Introduction

In answering the question, *What is the role of alternative media in teaching civil society?* one relevant response might be: *An experiential learning venue that helps to create a cultural climate for citizens that is inherently political, democratic and autonomous of the mass media.* We regard alternative media as essential power tools of civil society that have educational benefits that result from an outreach and teach approach that can be implemented in either formal or informal modes of education—that is, in school classrooms, or in the social environments of alternative media such as production studios or on-the street locations. The learning outcomes in these social environments may take place serendipitously, and for students of all ages—especially those with active learning styles—this is an attractive part of the process of accessing alternative media.

Michael Albert (2004) attempts a prescriptive definition of alternative media in his manifesto, *What Makes Alternative Media Alternative?* As he writes:

> An alternative media institution doesn't try to maximize profits, doesn't primarily sell audience to advertisers for revenues, is structured to subvert society's defining hierarchical social relationships, and is structurally profoundly different from and as independent of other major social institutions, particularly corporations, as it can be (n.p.).

In this paper we build on Albert's ideas about alternative media in civil society. Many segments of civil society are politically-motivated communities promoting numerous causes and holding various versions of democracy. Despite the inevitable diversity of civil society groups, John Ehrenberg (1999) suggests there is a basic agreement throughout history that civil society may be identified as "a democratic sphere of public action that limits the thrust of state power" (p. x). Media-literate members of civil society, then, are empowered by increased political knowledge and social and technical skills. Troy Murphy (2004) suggests that civil society include "both a site of rhetorical activity and a mediator of public life" (p. 75) that exist separately from government or institutionalized control. With these definitions in mind, we turn next to a discussion of how segments of civil society often resist and overcome institutionalized barriers to what they regard as progress, justice and democratic activity.

In an era of monopolizing and institutionalizing media, these resistant movements of civil society advocate for democratic voice and participation and alternatives to mass corporations that pose barriers to open dialogue and interactivity. Some of these movements have roots in formal education. David Buckingham (2003) notes that media education in United Kingdom schools has moved beyond informing students about media to more proactive programs of media literacy through hands-on production and use of accessible media

technologies. In terms of education, this seems to be a politically-charged step in initiating students into the realm of civil society, activism, and alternative media. In this instance, informal, on-going learning that alternative media users in civil society experience can be similarly compared to the formal learning experienced by students enrolled in media education courses in schools. This is where, as Buckingham suggests, critical fluency and access to use of media becomes an offensive "form of *preparation*," in terms of active learning outcomes, rather than a defensive "form of *protection*" and passive acceptance of the mass media (p. 13).

Our media-saturated society is a learning ground for youth and adults, and those who are more media literate will find media a useful tool and creative outlet. Alternative media enable and encourage empowerment, and learning outcomes may take place in either formal or informal educational settings. In addition to formal media education in K-12 schools and colleges, many community-based media outlets and U.S.-based nonprofit organizations such as Free Speech TV and Indymedia engage in outreach and teach approaches such as offering calendars of classes and providing accessible studio space to the public. How people participate in such learning experiences may depend upon their particular learning styles or preferences as well as their interests and the goals they wish to achieve.

Focusing on this outreach and teach approach, this article describes and analyzes two alternative media organizations in the United States: Free Speech TV and Indymedia. Our examination begins with a theoretical discussion and overview of alternative media and civil society that recognizes democratic principles and education. We then describe Free Speech TV and Indymedia, which exemplify outreach and teach strategies in their operations and published literature. Finally, we consider the relevance of these concepts related to the following questions: Has alternative media historically been integrated with the teaching of civil society? How do alternative media contribute to democratic learning in civil society? What are the learning processes and outcomes?

