

SPRINGBOARD AND BRIDGE: A STUDY OF A CAREER PROGRAM
AND ITS MATURE WOMEN GRADUATES

by

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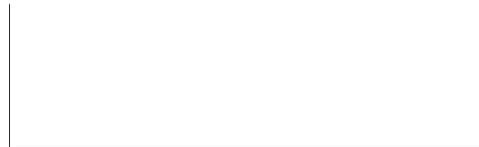
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Abstract

This is a study of a career program in a British Columbia two year post-secondary college and the program's mature women graduates. The writer is a graduate of the program, she worked in the field, and later became a member of the program's faculty. She acknowledges her subjectivity in that "she chooses a particular point of view from which to ask questions and a particular lens through which to see answers" (Gaskell 1192, 31). Gaskell's respect for the subjects of her studies, her studies of women's skills, and her analysis of individual educational programs provided the writer with understanding and models for this study.

Examples from the literature of women's work use qualitative methods appropriate to this study, where the writer seeks not "the right or ultimate answer" (Wollcott 1991, 146) but rather an increase in understanding of the problem. A survey of graduates elicited information about their work and provided criteria for selecting twelve mature women graduates as participants in the study. Each took part in an in-depth interview and subsequent telephone conversations. Analysis of the interviews and study of the literature led to further development of the research question.

The initial question centered on the skills used by the participants in the workplace and on the connections between these skills and the women's program, pre-program, and post-program education and experience. Analysis of the interviews led to an examination of the women's visible and invisible skills and re-directed the question towards the interaction between the program and the women's working lives. The question became "What role did the program and its culture play in the women's working lives?"

Examination of the data emphasised the difference between institutional employment and self-employment; the continuous thread of experience and education woven through the women's lives; the importance of general education, particularly writing, for students in the career program; and the essential but devalued and unrecognised part played by the women's invisible skills, both in the program and their work. The program is indeed a bridge to a new workplace for the women graduates and it provides a model of that workplace's view of women's skills. The study concluded

by recommending that the program and the college, rather than modelling society's blindness toward women's skills, take a leadership role in affirming, recognising, and valuing them.

The study recommended that research to acquire detailed information about graduates' careers, their work places, and the visible and invisible skills used by the graduates would provide valuable information for the program's future directions.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

All research involves the researcher, in that she chooses a particular point of view from which to ask questions and a particular lens through which to see answers” (Gaskell 1992, 31).

My own history places me close to the heart of the following study. Had some other person been its author, I might well have been one of the participants. In 1974, I, a 43 year old married woman with three children, enrolled in the Media Program at Bridgnorth College. After graduation from the program in 1976, I was employed by a suburban school district in a staff position as the district media technician. In March 1982, I returned to the Media Program at Bridgnorth College¹, as the laboratory supervisor, a faculty position; in 1985, I became an instructor; and from 1986 -1989, I was also the program co-ordinator. I supervised the students’ month long work experience for two years and, as co-ordinator, acted as liaison with the program’s advisory board whose members were drawn from employers and representatives of the field served by the program.

While working in the program, I became concerned about the low priority given to tracking graduates in the workplace. The college planning department surveyed graduates approximately twenty months after graduation, but admitted that the return rates were low and that the respondents were not asked to state whether they were male or female. Because I had been a mature woman graduate, I was particularly interested in the progress of similar women. I observed them with respect and admiration as they juggled multiple work and domestic responsibilities, tried to get employment, struggled to acquire more skills, and worked in situations where their skills were often not recognised or were under-utilised. I felt that there was an anomaly between the performance of the mature women in the program and the place that they occupied in the work world after graduation. I undertook this research in order to examine the women’s lives and their work more closely.

Framework

Jane Gaskell's work has helped more than any other in my search for meaning in the complex fabric of the women's lives which are woven from strands from their childhood, education, early adult experience, training at the college, and subsequent experience and employment. Their lives are also coloured by social, political, and economic events in British Columbia since 1975. In her writing Gaskell does not flinch from looking at the array of factors which affect the way people handle their lives. She examines the pushes and pulls between teachers' personal vision for their students, desire to make students employable, and defense of their own jobs and department. Her picture of the ambiguities and contradictions evident in people's lives is not coloured by disapproval or judgement. She recognises the partiality which colours the researcher's thinking:

We stand in our historical time, place, and culture. We stand in traditions of thought that have been thoroughly dominated by men and the bourgeoisie. And we come face to face with basic questions of value, of power, of women's place in the world (1992, 148).

