

Participatory and Ethnographic Filmmaking for Social Change:

concepts, methodologies and impacts.



Nepal Human Rights International Film Festival

Professor Michael Brown





Introduction

The aim of this presentation is:

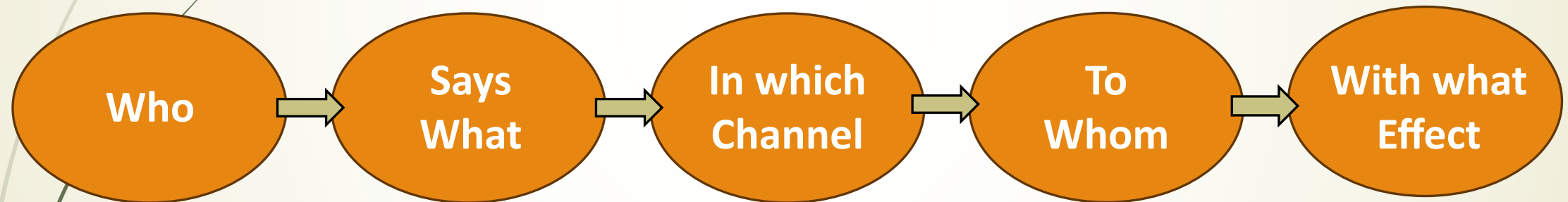
To explore concepts, methodologies and impacts of participatory and ethnographic filmmaking as an approach for supporting positive social change within marginalised and disadvantaged societies.

Presentation Content:

- Recognise different models of communication approaches
- Consider our positioning as filmmakers to our subject(s)
- Explore three case studies
- Invite participant feedback
- Address questions and comments

Early Models of Mass Media Communication

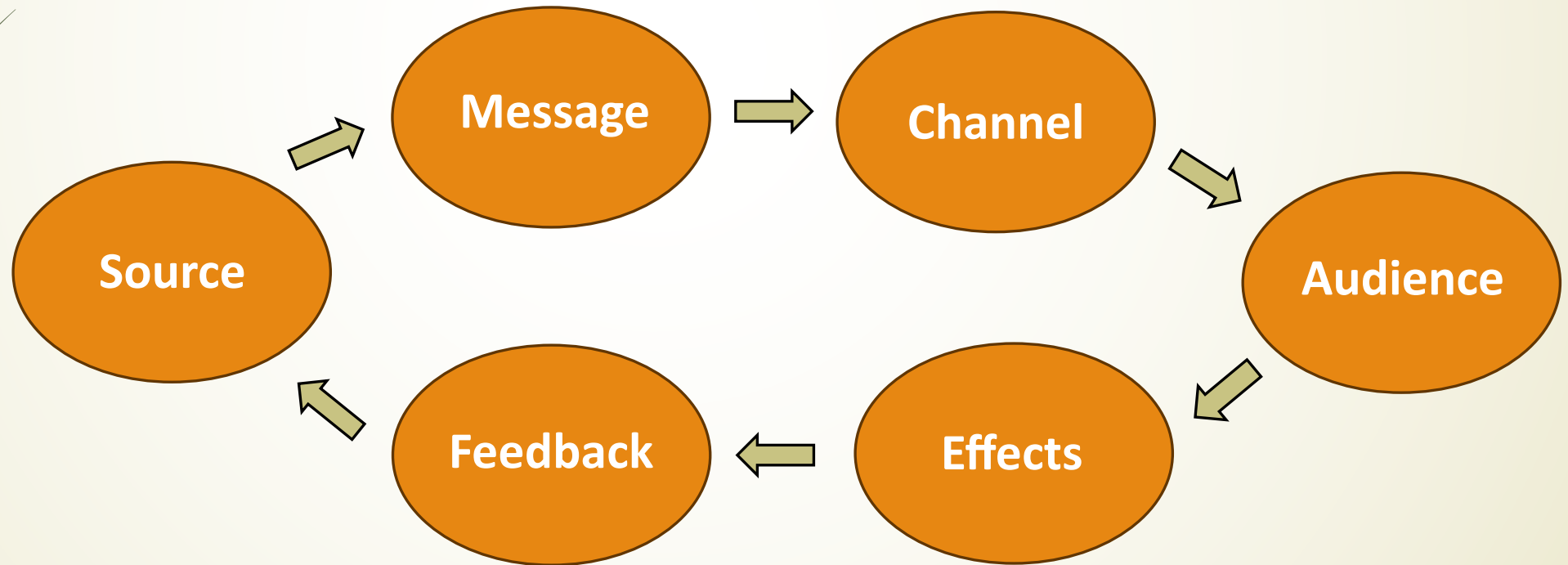
In the late 1940s Harold Lasswell explained mass media theory by a series of questions: WHO says WHAT in which CHANNEL to WHOM and with what EFFECT (Melkote,1991:P65 from Lasswell, 1948).



