Annual Report 2009

Empowering Marginalized Youth:
A Culturally Responsive Media Studies Program

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Date: August 15, 2009

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> Character development, at its best, permeates the entire life of the school as it is woven into policies, programs, practices, procedures, and interactions. It is a way of life.
>
> (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 2)

Students are bombarded daily with print, visual, and digital media. Whether it is on a billboard, listening to an iPod on the way to school, or text messaging a friend during class, youth culture is wired into these multiple forms of media literacy. However, the school curriculum often fails to address and/or incorporate the media literacies youth already experience daily outside of school. Instead, many students are asked by teachers to communicate their knowledge and understanding through a standardized literacy of writing and reading in English through for example the manipulation of digital *Word* processing software.

Therefore this annual report outlines how this media studies program for "at risk" students sought to develop and implement a socioculturally reponsive curriculum, which in turn addressed the following character development initiatives outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education:

• Improve students' attendance;
• Foster a sense of community and safety;
• Create spaces with students for their voices to be heard;
• Validate multiple representations of students' literacies; and
• Become politically engaged citizens.

In response to these specific initiatives, the program utilized emergent 2.0 technologies for students to experience the dominant literacies of the public schooling. Furthermore its respective curricular design and differentiated instructional strategies worked toward fostering an open learning environment where students could engage and perform multiple literacies (print, oral, visual, digital, etc.). In turn, teachers and students were afforded an educational space for integrating such multiple literacies into their daily

experiences at school while still addressing provincial overall and specific curriculum expectations.

This annual report reviews the following program deliverables through the following three phases: 1) Establishing a collaborative **partnership** with the ***Ottawa-Carleton District School Board***; 2) Creating a **character development program** for "**at risk**" **students**; and 3) Outlining the **impacts** of program and **lessons learned**.

Phase 1

Establishing Collaborative Partnerships

> The Character Development Initiative recognizes that academic achievement, character development, and civic engagement are inextricably linked and must be interwoven into students' educational experience. It provides students with tools for increasing academic achievement, a solid foundation for ethical decision-making, and more opportunities to use their voices to influence outcomes.
>
> (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 3)

This first phase of the project aimed to build a sense of community among the *Faculty of Education at University of Ottawa*, *Ottawa-Carelton District School Board*, *school administration*, *teachers*, and *students*. Consequently at the beginning of this phase, the field coordinator and myself had an initial meeting with the school principal and their *Student Success Team* at a vocational high school to discuss the feasibility of establishing a partnership for the program.

We had our first meeting with the principal and vice-principal at the end of **July 2008** to present the character development goals of the program. We were then invited to give an overview of the program again to the principal, vice-principal and *Student Success Team* at the end of **August 2008**. We also discussed the logistical issues for collaboratively designing the curriculum as well as the differentiated instructional strategies required for implementing the program over the course of the 2008-2009 academic year. At the end of this second meeting we received permission from the principal to conduct the program with a teacher and students enrolled in the *Grade 10 Communications Technology* course. Conseqently, we created a *Program Steering Committee* comprised of the principal, vice-principal, department head of the *Business and Technology Department*, teacher, school councellor, program coordinator, and field coordinator.

We had three more meetings between the end of **August** and **September 2008** with various members of the team to discuss the selection of suitable students for the program, integration of the program into the organizational infrastructure of the school, and its respective curriculum design. Due to the physical amount of space within the computer laboratory and number of available computers we had to limit our number of

potential participants to twelve students. Furthermore due to administrative policies and the organizational infrastructure of the school timetable, we were not able to incorporate a credit recovery component in the program, nor a 40-hour community service learning component. Nonetheless, we are strategizing with *the Program Steering Committee* how we might integrate the community service learning component for this upcoming year.

Once we received permission from the principal and established the logistical framework for the program with the *Student Success Team*, we then applied to the *Ottawa-Carleton Research Adivsory Committee* (**OCRAC**) for official permission to access the school. We received official permission on **October 20th 2008** with the condition that we would reapply for ethics approval later that academic year to conduct the evaluation component of the program. In **March of 2009** we applied for permission to conduct our evaluation. Therefore the actual implementation of the program with students commenced on **October 20th 2008** and ended on **June 31st of 2009**.

Nonetheless, while awaiting approval for access to the high school our curriculum and assessment team (a program coordinator, field coordinator, and classroom teacher) worked collaboratively together to develop a culturally responsive media studies curriculum that integrated the overall and specific expectations of the *Grade 10 Communications Technology* curriculum policy document and the *Language Arts Media Studies* strand. In turn, our team utilized the *Ontario Ministry of Education Curriculum Planner Software* and principles of backward design to develop all units of study for the program (see Wiggins and McTighe, 1998; and Cooper, 2006).

In **November of 2008**, we then had follow-up meetings with members of the *Program Steering Committee* to address any issues we might have with the curriculum design and assessment of the subsequent units of study. Upon the request of the participating teacher we also added a final summative project in **May of 2009**. After the implementation of the first unit of study, the program team organized a meeting in **December of 2008** with the administration, teacher, and students to decide whether or not they were sastified with the program and, if they wanted to continue the partnership in **January of 2009**. All parties agreed to resume the program and partnership in **January** until the end of **June 2009**. Moreover, we had a monthly lunch meeting with the partipating students, teacher, project coordinator, and field coordinators to discuss what was working and not working for all parties involved.

At the end of **February 2009,** we then discussed with the *Program Steering Committee* and students the possibility of integrating a research component into the program. All participating parties agreed and we in turn submitted a second request to conduct the research component to the *Ottawa Carleton Research Advisory Committee* (**OCRAC**) and the *University of Ottawa Ethics Review Board*. We received permission to conduct this component of the program on **May 7th of 2009**.

During the months of **May and June 2009** we interviewed members of the administration, teachers, and students about the **impacts** of the program and **lessons learned**.

Conseqently, we were able to successfully establish a collaborative partnership between the *Council of Ontario Directors of Education, Community Service Learning Project* and *Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa*, a local *vocational high school* and the *Ottawa-Carleton District School Board*.

Phase 2

Creating a Character Development Program For "At Risk" Students

> Educators must apply a broad knowledge of language, media, technology, and culture to their teaching since their students use multiple literacies to make sense of these various media—literacies that are constructed by variables such as race, class, ethnicity, gender, and age.