Culture, Civil Society and Alternative Media

To set the parameters of this article, we wish to define culture as a set of commonly-accepted learned values, beliefs, interests, traditions, and language of a particular segment of civil society. Raymond Williams (1961) understood culture as a complex concept within the "structure of feeling" (p. 41) - a web of cultural values, meanings, and traditions that mesh with contemporary political and social activity. Williams included three essential components in this structure of feeling: social (way of life, meanings, and values), ideal (process) and documentary (body of work; Morrell, 2001, p. 73). Similarly, Stuart Hall (1980) suggested that

culture could be broken down into three elements that included meanings and values of certain social groups, the day-to-day activity based around these meanings and values, and the manifestation and continued display of traditions that result from this ideology and activity. For the purposes of this paper, we understand the ideal and social components of civil society in alternative media as the values, meanings, and active components of a process that motivates the final projects or outcomes, such as documentaries and texts. A learning culture of civil society using alternative media, then, is one that gains knowledge and skills through discussion and collaborative projects for political progress. Media play a multi-purpose role in this process. They are sometimes the technology and language teachers motivating learning, sometimes the tools of both teaching and learning, and sometimes the actual products, or as Williams (1961) and Hall (1980) suggest, texts, documentaries, and traditions of learning.

Alternative Media: Informing or Activist?

The right to communicate, through outreach and teach strategies, the public accessibility of alternative media, and the increased availability of user-friendly technology lend to the diverse, hybrid nature of alternative media. While no discussion of education and media access can go without addressing issues of diversity and various barriers posed by social class and race, the digital divide is less prevalent in alternative than in mass media because of alternative media's localized or community-based setting. Community media promotes access to all citizens in their outreach, and teaching media literacy is an integral goal of this outreach. John Dewey believed that different social settings were essential to learning, and that whatever barriers existed in society could be dissolved through "associated living, of conjoint communicated experiences" in these various learning environments (as quoted in Garrison, 1996, p. 430). This associated living can be compared to the interactive alliances of civil society that cross racial and class-oriented boundaries in alternative media projects. Socially-oriented learning projects in alternative media settings can help break down barriers of class and race that also carry over into formal classrooms. Some scholars have criticized such outcomes as learning, voice, and empowerment as idealistically utopian and unattainable. While we recognize these outcomes as possible under certain circumstances, we wish to focus more on the probability of opportunities for learning and empowerment for segments of civil society, and less on the critical dissection of power struggles.

Thomas Jefferson argued that a healthy democracy was dependent on an informed public (Kubey, 2004). Dewey echoed that sentiment in his pluralistic conception of democracy and freedom via social and experiential education, and through the related activities of dialogue and opportunities for creative learning.

For Dewey, "democracy was the social structure that contributed most to freeing intelligence to grow" (as quoted in Garrison, 1996, p. 429). Murphy (2004) refers to Dewey by saying that "communication is more than a skill to be mastered," which can be displayed in the polished programming of mass media, but is rather a "larger process through which democratic possibilities are shaped and social realities constructed" (p. 80). Alternative media's outreach and teach approach meets Jefferson's and Dewey's interests by urging pluralistic and participatory learning opportunities, and through the social construction of problems and possible solutions. However, this social construction does not consist of issuing propaganda or promoting standardized culture, two activities of which inaccessible mass media are often accused.

Many religious, community, charitable, and other groups utilize alternative media to speak to their memberships and their larger communities. Some of these organizations, as a course of democratic practice, use alternative media as a pulpit for educating their audience. Likewise, segments of civil society may also use alternative media to promote political causes. In this way, alternative media are less scenarios of social inter-activism within civil society, but are events for informing and even persuading, although they are still avenues for teaching and learning. Alternative media may be accessed to influence or maintain particular traditions, or simply to inform citizens by describing what took place (for example, a film of a church service) or how to do something (such as cooking or sewing). The latter examples show how alternative media mirrors mass media in disseminating one-point broadcast messages, information, and ideologies, instead of initiating activism. At its essence, however, *access* to participation and learning is the democratic variable in alternative media, not the content of its messaging.

Using an outreach and teach approach via alternative media is not new, and there are myriad examples, both historical and worldwide, of projects that do just that. Radio has been utilized in remote areas to inform people about hygiene and health care. Consider, for example, the *Bienvenida Salud!* radio entertainment-education project in the Peruvian Amazon (Beverly Sypher, Michele McKinley, Samantha Ventsam & Eliana Elías Valdeavellano, 2002) and the African-based One World Radio (2004) global education network on AIDS. Formally, the educational programming and messages for these projects have been developed and rehearsed with the purpose of teaching health education, but the learning settings are often informal and non-traditional. When television was introduced as an instructional device in American schools in the 1960s it replaced textbook learning in some classrooms. In the outback country of Australia, rural Italy, and India, teaching via radio and television became an accepted method of educational instruction as technology has advanced (Schramm & Roberts, 1971). While studies of television as an instructional method have concluded that people

are able to teach and learn with access to media text and technology in both formal and non-traditional educational settings, none have necessarily addressed issues of activism. Activism appears to take the teaching and learning experience of alternative media into a more politically charged and even radical realm of civil society.