This model has been termed the 'hypodermic needle' model (Melkote 1991 from Berio, 1960), the 'bullet theory' (Melkote 1991 from Schramm, 1971) and the 'stimulus-response theory' (Melkote,1991 from DeFleur,1975).

Early Models of Mass Media Communication

With increasing need for the message originator to know the effects produced in the audience, two-way communication models were conceptualised. However, most approaches took the same components in the one-way model and, with the addition of 'feedback', bent them into a communication cycle.



Nora Cruz Quebral - Development Communication




The term 'development communication' was first coined in 1971 by Nora Cruz Quebral in the Philippines, who is often referred to as the 'mother of development communication', and the term became formalised as an academic discipline.

Development communication refers to the use of communication to facilitate social development.

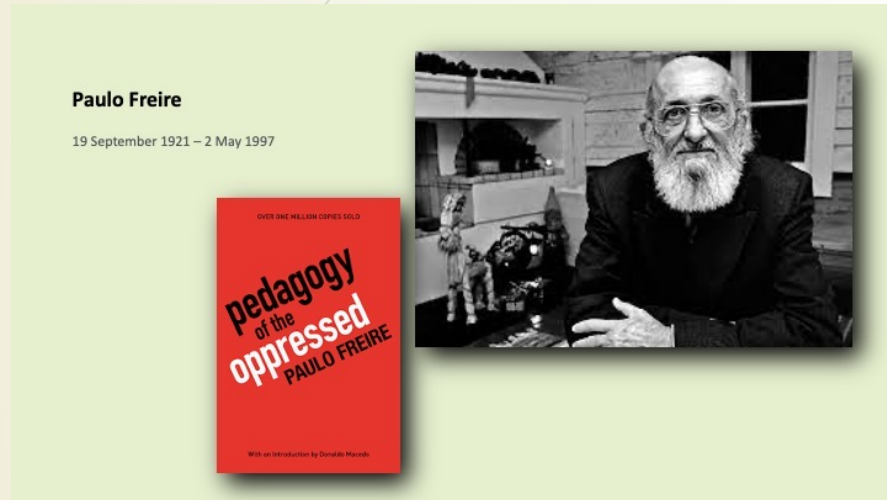


Nora Cruz Quebral - Development Communication



Quebral (2001) offered her definition as **'the art and science of human communication linked to a society's planned transformation from a state of poverty to one of dynamic socio-economic growth that makes for greater equity and the larger unfolding of individual potential'**.

Paulo Freire – critical consciousness



Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator and philosopher who supported marginalised and disadvantaged people to improve their life situations. Freire's idea of 'critical consciousness' reinforced processes of problem-solving with communities (Aubel, 1992:P.24). Emancipation from oppression is pursued through the awakening consciousness of one's own situation within community and society, driven by self-actualising actions for change.




Participatory Communication for Social Change

This is where we can frame **participatory filmmaking for social change**. Instead of focusing on communication (and filmmaking) as a noun, a product, we must focus on communication (and filmmaking) as a verb, an action. Participatory communication can facilitate us to investigate our own situation through self-reflection, listening to each other, engaged dialogue, developing new understanding and awareness, and ultimately changing our behaviours to ourselves, to other people, to other living things, to our planet.



Characteristics of the Participatory Filmmaking

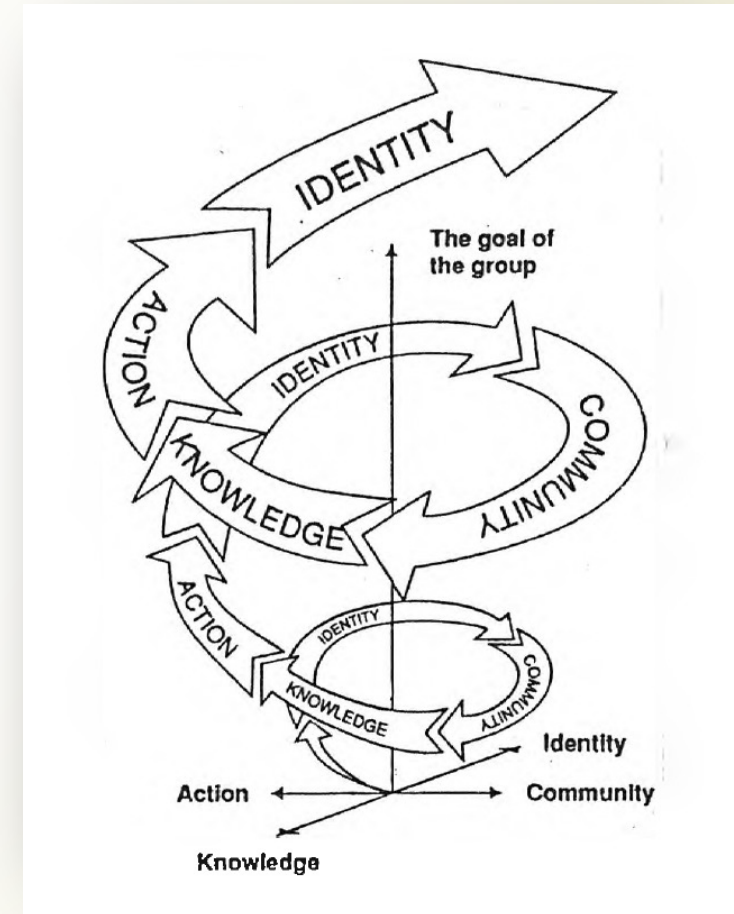
- Help in the development of the community's cultural identity
 - Act as a vehicle for citizen self-expression
 - Facilitate problem articulation
 - Serve as a tool for the diagnosis of a community's problems
 - Lead to collective action
- 