> (Goodman, 2003, pp. 35-36)

This unique character development program utilized a culturally responsive curriculum, differentiated instructional strategies, and emergent digital technologies to encourage "at risk" students to attend classes regularly, improve academic achievement and school safety, develop skills for future employment, foster positive school culture, and be actively engaged citizens within their school and communities. The program was implemented with students selected from two sections of the participating teacher's **Grade 10 Communications Technology** course. In turn, we were given a small computer laboratory beside that teacher's main classroom to engage the various program activities with students. There was a large window which connected both rooms. As a result, the teacher was able to observe and supervise our work from a reletavely close distance with the students.

In consultation with the appointed **Program Steering Committee**, nine students from differing sociocultural and economic backgrounds were invited to participate within this program. A formal letter and consent form were sent home to each student's parents. They were then required, if under the age of 18, to get parental signatures approving their participation within the program. Students had the option to withdraw from the program at any point during the course of the year. Four students from one section and five students from the other volunteered for the program. During the scheduled classtime for this specific course these students would then come to the computer laboratory and work with the program team instead of the teacher nextdoor.

Our teaching team then worked with these students during a fifty minute period four to five times a week due to the rotating schedule implemented within the organizational infrasructure of the school. As a result, students were afforded an opportunity to work with the program team from **October 20th 2008** to **June 31st 2009**.

Initially, we had one field coordinator who implemented the program with the progam coordinator from **October 2008** to **December 2009**. However, due to the unforeseen amount of planning and instructional time required for the successful implementation of this daily program within the school, we hired a second field coordinator in **December 2009** to help teach for the duration of the program.

The participating students' ages ranged from 15 to18. Each student was carefully selected and then invited to participate within the project in order to complement the overall team dynamic. Some students had behavioural issues and were deemed a risk by the administration to the larger school community. These students were part of the school's special behavioural unit. Whereas other students were strong academically, but had poor attendance issues often for various socioeconomic reasons. Some students had ADD and/or ADHD. Other students had difficulties negotiating the dominant literacies of schooling such as reading and writing within the formal English language utilized at this specific school. Consequently, these students had poor self-esteem issues which in turn translated into various behaviours that caused classroom management issues for certain teachers. Regardless of their prior backgrounds, the **Program Steering Committee** hoped that their participation within the program could help address each student's individual and academic needs through its respective socioculturally responsive curriculum, utilization of emergent technologies, and differentiated instructional strategies.

Four teacher-candidates enrolled in the **Bachelor of Education Global Cohort** within our Faculty of Education volunteered to be placed in this project. They in turn joined the program teaching team in **November of 2009**. The **Community Service Learning Center** at the **University of Ottawa** helped to fund their travel to and from the high school in **January of 2009.** The field coordinators and teacher-candidates worked as a team with the participating students on a daily basis to engage the program's three units of study.

The field coordinators kept a journal which in turn described what transpired during their daily encounters with students. The journals tracked the students' lived experiences of the various unit activities. Field coordinators also took notes on how such educational activities impacted the students' lives, and whether or not, they corresponded with the **Character Development** initiatives outlined by the ministry. They also recorded each student's attendance and any positive or negative behavioural issues taking place that day through their journal entries. Field coordinators also utilized the journals to assess their respective pedagogical performances and student appropriations of to the overall and specific curriculum expectations outlined in the **Grade 10 Communications Technology** course and **Language Arts Media Studies** strand in relation to the character development initiatives. In turn, these daily journals were sent to the project coordinator. At the end of each week, the project and field coordinators met to analyze the journal entries and assess what ways the program was

impacting the lives of the students. In turn, the team made curricular and instructional adjustments when deemed necessary to the program curriculum based on these weekly meetings.

Our curriculum and assessment team developed and then implemented the following three units of study with students: 1) *Creating Public Service Announcements: An Introduction to Digital Technologies*; 2) *Engaging Digital Literacies: Popular Culture, Social Justice, and Youth Activism*; and 3) *Producing Media Literacies: News Broadcasts Unplugged*. The units were designed specifically for students who have been identified as marginalized youth "at risk" of not completing their high school diploma. The field coordinators were responsible for both implementing and assessing students' collective and individual engagement with these three units of study. Furthermore, each unit works with emergent 2.0 technologies (digital newsletters, videos, radio podcasts, social networking, etc.) within the context of media studies to afford such students an opportunity to create spaces for to voice their educational concerns as Canadian citizens.

Unit 1

Creating Public Service Announcements: An Introduction to Digital Technologies

> For those schools serving predominantly poor and working-class students, computers tended to be used in much the same way as the instructional films and television of the past: as a mechanism for instructional delivery.

<div align="right">(Goodman, 2003, p. 12)</div>

The overall goal of this first unit worked toward creating a safe environment for students to take a more active role in becoming engaged citizens within their school community. Therefore affording students an opportunity to take ownership over the scope and sequencing of their daily educational experiences within the context of public schooling. In turn, the overall goals of this unit addressed the following four overall **Character Development** *initiatives* outlined by the **Ontario Ministry of Education Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat**: 1) academic achievement; 2) character development; 3) citizenship development; and 4) respect for diversity.

A critical media literacy component was also embedded within this first unit of the program (Buckingham, 2003). It provided students with an opportunity to learn the necessary knowledge and understanding and critical thinking skills to question the marginalization and/or validation of their voices within the media representations both inside and outside their school community. In turn, students were asked to create a public service announcement with digital technologies for their final assessment task. They were then afforded an opportunity to present their public service announcement to the rest of the school community. Consequently, the scope and sequence of this unit worked toward helping students successfully achieve this final performance task while developing the overall and specific character development initiatives.