Umberto Eco (1986) posed some interesting ideas about the chance to radically teach and learn through the use of alternative media. "Guerilla warfare" and grassroots infiltration of mass media turned passive audiences into activists who were able to "control the message and its multiple possibilities of interpretation" (p. 143). Alain Ambrosi and Sheryl Hamilton (1998) similarly discussed alternative media as a means of "community mobilisation…for preserving and reconstructing popular history, for creating sites of access and training…central to the education of media activists" (p. 98). Participation in alternative media offers both structured and informal learning opportunities through community media curricula or simply through social interaction with others.

Many alternative media outlets have common purposes of empowering the local public by providing access to communication and voice for local citizens. Buckingham's (2003) concepts of alternative media education as "a form of *preparation*" rather than "a form of *protection*" from the mass media is central in this discussion about whether or not learning rises to an offensive level rather than remaining defensive. Buckingham advocates a democratic integration of learning and a sense of activism in citizen use of alternative media. David Croteau and William Hoynes (2001) add that democracy cannot exist without a media system that projects diversity and that "reflects the range of creative visions and ideas that constitute a society's vibrant culture" (p. 5). These creative visions and ideas arise within a social, interactive teaching-learning praxis in the politically-oriented cultures of civil society.

Concepts of Democratic Learning in Alternative Media and Civil Society

Alternative media can act as agents of social change by disseminating information about little known topics and by urging dialogue and activism. A United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report on alternative media says:

> These are the kinds of consciously political and social demands by groups for whom alternative communication is but another facet of their need to contest hegemonic structures and forms to create a new social and cultural reality for themselves (UNESCO, 1993, p. 16).

The cultural foundation of alternative media use by civil society involves many struggles of overcoming barriers and inequities posed by bureaucracies, monopolies, and institutions modeling social injustice. Alternative media, in its earliest forms, might have been displayed in the actions of iconoclasts who protested ancient civil orders through various radical activities and self-produced media in town square rallies and demonstrations (Elsner, Nelson, & Olin, 2003). John Downing (2002) points out that "Histories of alternative media are…few and far between, though a real history of the labor movement, of the movements for black and Latino and women's empowerment, and of similar struggles, ends up somewhat unreal if the communications and media dimensions of these movements are left out" (p. xi). Formally, the hard-to-find history of alternative and community media is one that highlights praxis and activism that aligns with such resistance or solidarity movements, most often paralleling the power-challenging activist movements of the late 19th or 20th centuries.

Muckrakers of the early 1900s exposed institutions of "excessive self-interest and attendant corruption by powerful interests and their hired publicists" in American newspapers (Sproule, 1989, p. 233). About the same time, Antonio Gramsci (1985) envisioned an Italian communal press, fully operated and produced by the people, to "function as articulations of the interests of a mass democratic movement and serve the widest possible readership," and that would be fully integrated into the state's educational system (p. 387). For over thirty years, alternative media in the U.S. has supplied accessible television for the general public (Halleck, 2002b).

Alexis de Tocqueville's urging of the uprising of civil society in response to the imbalances of power between the mass majority in the U.S. and minorities came early in the history of a newly-dubbed democratic America. While visiting America in 1835, Tocqueville formed his idea of civil society through the example of democracy that he observed in terms of "the nonstate sphere of intermediate…association… founded on localism and the politics of interest" (as quoted in Ehrenberg, 1999, p. 160). Tocqueville "hoped that civil society would serve liberty by diluting the influence of any single interest, weakening the majority, and guarding against the excesses of the very democracy that stimulated their appearance," and based his model on "voluntary associations" fueled by political concerns, that satisfied both personal interest and that of the common good (p. 164). These collective voluntary associations are likely cultural in scope, but also encourage political activity that demonstrates interest in the social welfare of a larger community or culture (Ehrenberg, 1999).