Models of Participatory Communication

An early model of participatory communication was actually proposed back in 1982 (Thunberg et al, 1982), called the **Spiral of Interaction.**

Four functions of communication are identified:

- The expressive function. Individuals and groups express themselves in order to create an identity for themselves.
- The social function. By communicating together people create a sense of community.
- The information function. Through communication, individuals can share information and thereby increase their own knowledge.
- The control activation function. Communication leads to joint action, modifying the environment and improving the situation of individuals and their groups.



Characteristics of Participatory Communication

Oepen (1991) offered further thoughts about the participatory communication approach:

- The entry point of the communication strategy is the specific realities and problems of local groups, which are often rooted in rural subsistence, poverty and lack of organisational capacity.
- Horizontal communication processes motivate people and mobilise them to change behaviour. These processes occur through communication networks at the local level.
- The main criteria of success of communication interventions are the degree of participation and action by non-privileged groups in decision-making.



Ethnographic Films

Ethnography is generally described as the study of peoples and cultures with their customs, habits, and mutual differences. It is a dimension of anthropology, the study of human societies.

Ethnographic film, then, is a way of documenting and investigating people and their cultures.

I would also argue that animals and landscapes can be explored in film with an ethnographic mindset.

Anthropology meets Zoology = Anthrozoology

Ethnographic Films

The author Heider (2006: 2) makes a strong case for resisting the temptation to define ethnographic film as an absolute, but rather 'to look for the various attributes, or dimensions, that effect ethnographicness in films'.

As filmmakers, we immerse ourselves into the setting, the community, the person's life.

We build a relationship to the point where our presence no longer affects the way people behave.

Then we can start to film material that is authentic to the situation.

Longevity of engagement with, and in, the subject and their environment is essential.

Ethnographic Films

- **Direct Cinema:** non-interventionist, the filmmaker remains un-seen and detached from events, and the film has no commentary.
- **Observational Cinema:** de-emphasises persuasion to give a sense of what a given situation is like, but the filmmaker's presence is more obvious, and the film may incorporate interviews.
- **Cinéma Vérité:** translated as 'truthful cinema', the interaction between filmmaker and subjects is acknowledged, with the filmmaker often placing themselves within the film.



My Own Practice – Three Case Studies

As a development communication practitioner and ethnographic and documentary filmmaker, I seek to engage with marginalised, disadvantaged or declining peoples and their cultures, animals and the environment, promoting discussion and dialogue around issues that directly affect them.

I do, periodically, amend the way I describe my own work, as I learn.

I work locally and globally with communities and social development organisations, utilising participatory methods. You can find out more about my work at www.marginalvoices.org

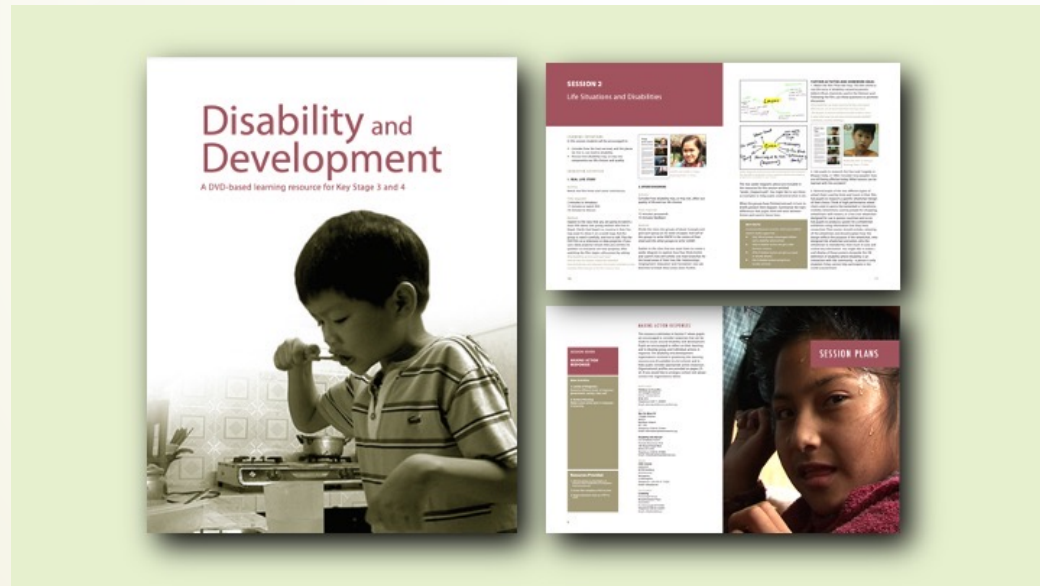


My Own Practice – Three Case Studies



Case Study 1 – Disability and Development (Investigative Filmmaking)