During the first few weeks of this introductory unit the teaching team utilized various progressive classroom management and instructional strategies to foster a positive sense of belonging, safety, and self-esteem within the computer laboratory. The team discussed with students the social and cultural behaviours necessary to perform both inside and outside the school community in order to become productive, conscientious, and empathetic global citizens. Furthermore, the teaching team tried to

model such social and cultural codes of conduct through their daily performances as teachers with students. Consequently, empathy and positive reinforcement were the most important attitudes for the teaching team to demonstrate toward students and each other. For example, upon the **Program Steering Committee's** advice, the coordinator purchased six new computer chairs for students to use while working within the program. This small gesture worked in turn to foster a sense that the students and their physical learning environment were cared for. From a practical standpoint, the new chairs also provided students with a more welcoming and comfortable learning environment when working at the computers. Hosting lunches while debriefing with students on their respective individual performances within the program also helped to foster a sense of belonging and community. Although there was a breakfast program within the school, for many of these students this was their first, if not only, daily meal. Our team therefore made a conscious effort to provide nutritional snacks for the students who attended the program.

In order to facilitate the various digital projects within the program we purchased three Macbooks, two external notebooks (250G hard-drives), blank DVDs, four flip video cameras, a green screen and its respective *Labvision* editing software. We then created three media stations within the computer laboratory for students to work both independently and cooperatively together. At first, many of the students were not familiar with the Mac operating system. Therefore, the first unit provided an opportunity for students to learn how to utilize these different digital technologies and respective literacies while engaging the **Grade 10 Communications Technology** curriculum expectations and specific character development initiatives. The unit content also afforded students an opportunity to learn more about teen culture, social justice issues related to marginalized youth, personal responsibility, empathy toward others, and strategies for engaging youth activism.

The scope and sequencing of the individual lesson plans were geared toward creating a learning environment where students could develop the necessary technical skills to produce and edit their final assessment task: a ninety-second public service announcement (PSA). In turn, our curriculum and assessment team developed the following ten subtasks to help students scaffold the necessary knowledge and understanding to successfully complete their final assessment task: 1) Introduction to media literacy; 2) Introduction to digital technologies and film making; 3) Developing critical media literacies; 4) Producing public service announcements; 5) Storyboarding; 6) Script writing; 7) Filming; 8) Editing; 9) Debriefing; and 10) Presenting to school community. Depending on a student's familiarity with digital technologies, film production, and critical media literacies each subtask took anywhere from five to ten periods (a period consisted of 50 minutes) to complete. Student attendance, behaviour, and attitudes during class time also affected the efficiency and quality of their individual and collective performances.

The unit began with a viewing of some documentary films (like *The Year Before Last*), commercials and public service announcements (on bullying, antidiscrimination, and sexually transmitted diseases for example) that focused on various social and cultural issues related to marginalized youth here in North America. The teaching team and students then took up the social justice issues covered within these films and public service announcements (PSA) to develop a topic, storyboard, and film script. Students then sought out a location within the school and invited other students to act as characters within their final projects. Students spent the rest of the unit learning how to edit their films with the iMovie editing software. This specific subtask included learning how to integrate narrative transitions and music into their final digital video productions.

As a group we then debriefed on the labour intensive processes professional filmmakers engage in order to produce a commercial and/or short films for a living. Our teaching team also utilized this introductory unit to diagnostically assess the students' prior knowledge and understanding of digital technologies, reading and writing abilities in the English language, critical thinking skills, as well as their individual social, cultural, and psychological needs as learners. Perhaps more importantly, we sought to create a sense of community with students. Depending on the unit the teaching team utilized a variety of assessment tools to assess student performance such as, but not limited to checklists, rubrics, portfolios, peer evaluation, and self-evaluation through conferencing. The unit of study took eight weeks to complete with the majority of "on-task" time spent on the filming and editing components.

A final public service announcement that represented the overall and specific goals of the program is worth noting here. A student, who was often suspended the year before, created a video on an incident that occurred just prior to his involvement with the program. A few months earlier, the student turned eighteen. Therefore he was able to vote for the first time during the 2008 Canadian Federal election. However, a few days before the election this student was suspended from school for several days. Furthermore, the student resided within the larger community surrounding the school. As a result, his polling station was at the very place he was suspended from. When the student came onto the school grounds a teacher denied him access, and in turn right to vote. Consequently, this student created a public service announcement about the "right to vote" and how adolescent youth might go about protecting that right when it is infringed upon. As a group we then discussed how such voting rights could be taken away from citizens when they do not respect Canadian law. The student's public service announcement (on bullying, racism, homophobia, etc.) was subsequently broadcasted to the teaching staff during one of their monthly staff meetings. By the end of this unit students realized that they had a unique opportunity to create spaces for their voices to be heard. Furthermore, students began to recognize the empowering effects of utilizing this form of media to communicate their voice on important social justice issues to the larger school community.

Unit 2

Engaging Digital Literacies:
Popular Culture, Social Justice, and Youth Activism

E-mail, chat, online gaming, personal Web pages with guestbooks and message boards, and a host of other interactive media—these allow not just for the exchange of information but the potential development of alternative communities and worldviews.

(Alexander, 2006, p. 33)

During this second unit of study our teaching team continued to engage the overall and specific expectations of the **Grade 10 Communications Technology** curriculum with students. In turn, the teaching team focused on a range of literary and informational forms that afforded students an opportunity to bring their multiple literacies (print, visual, and digital) into the classroom. This unit also continued to stress an integration of emergent technologies as a pedagogical medium for engaging the course content with students. Therefore students were provided with various subtasks, which in turn focused on utilizing a variety of print, visual and digital sources to generate information and gather ideas for their final performance task. The following five subtasks were created for this unit: 1) A movie study; 2) A character analysis; 3) Utilizing music as a medium for communication; 4) Writing a letter; and 5) Understanding music as a form of art.

Students began the unit by studying the film *Almost Famous*. Here students sought to understand how music could act as a medium for communicating popular culture, social justice issues, and youth activism. While watching the film students were asked to take note of its various technical and narrative elements. They then completed an analysis on the significance of music as a medium for communicating various intended and unintended messages. The teaching team provided central quotes from the movie to assist students with the composition of this analysis. The team created a social network website called *Engaging Youth Activism Through A Media Studies Curriculum* for students to share their work on (www.youthactivism.ning.com). Students could then upload as well as respond to each other's respective character analyses.

Students were then encouraged to develop their social networking pages. Consequently, on many occasions we discussed the various character development initiatives related to creating and ethically representing their respective public cyber identities. Students continued to utilize the social network site for the remainder of the course as a medium for both communicating final assignments as well as developing the character development initiatives toward becoming responsible cyber citizens.