Gaskell's examination of the ways in which we understand and value skill has helped my analysis of this slippery subject in the lives of the mature women graduates who participated in this study. For these mature women, an educational program was a bridge from one stage of life to another, as it was for the women discussed by Gaskell who were participants either in a city training program (1991, 374), or a high school business program (1987, 153). They all hoped skills learned in an educational program would lead to employment.

Acker, in her introduction to Gender Matters from School to Work, noted that much of Gaskell's work is concerned with "transitions and journeys" (1992, 1). Her work deals with the ongoing journey of life where transitions are made from one phase to the next through the completion of an educational program. Transitions also prevailed in my interviews with the women, transitions from full time mothering to paid employment, and from one type of work to

another. With these came changes in understanding about themselves and society. The sense of journey or transition was present in comments about change in family relationships, employment, technology, and their own aging.

Gaskell connected personal everyday events in the lives of young women in high school and later in their first jobs, to patterns of education and lives of teachers, and further to relations of power in society. Her analysis helped me to examine my observations and experience as a student, worker, teacher, and program co-ordinator. Gaskell's examination, although grounded in the study of one group in one place, has application for other inquiries about the effects of program design and teacher practice, particularly in the lives of women. It gave me the courage to grasp the knot which baffled me. This knot was tied from strings of the women's skills, education and experience; the program's formal and informal teaching; and the women's subsequent careers. Her work helped me to place this knot in the context of the way society and education shape the understanding of women's skills and the value attached to them.

The participants in the study were all graduates of a program that prided itself on opening the media workplace to women by accepting at least as many female as male applicants. From its early days, the program included mature women among its students. However, the view that women were equal to men was embodied in practices that assumed that they functioned in the same way. This understanding of gender carried over into discussions of the workplace. Long-time instructors rebutted suggestions that the workplace was different for women graduates and that the program's offerings might be able to respond more constructively to this difference.

I also observed that male students responded in a hostile manner to a woman guest speaker's comments when she differentiated between the workplace environment for women and men. Progress in the workplace for her had been a matter of endurance, courage, and silence. The difference was also clear to me in field-trips to graduates' work sites and visits to employers

where I found women graduates serving refreshments, a role never assumed by the men. The program modeled a situation where:

Gender blindness means silence on gender issues. It accepts the existing structure of the school and its subjects as a given, excluding discussion of the 'private' issue of gender (Gaskell 1992, 146).

I had been troubled by such scattered observations but Gaskell's work provided a framework for examining and starting to make sense of what I had experienced and seen.

The Research Question

The formulation of the question for this research has been an evolutionary process. The initial question for this study was "What skills do the mature women graduates of the Media Program use in the workplace?" It began with my concern that, after graduation from the program, the mature women used their pre-program skills at work more than those acquired from the program. For example, I heard women graduates talking about acting as receptionists in media production houses. Yet the act of applying to the program was in itself an act of resistance against a societal expectation which would have kept the women either at home or directed them toward clerical work. During the two years of the program, the mothers among the women waged an internal war: a battle between the demands of program and their determination to learn, on the one hand, and, on the other, the demands of love and responsibility at home. All the women wanted to work in a sector of the workplace which was not typified as belonging to women workers. They saw the acquisition of technical skills and knowledge as a key step for moving into this field. It would be ironic if, as I suspected, the women moved into a women's part of the media field.

Analysis of the program application forms and of the responses to a questionnaire which I had mailed to all available graduates, convinced me that the original question was too restrictive. Fifty three percent of the women and 51% of the men replied to the question. Based on this information, I saw that the workplace for women differed in kind and earnings. Women and men completed the same program. The women were either in institutional work or self-employed.

