

self-confidence, self-reliance and pride. Using the tools of technology, the community takes control of its own learning process. Then, from a position of self-confidence and control, the community can work with external agencies and facilitators to design programs which meet its needs and aspirations.

The experience of the local-television community-dialogue process, facilitated collaboratively by volunteers and extension workers in the early 1990s, exemplifies the principles and assumptions of community learning currently being realized by the Port au Port Community Education Initiative.

The Port au Port Community Education Initiative

Since 1991, the Port au Port Community Education Initiative Inc. has involved 27 agencies working to connect community needs and educational programs, although its mandate is much broader than the process described here. The Initiative recognizes that traditional definitions of learning do not hold true in community education.

In 1993, the first community television forums were organized in five communities on the Port au Port Peninsula. The purpose was to inform the residents about the work of the Education Initiative but, more importantly, to involve them in the planning process [See Local comments on...].

In 1995, the Initiative co-sponsored another grassroots process called the Communiquer Pour Survivre/Communication for Survival Initiative. This process is based on the premise that constructive dialogue and communication are the key to the ability to plan together for a better future. Designed as a collaboration between sponsors, community partners, participants and initiators, it promotes the sharing of experiences and plans within and between communities. One of its tools is small format video and community controlled television.

Working from grassroots

Grassroots communication tools and activities

Tools: Newsletter; community radio; black and white photography; posters; brochures; video letters; problem-oriented skits; and community television.

Activities: Live phone-in public meetings on community cable television systems; students videotaping interviews, "streeters" and cultural events; community round tables; workshops on group development; students producing video dramas to send to other communities; forming black and white photography groups; producing posters and brochures to publicize local events and festivals; transforming a corporate newsletter into a community newsletter; assisting a colleague to produce a regional newspaper; regional steering committee meetings of volunteers to discuss common issues and strategies.

However, communities use a wide variety of grassroots communication tools [See BOX above]. Training — combining formal programs with hands-on activities — involves much more than acquiring new technical skill in video and television production. It also highlights communication skills required by individuals and groups committed to their communities; ways of working in teams to plan common goals, and strategies for getting community involvement in survival projects.

There are no professionals in grassroots participatory communications; ordinary people plan the programming and operate the equipment. Resource people work mostly with youth and women in the communities — participants are students, itinerant farm workers, housewives, teachers, fishermen, unemployed fish plant workers, union officers, small business operators.

Trying to ensure that as many people as possible participate in the community communication process is a priority. "All the voices" is an essential component of grassroots communication. But it's not easy. Ordinary people are not used to being asked to speak publicly on issues and, when they do, nobody listens.

We are all conditioned by our life-long experience as passive

recipients of information from media and educational institutions. Therefore it requires a major effort to understand why it is futile to expect communication or education to effect a positive change unless the people themselves perceive the process as meeting community needs and being "from here."

The practice of respect for local ways of doing things — the common ground between community education and participatory communications technology — is essential for all educators and communicators who want to participate in development processes which meet the needs of our rural communities. The community can and must take ownership of its own communication process.

¹ The "Fogo Process" became known thanks in great part to the work of the Don Snowdon Centre at Memorial University. In 1995, the University closed the Centre. It has been resurrected in Ontario by the University of Guelph.

In 1996, Fred Campbell gave a presentation in Sao Paulo at a Workers School where Paulo Freire was executive director. Fred works with ryakuga, a grassroots, not-for-profit communications organization based in Stephenville, NF. Further information, examples of and a guide to community productions can be found at their web site: www.web.net/~ryakuga