

# Documentary Film Festivals

Transformative Learning,  
Community Building & Solidarity

Carole Roy



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## **Documentary Film Festivals**

TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

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This book series is dedicated to the radical love and actions of Paulo Freire, Jesus “Pato” Gomez, and Joe L. Kincheloe.

## TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

Cultural studies provides an analytical toolbox for both making sense of educational practice and extending the insights of educational professionals into their labors. In this context *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* provides a collection of books in the domain that specify this assertion. Crafted for an audience of teachers, teacher educators, scholars and students of cultural studies and others interested in cultural studies and pedagogy, the series documents both the possibilities of and the controversies surrounding the intersection of cultural studies and education. The editors and the authors of this series do not assume that the interaction of cultural studies and education devalues other types of knowledge and analytical forms. Rather the intersection of these knowledge disciplines offers a rejuvenating, optimistic, and positive perspective on education and educational institutions. Some might describe its contribution as democratic, emancipatory, and transformative. The editors and authors maintain that cultural studies helps free educators from sterile, monolithic analyses that have for too long undermined efforts to think of educational practices by providing other words, new languages, and fresh metaphors. Operating in an interdisciplinary cosmos, *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* is dedicated to exploring the ways cultural studies enhances the study and practice of education. With this in mind the series focuses in a non-exclusive way on popular culture as well as other dimensions of cultural studies including social theory, social justice and positionality, cultural dimensions of technological innovation, new media and media literacy, new forms of oppression emerging in an electronic hyperreality, and postcolonial global concerns. With these concerns in mind cultural studies scholars often argue that the realm of popular culture is the most powerful educational force in contemporary culture. Indeed, in the twenty-first century this pedagogical dynamic is sweeping through the entire world. Educators, they believe, must understand these emerging realities in order to gain an important voice in the pedagogical conversation.

Without an understanding of cultural pedagogy's (education that takes place outside of formal schooling) role in the shaping of individual identity – youth identity in particular – the role educators play in the lives of their students will continue to fade. Why do so many of our students feel that life is incomprehensible and devoid of meaning? What does it mean, teachers wonder, when young people are unable to describe their moods, their affective affiliation to the society around them. Meanings provided young people by mainstream institutions often do little to help them deal with their affective complexity, their difficulty negotiating the rift between meaning and affect. School knowledge and educational expectations seem as anachronistic as a ditto machine, not that learning ways of rational thought and making sense of the world are unimportant.

But school knowledge and educational expectations often have little to offer students about making sense of the way they feel, the way their affective lives are shaped. In no way do we argue that analysis of the production of youth in an electronic mediated world demands some “touchy-feely” educational superficiality. What is needed in this context is a rigorous analysis of the interrelationship between pedagogy, popular culture, meaning making, and youth subjectivity. In an era marked by youth depression, violence, and suicide such insights become extremely important, even life saving. Pessimism about the future is the common sense of many contemporary youth with its concomitant feeling that no one can make a difference.

If affective production can be shaped to reflect these perspectives, then it can be reshaped to lay the groundwork for optimism, passionate commitment, and transformative educational and political activity. In these ways cultural studies adds a dimension to the work of education unfilled by any other sub-discipline. This is what *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* seeks to produce – literature on these issues that makes a difference. It seeks to publish studies that help those who work with young people, those individuals involved in the disciplines that study children and youth, and young people themselves improve their lives in these bizarre times.

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**Carole Roy**

*St. Francis Xavier University, Canada*



SENSE PUBLISHERS  
ROTTERDAM/BOSTON/TAIPEI

A C.I.P. record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: 978-94-6300-478-7 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-94-6300-479-4 (hardback)

ISBN: 978-94-6300-480-0 (e-book)

Published by: Sense Publishers,  
P.O. Box 21858,  
3001 AW Rotterdam,  
The Netherlands  
<https://www.sensepublishers.com/>

Cover photographs:

**Top:** Raging Grannies. Still image from the film *Granny Power*. Photographer Jocelyne Clarke.

**Middle left:** Charlie Russell with a grizzly bear stretching his claws downward. Still image from the film *The Edge of Eden: Living with Grizzlies*. Photographer Paul Zacora.

**Middle right: 1st Photo:** Women drummers in Rwanda. Still image from the film *Sweet Dreams*. Photographer Lex Fletcher.

**Middle right: 2nd Photo:** Painted Trillium (*Trillium undulatum*) flower. Still image from the film *Treasures of the Old Forest*. Photographer Henri Steeghs.

**Bottom:** Photojournalist P. Sainath at work. Still image from the film *A Tribe of His Own: The Journalism of P. Sainath*. Photographer Joe Moulins.

