUNITY

I have facilitated video projects in three different communities. Situations ranged from a seven-day stay in someone's home in a poor West Virginia coal town to a year-long process coordinated with an established youth agency on the Cherokee Indian Reservation. In all three projects there were certain base-line requirements for what the community needed to provide. Following are some questions to ask of any community interested in sponsoring a video project:

### Facilities

Is there a facility available that can accommodate 10-15 people for up to two weeks?

Is there a secure, cool and dry place in which to store the video equipment?

Is there access to a quiet working/meeting area separate from the living quarters?

Is there a room that can be used exclusively for video editing?

Are there adequate bathroom, shower and kitchen facilities available?

Are there separate male and female sleeping quarters?

My experience has ranged from sleeping in a two room house with a hose for showers to sleeping on the floor of a fully equipped gymnasium. We had to be quite flexible and creative in this regard. However there *have* been facility issues that affected the success of past projects such as non-separate sleeping arrangements, conditions harmful to the equipment (i.e., too much humidity or not enough security), and inadequate space in which to work.

### **Meals**

Do we have kitchen facilities?

Are there people who will help us to cook our own meals?

Is there someone we can hire from the community to cook for us?

Is there some institution within the community willing to donate our meals?

Are there adults willing to bring in pre-cooked meals for us?

Can we organize one or more community potlucks?

Is there \$\$ available to buy food?

Is there a co-op or other cheaper and more community-supportive way of buying food?

Food may be the single best way to build support from the rest of the community. I have tried all of the above and I think a combination of approaches has the most potential for involving the greatest number of people who would otherwise not be involved with the project.

### **Transportation**

How accessible is the facility to the rest of the community?

Can we walk to the grocery store and other centers of community activity? To the homes of people whom we wish to interview?

Do we have use of a van, bus or other vehicles?

Are there adult drivers available? What is the best way to involve them?

By far the best situation was when we had total access to the community by foot.

### **Access to Young People**

Is there an existing youth group with whom to work?

Is there an agency, organization or contacts who are able to recruit individual young people to participate?

Are there young people who are willing and able to participate in the planning, recruiting and leadership for the project?

### **Access to Adults**

Are there adults in the community willing to participate in the residential project, at the very least, as chaperones?

Are there adults willing to participate in the planning and leadership processes of the project?

Are there adults willing to work with the young people before, during and after the video is completed?

Whether or not there is an organization willing to provide a support structure for the young people both before and after the actual project should be a major consideration. If it's a one time event it may not be worth doing and it certainly won't fulfill the goals and objectives.

### **Equipment**

Does the contact or sponsoring organization own video equipment?

Is it possible to gain unlimited access to anyone else's equipment (e.g., parents)?

Is there other accessible equipment such as a public access T.V. station or another agency?

Does the group have the potential/capability of obtaining a grant to buy their own equipment?

As the facilitating group we need to have at least one basic compliment of equipment (camera, tripod, lights, microphone, editing station, electrical cords, video tapes, batteries). Raising funds to buy video equipment to remain in the community and to continue to be used by and for the community once the initial video is completed should be a central aspect of each project.

## **Fund-raising**

Does the contact person or organization already have access to the funds, buildings and personnel necessary to support the project?

If not, do they have the capability of raising funds for the project?

To what extent are local people and organizations willing to donate their time and facilities?

To what extent are the youth willing and able to participate in fundraising activities?

Every community has been able to contribute a facility, adult support staff and some meals. Some communities have gone further towards raising their own funds by approaching local businesses and clubs, holding car washes and bake sales and applying for grants from local sources.

## **Access to the Community**

Does the contact or sponsoring organization have good relationships with the power people in the community (churches, unions, the town council, influential individuals, etc.)?

Do the rest of the people trust and respect them?

It is very important that the local contacts are trusted and respected within the community so that access to potential sites and subjects for filming is facilitated not inhibited by their presence. This is also important if there is

to be any real follow-up to the issues raised by the youth in their finished video. Obviously no group or individual will be "loved by all" but it is important to know as much as possible about where the contact person or organization stands in the eyes of the rest of the community and whether or not they are listened to with respect.

### **Co-leadership**

Skills to look for in a co-leader include:

- Someone who knows and has the respect of local youth
- Knowledge of various issues affecting the community
- Willingness to devote time & attention to youth whom others have rejected
- Understanding of and ability to facilitate group process
- Conflict resolution skills
- Skills in the area of youth group dynamics
- Willingness to play a disciplinarian role when necessary
- At least a basic understanding of community organizing
- At least a basic understanding of the video-making process

I cannot over-stress the importance of having skilled, competent, committed co-leaders.

