

## Topic Title: Education and Communication for Rural Community Sustainability

I first heard of the Fogo Process from Neil Tilley in the 1980s when he was trying to recruit me to come work for the university's extension service. At first I was an apostle, then I swung to Extension associate director Dave Curran's point of view that it was actually a myth which I repeated in conferences and even on community radio on Fogo Island itself.

But after reading essays, books and interviews in the past six months, I have changed my mind again. I now believe that Donald Snowden began the practice of participatory development support communications (PDSC) before it was named in the literature. In this essay we are equating the Fogo Process and PDSC.

But it is complicated. I am not suggesting that the Fogo Process films saved the people of the island from resettlement. I therefore disagree with the National Film Board and Shorefast and side with local author Roy Dwyer (his wedding was a NFB film) that it was the fisheries co-op that should have the credit.

Snowden, with experience facilitating co-operatives among the Innu, came to Newfoundland in 1964 (as he said working for the Cooperative Union of Canada to work with producer co-operatives) and became director of Extension in 1966.

Although director of the Memorial University Extension Service (Extension) for seven years, Donald Snowden did not consider himself an academic nor even of the university.

I never met Snowden but I have discussed the man with Elayne Harris – the last director of Extension and early on his executive assistant. Although a graduate journalist, Snowden was a practitioner and wrote little so the best source of his thought is an interview and a presentation to the Canadian Association for Adult Education.

It would seem from the beginning there was a divide between Extension and MUN academics. According to Snowden, "The academic university was notable for its absence or lack of interest." (Interview with Wendy Quarry, 1984)

He explained the divide in the CASAE presentation: "I think that there is hostility and resentment towards such (community based) research because of the tradition of the one-way extraction and of totally inadequate communication on the part of researchers with local people."

"I see too, in my own institution, of the conviction on the part some academics that research conducted by [a] non-academic or non-professional is of little or no value. That's not just common to my institution - it's common throughout this country and it's a global impediment to participatory research." (CASAE Presentation: 1983)

To date the only so-called academic peer reviewed study of MUN Extension has been written by MUN history teacher Jeff Webb who basically claims Extension did nothing after 1969.

Snowden's colleague, Tony Williamson – who initiated the Don Snowden Centre for Development Support Communication after Snowden's death in India and later transferred the centre to U Guelph – and Snowden were specific in their description of what Extension was trying to do in rural NL.

“Community development is essentially an educational process. The basic tenet of community development is involvement of local people in identification and solution of their own problems. (Snowden, Williamson, p. 26, 1984)

“Hence it is clear that the University Extension representatives are engaged in community development and adult education in the fullest sense. It can be seen that the University Extension worker is not task oriented. He can work with greater flexibility because he is not under directives. He is primarily an adult educator and co-ordinator concerned with the processes which enable the individuals of the community to develop, to choose their own priorities and tasks, to be self determined.” Snowden, Williamson, p 24, 1984)

“Practitioners of the Fogo Process, on the other hand, see development support communications as a tool in participatory action research or participatory development. Although the Fogo Process has concentrated upon film and video, other media such as popular theatre or puppetry can be utilized in the same way. All can be powerful means for involving people in a process which enhances self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-empowerment through objective reflection, consensus, community action, structural change and participation in development which improves the quality of life for those who engage in it.” (Williamson, pp 3-4, 1988)

I'm thinking that when Snowden (and Tony Williamson) describe the Extension field worker/adult educator they are also describing the way Snowden worked – as a practitioner with a community development “ethic” (personal communication, Bruce Gilbert, 2021). In other words, they weren't working from engagement rules in a text book but rather from a flexible attitude and a respect for local “ways of doing things.” (personal communication, Bev Kirby's definition of culture, 2000)

One might say the divide between Extension and MUN academics began at St Francis Xavier in the 1930s with the concept of For the People - In 1920 Father Jimmy Tompkins wrote a manifesto exhorting St. Francis Xavier University to focus on education and training For the People and attacked the concept of the university “serving only an elite group seeking professional careers.” (Cameron, p. 169, 1996)

Supported by Father Moses Coady, by 1930 St. FX established a Department of Extension AKA a Department of Social Action with the “social vision” of a co-operative society and programs for fishermen, miners, lumbermen and ordinary people, including women. In 1933 the Newfoundland Commission of Government requested support and St. FX sent a team of five who, according to Coady, in five years helped establish six hundred study clubs, twenty six credit unions, twenty five buying clubs, and ten other co-operatives. (Coady, p 66, 1939)

This was the time of the ‘Depression’ and Coady had no illusions of the nature of the ‘modern democracy’. “Our people in a modern democracy have little liberty left under the dictatorship of big business and finance...” (Coady, p 138, 1939)

It's interesting that MUN Extension was initiated in 1959 – a year of economic depression in Newfoundland – 19.2 % unemployed and one half the labor force on welfare – worst since the 30s.

In trying to analyse the history of Newfoundland and Labrador Extension-Snowden style participatory development support communications it's obvious we are moving from a 60s culture of freedom, equality and people's rights to the present Age of COVID – which is still evolving but definitely a time of conflict and , in Open Systems Theory language, a “time of tumultuous change”.

It is also obvious we , as described in the project summary, currently have no effective champions for participatory communications to support the sustainability of NL outports in a province whose premier extolls neo-colonial Westminster governance.

It would seem that in 2024 challenges of funding and champions are less significant than a need for autonomy and self governance.

This point of view would seem to be supported by this week's protest of the people, fishers and plant workers, at the Confederation Building.