Cover image design by Katrina Davenport

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 2002, I attended the World Community Film Festival in Courtenay, British Columbia, for the first. I was inspired by the imaginative and courageous struggles. I was especially thrilled to hear about unsung victories. For the next years the first thing I wrote in a new calendar book was the Courtenay film festival, never imagining that 13 years later I would be writing about documentary film festivals. In the spring of 2004 I moved to Peterborough, a wonderfully welcoming and receptive community, and in January 2005 we held the first Traveling World Community Film Festival – Peterborough, having borrowed films from Courtenay. Tickets sold out days before the festival! It was exhilarating and rewarding to be part of such a creative and capable community. The festival in Peterborough has grown into a magnificent community event. In 2007, I moved to Antigonish, Nova Scotia, where within a few months a group of nine people organized the Antigonish International Film Festival, also borrowing the films from Courtenay's Traveling World Community Film Festival.

I am indebted to many. I am grateful to the brilliant visionaries and organizers in Courtenay who created the first World Community Film Festival and who had the dedication to keep it going for more than 24 years: Dr. Frank Tester, Anne Cubitt, Wayne Bradley, Janet Fairbanks, Jeanette Reinhardt, Dr. Don Castleden, Don Munro and the many others I have not had a chance to meet. I am thankful to Eva Manly for telling me about the Courtenay film festival and opening up a new life for me.

I thank the organizers in Peterborough who were willing to take a risk and try something new: Krista English, Ferne Cristall, Linda Slavin, Daphne Ingram, Joyce Barrett, Debbie Harrison, Julie Cosgrove, Miriam McFadyen, and Su Ditta. I wish to thank Jane Gutteridge at the National Film Board of Canada for her ongoing help.

I sincerely appreciate the cooperative, reliable, and dynamic team of festival organizers in Antigonish who are hospitable in the deepest sense and a joy to work with: Elaine MacLean, Larry Lamey, Janet Stark, Pam and Shawn Chisholm, Jeff Parker, Trina and Don Davenport, Sue Adams, Denise Davies, Peter and Mary Anne Gosbee, Bart Sears, Bernadette Lancaster, and Andrew Loscher. Former team members: Brenda McKenna, Lise Brin, Dr. John Buckland-Nicks, Catherine Tetu, Dr. Alison Mathie, Marla Gaudet, Lorraine Fennell, Odile Tetu, John Reigle, Dr. Nancy Peters, Lorraine Lee, Catherine Irving, and Kate Fiander. I also wish to acknowledge the volunteers and sponsors who help make the festival happen. I also wish to thank my colleagues in the Department of Adult Education at St. Francis Xavier University, Dr. Leona English and Dr. Maureen Coady, for their ongoing enthusiasm and support. I thank Susan Young and Paula Cameron, graduate students at the time who helped as research assistants.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank all people who attended these festivals, seeking the power of stories to inform and inspire, knowing that the nightmare scenarios that populate our news every day are not the only possible futures. Finally, I wish to express my profound gratitude to the filmmakers who invest so much time and energy in listening for, and to, stories, pursuing their projects despite the limited financial support available, because of their compassion, their decency, and their belief that injustices need to be exposed, stories told, and visions of possibilities shared. We thank them and we watch their films. We hear people's voices.

I acknowledge the support of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

I thank the *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* for permission to use material from an article already published: Roy, C. (2014). Telling stories of resistance and change: Organizers of film festivals contribute to media literacy. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 26(3), 1–16.

I thank the *International Journal of Lifelong Education* for permission to use material from an article already published: Roy, C. (2012). 'Why don't they show those on TV?' Documentary film festivals, media, and community. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 31(3), 293–307.

## **POLITICS, MEDIA, AND DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVALS**

Adult educators often engage in practice and research toward social justice using social movements as a site and nexus of their projects. Increasingly, these social movements are recognized as significant sites of collective adult learning and transformation (Clover, 2006; Hall & Turay, 2006). In support of the co-learning dimension, English and Mayo (2012) suggested a notion of citizenship that “embraces collectivity and movements rather than the idea of atomised individual citizens” (p. 19). Gorman (2007) also challenged the notion of the autonomous, at times competitive, learner and instead suggested that our field needs to pay attention to the collective nature of learning, especially when discussing social movements, resistance to the status quo, or struggles for social justice and political equality. However, although collective events or actions may occur spontaneously, they generally require some degree of organization. We live in a time when “community is made difficult by social and technological developments that force us further and further apart into a chaotic assemblage of fractured individual existences,” at least in North America (Preskill & Brookfield, 2009, p. 199). Preskill and Brookfield suggested that finding ways to bring people together, disseminate alternative information, and encourage collaboration and engagement are crucial to building solidarity. Documentary film festivals do just that.