The men also worked in these areas, but in addition were employees of corporations and media production houses. The women earned less and held fewer full-time, permanent positions. And yet seven years of observation and experience in the program assured me that the women's grades were as high as the men's. Examination of the original question, like peeling the skins of an onion, revealed other questions. "Was there a relationship between parts of the program, other than course content, and the women's location in the work world?" "How were the skills that the women used in their work linked to their previous education and experience?" "What more did they have to learn to get into the workplace and to stay there?" These questions were the basis for in-depth interviews with the 12 mature women graduates of the program.

As the interviews progressed, it became clear that my first perspective was indeed too narrow. My attention was drawn to the program as a whole, rather than to the skills learned from a series of courses. The program was the bridge between the women's past and present. It was a catalyst. The overarching research question concerned the career program in its dynamic role as bridge and catalyst in the lives of the women. The question became "What role did the program and its culture play in the women's working lives?" Analysis of the interviews from this perspective revealed further questions. "How does the value placed by society on women's work affect the women's esteem for their own skills?" "How does family life affect their employment?" "How does the design of this particular post-secondary career education affect the mature women?" What became most interesting and fruitful was to see the braiding of skills, experience and education which have brought the women to where they are today.

Focussing attention on the program led to questions about the impact of government policy and society upon it. "What are the pressures on the program to frame its offerings in a certain way?" "What are the connections with employers?" Since 1991, the British Columbia Human Resources Development Project has been working "to develop a policy framework for the future of all forms of education, training and learning for adults in our province" (1992, 1). How will its recommendations and its understanding of education affect the mature women students in career/vocational programs at the colleges?

The introduction to “Springboard and Bridge” makes clear my position in relation to the study. It discusses Gaskell’s work as a valuable model for a study which examines women, the place of education and skill in their lives, and the pressures of society and policy on educational content and environment. Finally, I describe the evolution of the question from a focus just on the skills used by the women in the workplace, through a series of questions, to an examination of the connections between the women, their skills, their work, the program, and the external environment of society and educational policy. These questions are pursued in the following chapters.

In Chapter Two, I describe the methods which I selected in response to the needs of the study. In Chapter Three, I describe the setting for the study. This includes a description of the Media Program, the marketplace served by the program, and a discussion of the participating women. Chapter Four provides a theoretical perspective for the study, grounded in the work of Gaskell and other relevant literature. In Chapter Five, I discuss connections between the participants’ skills learned before, after, and from the program. In Chapter Six, I discuss the participants’ invisible skills and note links between the invisibility of their skills and their educational experience in the program. In both Chapters Five and Six, I structure the study around the categories of institutional employment and self-employment. In Chapter Seven, I conclude that it is important to articulate and value the women’s invisible skills within the two year college program. I note the connection between the program’s training and the Human Resource Development Project being completed at present under the aegis of the Ministry of Training and Post-secondary Education, and its implications for women. I find that this study demonstrates the need for further program based research about women graduates’ success, or lack of success, after they complete the program. Although career programs cannot guarantee graduates’ employment, careful tracking of graduates over a number of years would be a source of valuable information about the fit between program and workplace.

Endnotes

¹ Pseudonyms for institutions and the participants are used throughout the study.

Chapter 2: Methods

In this chapter I discuss the suitability of choosing a qualitative approach for a study of the mature women graduates of the Media Resources Program. I describe steps in the development of the project. I conclude with a discussion of the themes emerging from the analysis and the structure that they suggested for this study.

Justification of the research method

I chose a qualitative approach for this study because this type of research uses the subjectivity of the researcher to seek understanding of the question; endeavours to unravel subtle and ambiguous connections within the area being studied; and has been used effectively in other research dealing with women's work and education (Gaskell and McLaren 1987; Statham, Miller and Mauksch 1998). An outline of my personal background is included in the Introduction, both to acknowledge and define my subjectivity and to clarify that "the beliefs and behaviors of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for (or against) the claims advanced in the results of research" (Harding 1987, 9). The autobiographical outline responds to Harding's dictum that:

[T]he class, race, culture, and gender assumptions, beliefs and behaviors of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint (1987, 9).

Wolcott supports this stance by stating that he, rather than attempting "to establish a detached objectivity . . . opt[s] for subjectivity as a strength of qualitative approaches" (1991, 131). The twelve women who participated in this study reflect many of my own experiences. As a researcher, I locate myself among the participants. My perception is undoubtedly coloured by my own experiences working in the field, although I do not refer explicitly to them.