Some of the underlying principles and components of alternative media's outreach and teach approach are exemplified in a discussion of Denis McQuail's democratic-participant media theory model (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 1993). Based on a normative set of

principles, the democratic-participant media theory suggests that all groups in society ought to have the right to access media, particularly media that serves their needs; that media content should not be controlled by political or state entities; that local organizations and communities should have their own media; and that media ought to encourage active participation, which is better served through the promotion of smaller scale media forms. Alternative media are reflective of these principles, particularly in being accessible and encouraging learning through interactive participation.

Alternative media's outreach and teach interactivity occurs in the public sphere. Jurgen Habermas (1974) suggests that this public space promotes democratic problem solving through dialogue and deliberation, and often the tolerance to respectfully agree to disagree. The public sphere of alternative media may be an appropriate setting for deliberative communication and a social learning process involving both consensus and compromise. Discomfort and disagreement are necessary elements of this learning praxis, and its outcomes motivate ongoing communication that often regenerates and perpetrates more communication projects and more media documentation. The documented projects, coalitions and political initiatives that arise are socially interactive processes that Habermas refers to as "communicative action" (Deetz, 2001). Dialogue motivates problem-solving, and involves individual voices whose collective interests lead to taking action in the public sphere.

The activist-oriented tradition, which involves struggle and resistance to domination, is dependent upon communication. Andrew Calabrese (1999), for example, discusses Gramsci's suggestion that a "war of position" must precede any "war of movement" (p. 180). This war of position involves a process of social learning and reflection, dialogue, and political strategizing, while the war of movement promotes revolution and radical action. Note how this offensive, proactive idea of a war of position versus a defensive, in-the-trenches war of movement is parallel to Buckingham's (2003) notion of media education as a form of preparation, rather than a form of protection. While the alternative media documentation of some segments of civil society sometimes contemplates the realm of possible revolution, much of the work remains within the boundaries of a war of position. Gramsci's (1971) "organic intellectuals" (p. 1) serve as leaders in this war of position in which members of subaltern groups form new historical blocs based on counter-hegemonic structures that promote and support their political, economic and cultural interests. These subaltern groups are examples of segments of the learning culture of civil society accessing alternative media. Gramsci supported this kind of culture by promoting resistance to early 20th century fascism in Italy through the work of a grassroots communal press, written, produced, and read by community-based constituents operating in solidarity and against the state.

As we can see from a discussion of these concepts, the cultural conditions that ignite the use of alternative media by civil society are often caused by, and embedded within, the political-economic climate of the times. While a full-fledged analysis of civil society conflicts with mass media monopolies is beyond the scope of this article, we acknowledge the dominance of mass media monopolies by saying that, according to mediachannel.org (2005), there are currently only a "half-dozen media conglomerates on which the majority of Americans depend or their news, views and entertainment"(n.p.).

Before entering into a discussion of the contrasts between alternative media and mass media, we offer a textual analysis of Free Speech TV and Indymedia. We analyzed Web sites, pamphlets, and articles, and included our experiences visiting the offices and production studio of FSTV. Indymedia is a virtual network without walls, so our visits were conducted via the Internet. We exemplify elements of the outreach and teach approach used by these two alternative media outlets in this analysis.

Free Speech TV: "What Democracy Looks Like"

An introduction on the Free Speech TV (FSTV) Web site cites the Colorado-based alternative media organization as the "The Nation's First Progressive Television Channel." The organization's slogan, *Free Speech TV: "What Democracy Looks Like,"* strongly promotes it as a leader in alternative television for civil society. A review of FSTV's history, infrastructure, and operation is a necessary precursor for further discussion.

FSTV reaches over 11 million homes in the U.S. and is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on DISH Satellite Network, Channel 9415. Selected programs broadcast on over 80 community access cable stations in 23 states. World citizens can also access FSTV via the Internet, although it is only licensed through conventional means for U.S. broadcast. The channel is a publicly-supported project of Public Communicators, Inc., and operates as an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit, tax-exempt organization. So far, the FSTV description aligns closely with Albert's (2004 definition of alternative media.