A sense of community, however defined, is not to be taken for granted regardless of its basis: geography, identity, profession, political view, or religious belief, to name a few. A challenge in community building is ensuring respect for differences, and even more importantly in a diverse society, appreciating the differences. “Supporting community is making the most of the strength of solidarity without letting the need for unity overpower the group and short-circuit healthy dissent” (Preskill & Brookfield, 2009, p. 194). Confronted with massive global problems such as climate warming, ecological crises, and the growing gap between the poor and the rich, individual citizens can easily feel irrelevant and disengaged. Activities that inform and expand cross-sectorial networks are required to promote interactions, encourage alliances, and contribute to the breakdown of isolation between and within individuals, groups, or issues. No less important is the legitimization of dreams. Overcoming injustices, according to P. Freire (2004), demands profound changes to the inequitable social structures, but such changes require the ability to imagine a different world. P. Freire believed in the possibility of change: “What is not possible, however, is to even think about transforming the world without a dream, without utopia, or without a

vision” (p. 31). Effective methodologies for respectful, meaningful, and productive exchanges and dialogue between those with differences are needed especially in a multicultural and diverse society.

### FILM FESTIVALS: IDENTITY AND CRISIS

Cannes, Sundance, and Edinburg are known for their film festivals. It is no secret that festivals such as these attract large, enthusiastic audiences and financially benefit their cities and the film industry. Although they may be the most famous, they are by no means the only successful film festivals. Celebrity is not necessarily why film festivals are deemed successful. In fact, there are film festivals in which the goals are public education and community development. Through such cultural events, questions of identity and community resiliency arise, at times as a response to severe social and political crises.

The Panafrican Festival of Cinema in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, started in 1969, with the goals of developing African cinema, expanding its use for education, and raising awareness of cultural, social, and political issues. By 1985, festival organizers expressed their belief through the theme chosen for that year: liberation. Richard Peña, director of the New York Film Festival and the Film Society of Lincoln Center, said that the Panafrican Festival of Cinema in Ouagadougou is an example of the dialogic nature of film, and referred to well-known French film director and critic Jean-Luc Godard saying that real cinema is a collective experience for the audience (Turan, 2002). Gaston Kaboré, a pioneering film director in Burkina Faso, suggested that cinema was a tool of liberation as it helped name their reality (Turan, 2002). Films provide effective means of communication and outreach, and this is especially so in populations with low literacy rates. Although the literacy rate in Burkina Faso has been as low as 18%, it had only increased to 29% in 2012 (UNICEF, 2013). According to Kaboré, people support the film festival because they can find their stories in the films, as their own lives provided the scripts for films, giving value to their stories. Over time the festival has expanded to include the Black Diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean Islands, and now offers the Paul Robeson Award in honour of his excellence as both an actor and an activist engaged against racism. The festival has also developed a documentation centre on African cinema. In the March 1, 2013, edition of *The Guardian*, Misha Hussain called it “Africa’s film festival with a conscience,” which has contributed to establishing Africa’s cultural identities. Kaboré wrote, “Culture and development are interconnected. When people see themselves on screen they are empowered to change their own reality. ... The big screen ... widens their imagination. Film isn’t a luxury for Africa. It is a necessity” (“Film Festival in Burkina Faso,” n.d., final paragraph).

A more dramatic example is the Sarajevo Film Festival, which was created in 1995 (the 4th year of the siege of Sarajevo) in defiance of the Bosnian War. Some directors came in armored vehicles, carrying their films through a tunnel underneath the airport; portable generators were used to run the projectors because there was

no electricity; and moviegoers had to give a cigarette in exchange for a ticket due to the lack of currency (Pond, 2014). The goal of the festival was to help in the reconstruction of a community experiencing hardship. In the first years, going to see films was one of the main cultural events, and question periods after films could last 3 hours. The second festival ended the same day the Dayton Accord was signed, officially ending the war (Pond, 2014). The Sarajevo Film Festival proved so significant to local morale that in 1997 the Bosnian government issued a stamp in its honor (Jockims, 2012). Local resident Haris Pasovic stated that the festival provided a way out of the isolation of war; they watched films because of their desire to connect, and to reassert their humanity and their belonging to the world (Turan, 2002). Today, 20 years later, the Sarajevo Film Festival is the leading film festival in the region and in 2014 close to 200 films were shown to an audience of more than 100,000 people.

The Sarajevo Film Festival is a good example of the ideas Lord David Putnam delivered in a speech at the 2009 Edinburgh International Film Festival. A British film producer and educator, Putnam stated that in times of crisis, film can play an important political role due to its remarkable ability to communicate the complexity of situations to a wide diversity of people, exercising a form of leadership. Putnam echoed P. Freire's assertion that dreams are necessary and suggested that films can ignite the imagination (Knegt, 2009). Films, especially documentaries that present successful struggles, victories, or creative community development, can help us reimagine possibilities.