The aim of this work was to help young people in the UK and Ireland have a broader world view, and deeper understanding of the issues affecting other young people around the world. So, as they grow into adults and take on jobs with responsibility, they have a greater understanding of global issues.



Case Study 1 – Disability and Development

THE FILMS



RODINSON and SEBASTIAN in Haiti
Running Time: 10 mins



ANITA and LAXMI in Nepal
Running Time: 17 mins



PHAN VAN HUY in Vietnam
Running Time: 17 mins



ELIAS in Ethiopia
Running Time: 10 mins



KIRSTEN in Northern Ireland
Running Time: 12 mins



JUDITH in Tanzania
Running Time: 15 mins



FABIOLA and MACK in Bolivia
Running Time: 16 mins

THE FILM-MAKER

The films were made by Michael Brown, the Director of the Development Media Workshop. Michael has over twenty years experience working in development communication and development education, both locally and globally. He has a PhD in participatory development communication.



The Development Media Workshop was established in 2005. It focuses on development and environmental issues, using media and educational materials to promote awareness and discussion of important issues, locally and globally.

DMW

DEVELOPMENT MEDIA WORKSHOP
www.developmentmediaworkshop.org
www.vimeo.com/channels/dmw

SESSION 2

Life Situations and Disabilities

LEARNING INTENTIONS

In this session students will be encouraged to:

- Consider how the lives we lead, and the places we live in, can lead to disability.
- Discuss how disability may, or may not, compromise our life choices and quality.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. REAL LIFE STORY

Activity:
Watch the film 'Anita and Laxmi' and discuss

Time required:
2 minutes to introduce
17 minutes to watch film
10 minutes to discuss

Method:

Explain to the class that you are going to watch a short film about two young women who live in Nepal. Clarify that Nepal is a country in Asia. You may want to show it on a world map. Ask the group to watch carefully, and not to talk. Play the DVD film on a television or data projector. If you use a data projector ensure that you connect to speakers so everyone can hear properly. After watching the film, begin a discussion by asking:

What disabilities do Anita and Laxmi have?

How has their life situation created their disability?

How did Rodinson's and Sebastian's life situation contribute to their disability? (Remind pupils of the film in Session One)



ANITA and LAXMI in Nepal
Running Time: 17 mins

2. SPIDER DIAGRAMS

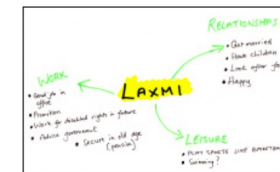
Activity:
Consider how disability may, or may not, affect our quality of life and our life choices

Time required:
15 minutes groupwork
10 minutes feedback

Method:

Divide the class into groups of about 4 people and give each group an A2 sheet of paper. Ask half of the groups to write 'ANITA' in the centre of their sheet and the other groups to write 'LAXMI'.

Explain to the class that you want them to create a spider diagram to explore how they think Anita's and Laxmi's lives will unfold. Use main branches for the broad areas of 'their lives like 'relationships', 'employment', 'education' and 'recreation'. Use sub branches to break these areas down further.



FURTHER ACTIVITIES AND HOMEWORK IDEAS

1. Watch the film 'Phan Van Huy'. This film shows a real life story of disability caused by genetic defects (from chemicals used in the Vietnam war). Following the film, use these questions to promote discussion:

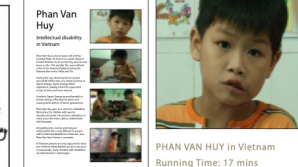
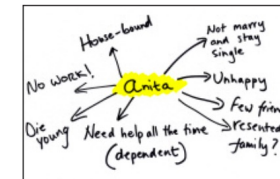
What disabilities are shown and why did they come about?

What lessons can be learnt from Phan Van Huy's story?

(The dangers of chemical warfare long after conflict is over.)

In what other ways can war leave innocent people disabled?

(Landmines, crossfire, bombings)



PHAN VAN HUY in Vietnam
Running Time: 17 mins

Spider Diagrams produced may look something like these examples. You may like to ask pupils to use a computer-based mind-mapping programme if available in your school.

The two spider diagrams above are included in the resources for this session entitled 'Spider_Diagrams.pdf'. You might like to use these as examples to help pupils understand what to do.

When the groups have finished ask each in turn to briefly present their diagram. Summarise the main differences that pupils think will exist between Anita's and Laxmi's future lives.