FSTV was founded in 1995, evolving out of *The 90's* public television show and *The 90's Channel* on cable television, both of which were started in the Denver-Boulder area in 1989. Between 1995 and 2000 FSTV provided weekly programming for 50 community cable channels. The organization was a result of a populist struggle—an alliance of citizen movements—that gained cohesive momentum after collaborative meetings and protests, in a war of position and sometimes a war of movement, at the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) meetings in Seattle, Washington. At the time, these segments of civil society were

rallying against the questionable role and policies of the United States in the WTO. Soon after, in 2000, FSTV became a full-time channel on DISH Network when a newly legislated Federal Communication Commission (FCC) policy required that 4-7 percent of satellite channels were to be offered for the public interest.

Currently, FSTV relies on a social and political network of collaborative partnerships to support and sustain its democratic processes. The partnerships are a learning network for sharing resources, expertise, activities and information, and often overlap in their interests and alliances. Some of these partners include the Media Education Foundation in Northampton, Massachusetts, the Global Exchange in San Francisco, Cities for Peace: Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., United for Peace and Justice in New York City and several others.

These organizations, along with FSTV, have common goals and interests in producing and distributing documentaries that promote critical thinking and debate about the relationships between media ownership and commercial media content, as well as issues of diverse representation and informed citizen participation. Seemingly embedded within civil society, these organizations collectively monitor issues concerning human rights, the environment, warfare, peace, coalition building, community education, and support for writers, artists, and activists protesting the political status quo. FSTV's activist-oriented slogan suggests that radical action may be possible and even necessary: *"Television is being revolutionized, so the revolution will be televised."*

FSTV (2004) also has a goal of "promoting your work and making it available to as many people as you desire" (n.p.). Via the Web site and a promotional pamphlet, FSTV encourages members of the public to send in tapes of their work, and provides information on the basic techniques of self-produced video such as sound, lighting, and storytelling for 20-, 30- and 60-second Public Service Announcements and 3- to –5-minute news segments. People may provide FSTV with rights to broadcast these messages in whole or in part.

FSTV is known for broadcasting independently produced documentaries on topics of often controversial and little-known social, political, cultural, and environmental issues. The program line-up is featured at the channel's Web site, http://www.freespeech.org. The program schedule for September, 2005 includes such controversial topics in a weekly show called "Alternative Voices" as religion ("God in Government"), abortion ("Fetal Positions"), social disorder ("Waco-The Rule of Engagement"), business ("Life Running Out of Control"), and nutrition ("Farm, Inc, Parts I & II). All of these programs are investigative in nature, address questions about the reasons behind these events and activities, and attempt to expose the real truth of the stories. Many of the programs are re-run several times during the year.

Between 5 and 10 percent of the channel's programming is produced by FSTV staff. All other programming is commissioned or produced independently, and is either purchased or given to the station for broadcast. FSTV also develops programming partnerships with social justice organizations, provides live broadcasts from remote locations, and maintains an adjunct Web site that features a large collection of progressive audio and video content.

More public outreach is evident in a staff-produced four-page newsletter that is mailed quarterly to donors, producers, and anyone who is interested FSTV's work. One can also subscribe to an e-Newsletter from FSTV's Web site. The newsletters contain information on topics including programming, upcoming events, activities of the network of support organizations, opportunities for getting involved, information about donating, and featured interviews and commentary from FSTV staff members.

Much of the literature distributed through FSTV promotes active citizenry and progressive social and political change. In addressing the public, FSTV urges positive action and interaction:

> We hope that once you are done watching, you'll get up off the couch and get mobilized to take action and join in fighting injustice, revitalizing democracy and building a more compassionate world. And, we'd love to know if it's working, so give us a call or send us an email and let us know what YOU did to make a difference (2004, n.p.).

Other examples of outreach and teach strategies are indicated in this excerpt from a Web page entitled "Where do you get your information?":

> Free Speech TV wants you to consider being more active, not as a consumer, but as a citizen… Our programs expose perspectives ignored or misrepresented by corporate media, and give you the information you need to fight injustices, to revitalize democracy, and to build a more compassionate world (2004, n.p.).

The channel's Web site is regularly updated to include information on how to become active in the community. Encouragement of public participation is prevalent in all FSTV outreach, and includes rhetoric about empowerment, struggle, and overcoming unjust power. For example:

> Free Speech TV is a milestone in the march toward greater social justice... providing media access to people and perspectives that are under-represented in, excluded from, or censored in the mainstream media . . . making dramatic strides in extending the use of television as a powerful communication tool to help revitalize democracy, and build a more compassionate world…an oasis of independence and conscience (2004, n.p.).