## MEDIA

Citizens need information and opportunities to interact with others to break down the isolating silos of class, race, culture, and religious and political beliefs, to name just some of the many divisions. The importance of mass media in a democratic society was not lost on social critic and communication theorist N. Postman (2006), who suggested that culture is the result of speech. As a result, N. Postman suggested, every new means of communication provides a unique modality for thought and expressions, be it painting, literature, or visual media which help us make sense of the world. In other words, the media create our perception of the world. An example might be how people who experienced the crash of the towers in New York on September 11, 2001 (9/11) often compared it to watching a movie, which made them spectators despite their presence. In the introduction to the twentieth anniversary of N. Postman's (2006) *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, his son, A. Postman (2006), briefly summarized his father's views on television. "TV is turning all public life (education, religion, politics, journalism) into entertainment" while "the image is undermining other forms of communication, particularly the written word" (p. vii). He continued to summarize his father's ideas with a warning that anticipated the dominance of information technologies and its billions of bytes because our infatuation with TV results in an overabundance of

information, a glut, “until what is truly meaningful is lost and we no longer care what we’ve lost as long as we’re being amused” (A. Postman, 2006, p. vii). In 1996, media critic McChesney had already called attention to the fact that Western society would be facing an assault of privatisation and deregulation of the media. A decade later, another media critic expressed concerns about what he called the “degradation of the communication networks” with pseudo-information (Berry, 2006, p. 11). In fact, Lowry Mays, the founder and CEO of Clear Channel Communications, the largest operator of radio stations in the U.S., once admitted that the purpose of his business was not providing news, information, or music, but selling products for its customers, the advertisers (Waltz, 2005). Although ubiquitous mass media and the “thousand channels universe” provide some information, media critic Solomon (2004) suggested that it amounts to a “multiplicity of sameness” (para. 5).

In addition to the homogeneity to which Solomon (2004) referred, and the anticipation of being drowned in an abundance of bits of information that lose their meaning, N. Postman (2006) suggested that mass media tend to promote spectatorship and do little to encourage citizens’ engagement, especially because creative examples of community development or courageous and successful social movements are rarely displayed on TV screens, except perhaps for a short time when they become massive (e.g., the Arab Spring). Yet, in Canada, although publicly owned media have been tools for social change in the past, they have recently faced severe cuts to their funding. Some citizens, however, have stepped in with initiatives that attempt to fill the void left by the withdrawal from various levels of government for support and funds for progressive programs. These citizens support progressive programs like documentary film festivals.

This book is about community based documentary film festivals in small Canadian towns; their history, the impact they have on viewers and the kind of leadership demonstrated by organizers. This use of film festivals responds directly to our current age, which is an age of the visual. As N. Postman (2006) observed more than three decades ago, “As a culture moves from orality to writing to printing to televising, its ideas of truth move with it. ... Every epistemology is the epistemology of a stage of media development” (p. 24). Although there is danger in embracing every new view that comes along, our society need not abandon the potential of the visual pedagogy of media as it can also include a wide range of people and support an epistemology that can be more democratic when it is inclusive of diverse voices and allows sharing beyond what is familiar. N. Postman also suggested that with care this visual epistemology can be remarkably effective in bolstering hope in scenarios such as a rise of opposition to war or violence. In *Pedagogy of Indignation*, P. Freire (2004) suggested that denunciation of a perverse reality must be accompanied by the announcement of the possibility of a new world. “It would be horrible if we could only feel oppression, but not imagine a different world or dream of it as a vision, and embrace the struggle of its erection” (p. 119). In a 2009 meeting in Brazil, the International Council of Adult Education called on adult educators to renew their commitment to social and political transformation. This book about documentary

film festivals is an attempt to announce possibilities and respond to the call for renewal. Independent documentary filmmakers provide a bullhorn for diverse, dissenting, and inspiring voices, as documentaries presented in these festivals tell informative, at times poignant, often inspiring, stories of people from around the world that foster critical thinking, promote understanding across differences, stimulate imagination, lessen isolation, and encourage solidarity. They make us ask, as did many audience members, Why don't we see this on TV?

#### MEDIA AND ADULT EDUCATION

In Canada, public media organizations like the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and the National Film Board (NFB) were historically “vital instruments in Canada’s adult education efforts” (Selman, Selman, Cooke, & Dampier, 1998, p. 290). Yet, despite their value in a democratic society, or more cynically probably because of their value, they have suffered major funding cuts in recent decades that have drastically reduced the abilities of these cultural institutions to play their important roles (Selman, Selman, Cooke, & Dampier). In many ways, the cuts serve as a reminder of the historical success of the linkage between CBC and adult education. Collaboration with CBC led to two of the biggest experiments in media-delivered adult education in Canada using participatory and grassroots approaches to social change: the National Farm Radio Forum (1935–1965), and Citizens’ Radio Forum (1941–), which continues to this day under the name Cross Country Checkup (Draper & Carere, 1998). At the time these programs were initiated many adult educators held notions of democracy that were intrinsically related to education as empowerment; they believed that people “had within themselves a craving for knowledge” which could be used to solve problems and improve their conditions (Mirth, 1996, p. 62).