The field coordinators periodically took and incorporated screen captures of students' social networking webpages into their daily journals and tracked each student's development toward becoming responsible cyber citizens within our larger virtual classroom community. For many students the social networking site remained a preferred medium for both performing and sharing their multiple literacies with the teaching team and each other. The teaching team and students also discussed how social networking sites in general now serve the political needs of various local, nation, and international organizations as a preferred medium for engaging social justice issues. In turn, they discussed the relationships between popular culture, social justice, and youth activism.

For their final performance task, students chose a favourite song and wrote a letter to a parent, friend, teacher, or loved one that in turn communicated its intended message. As a result, some students wrote letters to their parents explaining their daily struggles both inside and outside of school. Whereas others, wrote songs to their girlfriends and boyfriends about the potential emotional affect of losing them would have in their lives. While others, wrote letters to the public about how music changed, and in some cases, saved their lives. Students then chose a medium to communicate their letter (such as photography, a composition remixing music, webpage, drawing, painting, collage, album cover, poster, video, etc.). Some students combined different forms of a given medium to communicate the intended message of their letters. However, most chose to produce videos that integrated a chosen song, themes from their letter, and visual images of their lives both inside and outside of school. Once finished, students uploaded their final digital product onto the social networking site to share with their peers in the program. Students then had critical thinking sessions in class to evaluate each other's work.

This unit took place during a major transit strike in Ottawa. As a result, many students attendance at the school in general over the course of the strike was inconsistent. Therefore, for this particular unit of study students worked independently on their respective final performance tasks. Furthermore, due to the inconsistent attendance over the course of the labour dispute, the unit took much longer to complete than anticipated. In order to address student achievement in relation to attendance, our teaching team plans to make the social networking site a more integral component next year for communicating with absent students as well as aiding them to complete assignments. Another major impediment to a student success with this unit was due to

the school board censorship of certain websites. Consequently, students had trouble accessing certain information necessary for some of the teaching team's assignments. In turn, the teaching team also had difficulty accessing websites like Youtube. Therefore the teaching team was limited in terms of the types of digital information they could critically examine with students toward becoming responsible cyber citizens. Nonetheless, during this unit students became more familiar with the various self-evaluation strategies associated with performance task assessments (portfolios, rubrics, and conferencing). Many students began to take more ownership over their individual educational plans, and in turn achievement. Consider the following example of how this unit continued to impact individual education plan of a student.

Former elementary teachers, principals, and/or their parents recommended many of the students who attended this vocational high school with alternative programming. However, Ezra an 18-year-old male told us that he chose to attend this school through his own volition.[1] Prior to his acceptance into the school's special programming, he was required to take a series of special testing to determine his eligibility. As a result, he was then recommended for acceptance into the school's unique vocational programming. In terms of writing (grammar and punctuation), Ezra was well below the recommended provincial grade 10 literacy levels. Consequently, Ezra often resisted handwriting, or print as a medium for communicating, during class time. Nonetheless, his application of critical thinking skills to knowledge and understanding were well above the grade 10 literacy levels. Therefore, as a teaching team we tried to ensure that Ezra had alternative mediums to communicate his knowledge and understanding on the various topics he chose to engage for his final performance tasks.

Many of the students enrolled in this program come from working class families here in Canada, that are perhaps below the poverty line or very much near it, with both parents maybe working two or three jobs each. Therefore, school plays a major role in terms of their character development toward becoming responsible Canadian citizens. Like many other students in the program, Ezra's family moved around a lot. He attributed this pattern of migrancy to his mother's continual search to secure permanent employment. As a result, he attended numerous elementary schools before coming to this high school. Due to the nature of his work, his father was often absent for two and three months at a time. In turn, his older brother took care of him and his siblings while his mother and father were working. Consequently, Ezra was not afforded an opportunity to establish a consistent sense of belonging with his community of peers both inside and outside the various elementary schools he attended. Furthermore, he did not have a parental figure at home to help supervise his after school activities or assist him with his homework.

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[1] Pseudonyms have been utilized to help protect the anonymity of students throughout the report.

As a new kid on the block at different elementary schools, Ezra was often bullied. Therefore, Ezra made bullying a major focus of study for his final performance task. In turn, he examined how *Slipknot* (a popular heavy metal band) and skateboarding both hurt and helped to improve his self-esteem throughout high school. For his final project, he created a website showcasing links to this band and favourite skateboarding websites. He also wrote a letter describing his experiences both as a victim and perpetrator of bullying. Consider the following sample of his writing and thinking:

> *After grand 6 was done in the summer i was different i wood gate mad at little things and i did not now why so i stared to smock and smock weed and i felt bater i new it was not right but i did it any was in to the 2end mouth of summer i became a drug driller and i was go down hill more and more but i did not care.*

Like Ezra, many of the students involved with the program wrote English words in terms of how they sounded phonetically. As a teaching team we tried to encourage students to focus on developing the overall structure of their life narratives rather than correcting proper punctuation and/or grammar. Nonetheless, we asked students to make the necessary textual adjustments (editorial revisions) depending on the contexts of their final publication destination. Although Ezra struggled to communicate via print with "standard" English, he was proficient with the digital literacies necessary to develop websites. More than any other student in the program, Ezra connected with the idea that social networking and video production on the Internet could create spaces for marginalized voices to be heard. Ezra entitled his project *How Slipknot Saved my Life*. In turn, his final performance task shared a digital story of falling in love, giving up drugs, losing weight, and bullying.

Unit 3

Producing Media Literacies:
News Broadcasts Unplugged

> The media are industries, generating profit and employment; they provide us with most of our information about the political process; and they offer us ideas, images and representations (both factual and fictional) that inevitably shape our view of reality.