KEY FACTS

In economically poorer countries, small-scale unofficial research studies suggest that...

- Only 10% of primary school-aged children with a disability attend school.
- 50% of disabled women and girls suffer domestic violence.
- 25% of disabled women and girls are raped or sexually abused.
- 6% of disabled women and girls are forcibly sterilised.

Case Study 1 – Disability and Development



Case Study 2 – Brick Mule (Ethnographic Filmmaking)

This work explored the use of film ethnography as an action research methodology based on Paulo Freire's principles, where vulnerable Nepali communities (whose lives and livelihoods are heavily dependent on working equines) and their equines engaged in participatory film ethnography, as part of ongoing engagement activities by project partners seeking transformation in working equine welfare and the economic stability of equine-owning communities.



Case Study 2 – Brick Mule



Case Study 2 – Brick Mule



Case Study 2 – Brick Mule




Case Study 2 – Brick Mule

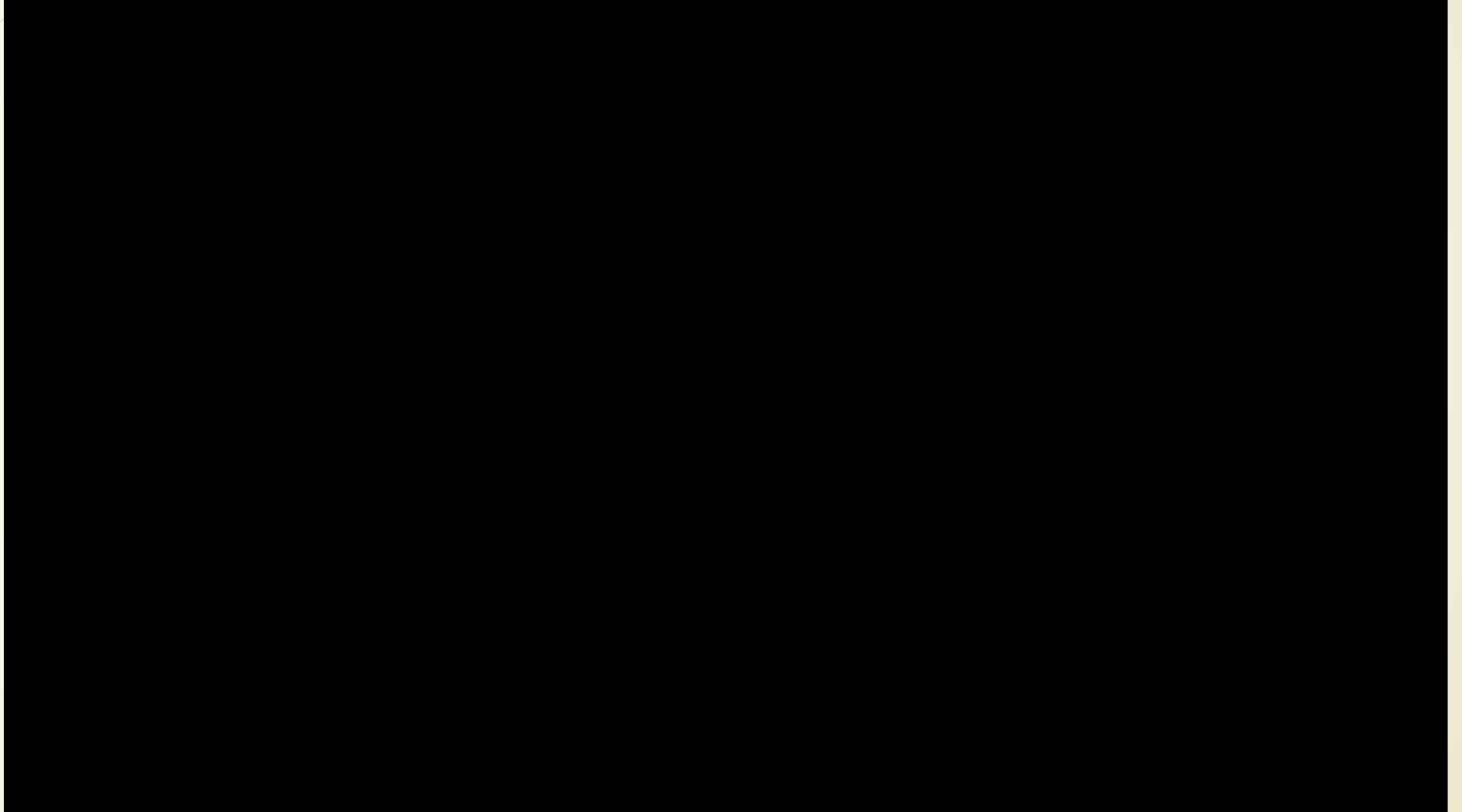


Case Study 2 – Brick Mule





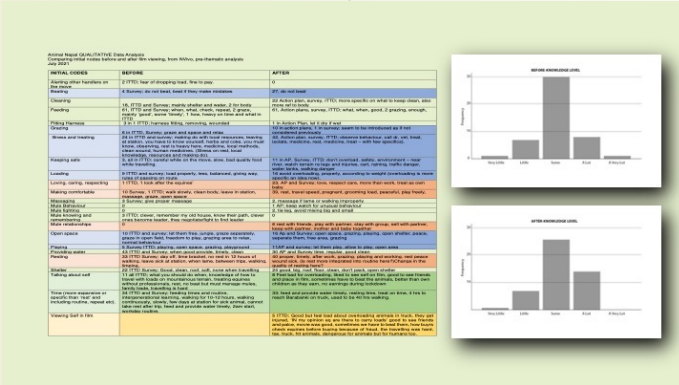
Case Study 2 – Brick Mule



Case Study 2 – Brick Mule

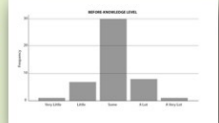
Keeping equines free from hunger and thirst	Keeping equines free from discomfort	Keeping equines free from pain, injury and disease	Keeping equines free from fear and distress	Allowing equines to express normal behaviour
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feed timely • Feed as much as possible • Water animal during trip • Feed before work • Let equine graze at station • Carry enough food for trip • Feed equine who are sick • Provide water to sick • Fresh and clean drinking water • Feed timely • Proper medical treatment • Feed 3 times a day • Timely provide water in 3 to 4 hours of gap 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let them play and relax while resting • Massage body if do no walk properly • Groom at evening • Clean foot after work • Let the harness dry if it is wet after work • Do no walk while it is raining • Provide good shelter • Provide enough space • Keep the shelter clear • Give 3 hours of rest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medicine and medical support • Inform vet • Rest if sick • Clean foot if it is lame • Provide good food if weak • Deworm if not eating properly • Provide vitamins time to time • Timely treatment • Timely check up • Don't beat the equine • Give timely treatment • When sick, consult nearby vet or animal hospital • Consult vet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not beat animals • Love them • Care properly • Let them play with their partner • Keep the group together • Always sell the animals with their partner if they have • Keep the mother and their child together • Allow them to graze freely • Let them play • Give 10 to 15 minutes of rest • Treat the equine as their own baby 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep in free space • Give love and care • Let them play • Rest if sick • Keep the partners together • Proper grazing land • Keep a watch on any inappropriate behaviour