The NFB, started in 1939 and headed by John Grierson, instigated the creation of more than 250 film councils across the country to ensure that citizens had access to its films. More ingeniously, in 1967 the NFB created Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle, a highly innovative program that used films and filmmaking for community development. With support from NFB officers, citizens watched documentaries, analyzed their situations, told their stories through filmmaking, and examined and strategized solutions. The well-known Fogo Island project in Newfoundland used films for isolated communities to tell their stories to other communities on their small island that differed by language and/or religion, and with whom they had little contact. After being introduced to each other and hearing of the government’s plan to relocate all of the island’s communities, they successfully resisted the relocation. Challenge for Change lasted until 1979 and according to Marchessault (1995), provided an alternative to “the paternalistic and authoritarian mandate of Grierson’s NFB,” which was “to interpret Canada to Canadians and to the rest of the world and to make films in the national interest” (p. 15). Marchessault also suggested that Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle confronted “the NFB’s

technocratic elitism” (p. 15) while seeking to encourage community dialogue and social change. This program was copied in experiments in the United States (Low, 2010). In 1974, the NFB created the first studio in the world dedicated to women filmmakers, which lasted until 1996 and was much celebrated. Due to an explicit concern with community engagement and social justice in 1939, the NFB used films as catalysts for discussion. The community councils showed films in venues as diverse as churches, union halls, service clubs, or any other available spaces (Kidd, 1950). However, over time their community based approach has changed and now its online Screening Room, launched in 2009, makes hundreds of films available free to individual viewers. Although access to films has increased through television, cinemas, Internet, and the wide distribution of videos, now we often view them in relative isolation. The mass media in Canada continue to be influential, though they are now often oriented to conservative approaches and homogenous voices. This is no accident, given the concentration of ownership. Obar et al. (2013) observed that “Canada has the most concentrated television industry in the G8 group of countries. ... Overall, around 80 percent of the cable, satellite, and Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) markets are controlled by four groups, according to recent data” (p. 8). Obar et al. further suggested that “it is no surprise that in the current neo-liberal political climate, state and corporate support for public broadcasting has suffered” (p. 39). The ideological landscape has shifted to a focus on austerity and the struggle for public broadcasting is pitted against a preference for market-based solutions (Obar et al., 2013).

In addition, the Boston-based Analysis Group suggested that although the concentration in the media sector has been growing quickly in Canada, the integration of content creators and television distributors exceeded all other G8 countries. “As recently as 2009, only 40 per cent of the TV distribution market was in the hands of content creators, the report states—less than half the percentage today” (Tencer, 2013). Dobbin (2010), who comments on political issues in Canada, further suggested that control of the media by the right has resulted in a decline in political debate in Canada, neutralization of dissenting voices, and a lack of public understanding of the situation. Dobbin drew attention to the control exercised by Conrad Black and the Asper family, which he believes has silenced dissent or discussion. Furthermore, he sees television as continuing to have weight and to influence public opinion tremendously, which makes the study of media control the more pressing. Baker (2007) agreed and stated that “a country is democratic only to the extent that the media, as well as elections, are structurally egalitarian and politically salient” (p. 7). As McChesney (2001) warned, a highly concentrated media in the hands of private corporations challenges any notion of a free press, deemed essential for a democracy. He also pointed out that this situation is not a result of the free market so cherished, in theory, by neo-liberalism, but the result of policies that created such a system, policies heavily influenced by the laws and regulations the large media corporations advocated while the general public usually had little to no input. In response to this situation, Dobbin (2010) offered some possible avenues for action, including small

groups acting together to think about alternatives, reading, and studying. Despite the challenges, some citizens realize the strategic educational and community building importance of documentary films.

The notion of citizen engagement is essential, as it taps into what is needed to make a democratic society. In support of this notion, Magnusson (1990), a political scientist, suggested that “what ordinary people think and do is actually more crucial for the movement’s success than what the states do” (p. 536). Yet, many stories of what ordinary people do are not represented in mainstream news, leaving us unaware of the creative and courageous efforts of people all over the world who are acting to protect their dignity and/or their environments. Learning about oppression and injustices can leave an individual exhausted or focused on rage; yet, compassion without anger “renders us impotent, seduces us into watered-down humanism, [and] stifles our good energy” (McAllister, 1982, p. iv). Awareness of the same issues in a collective context can provide the support needed to face difficult realities. However, this grassroots interest in the use of films for citizen education and advocacy for social justice is not reflected in the adult education literature, even though adult education has a long tradition of social justice orientation. Documentary film festivals can play an important role in creating space for dialogue as well as promoting the recording and analysis of community struggles and victories that deserve our attention.