> (Buckingham, 2003, p. 5)

This unit was created to increase student awareness about the production of various media literacies such as news broadcasting. In turn, the scope and sequencing of the unit sought to afford students an opportunity to learn more about the required skills necessary for employment within the field of broadcasting. Consequently, the teaching team created subtasks for this unit of study, which in turn encouraged students to develop the technological, critical thinking, and cooperatively learning skills necessary to conceive, produce and edit news broadcasts as a media production team. The following seven subtasks were created for the unit: 1) Is it Real or, is it Fake: Analyzing News Stories; 2) Researching the Newsworthy Issues; 3) Producing the News; 4) Becoming Field Journalist; 5) Speaking from the Anchor Desk; 6) Editing Room; and 7) Post-Production Self-Evaluation.

Students began this unit by watching different television commercials and news broadcasts (see www.theonion.com). Once again this first subtask was designed to diagnostically assess the students' abilities to find, analyze, and critique various media sources. The teaching team provided students with both factual and fictional news stories. Such stories included the *Fox News* reporting on whether or not the Obamas' fist bump was "a fist pound" or a "terrorist fist jab." Another example was *Gap Unveils New 'For Kids By Kids' Clothing Line* (http://www.theonion.com/content/node/61443). This fictional news story combined the unfortunate realities of *Gap* utilizing sweatshops to fabricate kids clothing, and in turn North American consumers direct and indirect exploitations of child labour. Students then conducted research via the Internet in order to confirm whether or not each news story was real or fake. During large group discussions students then shared their respective rationales for confirming the authenticity and/or "fakeness" of each story. The teaching team and students examined

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the benefits, ethics, and risks associated with various political dynamics of corporate communications companies. Students also sought to understand the ethics and practices associated with producing the news.

Once students had a foundation with analyzing the ways in which various media corporations produced the news, the teaching team then introduced the subsequent knowledge and technical skills necessary to enter the fields of journalism and news broadcasting as a potential career path. The students' first assignment asked them to develop and practice their journalistic skills by covering the Barack Obama visit to Ottawa on February 19th, 2009. In turn, students worked in small groups to develop the premise of their news stories, interview questions, film locations, and editing. Prior to his arrival, students generated questions to ask pedestrians about what they thought of Barack Obama in general, his visit to Canada, and what he could do politically for Canadians in the future. On the day of his arrival, the teaching team took students on a field trip to interview people at a local bus terminal. Students were then able to practice both their journalistic and technological skills at producing the news. For example, students took turns interviewing pedestrians, working the digital recording equipment, as well as directing the production of the broadcast. As a result, students were highly engaged with this component of the unit.

Students then returned to the computer laboratory and worked in groups to review and log the interviews they collected. Utilizing iMovie, students spent the next few days sorting the interviews into a storyboard in order to create the narrative for their news broadcast. For both the teaching team and students this was our fist time creating a digital news story broadcast. As a result, there was a lot of improvisation and experimenting with both the editing software (*Labvision* green screen software) as well as narrative structures for the broadcasts. Nonetheless, the teaching team and students were able to learn how to utilize the green screen technology and *Labvision* software to create a digital anchor desk for reporting our first news story. Furthermore, students learned how to structure their narrative in-takes and out-takes in order to transition to and from the anchor desk at our virtual broadcast news station. Consequently, the editing component took much longer for the teaching team to teach to students, and then for students to complete.

Once the production of this first news broadcast was completed, the administration broadcasted it to the rest of the school community via its simulcast system on a Friday morning just before the lunchtime bell. The broadcast was well received by teachers and fellow students. The teaching team and students produced ten more episodes, which focused on a range of different newsworthy stories affecting students, teachers, and administration (racism, bullying, cafeteria food, school events, etc.). Students also created special segments like *JD's Hockey Corner*, *Skateboarding*, and *Good Idea, Bad Idea*.

The news broadcast eventually became an expected feature every Friday for the remainder of the unit, which lasted ten weeks. As a result, the teaching team and students had to meet a strict production deadline in order to complete each episode. Students rotated each week to develop their skills at the different production roles (field journalist, cameraman, hosting the anchor desk, editing, etc.). The teaching team and students had to be flexible due to the attendance of peers (sickness, truancy, or obligations to other school activities like coop within the workplace). Consequently, producing each episode often became time consuming for the teaching team, which had to help complete the editing process for some of the episodes. Next year, the teaching team will try to incorporate the broadcast component into a news club during lunch hour, or part of an English teacher's course in order to help support the production of each episode.

Nonetheless, this unit was the highlight of the **Character Development program**. The news broadcasts created a space for students' voices to be headed by the rest of the school community on various important social issues. As a result, the students became responsible active citizens within the larger school community. Teachers and peers commended students both for the topics covered and quality of their performances within the broadcasts. This in turn helped students to develop a positive sense of self. Furthermore, during this unit students developed a sound understanding of the self-evaluation strategies associated with performance task assessments (portfolios, rubrics, and conferencing). The teaching team observed a substantial difference and connection between a student's sense of self and self-evaluation. For example, although some students were performing at the level three provincial standard, they would assess their work to be a level one or level two. During the conferencing sessions the teaching team and students discussed the evaluation expectations associated with each level and in turn how the students were or not addressing those expectations. By the end of the unit of study many students were able to self-assess their work so that it corresponded more consistently with the teaching team's interpretations of the provincial standards.

This unit of study helped students to develop better interpersonal relationships with the school administration, teachers, and peers. For example, students interviewed members of the administration for some of their news stories. Consequently, some students were able to interact with a vice-principal outside of a disciplinary context for the first time. Such positive interactions improved relationships between these students and administration when future disciplinary issues took place. Furthermore, students developed the civic literacy skills necessary for understanding how certain educational circumstances and events impact their daily lives at school. Students within the larger school community also recognized the empowering possibilities of such civic engagement.