During nearly twenty years of observing the careers of the mature women, from the perspectives of sister student, worker in the field, colleague, and, finally teacher, I became aware that they were tapping a reserve of skills which were unarticulated either by them or by the program. In exploring the web of women's skills, I found Wolcott's perspective on qualitative research useful. He writes: "I do not go about trying to discover a ready made world; rather I seek to understand a social world we are continuously constructing" (1991, 147). He stresses a

process of learning and an uncovering of information, in which he does not purport to find a correct answer but rather to increase understanding of the problem:

What I seek is something else, a quality that points more to identifying critical elements and wringing plausible interpretations from them, something one can pursue without becoming obsessed with finding the right or ultimate answer, the correct version, the Truth. . . . For the present, understanding seems to encapsulate the idea as well as any other everyday term (Wolcott 1991, 146).

Understanding women's work is the focus of The Worth of Women's Work (1988). The editors, Statham, Miller and Mauksch, bring together thirteen papers whose authors use qualitative methods to examine women's work in a range of occupations. They note that "the researchers often had personal experience to draw upon in understanding and interpreting what they saw" (11), and that the great strength of a qualitative approach is "its ability to highlight subtle, sometimes opaque connections"(11). In their work, as in Wolcott's, "conscious effort to include primary data in my final accounts" (Wolcott 1991, 129), the words of the participants are respected and used to ground the studies. Miller, Mauksch and Statham link qualitative research with effectively studying the "labor of powerless groups" where women often occupy service roles. They argue that:

[T]he active role of women in the social construction of a work reality that is uniquely theirs would have remained beyond the grasp of those adhering to a deductive, positivistic perspective (1988, 310).

Miller, Mauksch, and Statham also find qualitative methods useful for revealing the ambiguous implications of emotional work for women (work that I include in the category of invisible skills), and use these methods to gain "insight into the lived labor of women" (312) where these ambiguities prevail.

I intended to explore the place of skills in the women's lives. I wanted to stay close to their lives by using their voices to increase understanding of their contributions to the workplace and to raise questions about the value attributed to their work. The examples provided by other

researchers convinced me that qualitative research was best suited for a study where I aimed to look for understanding rather than correctness, to see the world as socially constructed, and to examine the connections between womens' skills, their education, and their work.

Method

This study "Springboard and Bridge", was completed in five overlapping phases: gathering background material; selection of participants; data collection; the use of supplementary data from a pilot study (1990); and data analysis.

Gathering background material

As background for a study of the mature women graduates of the Media Program and to provide the program itself with information, I first established a wide overview of all the program graduates and their work experience, reaching back as far as possible. This included examining applications to the program and surveying program graduates by means of a questionnaire. The Media Program gave me free access to department files and the college paid for mailing. From the resulting information I was able to locate possible participants and to establish criteria for their selection.

The most comprehensive account of graduates' work available when I started the study in September 1991 was the program's 1982 telephone survey of graduates, compiled in a booklet. To augment this information, I used addresses available from the program and college records to survey program graduates. I chose to survey only those who graduated before 1990 because my experience has shown that graduates are often unsettled during the year following graduation.

I surveyed the graduates by means of a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) which was mailed to the 85 women and 119 men listed as graduating from 1971 to 1989. The questionnaire requested information about the respondent's date of graduation, work history, and an estimation

of her or his present monthly salary. Replies were received from 53% of the women and 51% of the men¹. (See Appendix 2 for details about the responses to the questionnaire.)

Selection of participants for the study

I have chosen to define a mature student by the classification frequently used in Adult Education:

The adult can be distinguished from a child or adolescent by his or her acceptance of social roles and functions that define adulthood. The roles of wage earner, marriage partner, parent, decision maker, and citizen all denote the independence characteristic of adulthood (Darkenwald and Merriam 1982, 77).

Past experience with women students in the program led me to select 26 years old at entry as the bench mark for “mature”. By this time, the women have settled in their adult roles. They have experienced paid employment or have been full-time mothers. For them at this age, entering the program is a well considered decision entailing significant changes in their lives. This contrasts with younger women for whom entering the program may well be another step in an educational continuum.