It is obvious from FSTV's use of terminology and the tone of these messages that FSTV plans to gather followers and expand the learning opportunities for members of civil society. The channel follows "Core Strategies" in developing administrative and operational policies and procedures. These procedures fall under three categories: movement building ("Empowering global citizens, by exposing abuse of power in all its forms, and by highlighting efforts of resistance"), partnerships ("Building partnerships with social justice organizations and directing viewers to their work"), independent media ("Working with, and supporting the growth of independent media"), and creativity ("Celebrating creativity and artistic expression as a vital part of any healthy society"; 2005, n.p.).

FSTV's infrastructure continues to grow as the popularity of the channel increases. In this way, FSTV shares certain similarities with mainstream media as it grows, but at the same time remains a vastly different operation in terms of purpose, interactivity and access. Although FSTV has been successful in serving the needs of activist citizens, it has experienced internal struggles such as personnel issues, a low budget, and operational and structural malfunctions. The channel struggles to secure funding, just like all public television stations. However, because it is sustained through grants and donations, it remains non-commercial and nonprofit, and can deliver content that is largely uncensored, unedited, and unlimited. FSTV serves as a cultural magnet for learning activity in alternative media, particularly for politically oriented civil society. FSTV's strategies are exemplary of an outreach and teach approach and social learning in a public sphere.

The Independent Media Center: "Don't Hate the Media, Be the Media"

The Independent Media Center (IMC), also known as Indymedia, began in November 1999 to provide first-hand, grassroots coverage of WTO meetings and protests in Seattle. What started as a localized, community-based operation has since evolved into an expanding international network encompassing hundreds of centers in numerous countries across the globe. The IMC in Seattle was originally initiated as a "democratic media project" with the purpose of engaging the public with first-hand, alternative perspectives of WTO meetings and protests. During the event, the IMC staff, which consisted of volunteer journalists and activists, uploaded video, audio, photographs, and field reports to the Indymedia.org Web site, which served as the center's primary information distribution mechanism. The goal of the original group in Seattle was to provide community radio stations, cable access stations, and other community-based

organizations with open and free access to the Indymedia.org website to download information and disseminate it to their own communities and constituents in an effort to reach community members and teach them about particular issues and causes.

The Seattle IMC served as a template for the creation of other IMCs around the country, and these centers began to proliferate. Most IMCs distribute their information via the Internet, and serve their communities by providing information on local issues, politics, and other matters of concern to local citizens, especially those who are activist-oriented. While each IMC operates autonomously, they are all connected through the global hub of the main Indymedia.org website. This site acts as a distribution center and clearinghouse for information related to activist-oriented and civic activities happening across the globe. Content for the Indymedia website is aggregated from the different IMC sites, and links are available so readers can access the various local IMCs from anywhere in the world. In addition to its website, Indymedia operates and maintains other outreach properties, including radio broadcasts and documentary programs. All of the content produced for the IMC properties, whether disseminated in print, radio, or video, is produced by Indymedia volunteers or ordinary citizens and activists. As an organization, Indymedia advocates and encourages active civic participation and collaboration at both the local and global levels, and facilitates an outreach and teach philosophy through its locally created, informative literature on social justice issues. Citizens are invited to join causes through their local IMC chapter, to start their own local IMC chapter, or to act as journalists producing their own content and material to disperse locally and globally via the Web.

As Halleck (2002a) points out, "From the beginning there has been a commitment to democratic process on all levels within the IMCs" (n.p.). This commitment has not only been practiced within the organization, but also in the democratic practices it employs to engage citizens. As part of its website, Indymedia has launched an open-publishing format that allows anyone to produce and publish their own content and material to the site. This approach aligns with Indymedia's do-it-yourself ethic and "everyone is a journalist" motto, which is promoted throughout the Indymedia website and literature. The open-publishing process is fairly intuitive. In order to publish material, users can go to the main Indymedia.org website, follow the "publish" link, enter information into a few fields, and upload their material to the newswire. Users may also post video and audio to the site.