During April of 2009 a student enrolled in the *Physical Support Unit* (PSU) at the school approached us. This program exists to provide services for students who have physical exceptionalities. The student asked our group if she could film an interview that would speak to some of the daily realities faced by PSU students at the school. Here is part of the interview created for the broadcast:

Meagan: *Hello I am Meagan and this is John. Today we are going to talk to you today about what bothers us about when people treat us differently just because we are in wheelchairs. First off, I know I can't stand it when somebody walks up to us to and talks to us and treats us like we are five-year olds. Like come on guys, we're teenagers just like you and we don't like being treated any differently. We do all the same stuff as you guys do, we have friends as you guys do, so don't treat us any differently. What do you think about that subject John?*

John: *Well, what I think is when people come up to us, and they don't, well they walk by us and don't even hear what we want to say or anything. They don't even listen to us, we would say hi or anything like that and they would walk by us and not even pay attention. They would walk by like we are nothing.*

Meagan: *Like we are not even there.*

John: *Yeah, like its nothing.*

Meagan: *Another thing that happened like two weeks go, that pushed my buttons, drove me nuts, and this is actually what made me want to do this report. I strongly, strongly dislike when people don't say excuse me to me, and just jump over me in my chair. Like, what the heck guys? Like, again, you guys don't jump over your friends to get over them in the hallways, so don't do it to us. It's extremely disrespectful to us and I don't like it and I'm sure my friends don't either. What do you think about that John?*

John: *Well, I've found that people jump over my legs to get to like the garbage can or to get to their friends, they just want to get somewhere and they jump over me. Like I don't respect that, they are not respecting me and people don't just jump over their own friends to get somewhere so why should they jump over us?*

Here is an example where students created spaces for their peers' voices to be heard by the larger school community.

During this unit of study students were able to actively participate in the decision making process, engage activities that reinforced a capacity to care for others and our world. Furthermore students learned how to utilize their voices in authentic and constructive ways to both engage and produce the multiple literacies found in news stories.

Phase 3

Summary of Impacts and Lessons Learned

Character development is the deliberate effort to nurture the universal attributes upon which communities agree. These attributes reflect a forged consensus on the beliefs and values of families and communities. They transcend socioeconomic, racial, religious, cultural, gender and other factors that often divide people and communities.

(Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 4)

This media studies program was created to empower the daily lives of margalized youth. Therefore the program was implemented at a school within the ***Ottawa-Carleton District School Board which*** which had a large population of students identified as being "at risk" of not completing their high school diploma. Utilizing the qualitative data derived from the field coordinator's daily journal observations, screen captures of the social networking website, final perfomance tasks, and interviews with administration, teachers, and students we were able to evaluate the program. Consequently, this section of the report provides a general summary of the impacts and lessons learned toward improving the following: 1) Academic achievement; 2) Interpersonal skills; 3) Safe learning environment; 4) Life skills; 5) Employability skills; 6) Positive Conceptions Culture; and 7) Responsible citizenship in classroom, schools and communities.

<u>Academic Achievement</u>:

Many students within this particular school were identified by the administration as being "at risk" of not completing the necessary high school credits needed to graduate for various social, cultural, and economic reasons. Throughout the year, our team learned that some of the students within the program came from single income families. Others lived within households where both parents worked more than one job. Consequently, some of the students were left to fend for themselves before and after school hours. In turn, these students sometimes hung out on the streets, at malls, friends' houses, and/or skateboard parks. Other students worked after school to help generate income for their families. Or, were responsible for taking care of their younger siblings after school. Such added responsibilities affected the attendance of some

students enrolled in the program. We lost one student during the bus strike in Ottawa because she had to take care of her younger siblings while both parents were away at work. As a result, she was unable to both develop and then demonstrate the required knowledge and understanding, application, critical thinking and communication skills necessary to complete the program and/or get a credit. Attendance was the most important impact on student academic achievement. No matter what socioeconomic or cultural background a student came from, we found that students who attended school regularly performed better academically.

The curriculum and assessment team designed differentiated instructional activities which afforded students opportunities to choose content which focused on social justice issues within the context of popular youth culture in order to encourage such engagement. The teaching team also incorporated the use of emergent 2.0 technologies (Youtube, social networking, digital video, etc.) into their pedagogical strategies. However, the quality of attendance also determined the level of performance. For example, the quality of "time on task" during class affected academic performance. One student who helped his father's snow removal business during the winter was often late for class due to working the nightshift. The lack of sleep affected his attention when engaging tasks and in turn academic achievement.

Fostering positive self-esteem and belief in one's capacity to succeed also impacted student achievement. If students did not perform the dominant expected social and cultural behaviours, they were further segregated from the larger community and placing into special programs like the school's behavioural unit. Often this was done to ensure the safety of teachers as well as other students. Nonetheless, such segregation affected a student's sense of self-esteem and in turn confidence to achieve high standards of academic excellence. Therefore the progam provided opportunities for students conceptualize and develop various strategies with the teaching team to self-evaluate the ways in which their respective behaviours potentially impacted their academic achievement. For example, a student named Donald felt like his experience within the program went beyond skill acquisition. Instead for him the program had a deeper positive effect on his sense of self worth. During an interview, Donald shared the following:

I feel like I am really different from last year and the beginning of this year. I used to come to school, then go outside to smoke up, then go get junk food, and then go to my last class. My marks really suffered and I felt like I wasn't doing anything with my life. But now this project is making me come to school and go to more of my classes.

Donald's attendance improved over the course of the term as well as his academic performance. All students who attended the program regurlarly performed at a level 3 provincial standard by the end of the course. For some students such success carried over in to their courses with other teachers.

Furthemore, the teaching team integrated the new Ontario assessment policy practices. In turn, the team made sure to explain to students through the use of rubrics, portfolios, and conferencing how they might work toward achieving the different provicial standards (levels of 1, 2, 3, 4). At the start of each unit, the team went over the assessment tools associated with individual subtasks as well as the final perfomance task with students. Furthermore, student behaviour and learning skills were assessed independently from what they demonstrated in terms of knowledge and understanding, application, critical thinking and communication skill.

By the end of the program we observed students improve the following:

- Capacity to identify and describe different techniques for producing print, visual, audio, and video media;
- Ability to utilize different techniques to produce print, visual, audio, and video media;
- Critical thinking skills necessary to explain benefits, risks, and ethics associated with communications technology;
- Critical thinking skills necessary to analyze a range of media forms to identify their elements, audiences, and productions practices, and draw conclusion from how these factors shape media works;
- Knowledge and understanding of digital literacies necessary to create media works and use respective established criteria to assess the effectiveness of such works;
- Commitment to work on course projects independantly beyond school hours; and
- Ability to self-evaluate knowledge and understanding, application, critical thinking, and communication skills in relation to final performance tasks.