#### WHY A FESTIVAL?

Festivals have been flourishing around the world, such as the Cannes Film Festival, the London Literature Festival, and the Hong Kong Chinese New Year Festival. Although few people in Canada attend protests (e.g., anti-war, environment, labour), festivals have also been flourishing over the last four decades. These run the gamut from political to music festivals to celebration of agriculture. Examples include the Vancouver Folk Music Festival, Caribana, which is a celebration of Caribbean cultures in Toronto, the Nova Scotia Annapolis Valley Apple Blossom Festival, and Pride Montreal, which celebrates LGBTQ. In a paper titled “Performing Knowledges of Inquiry in the Creases of Festivals,” Andruske and Noble (2006) commented on the role festivals have played historically. Festivals are found throughout human history as gatherings that provide opportunities for cross-pollination and “allow for a ... dialogue ... so that the ‘other’ becomes more familiar, safer, and more acceptable” (p. 3). This balance between the familiar and the new is central to the attractiveness of festivals; in addition, the usual atmosphere of friendliness, sharing, and solidarity that prevails, rather than distance and snobbishness, appeals to a great number of people (Dufresne-Tasse, O’Neill, Wetzl-Fairchild, & Emond, 2001). Andruske and Noble confirmed that approachability and the lack of “preconditions, markers of acceptance, or sense of ‘measuring up’” in festivals “foster a sense of belonging” (p. 5). In her book *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*, Ehrenreich (2006) suggested that festivals are a means of inclusion, of bringing people together in a circle to join a common activity. Over the last three decades, film festivals have

also gained in popularity. A cursory search of the Internet shows more than 100 film festivals per year across Canada; around the world there are more than 6,000 film festivals (Turan, 2002). These festivals espouse wide-ranging agendas, including geopolitical, aesthetic, social justice, and industry-related.

The study of film festivals is a growing, but new, field of academic research. Film festival scholarship includes subjects such as festival programming (Ruoff, 2012), festival management (Fischer, 2013), and the impact of the Internet and digital technologies on film distribution (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012). Large financial interests have long realized the power of film. Peter Cherin, President of Twentieth Century Fox's parent corporation, sees film as a source of human emotions, and futurist Kevin Roche suggested that in the future competition will no longer be over market share but about capturing minds (Turan, 2002). Although there has been a noticeable increase in the number of film festivals and their popularity since the mid-1990s, little attention has been paid to film festivals as dynamic sites of adult and citizenship education, and community building. Although they may be perceived as providing entertainment, they also portray complex ideas in a short time, stimulating reflection and discussion. Film festivals can be dynamic sites of learning. The festivals in this study show independent filmmakers' documentaries that are not widely seen because distribution networks favour corporate distributors. Winton and Garrison (2010), media studies scholars, described how commercial film distribution structures shape what we see, and do not see, and often ignore under-represented narratives. They argued that alternative films are not enough; alternative distribution networks are equally important, especially for political films, which do not generate large revenues and consequently struggle to find sponsors. Big business is loath to get involved in the financing or distribution of activist productions. In addition, Winton and Garrison suggested that alternative means of making documentaries available are important to reach counter-publics, which are ignored in scholarship, despite the fact that documentary film festivals are often very popular. Film festivals are not only ticket sellers but, according to the chair of the Toronto International Film Festival, a viable alternative distribution network because many films are presented only at festivals.

## DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVALS

Social scientists studying film festivals are more likely to focus on what might be called *general film festivals*, which primarily feature productions by the established film industry (Wong, 2011), and tend to ignore documentary film festivals (Nisbet & Aufderheide, 2009). In *Film Festivals and Activism* for instance, Iordanova and Torchin (2012) shared an interest in documentary film festivals and issues of social justice; however, many festivals studied focus on a single issue that may include human rights, queer, indigenous, environment, disabilities, or mental health, to name a few. In contrast, the film festivals studied in this book include only documentary films by independent filmmakers and seek to represent a wide range of issues,

providing a more nuanced consideration of the connections between media/film and transformative learning, adult education, and community development.

In Canada in the early 1990s a documentary film festival was created in Courtenay, a small town in British Columbia, which inspired other small communities to do the same. These community based film festivals are not sponsored by the corporate film industry, and are dedicated entirely to featuring the works of independent documentary filmmakers. This rise in documentary film festivals answered a need for concerned citizens seeking to act who realized they first required accurate information about the challenges at home and abroad. More importantly, they needed examples of successful community efforts to fuel imagination and hope that change towards sustainability and justice is possible. Based on extensive primary research of an original community based festival and two of the many associated festivals it inspired, this book presents a uniquely detailed and engaged analysis of the festival audiences, the visions of the organizers, and the impact these film festivals had on individuals and the communities where they took place. The selected festivals in this study are the World Community Film Festival (Courtenay, British Columbia), the Traveling World Community Film Festival (now called ReFrame Peterborough International Film Festival) (Peterborough, Ontario), and the Antigonish International Film Festival (Antigonish, Nova Scotia). These documentary film festivals represent examples of P. Freire's (2004) pedagogy of indignation in action and the use of the arts as alternative information channels for issues related to social justice and community development. "Media and the arts are among the many exciting trends and strategies that are part of the toolkit of community development and education" (English & Mayo, 2012, p. 136).