Case Study 2 – Brick Mule

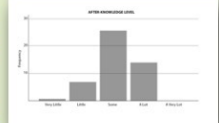


Animal Rights (S) ALTERNATIVE Data Project
Summary report: themes between the 'before' and 'after' knowledge, from before you showed evidence

BEFORE	AFTER
Recognising other functions on animals 2 (17%) Year of ongoing food, how to say	5 (23%) Year of ongoing food, how to say
Cleaning 26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say	26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say
Feeding 26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say	26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say
Feeding techniques 26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say	26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say
Water and hygiene 26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say	26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say
Working with 26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say	26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say
Learning 26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say	26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say
Learning, teaching, understanding 26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say	26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say
Working conditions 26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say	26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say
Transportation 26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say	26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say
Working with 26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say	26 (21%) Year of ongoing food, how to say



Theme	Frequency
Working conditions	26
Feeding techniques	15
Feeding	10
Learning	10
Water and hygiene	10



Theme	Frequency
Water and hygiene	26
Working conditions	15
Feeding	10
Learning	10
Feeding techniques	10

A thematic analysis identified a significant shift from an ‘instrumental’ view of animal care in the ‘Before Knowledges’ to an ‘experiential’ view in the ‘After Knowledges’.

‘Before Knowledges’ - viewed the working mule as an instrument or an object.

‘After knowledges’ - a recognition that the mules are dwelling in and experiencing their environment rather than just existing in it like machines.

Evidencing Impact

Evidencing the impact of the process in realising positive social change is extremely important. As participatory filmmakers for social change we need to be critically aware of the impact of our work.

You can read about this project more fully in this journal article:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1472586X.2022.2161410>



Visual Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rvst20>

**Film ethnography and critical consciousness:
exploring a community-based action research
methodology for Freirean transformation**