Indymedia's practices and philosophies are closely aligned with several of the theoretical advancements and implications outlined by Habermas (1974), McQuail (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 1993), and Tocqueville (Ehrenberg, 1999). These conceptual aspects are

demonstrated and understood in terms of how Indymedia sets its goals, function, and purpose, as well as the ways in which it encourages and supports civic participation and activities. Indymedia promotes a learning culture of civil society by encouraging its audience to take an active role, either by publishing their own material through its open-publishing format or creating their own IMC. In turn, Indymedia promotes an outreach and teach approach through the coordination of local and global activist events, protests, screenings of the organization's documentaries, and other activities.

Local IMCs tend to emerge either alongside or as a result of particular social and political movements. One of the more recently established IMC's in Palestine is an exemplary case. The formation of local IMCs give locally based groups an outlet and presence, not just in their own communities, but throughout the world via the Internet. Local IMC websites, as well as the main Indymedia site, enable localized groups to disseminate information to geographically dispersed audiences. With such slogans as "Don't Hate the Media, Be the Media," and "Everyone is a Witness, Everyone is a Journalist," it is evident that Indymedia encourages and fosters civic action and participation. This philosophy is demonstrative of democratic theories set forth by McQuail (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 1993), as well as illustrative of Habermas's (1974) notion of the public sphere as a place to encourage democratic discourse and equal participation.

Discussion

We believe that Free Speech TV and Indymedia, as alternative media organizations, are exemplary outreach and teach models of social learning in cultures of civil society. We return to the original questions posed in the introduction to this article: Has alternative media historically been integrated with the teaching of civil society? How do alternative media contribute to democratic learning in civil society? What are the learning processes and outcomes? While the answers to these questions constitute a much larger and longer research endeavor than is possible within the parameters of this article, we have addressed the main intersections between alternative media, civil society, and learning culture in terms of history, and in reference to democratic practice and the integration of social learning.

We suggest in the following discussion and summary that alternative media has historically played an outreach and teach role in the praxis-oriented, social learning culture of civil society. This activity most often takes place in informal learning situations, but may also begin with K-12 media education that utilizes alternative media environments. In these environments, boundaries are

often broken down between age, race, gender and class, and teachers often become peers with students as learning becomes socially and experientially oriented. This learning activity—per Buckingham's (2003) form of preparation and Gramsci's (Calabrese, 1999) war of position—may apply to students of all ages within civil society who engage in the use of alternative media. Textual analyses of FSTV and Indymedia reveal that these organizations use an outreach and teach approach that is based on ideals of democracy, empowerment through learning, and social and political interests that are similar to the goals of most schools and educational institutions.

As an organization, Indymedia closely parallels Gramsci's (1985) vision of a communal press, as it is largely operated and sustained by the people in the interest of serving the widest possible audience. Like FSTV, Indymedia seeks to promote democracy by encouraging widespread democratic participation. Begun as an experiment in democratic media, Indymedia has been able to retain its core democratic framework and principles. One of the ways in which it has been able to do this is through the promotion of its open-publishing format as well as its outreach and teach approaches to informing and involving citizens, both at the local and global levels, in social justice issues and events. In so doing, it encourages audiences to become part of the process of community-oriented and community-serving media by disseminating and sharing their own experiences and information. Indymedia's Internet-based operation is pivotal in perpetuating this alternative media philosophy and practice.

Alternative media, however, is not a panacea for all social and political ills, and it is likely that experiential, social learning does not suit every student's learning style. As previously mentioned, however, access to communications media is the key democratic variable of learning via alternative media in civil society. But a problem remains: a relatively small number of citizens realize that access to this media technology and learning opportunities is available to them. As Halleck (2002b) suggests, many people are not aware of alternative, accessible media, and thus cannot use it. Of all FSTV programming, only between 5 and 10 percent is produced locally. This indicates that use of alternative media might be limited to only a small proportion of civil society. The size of the FSTV audience is difficult to track, but becomes more evident when one looks at responses to public pledge drives, Internet funding outreach, invitations to produce, inquiries to the online store, applicants for employment and internships, and the size of the volunteer base. Of course, this kind of interactivity would be an anomaly in mass media, so the chance to participate in alternative media is enabling for citizens who wish to communicate with a larger public, even though the opportunity may reach fewer people. This is not necessarily the fault of alternative media, which refrains from glitzy, commercial advertising and the lure of popular culture programming. In addition, the funding and time required to do such advertising is

limited, and even more important, commercial advertising is counter to the overall alternative media ethos.