Film festivals are attractive and enjoyable in part because film is associated with leisure, but also because they are social events; the audience is usually open, relaxed, and willing to go on a journey. Documentary film festivals, in particular, make it possible for individuals to inform themselves in a supportive, non-threatening atmosphere, which creates an excellent basis for exchange and dialogue. Generally, films allow viewers to empathize with those portrayed on the screen, to find out about others, or to find out about global issues together. At times, views represented in the film may be in conflict with the viewers' own views, or may represent a conflict among different factions shown in the film, permitting an airing of differences. Such an open atmosphere is particularly important in a society that is marked by diversity, as openness encourages exchanges across differences in a public space where all are legitimate regardless of concern, identity, or contribution. Although a book requires literacy, at times a high level of literacy, a film is accessible to a wide range of people. By exposing different individual and collective realities from a wide range of people and situations, documentaries by independent filmmakers help create bridges across differences, be they genders, races, cultures, religions, social classes, countries, or the world.

Andruske and Noble's (2006) earlier observations, that festivals allow contact with *the other* and provide an attractive, welcoming, and friendly atmosphere, are

relevant to international documentary film festivals given that the stories are often about people from distant places. Even when they are about people from nearby locations, the stories are often those of people who, though nearby, may experience significantly different realities. Although the festivals examined in this book take place in familiar venues in small communities and attract mostly the members of those communities, each festival provides a hiatus from normal daily routines, creating a liminal space within the community but “outside the everyday” context (Andruske & Noble, p. 4). The informal, communal, and open atmosphere allows for a sense of support or, at least, the realization that one is not alone, as others have also seen the story and heard the same information. Unlike watching films alone at home where the knowledge is individualized, seeing films in a festival context means that this new knowledge is constructed within a community. Rojas et al. (2005) surmised that scholars have discussed the role of media in promoting, or not promoting, tolerance and community engagement, and suggested that opportunities for face-to-face meetings are very important, especially when related to diversity, as change is “significantly determined by the heterogeneity of interpersonal contacts” (p. 95). Documentary film festivals promote the development of a democratic epistemology outside educational institutions because the stories they present highlight and challenge the narrow representations offered by mainstream media.

Documentary film festivals also make it possible to share community struggles and victories. Hall (2001) suggested that it is important to record such struggles and the knowledge they create. In addition, they provide continuity as well as resources for other activists and adult educators. Mainstream media are often devoid of stories of ordinary people who creatively and courageously struggle, all over the world, and at times even win in their efforts to protect their dignity and/or their environment. These stories are immensely important because they provide support and encouragement for others to dare to act. By offering different visions, films and film festivals are important tools of transformation. Cranton (1996) suggested that gaining additional perspectives helps individuals question their beliefs, which can lead to social change. These festivals embody P. Freire’s (2004) pedagogy of indignation as they expose and denounce problems or injustices while also celebrating stories of success and revealing possibilities. Films allow viewers to reflect on various issues, respectfully considering new information without having to take a position immediately or publicly. Viewers can take time to think and to discuss with others informally rather than be required to engage in a debate, which might be threatening for some people encountering particular information for the first time.

Some films have had a concrete effect on their audience and fostered change in a community. The film *Fix: The Story of an Addicted City* (Carson & Wild, 2002) tells of the struggle of a group of drug users in the notorious Vancouver Downtown Eastside who want a clinic for safe injection of drugs as a solution to the mounting death toll due to drug overdose. The main characters are: (a) a loud and determined long time drug addict who was once a businessman; (b) an extremely outspoken

nurse who started an organization of drug users (although she is not a drug user); (c) the aristocratic mayor of the city of Vancouver, who, after much reflection and exposure to the problems decides to support a safe injection site (however, his conservative party does not like the mayor's support of this idea and throws him out of the party); and (d) the coroner of the city, who opposes the conservative party, supports a safe injection site and decides to run for mayor. The leftist party coroner runs for mayor, and the current conservative party mayor in power who has been thrown out of his party, join forces on behalf of a safe injection site. The film was released during the municipal electoral campaign, and people learned that there was also a drug problem in the rich parts of the city but that those people have money to hide behind walls. The population came to see drug addiction as a health issue rather than a criminal issue. The result: they voted the leftist coroner in, and kicked out the conservative party who had kicked out the mayor because of his support for a safe injection site. This was in 2002. The injection site is still functioning in 2015 and has saved many lives. An article in 2014 on the businessman-turned-drug-addict showed that he has successfully escaped drug addiction (Howell, 2014).

Another film that had an impact, *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media* (Achbar & Wintonick, 1992), is a film about the academic linguist and political analyst Noam Chomsky, who clearly conveyed his message that government and media corporations work together to manipulate public opinion in the U.S. The film was shown in Courtenay, British Columbia at the World Community Film Festival in the late 1990s. At the time, Ezra Winton was a youth attending the festival and this film made such a strong impression that, years later, when he was a student at Concordia University in Montreal and 3,500 kilometres away from his home, he co-founded a very popular film event, Cinema Politica, a weekly series of documentaries on social and political issues. The series is usually sold-out, and has also become a distribution centre to other Cinema Politica across Canada and to 20 cities outside of Canada. Cinema Politica has been attracting university students and others at a time when we hear that youth are not interested in politics. This shows that a film seen at the Courtenay Film Festival years earlier had enough of an influence on Winton to inspire him to start a very successful documentary screening series and distribution centre.