Michael Brown, Mary-Jane O'Leary & Hari Joshi

Case Study 3 – Community Voices

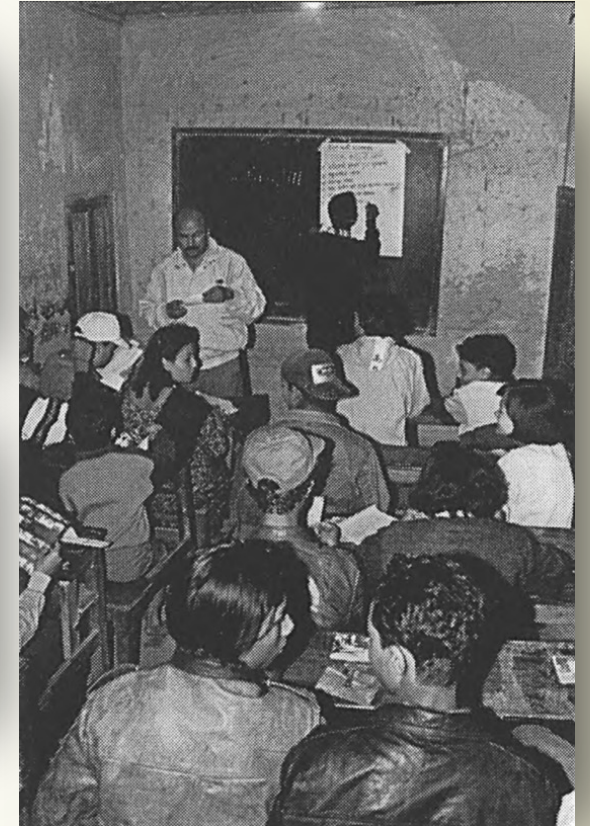
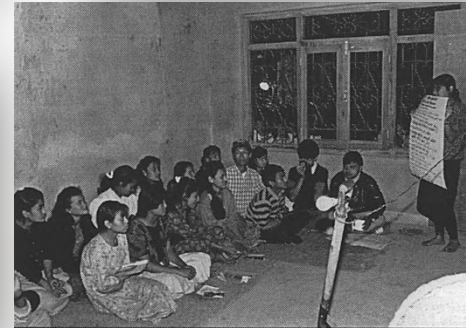
(Participatory Filmmaking)

I lived full-time in Nepal from 1990-1995, and in 1994 I instigated a participatory communication initiative with inner city youth groups in Patan. I was young, but very uncomfortable with the top-down development communication models being used by the NGO I was working for. I was intrigued by Paulo Freire's ideas and the concept of participatory communication, and I wanted to apply the theories in real life. The project lasted a whole year and followed this process:

Stage 1 - exploring their identity, building group cohesion and finding a common goal



Case Study 3 – Community Voices

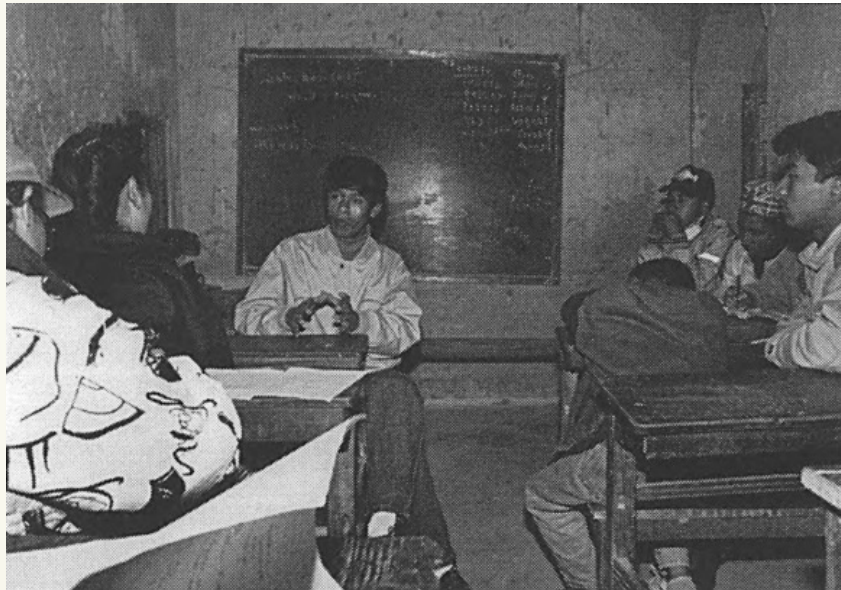


Gujibahal - teenage girls being married and then not being allowed to continue in school, go to college, seek employment and have a career. The daughter-in-law situation.

Nagabahal - abuse of alcohol and domestic violence in the home, influencing drugs and alcohol abuse by teenagers.

Case Study 3 – Community Voices

Stage 2 - deepening understanding and building a supportive community





Case Study 3 – Community Voices

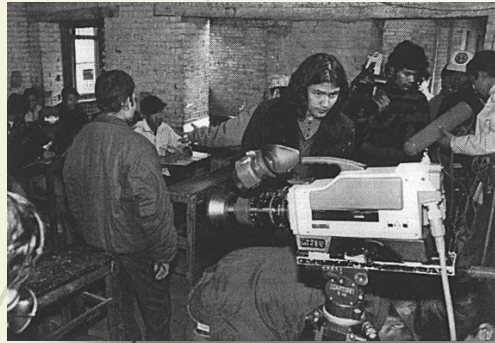
Stage 3 - Action

Each group then decided the best way to use participatory communication actions to present their issues and initiate dialogue within their wider community.