Although students were able to improve their overall skills in these specific areas, the teaching team had to provide highly structured instructional activities. Often students utilized their lack of organization skills as a precursor for not engaging assigned tasks during class. Therefore the teaching teach had to ensure that all necessary learning materials were organized prior to students arriving to class. For example, the teaching team had to save and organize their digital files at the end of class so that students could easily find them the next time. Therefore next year the teaching team will work to focus more on learning skills (time management, organization, note taking, etc.) with students while engaging the program content.

<u>Improved interpersonal relationships</u>:

The entire first unit of study focused on improving interpersonal relationships in terms of fostering a caring environment for students as well as a capacity to empathize with each other. For many students the school remained the only place where they interacted with adults who cared for them. Some students in the program were use to dealing conflict situations at home or adults in positions of authority on a daily basis. In turn, the strategies they developed for dealing with such conflict were then transferred with peers and teachers in the classroom. However, many of the strategies such students utilized were inappropriate and often worked to escalate a conflict situation rather than resolve it. Therefore, our teaching team modelled strategies of caring empathetic relationships with students and each other. Students watched films and had group discussions on topics like conflict resolution, respect, and empathy. The teaching team sometime spent an entire period working with students on strategies to resolve a conflict situation that took place prior to attending class. The team also helped students to develop strategies for approaching teachers, administration, and the school's assigned police officer in order to ask permission for interviews. Consequently, the students learned how to interact with teachers, administration, and police in constructive ways rather than for disciplinary issues. Students also discussed etiquette for interacting with the teaching team and each other on the social networking website. Consequently, we did not have any major issues with regards to interpersonal interactions between students and teaching team on the website. Most students were not only able to broaden their repertoire of strategies for dealing with conflict over the course of the program, but also utilize them within the appropriate contexts.

<u>Safe and orderly schools</u>:

Students engaged various activism projects over the course of the project to promote a safe environment for all students within the school. For example two students produced a public service announcement, which addressed bullying. Students also created news stories, which focused on racism and homophobia within the school. Our teaching team was able to devise strategies with students to address some of the bullying taking place at school. The teaching team helped students to write letters to the administration which described how they were experiencing bullying while at school and how they responded to such bullying. Consider the following letter:

Dear administration,

I got out of my brother's car this morning in front of the school and David Smith said "you're mom's a prostitute and she sleeps on the corners to get money for you to

survive." I ran after David towards the school. David ran into the school and I was running after him. Mr. Tompkins saw me, and said, "think twice." I slammed open the door and walked back outside the school. Mr. Tompkins and Ms. Giovanni followed me outside. They both stood in front of me, so I was against the wall, to calm me down and make sure I didn't go back after David. And Tompkins started talking to me outside. He said "who do you think is a better man for walking away?" I said, "I am." Then I walked back into the school and I didn't see David. I put my coat in my locker and went to my first period class.

I got so mad because of the stuff David was saying about my mom and that the administration staff wasn't doing anything about it. This has been going on for two years. I have told administration. Only Principal Jenkins did something before his leave. Every time David sees me around the school or on the bus he says something. He always says bad stuff about mom. I got so mad today because I can't put up with this for the rest of the school year. I feel bullied, not physically but mentally. I felt like it had to be dealt with.

I apologize for running after him to go and hurt him but you have to understand where I am coming from. I understand that violence is not the right reaction at the school, this is not what anyone looks for, but I don't know what I am supposed to do. I want David to stop saying these things. I want someone to deal with this problem so I don't feel like I have to. My mom is going through a difficult time right now and so I am extra sensitive.

Sincerely, Jim

The teaching team was able to improve interpersonal relationships between students and administration, foster a safe school environment, and reduce behavioural problems through the writing of such letters. Our class just happened to be Jim's first period. He entered the classroom very angry. Often when Jim was angry he did not have the necessary communication skills to express himself in an appropriate way. Consequently, we spent the entire period with him to devise the appropriate strategies and language for him to utilize for when summoned by the administration to explain his involvement in this specific incident prior to school commencing that day. The project coordinator suggested that Jim narrate the incident to one of the field coordinators who would in turn transcribe it for him. They both then worked to shape his narration into a letter addressed to administration. When summoned Jim gave the letter the vice-principal. David was subsequently summoned and suspended. Jim's mother was also contacted to help devise an action plan so that he would no longer feel harassed by this specific student at school. As a result, Jim was satisfied that the administration demonstrated empathy for his situation. In turn, he felt that his voice was both heard and validated.

However, some of the students in our program were being bullied on the Internet and when they were off school grounds. Our teaching team will need to work more closely with administration next year in order to devise strategies for dealing with online bullying.

<u>Reduced behavioural problems:</u>

Our teaching team started the program by watching the documentary film *The Year Before Last*. The film focuses on the lives of four young male students during their last year at a high school in Montreal. Some of these students had various behavioural problems within the context of schooling. The teaching team asked students to consider various behavioural issues they have at school in relation to the characters in the film. In turn, this helped both the teaching team and students to identify inappropriate behaviours they had to reduce at school. Students also produced news stories on the use of inappropriate language at school and the respective consequences for doing so. Each week the team would debrief with students on appropriate and inappropriate behaviour when walking around the hallways to produce video projects. Over the course of the program the teaching team and students worked to improve the following behaviours:

- Appropriate use of language;
- Respect for each other and teaching staff; and
- Taking responsibility for actions.

Furthermore, the teaching team worked to encourage students to perform appropriate behaviours expected while working at a workplace. The teaching team, administration, and teachers observed an overall difference in student behaviour by the end of the program.

<u>Improved life preparation and Employability Skills:</u>

Most of the students enrolled at the school will not be going on to university let alone college. Consequently, its vocational programming focuses on preparing students for the employment sector. Furthermore, many of the students like the ones in our program, were not able to learn for various social, cultural, and cognitive reasons in a regular academic school program. Part of our program worked to help students develop the necessary behaviours and skills for future employment within the workforce. In turn, our teaching team worked with students to improve the following workplace related learning skills:

- Working Independently (accepts responsibility for completing tasks, follows instructions, etc.);
- Working as a team (works cooperatively with others, solves problems collaboratively, etc.);

- Organization (organizes work when faced with a number of tasks, manages time, etc.);
- Work Habits (completes homework, follows direction, shows attention to detail, etc.); and
- Initiative (responds to challenges and takes positive risks, conducts research, requires little prompting to complete a task, etc.)