Of the 28 mature women who were mailed the questionnaire 21 replied. I asked 13 of these women to participate in the study. Criteria for selection were:-

- A. The participant was at least 26 years old when she applied to the program.
- B. The participant was still (1991) committed to employment in a field related to the program’s teaching.
- C. The participant lived within easy travel distance, that is in the Lower Mainland or Victoria.
- D. The participant’s response to the questionnaire was completed fully, thus indicating an interest in a study of the program graduates.

Eight of the 21 women did not fit the criteria: four were working in other fields, two were full time mothers, one lived too far away, and one did not complete the questionnaire. One of the thirteen possible participants dropped out near the start of the study when she moved to another part of the province. She had decided to return to her previous non media career.

Information about applicants' ages was derived from written application forms, which were available only for students applying to the program after 1980. When I examined the returned questionnaires, I realised that four of the women who met the criteria had graduated before 1980. Consequently, I did not know how old they had been when they entered the program. I telephoned them to confirm that they had been at least 26 years old at that time.

The twelve participants who met the criteria represent a wide range of mature women who choose to enter the Media Program. Their ages ranged from 26 to 41 years at entry into the program. Their formal education ranged from two who did not complete high school to three with bachelor's degrees. Nine of the participants were mothers, five were married, and seven were single women. All had worked in paid employment at some time before entering the program. Women from the fields of health, education, and social services have been attracted to the Media Program. For example, in 1988 two of the four mature women in the program at that time had been educators, one as an elementary school teacher, the other as a park ranger. In 1987, two of the four mature women graduates had previously been employed in social services. Among the selected participants for my study were two nurses and two other women workers from health-related fields of education and practice. (See Chapter 3 for details of participants' lives.) The wide diversity of the women's previous occupations and education was representative of the program as a whole. The mature women entering the program shared an understanding that they were not specialists. They were eager to make themselves marketable by harnessing their previous experience with technological skills to meet the needs of a workplace that they perceived to be expanding.

I cannot claim that the participants in this study are representative of all mature women entering a career/ vocational program at a post-secondary college in British Columbia. By using

information from the application files and questionnaires, I selected the twelve women as representative of mature women graduating from the program and of the variety of workplaces inhabited by them. I quote Gaskell's words about her study of high school students enrolled in business classes as a model for this study. She writes: "This research must be treated as a particular case study in a particular setting, not as a report on a representative group" (1987, 154).

Data collection

Data were collected from unstructured interviews with each of the twelve participants. I requested each woman's participation through a formal letter explaining the purpose of the study and asking for her help. I followed this with a telephone conversation with each of them to answer questions and establish a place and time convenient to them for an interview. Interviews were held in places selected by the participants. Eight suggested their homes, three other interviews took place in restaurants and one in a shopping mall. None declined to participate.

The interview schedule was unstructured but was designed to cover the participant's work history, what she did in her work, where she had worked, how she valued and used the skills learned in the program, how she gained access to work, and how her previous experience related to her current employment. The interviews were recorded and lasted between one and two hours.

Use of supplementary data from a pilot study (1990)

To extend my understanding of some questions raised by my analysis, I contacted three women who had been participants in a 1990 pilot study of three mature women who were completing the last semester of the program. I spoke with them and requested their permission to quote from the 1990 interviews. The conversations gave me an opportunity to talk about their present work and raised questions about their visible and invisible skills.

Data analysis

I examined the interviews for themes and topics. Relevant quotations were collected on cards in various categories, for example “pre-program education”, “pre-program work”, “technical skills”, “program acquired skills”, “skills used in work place”. I constantly referred back to the interviews and related the experience of the women to perspectives provided by the literature. Analysis of the interviews led me to enlarge my original question from a focus on the skills employed by the women in the workplace to an exploration of the skills learned at different stages in their lives. In pursuing this wider question, I found connections between the value placed by society on the women’s skill contributions and the way this was reflected in the women’s view of themselves and their work. One theme emerged continually: that there was a disparity between the essential nature of the women’s contributions to the workplace and the recognition and value which are attached to them both by society and by the women themselves. The effects of being unvalued were noticeable, appearing for example, in discussions of “confidence” in six of the twelve interviews. The women linked the topic of confidence to other topics such as payment for work, using equipment, being a woman in the media industry, tension between the mother and worker roles, and getting older. I then started to make connections between the women’s lives in the workplace and in the career/vocational program which directed them towards the media workplace.