Gugibahal - street drama

Nagbahal - tv drama for screening on their local cable tv network

Case Study 3 – Community Voices



Case Study 3 – Community Voices



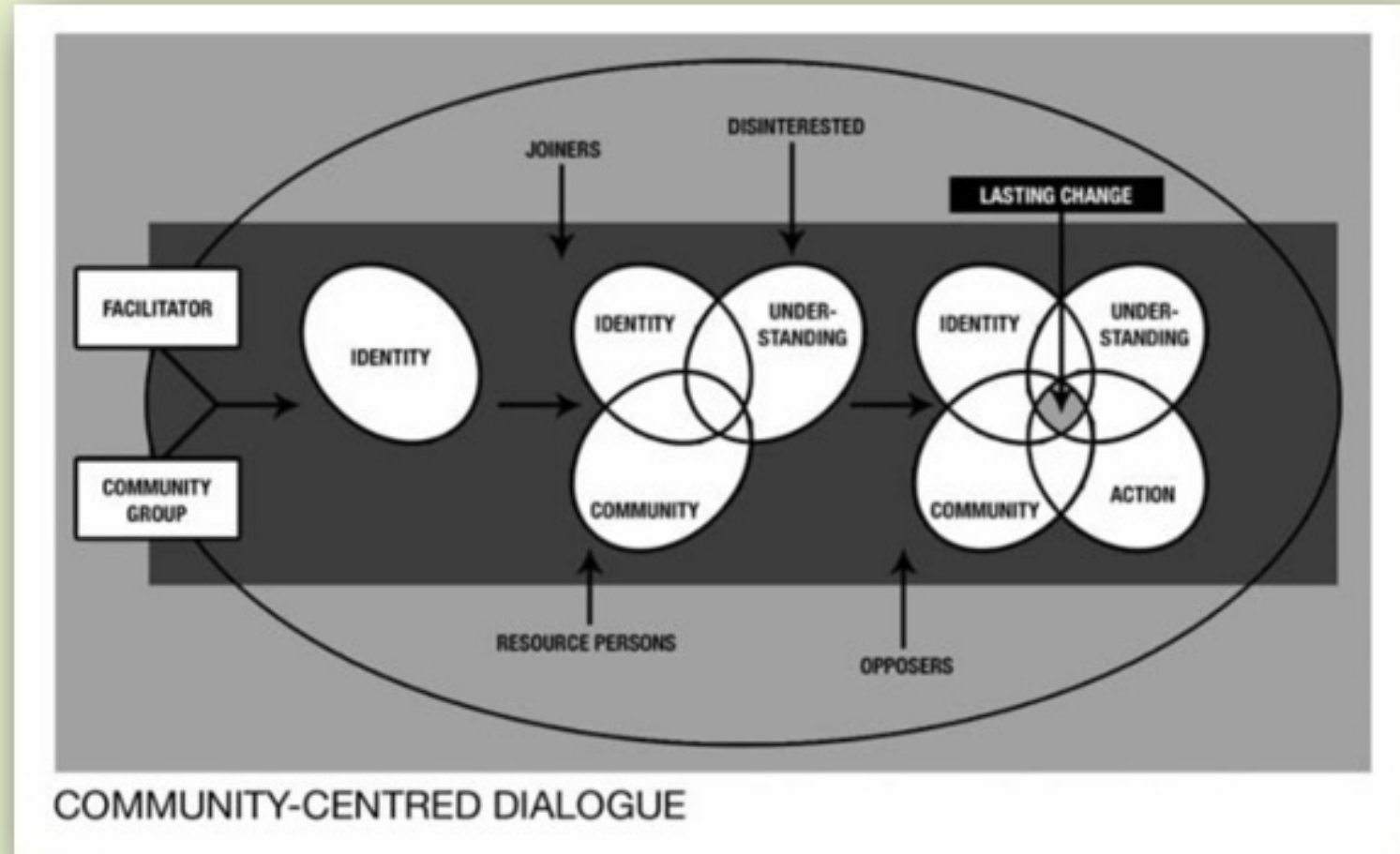
Case Study 3 – Community Voices


Stage 4 - Impact

Following the presentation of their dramas, each group then organised focus group discussions within their communities over the following three weeks. Using a prepared structure, and supported by a facilitator, the youth used the focus groups to initiate a dialogue within their community, so their issues could be brought out into the open. Discussion spread beyond the focus groups and became widespread within their communities.



Case Study 3 – Community Voices





Masters and PhD

I supervise students and researchers in the areas of:

- **ethnographic filmmaking and video ethnography**
- **development communication**
- **participatory filmmaking**
- **filmmaking for social change**

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Summary

In conclusion then, we have looked at:

- A concise background to the evolution of participatory communication.
- Selected theoretical underpinning and communication Models.
- Three case studies

Main conclusion:

Making a film is not enough if we want to catalyse social change. We must think very hard about how we engage with subject(s), how we position ourselves, and how we use our films to engage society and create discussion and dialogue.

- Participant Feedback.
- Questions and discussion.

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