During the news production unit the teaching team often made connections between knowledge and skills students were learning and how they could then transfer them to a workplace setting. Many students did not realize the amount of work that went into the production of movies or the news. Consequently, students learned about the various pre and postproduction aspects of producing media projects such as films, commercials, and news broadcasts. In turn, students developed skills in staging sets for filming, acting, camera angles, editing, etc.

The teaching team utilized self-evaluation rubrics to help students identify their strengths and weakness in relation to potential career opportunities. The expectations outlined in the rubric were developed from a broadcasting job advertisement found on the Internet. After the production of each news broadcast students had to choose a set of skills they would work to improve upon during the following production. Furthermore, utilizing the assessment rubric students had to verbally justify what level they were performing at in relation to the Ontario curriculum and assessment policy standards.

By the end of the program students were able to collectively produce news broadcasts from start to finish. Some students expressed that they would like to go into film production as potential employment.

Positive school cultures:

The students participating within the program came from different economic, social and cultural backgrounds. Some of the students were first generation immigrants to Canada (Pilipino, Lebanese, Spanish). Other students had different sexual orientations. The teaching team encouraged students to address topics like racism and homophobia within their chosen media projects.

The social networking website also provided a unique opportunity for students to freely express their cultural identities. A student named Kiko created a music video that spoke to his experiences of living in and leaving the Philippines for his social networking page. Consider the following sample:

Leaving the Philippines, kinda hard cos that's where we all grew up at and so much memories fading from back then i really miss the long days of summer all year round, the beautiful beaches and the home cooked meals sutch as Tinola, Sinigang na hipon, Champorado [chocolaate rice], Nilaga but the best parts of the foods were the fresh

grown vegetables and/or fruits, they are really different from the fruits and vegetables here, because in the Philippines its more tropical so the fruits are more juicier and there are a lot more variety to choose from i could go on but it would take forever and i'll make my self hungry. Another awesome place is where all the mountains are tropical water falls with unbelievably clean n' fresh water and the people are very nice even if they are living on the streets they always find a way to find happiness and make money, by making bags, hats, cooking food they are just real friendly people. Ghetto houses in the Philippines are huge compared to the houses here the called a project homes but they all still sell for a lot of money. They bullied them big because usually there are more then 5 children in the family my grandmother had 13 kids so they had to have a big house to fit them all in, but a long time ago it wasn't really like that you would have to build your own home witch was really tiny and catch your own meals its gotten a bit better now but I'm still hoping to go back to the Promise Land again someday.

The teaching team was able to learn a lot more about an individual student's cultural background through the social networking site. The incorporation of the social network site into the program design facilitated further conversations about cultural backgrounds among teachers and peers within the classroom. This in turn helped to foster positive communication around social justice issues related to culture.

Furthermore, students utilized the news broadcasts to produce different segments on youth culture within the school (skateboarding, music, love relationships, etc.). They also focused on how to develop a more positive cultural relationship with our environment. As a result, students utilized the news broadcasts to engage youth activism within their school. For example, one student created a video to address his concerns about cigarette butts littering the property and surrounding neighbourhood. He interviewed the pottery teacher to see if there was something they could design and construct as a disposal unit for the waste. Two students produced a story on adolescent relationships. Within this story they had interviewees comment on same sex relations, acceptance, and inclusion. Another students focused his story on skater culture in order to dispel negative stereotypes created by the media.

During our interviews with administration and teachers they commented on how the program created the first news broadcast and helped to foster a positive school culture among the teaching staff and students.

Responsible citizenship in classroom, schools and communities:

The overarching aim of this Character Development program sought to help "at risk" students develop the multiple literacy skills necessary for understanding how certain educational circumstances and events impact their daily lives at school. Drawing on multiple forms of media (print, visual, audio, digital), this program provided an interdisciplinary culturally responsive curriculum and embedded differentiated instructional strategies, which in turn encourage students to become engaged citizens

within their school and communities. In turn, the program provided units of study for students to become responsible citizens within the larger school community. Over the course of the program students began to recognize the empowering possibilities of such civic engagement. Students were able to develop their sense of agency and civic responsibilities through the creation of a public service announcement, a video montage of how music, popular culture, and social issues affect their daily lives, and news broadcasts that addressed their community's concerns. The students were also able to make connections among being afforded opportunities to represent their multiple literacies at school, civic engagement within their community, and appropriate economic, social, and cultural capital.

Conclusions:

The program sought to both understand and disrupt the various ways in which the institution of schooling situates and defines the concept of literacy and in turn determines "what" and "who" counts as being literate within the context of public vocational schooling. "For perhaps the first time in human history," Lankshear and Knobel (2007) make clear, "new technologies have amplified the capacities and skills of the young to such an extent that many conventional assumptions about curriculum seem to have become inappropriate" (p. 8). Consequently, our teaching team continues to experiment with curriculum designs and differentiated instructional strategies that in turn reflect the interests of "at risk" youth who are often disengaged with the official content and school programming. Moreover, our teaching team will continue to analyze and synthesize the qualitative data generated from this first year in order to further understand how our pedagogical experimentations with communication technologies and their respective multiple literacies afford "at risk" students an opportunity to learn the necessary knowledge and skills to produce and appropriate emergent forms of economic, social, and cultural capital. In turn, we will utilize lessons learned from this qualitative data to make the adjustments to our implementation of the project next year.

<u>Dissemination</u>:

The impacts and lessons learned from the program were and will be presented at the following conferences:

- Faculty of Education Research Fair, University of Ottawa (February, 2009)
- Transition to Practice Conference, University of Ottawa (March, 2009)
- Ontario Ministry of Education Forum in Toronto (May, 2009)
- Provoking Curriculum Studies Conference, University of Ottawa (May, 2009)
- Third World Curriculum Studies Conference, South Africa (September, 2009)
- Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practices, Dayton, Ohio, (October, 2009)

The two field coordinators and project coordinator will be analyzing the qualitative data further in relation to existing research literature to publish impacts and lessons learned in professional curriculum studies journals and in preparation for the final report.

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