Themes relevant to women graduates arose out of the twelve women’s interviews and from the responses to the graduate survey. One important theme was the difference between the public sector (institutional) and private sector workplace. In contemporary society, private sector work for the participating women means freelancing, or self-employment. Only the institutionally employed participants retained employee status in 1992. The differences in the work environment in the two sectors offered a useful structure for organising the discussion of the women’s skills. A second theme concerned the weaving of many skills from the participants’ lives in order to find and maintain a position in the workplace. A third theme was the problematic effect upon the women of the value placed by society on their invisible skills. These themes are traced in the following chapters.

The methods which I have chosen for an examination of “Springboard and Bridge” have allowed me to use my own experience as a base for exploring the way in which twelve mature women have used their inventory of skills in the world of work. The women’s interviews impelled me to look at the way society recognises women’s skills and to make connections between this and their education. At a time when society and spokes-people for government urge more training and acquisition of specific skills, it is important to assess what is useful to the learners who pay to acquire them.

Endnotes

¹ Seven questionnaires addressed to women and seven addressed to men were returned because the graduates were no longer at those addresses.

Chapter 3: Background

This chapter provides information on the setting for the study. First, I discuss the community college and one career/vocational program, the Media Program, where the participants in this study acquired their media skills within the 1970 -1989 time-frame. Second, I describe the different kinds of workplace, connected with the media, in which the participants work. I draw on information from the responses to the questionnaire mailed to all program graduates (see Chapter 2, 11). I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the participants.

The College

The time period framing this study has been one of great expansion in the Vancouver Regional District. For example, the population for Vancouver's metropolitan area has grown from 826,798 in 1961 (Canada Year Book 1990, 2.22) to an estimated population of 1,473,700 in 1992 for the same area (Canadian Markets 1992, 548). Bridgnorth College opened in 1968 during this period of growth. It was one of the two year colleges envisaged by J.B. MacDonald in Higher Education in B.C.: A Plan for the Future, in which he called for another level of education between those offered by the university and the secondary schools. Although the emphasis of his study was to preserve the universities for professional schools and graduate studies, he saw the need for "technological and semi-professional courses designed for students who want formal education beyond high school but who do not plan to complete the requirements of a degree" (MacDonald 1962, 51). He stated that a body of technologically trained people would be essential to the province's economic viability.

The two year colleges were designed to fill this need. They were also opened in response to energetic lobbying by British Columbia citizens eager for educational opportunities. They saw the colleges as a way to democratise access to education more than as a way to meet the province's economic needs.

The colleges were founded on a widely supported philosophy directed towards the provision of a wider range of opportunities for a greater number and variety of people they should be a democratising influence, that should emphasise the worth of people irrespective of career directions (Beinder 1983, 11).

These two perspectives still exist in tension with each other. The first links education closely to the economic needs of the province, while the second has a broader purpose as noted in Soles' discussion of the technological college courses.

[C]ollege education must be guided by more than mere utilitarian purposes. If we seek only the social adjustment of our students to the world in which they must live, we betray them, for the world in itself provides no real standards of values. Surely our task is to educate our students, not simply to train them in a technology, or process them towards a degree (Soles 1970, 220).

The colleges have made it possible for mature women to change their lives through accessible, affordable education while the universities were closed to them by academic requirements, distance, and cost. An interview with one of the study's participants provided an example of this. The university to which she had applied before entering the program threw obstacles in her way which alienated her from attempting to channel her aspirations through academic university studies. Despite a bachelor's degree and some professional writing, she had been told that she must take undergraduate courses before entering a master's program. She could not afford to do this. She commented sardonically to me, "What was all this about re-entry for women?"

In contrast to the universities' narrow understanding of qualification for further education, the Academic Board for Higher Education in British Columbia (1965) stressed the importance of the diversity of skills, beyond the specifically technical or academic, brought by students to college programs.

They [students] may surpass many university graduates in their ability to deal with people; their ability to manage practical and technical affairs; their artistic, musical or dramatic talent; their capability and initiative to get things done; and in terms of sheer good sense, judgement and responsibility (1965, 3).