This alternative media dilemma of reaching out to limited audiences may coincide with the traditional cultural stereotype through outreach and teach strategies that educational media is boring. Thus, the increasingly enthusiastic rhetoric used in FSTV's and Indymedia's public outreach materials may be attributed to a more robust outreach to gather in both users and spectators. There is also concern among participants and spectators that some of the documentary programming may be elitist in content and character, appealing to only those citizens with advanced educational backgrounds. This concern brings up social divisions of class and race that go beyond inaccessibility and the digital divide.

While there are few barriers to producing and publishing content and material to the Indymedia website, accessibility is still an issue as it is a predominantly Internet-based operation. While the digital divide between those who have access to technology such as the Internet is diminishing in the U.S., it remains a concern at the global level. In order to fully participate in civic activities and discussion, all citizens of the world must have access to central information. While mainstream media outlets are increasingly commodifying information published on their websites, access to information on Indymedia— including video and streaming audio and radio—is free. However, those who are most affected by questionable international policies and social and political injustices often do not have Internet access. As an organization, Indymedia recognizes the gap that exists between the "information rich" and "information poor," and localized centers are taking action to help bridge this gap. For example, the Argentina IMC, "begun during the surge of organizing against the national government and IMF policies in 2001… coordinates shows of videos and photos, workshops on the Internet, and journalism and popular education with groups of workers, neighborhood assemblies, and among the traditional left parties and independent political and cultural organizations" (Kidd, 2003, p. 4). In this way, IMC volunteers immerse themselves within their local communities to outreach and teach and to help build active learning cultures in civil society geared toward serving the interests of the common good.

Encouragement to learn interactively is evident in the rhetoric of FSTV policies, programming, public outreach (its Web site and newsletter), and even in the story of the channel's history. The civil society that FSTV serves aligns with those voluntary associations promoted by Tocqueville, and in turn serves a certain population of like-minded citizens who are often volunteers working within their own communities, but who are also knowledgeable about the global community. Despite diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and goals, the learning cultures of alternative media that exist within FSTV and Indymedia still democratically

promote the extension of their teaching-learning outreach into a larger public sphere.

Indymedia also parallels the function and principles of civil society, both locally and globally. In relation to Tocqueville's definition of civil society, Indymedia can be recognized as a network of voluntary associations that encourage democratic civic participation. As a representative of global civil society, the Indymedia network continues to proliferate as a result of new and emerging social and political movements. These movements help to sustain Indymedia, and other alternative media projects. Therefore, civil society—both local and global—serves a dual purpose in helping to create and sustain alternative and independent media organizations and projects.

Even as FSTV and Indymedia adjust to today's cultural, political, and economic times, they work towards modeling a Tocquevillian-style civil society that encourages interactive social learning in Habermas' (1974) public sphere, that accomplishes Gramsci's (Calabrese, 1999) war of position, and that uses Buckingham's (2003) form of preparation in terms of attaining media literacy. The main purpose of these organizations is to empower the citizenry, but as anyone working in either formal or non-traditional education knows, this is no easy task. The so-called walls of the alternative media classroom are much wider and lower than normal, conducive to more socially interactive and even radical forms of education, and this encourages student voice and political involvement. Some of the learning can be accumulated serendipitously and via happenstance, and for students with experiential learning preferences and activists, this is appealing.

Conclusion

Alternative media's outreach and teach strategies are conducive to a social and experiential learning process that leads to media literacy. The examples of Free Speech TV and Indymedia illustrate how alternative media organizations conduct this outreach, not only to inform people about urgent social, political, and economic issues, but also to encourage citizen participation in both politics and media. The public sphere settings of alternative media contribute to the positive experience of diversity. Hybridity also exists in the full range of alternative media, and because of these variations, groups in civil society may shop around for a good match promoting their values via alternative media. Overall, the praxis inherent in accessing alternative media and becoming media literate involves complex, social learning processes within cultures of civil society. These processes are dynamic and empowered, and also interesting to study, especially in

the current hyperactive times of educational reform and social and political challenge.

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