**APPENDIX B**

**VIDEO PROJECT EXERCISES AND PROCESSES**

### **Session 1**

*Purpose:* to get people talking, break the ice; general orientation: start thinking about the process of film/video-making

*Desired Outcome:* know each other's names, know the expectations, know the schedule, begin feeling comfortable, begin to THINK VIDEO

*Approach:* icebreakers; orientation/expectations; some light discussion around video

*Facilitator:* there needs to be a designated and prepared facilitator for each session -- it could be the primary facilitator, co-leader(s), leaders-in training, local contacts and community leaders, the participants themselves -- whoever is appropriate

### **Session 2**

*Purpose:* set context; begin to generate/identify themes; intro to community analysis

*Desired Outcome:* "community" as part of theme; list of possible topics/themes; sense of commonality among participants; understanding of self as part of community

*Approach:* draw pictures of community and our place within the community - where we feel good/bad; Draw pictures of how we would like to see our communities changed. Share

*Materials:* newsprint, magic markers, crayons, tape

**Session 3**

*Purpose:* introduction to camera, tripod, microphones

*Desired Outcome:* some feeling of comfort/familiarity with equipment;  
basic understanding of equipment parts/functions; enjoy  
process

*Approach:* small group exploration along with manuals; some input from  
facilitators; Intro to mics & impt. of sound; Practice  
interviews

*Materials:* 3 cameras/tripods; available mics (with batteries); manuals

*Facilitator:* leaders-in-training

**Session 4**

*Purpose:* education about the local community

*Desired Outcome:* further themes/ideas/resources identified

*Approach:* program by local leaders - we might film this

*Facilitator:* local contact

**Session 5**

*Purpose:* intro to story (elements, theme, etc.); discussion of the kinds of videos (drama - documentary); concept of storyboard

*Desired Outcome:* understanding of the importance of writing a good story to making a video; a better understanding of how to do that; understanding of the what and why of a storyboard

*Approach:* have the group offer sentences to write a collective story discuss elements and types of stories - what makes it good/bad then draw a brief storyboard and discuss

*Materials:* newsprint, marker

**Session 6**

*Purpose:* more familiarity with equipment/equipment use; intro to lights beginning understanding of technique and editing concepts

*Desired Outcome:* participants will have some concept of editing; know the basics of and be comfortable with lights; and begin to view their camera work with a critical eye

*Approach:* critique practice interviews; set up camera with monitor & talk about kinds and uses of shots; then split into two groups 1) set up lights/explain key concepts; 2) introduce the concept of editing

*Materials:* editing system, lights

## Session 7

*Purpose:* get to know each other better; generate personal themes;  
practice storytelling/storyboard

*Desired Outcome:* people comfortable with sharing personal "stuff" and to  
identify more issues for the video itself

*Approach:* draw life stories

*Materials:* newsprint, markers, crayons, tape, comfortable space

## Session 8

*Purpose:* identify and develop topic of video

*Desired Outcome:* specific topic; some brainstorming around interviews,  
resources, information needed; rough idea of story

*Approach:* come back to 3 questions: What do we want to say?

\*\*we will stay flexible

How does it tie together?

with this\*\*

Where do we fit into it?

*Materials:* newsprint, magic markers

**Session 9**

*Purpose:* identify top choices for topic with rough idea of each

*Desired Outcome:* narrow down to no more than 3 possibilities

*Approach:* summarize issues/themes to date; brainstorm list for topic;  
elaborate on each idea; straw vote for top choices (3)

*Materials:* previous newsprint lists, newsprint, markers

**Session 10**

*Purpose:* develop one theme with rough story line

*Desired Outcome:* a topic/theme which everyone owns and understands

*Approach:* 3 small groups develop storyboard out of identified  
possibilities; share with large group; cut up boards and each  
individual put the story together how they see it for the whole group

**Session 11**

*Purpose:* begin work on *our* video

*Desired Outcome:* divide labor - writers; camera crew(s); interviewers

*Approach:* lecturettes including "how to interview"; composition of  
camera crew/explanation of B-Roll; Define TASKS: shoot B-roll;  
set up interviews, develop questions; develop storyboard, begin to  
write narrative

**Session 12**

*Purpose:* teach how to log

*Desired Outcome:* footage will be logged as it comes in

*Approach:* demonstration

*Materials:* notebooks, pens, monitor and deck

**Session 13**

community potluck and interaction

shoot, interview, log

**Session 14**

shoot, interview, log, detail storyboard, put together edit lists

**Session 15**

*Purpose:* figure out where we are at in terms of our topic and theme

*Desired Outcome:* we must be able to identify/articulate theme

*Approach:* discussion

**Session 16**

*Purpose:* figure out where *the group* is at in terms of dynamics or conflict

*Desired Outcome:* work through whatever is going on a personal level

*Approach:* talking group

**Session 17**

*Purpose:* editing training

*Desired Outcome:* identify those interested in editing; train at least 3 people with the equipment so they can do it w/o us

*Approach:* demonstration for all in detail; individual training

*Materials:* editing system; tapes of B-roll

**Session 18**

*Purpose:* more editing training

*Desired Outcome:* make sure that everyone has had a chance to learn to use the equipment; spend more time with those who want/need it

*Approach:* individual training

*Materials:* editing system; tapes of B-roll

(meanwhile everyone else is shooting, logging, etc.)

**Session 19**

*Purpose:* put this experience into the context of the greater community and explore possibility of future opportunities

*Desired Outcome:* participants feel proud of what they are doing and begin to see the possibilities for how this might fit into their future as well as the future of community development efforts

*Approach:* visit public access T.V. station

*Materials:* transportation

*Facilitator:* the station staff

**Session 20**

Complete storyboard with detailed editing instructions

**Remaining Sessions:**

Rough Edit

Shoot, interview, revise storyboard and edit

Final Edit

Community Potluck and Showing

Community Feedback

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