My experience shows that the tension between MacDonald's focus on technological training and the Academic Board's more liberal view of education continues to be felt by faculty in career/ vocational programs, particularly by those instructors who joined the colleges in the

early days. On the one hand, the instructors feel pressure to meet the system's economic demands. On the other hand, they feel pressure to meet the needs and aspirations of individual students.

In addition to the tension between pressure from the external environment and students' individual needs, there is a tension between technical training and general education. The Academic Board for Higher Education had expected this to be resolved in the colleges' curriculum. The members of the Board saw this as a way "to counteract the false distinction that is commonly drawn between academic and technical education." They hoped that:

Within a college program these may be merged in ways that enable students to comprehend their fields of study not merely as academic or technical but as powerful social and intellectual forces that are deeply and widely influential in human affairs (Academic Board for Higher Education in British Columbia 1965, 11).

Even for technical students, the curriculum was intended to "meet the needs of the present and future by enlarging the students' cultural and intellectual scope and interests while providing proficiency in a technical field" (Academic Board 1966, 11).

This broad view of college education was challenged in the economic recession of the late 1970s and early 1980s when, as Beinder commented,

Suddenly our provincial leaders began to insert the term 'marketable skills' into discussions of priorities for community colleges. . . . Boards and administrators share the exasperation brought on by the increasing insistence of government on the primacy of technical /vocational training over general and academic education. They are forced to submit to the precedence of employer demands over student needs and expectations (Beinder 1983, 18-19).

In response to cuts in college funding, departments were obliged to decide where courses should be cut. In order to maintain credibility, they preserved specific technical courses, providing visible skills to graduates entering the workplace, at the expense of the general education components.

The Program

The earliest notice of the Media Program is on page 56 of the 1969 college calendar where it is called the “Educational Resource Technician Program”. It enrolled its first students in 1969. The 1969 description of the Program’s courses reflected the Academic Board’s (1966) liberal approach to curriculum. Courses on “Resource economics of British Columbia”, “Philosophy and organisation of the B.C. school system”, and “Current economic issues” were included with technical courses (see Appendix 3).

From its inception, the Program has aimed at enrolling equal numbers of women and men. The 1969 material states; “The program is ideal for men and women alike”(56). One of the program’s original instructors told me that the determination to ensure equal access to the program opened, for women, the field of work related to the media; its production, distribution, and use, in both the public and private sectors. Mature students have also been readily accepted in the program and have been attracted by its mix of technical, intellectual, and creative components.

By 1971 the program was called Audio Visual Resources program and, in 1972, received its present title, the Media Program. The 1969 college calendar stated that:

The graduate from this program will be proficient in the field of graphics, photography, and the maintenance of audio and visual equipment. In addition he [sic] will be skilled in the production, care, organisation and distribution of audio visual materials. He will also have experience in instructing workshop groups in the various audio visual skills.

Specific courses have been included to provide the necessary background which will enable the graduate to work in schools in a para-professional role with teachers.

Educational Resource Technicians will also be prepared to take positions with management, business, and industry, assisting in the promotion of products and services (1969, 56).

The specific character of the 1969 calendar description changed over the years to become more comprehensive. In the 1991-92 college calendar, the educational field was just one of many

employment areas served by the program. There is a shift toward private sector self-employment.

Graduates are currently working in a variety of settings as media producers and A/V directors for a variety of educational institutions, private companies, and other organisations; production and administrative staff; news and film editors; and freelance producers (149).

The mix of technical and more general education is described by the calendar.

The core of the program is production training. Students are taught standards of excellence and effectiveness in all forms of educational production work. Basic technical skills are taught in all media areas, and a large number of projects are completed by students during their training. . . . The program involves more than technical skills. Courses also develop knowledge and skills in communication, learning theory, instructional design, the uses of media in education, the maintenance and purchase of equipment and resources distribution (1991, 149).

