

## **Shawn Sobers – PhD Update: 6<sup>th</sup> May 2005**

### **Statement:**

“An enquiry into the sustainability of knowledge, skills and outputs from Community Media education projects.”

### **Question:**

“What structures within community media education activities enable the sustainability and impact of knowledge, attainment, skills, and other set project aims, to take place?”

### **Aims of this research:**

- To gain a better understanding of how informal education initiatives can maximise their impact and effectiveness.
- To explore the inherent structures and relationships within the community media sector - primarily focusing on educational activity – and gauge how these structures and relationships may influence potential levels of impact and effectiveness of the given project in process.
- To highlight various methods of best practice – drawing from the experiences of facilitators working in this sector - in relation to maximising levels of impact and effectiveness of any given project.
- Working towards building a solid identity for educational activity within the community media sector, which is predominantly assumed as being only community based television and radio broadcast initiatives.
- To produce a text (thesis) which is not only a contribution to new knowledge, but is also a useful tool for various stakeholders of community media & arts and informal education sector.

### **Objectives:**

- To build list of potential interviewees and/or consultants to contact for this research, locally, nationally and internationally.
- To secure agreements to use a minimum of five projects as case-studies: to explore project structures, aims, expectations, perceptions and other areas of potential impact and sustainability.
- To administrate a web presence for this research which explores the direct and wider issues relating to the community media sector, to raise the profile, encourage debate and as a consultative tool.  
(see: [www.firstborn-creatives.co.uk](http://www.firstborn-creatives.co.uk). Follow link to ‘Community Media Research’)

### **Background to this research:**

Since starting this research in April 2004, and enrolling on the PhD in Sept 2004, I have written a series of papers, essays and presentations which have – as an ongoing process – attempted to map the territory of this research. These papers have explored particular arguments, defined specific terms or ideas, or have simply been me thinking allowed and working things out, which I find to be a useful process. These papers collectively are a useful resource to extract any critical thinking & aims which underpins my motivations for carrying out this research, for identifying strong theoretical recurring themes, and hopefully will help me keep focused throughout.

Some of the papers I have written to date are:

- Key Questions to ask about the Community Media Sector (March 2004)
- Argument: The Community Media Sector is not the amateur cousin to Broadcast (April 2004)
- Exploration of Community Media Research Questions (November 2004)
- Definition of *Community Media* (December 2004)
- Negotiating Methods and Theories - Part 1 (January 2005)
- Beyond Project: Community Media and Impact, Effectiveness and Sustainability (April 2005)
- Project Evaluation Map (April 2005)

There are still more papers for me to write – exploring certain areas and concepts – but I also occasionally feel frustrated with not having interviewed anyone officially yet or have carried out field research, (especially as all of my extra-curricular work is actively in the community media sector, with Firstborn Creatives.) That said, laying the foundations by writing these papers is a useful process and I know when the time is right, and when I feel confident about the questions I need to ask, that I will get out there as a researcher in the *field*.

**Methodology for carrying out this research:**

This is still very much shifting sands, but my latest plan is to build the research/thesis around a structure of five (or more) community based media education projects, which would each constitute as a case study. In each case study I will ask key questions to each of the main stake-holders of the majority of media education projects, namely – funders, facilitators, group workers (i.e. teachers, youth workers), participants, evaluators (if any), and audiences (of screenings, etc). Throughout the duration of the project (case study) I would make contact with each of these stake-holders four times - at the beginning, middle, end and after their involvement with the project, determined on when they first make contact with the project. This structure will enable me to create a ‘*timeline of involvement*’ which different projects are based upon, and allow me to analyse data that juxtaposes responses given by the various stake-holders. For example, priorities for a project as described by a funder or facilitator, may differ wildly from the priorities of the actual participants of the project.

Obviously I then need to do something with these findings, and also to go *behind* the data to investigate why these views are held, how they impact on the effectiveness of a project, and what strategies can be employed to ensure a parity of aims and expectations across the stake-holders. Also need to identify methods which can be put in place on any project to ensure that the stake holders who actually matter - the participants – are the ones who receive the benefits of maximising the potential effectiveness of any given project. Which method I will adopt to achieve this latter part of the research, I am not too sure at present.

**Theoretical Framework:**

Underpinning the entire research will (maybe) be an analysis of how the structures and relationships within this area or work relates to the post-structuralist (Foucault) notions of knowledge, power and authorship. Much writing has been done on this area in the relation to the mass media in the field of media studies, but there is little solid theoretical work produced in the arena of community based media education activity. I’m confident that this theoretical analysis and narrative will be a contribution to new knowledge, but I need to ensure that any theoretical framework I adopt (if any) is suitable for the subject matter, and not merely imposed upon it. Foucault’s notions of knowledge, power and authorship seem apt at this stage, as he describes the “mutual” nature of these concepts, (which is in-keeping with facilitated/participatory community based activities), rather than the more traditional notions such as the oppressed/oppressor, and the sole author.