### *Community Building*

At times, films and film festivals foster a sense of connectedness with viewers sharing the screening experience or with individuals and communities in the films, which is important to counteract the sense of isolation and desperation that can arise when facing global problems as individuals. "Our world does not consist of separate things but of relationships" (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 6), relationships that Heron (2001) saw as focused on connectedness. The effectiveness of film is in part due to the blending of ideas and emotions. Some researchers suggested that affective learning is required before critical reflection can take place (e.g., Coffman, 1989;

J. H. Morgan, 1987). Taylor (1996) suggested that from a neurobiological standpoint emotions are considered crucial to reasoning and later to making decisions. Taylor (1997) further stated that we can no longer afford to view emotions as irrelevant to thinking, but rather must include emotions in our search for understanding and greater clarity. Media educators say that “a film can open you up and make you receptive to a broad range of experiences” as it “touches the heart and mind at the same time” (Cristall & Emanuel, 1986, p. 13). A documentary film can portray complex situations; it allows viewers to consider new perspectives and, at times, even encourages empathy for people with different points of view or life experiences. David Putnam pointed out that although he understood that viewing films is not enough to change the world or to solve the world’s problems, it can help the viewers see these issues more deeply and help them envisage a new world order, to dream possibilities (Knegt, 2009).

Perhaps more importantly for citizen engagement and the social justice agenda, Boler and Allen (2002) suggested that documentaries by independent filmmakers provide an opportunity to think about what is missing from mainstream media and critically reflect on the images we encounter every day in our visual horizon. Independently produced documentaries get the lowest exposure to mainstream theaters and are not easily available to individuals without some effort. In this context, film festivals expand audiences, possibly mobilizing them as well, and support independent filmmakers and their movement (Cristall & Emanuel, 1986). The film distribution system ignores these films and filmmakers because it works almost exclusively for large corporate production companies. In this book I will reflect on the role documentary films and film festivals play in strengthening community and solidarity toward social change. These festivals provide alternative information, foster critical thinking skills and media literacy, build community, foster solidarity, and contribute to social movements by exposing problems as well as victories. These festivals create a public space for exchange and dialogue, and inspiration for preferred futures. Finally, participatory collaboration of allied community organizations and educational institutions demonstrates a potentially sustainable model of organizing. Alliances attempt to answer Collins’ (2006) call for meeting the challenges of this time with strategies that bring together “critique for resistance with the development of appropriate alternative adult education initiatives” (pp. 119–120). Let us not abdicate the airwaves to corporate power but rather reclaim the screens to provide stories ignored by mass media; a documentary film festival that seeks to engage citizens is a start. While we experiment with documentary film festivals we may ask “What kinds of shared experiences do the festivals evoke? What kinds of new experiences do the festivals offer? What specific goals and ideologies are promoted?” (Lutkehaus, 1995, p. 122) In addition, I will look at what documentary film festivals can tell us about Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning theory, P. Freire’s (2004) pedagogy of indignation and hope, and the engagement of a volunteer grassroots organization that stands outside the structure of civil society yet brings together non-profit organizations, small for-profit businesses, local governance, departments

from a university, and advocacy groups in an informal learning space conducive to exploring social justice and solidarity.

### *A Note on Methodology*

This book is the result of a qualitative case study of the World Community Film Festival in Courtenay, British Columbia, and two of the affiliate documentary film festivals it inspired in Peterborough, Ontario, and Antigonish, Nova Scotia. All three film festivals take place in small Canadian communities with fewer than 75,000 residents. Courtenay was selected because it was the first and longest lasting (started in 1991). Peterborough and Antigonish are more recent additions (2005 and 2007, respectively); both are university towns of different sizes. Peterborough is the largest of the three communities, and Antigonish is the smallest. The locations of Peterborough and Antigonish are also different in terms of easy access to a large urban area: Peterborough is only a 1.5-hr drive northeast of Toronto, and Antigonish is 2.5-hr east of Halifax. I have a personal connection with each festival, having attended Courtenay for a few years before joining with others to start the festivals in Peterborough and later in Antigonish. Although I was no longer with the Peterborough festival at the time of this study, I was still involved as coordinator of the Antigonish festival.

Data were collected between 2008 and 2011 in exit interviews, group interviews, and in-depth individual interviews with attendees, organizers, and sponsors to gather information on these three festivals: 94 exit interviews with attendees; 4 group interviews with 24 attendees; 23 in-depth interviews with individual attendees; 18 in-depth interviews with individual organizers and authorities in the use of the arts in social justice education; and 2 group interviews with a total of 11 sponsors. I also had access to the archives of each festival. The names of attendees and sponsors are protected through the use of pseudonyms. The names of organizers have been used only if they gave permission. The data were analyzed in light of Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning theory to discern the learning that took place as well as the limitations of this type of event. In addition, P. Freire's pedagogy of indignation was also helpful in data analysis and formulation of findings. For ease of reference, all participant quotations are from the study data unless otherwise noted. Finally, this study received a research grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.