**Taxonomy of Terms:**

Not enough space here for full definitions, but key words for me at this stage are:

<b>Sustainability</b> - (cultural, not just financial). As strategies to ensure deep effectiveness.	<b>Impact</b> – (an event) - what knowledge / power is being transferred? What environment is being created?	<b>Effectiveness</b> – (a process) – what effects of transfer of knowledge/power? How is it sustained?	<b>knowledge</b> - (Foucault). Alone does not automatically lead to liberation. Also as a form of energy.	<b>power</b> – (Foucault). As a plateau rather than a hegemonic triangle. The “mutual hold” of power. Participatory.
<b>community</b> - (what constitutes a...) (a token word???) What isn’t a community? Does social agenda have to be a priority?	<b>Praxis</b> – (Paulo Freire). That real education is by linking knowledge/experience. ‘Student’ to have an interaction with his/her environment.	<b>authorship</b> - (who owns? Does it matter?) Facilitation as part of the creative process. As a misrepresented Western concept.	<b>Project</b> – implies an end point, rather than ongoing agenda. I want to encourage a ‘ <i>Beyond Project</i> ’ mentality.	<b>Influence</b> – in Rational terms, what contacts and impacts have knock on effects? What traces can be made, or even credited, with in-direct outcomes of a project?

## PhD Update – 19 May 2005

Shawn Sobers

### The Houdini approach to research

I have realised that doing a PhD is like being an escapologist. With planning you end up tying yourself in knots. You then have to escape as convincingly as possible, whilst keeping whatever integrity, credibility and reputation you think you had, trying not to get too bruised in the process.

### Reformation of the Media

Inspired by reading James Curran's essay in 'Culture, Society and the Media' (page 202), where he compares the ideological rise of the papacy with the ideological rise of the media - this led me to thinking that community media could be considered to be a reformation of the media sector. The reformation of the churches came about for many reasons, one of which was the influence of new technologies such as the printing press. Now new media technologies are giving an added boost to 'alternative media' activities, independent of mass media institutions.

Obviously I'm not the only person to think this, and I found lots of similar articles on the internet. It does raise some interesting questions for me though. The Reformation is commonly seen as a time of liberation from the power of the clergy. The aspect of community media I am most inspired by is how it enables (empowers) people to have a voice, especially if they had previously been in position of felt & perceived 'powerlessness'. That said: *Should I explicitly state that my research is focused and concerned with 'socially marginalised' groups?*

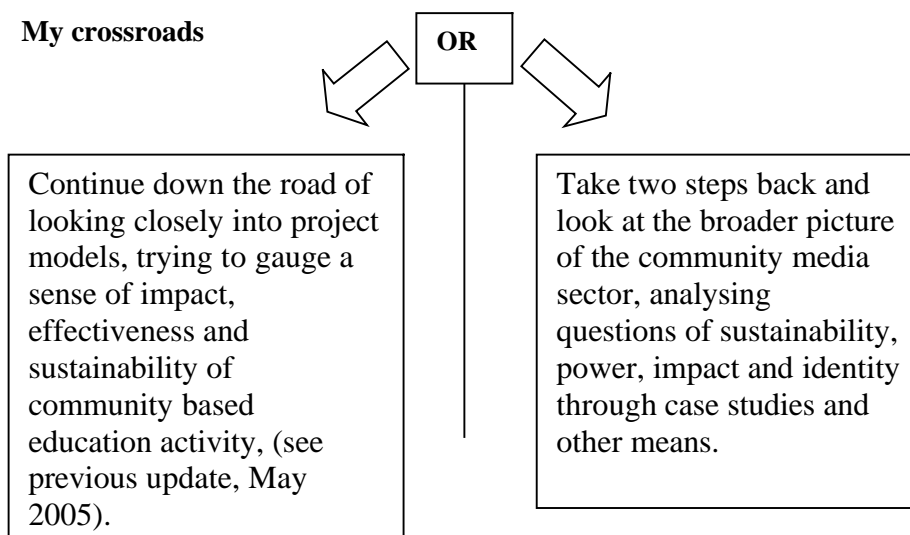
With that in mind, is Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* relevant research? Answer: No, but it seems that Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* will be!

### Identity, Power and Representation

However you choose to define and identify yourself – whether by race, gender, sexuality, etc – if you are not in control of how your identity is represented, then you have the potential of becoming exploited, (oppressed). (I've carried this thought around with me like baggage for years, and it's based on Marx's notion of how the (non-)ownership of the means of production will exploit the proletariat.)

Could analyse this hypothesis through the spectacle of community media sector.

### **My crossroads**



## **Conclusion**

Like the performance of an escapologist, I think the creative, exciting energy lies in the moments of doubt, (but only if a safe escape is ultimately achieved!)

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