It is in the area of non-technical learning (communication, learning theory, and the uses of media in education) that allocation of time has been eroded by pressure from the external environment and by the number of technologies with which contemporary students must be familiar to be considered media generalists. The increase in the program's technical content is illustrated by the following example. Where the 1969 program outline specified training in graphics and photography, the 1992 calendar, in contrast, specified training in photography, film, audio, video, and computer technologies . Two more examples illustrate the scope of this difference. First, students used to design a show, sequencing a series of single images for one projector. Now, they program at least nine projectors, making visual sense with sequencing, abutting, overlaying, and pacing images. Second, students used to deal with each medium separately. Now, they design and program video, film, and still images which are conjoined to create multi-media productions. At present, video and computer technology overarch the program. Ten years ago video was just one form of media; now industry practice dictates it as the common distribution medium for all forms of media.

Communications courses, one in the first and one in the second year, promote verbal and written communication skills as well as giving students practical contacts with the media industry. Graduates of the program must have some degree of competence in all the program's

technologies if they are to speak the language of the media workplace and be acceptable to prospective employers. In order to graduate, students complete 72 credit hours and 60 laboratory hours, which are used for production. The program finishes with a four week practicum in a workplace chosen by the student and approved by the practicum supervisor.

Continuing funding pressure on the program and the need to incorporate more new technology in the curriculum have led, through the 1980s, to a decrease in time for those academic courses which allowed a wider critical view of media, and of its use in society and education. This content was covered in nine credit hours assigned to the Media Applications and Research Methods Courses (1969-1984). In 1985 they were reduced to six credit hours (College Calendar, 1984-85, 94). They have been squeezed thin and lie in the shadow of the program's technical offerings.

The program's faculty are committed to the program's "generalist" approach because it offers the graduates the widest range of options for employment and for more specialised training in the future. The term generalist is applied to program graduates because they are not specialists in any one medium. Frequently media generalists have been hired to work in educational and other public sector institutions where they are required to understand the operation and appropriate use of a variety of media.

The workplace

In the early 1970s, graduates' employment was primarily in the field of educational media. They were employed by universities, colleges, schools, and hospitals for work in their audio-visual departments. They worked as producers, writers, operators and selectors of equipment, informal teachers, and co-ordinators: they were media generalists. Of the 30 respondents to the questionnaire, women and men, who graduated during the 1970s, 20 (eight women) were first employed by institutions in this capacity. Thirteen of them (five women) are still institutionally employed, including those who have become managers, co-ordinators or teachers. Four, although not institutionally employed, are still working in the field of education.

The situation has changed for those who graduated after 1980. Of the 71 graduates from the 1980s who replied to the questionnaire, only 14 are institutionally employed (six women, eight men). Only two of the six women have full-time positions. Seven of the eight men have full-time positions. The increase of part-time work for women is noted overall by Statistics Canada in the 1992 Canada Year Book:

Women are also much more likely than men to hold part-time jobs, generally with fewer benefits and less security. In 1988, about one in four working women held a part-time job, compared to one in 10 working men (1992, 146).

The purpose of this study is to examine the work world of the program's mature women graduates, not to make comparisons with the men's work world; however, the prevalence of part-time work status for women warrants emphasis.

In the private sector, graduates who are most successful develop a special, conspicuous skill. For instance, they may become video editors, sound track designers, script writers, programmers for multi-image, or producers. Based on this special skill, they build a reputation which attracts clients. Establishing a good reputation takes a network of contacts, high demand skills, persistence, and luck.

In the 1980s big slide-sound productions were in demand. This trend culminated in Expo '86, a major world fair hosted by Vancouver. Pavilions promoting different nations and regions relied on visual media to deliver their messages vividly. One Canadian corporation commissioned a show which called for visuals from more than 100 projectors to be harnessed by computer with moving images and other special effects. Local audio-visual production houses employed many of the program's graduates for two or three years in preparation for Expo '86 and to maintain the shows during the exposition. Such audio-visual production and staging are very costly, while costs are lower for distribution and staging of video productions. As a result of rising costs and the economic slump after Expo '87, one of Vancouver's two major audio/ visual production houses closed in 1988. At one time six graduates of the Media Program were on its

staff. The remaining large company has been restructured. It retains a small core of administrative staff and hires other employees on a contractual basis as self-employed workers.

Media production has moved more to film and television. Edwards, in an article in Vancouver Step, an entertainment industry magazine, states:

Statistics from the BC Film Commission show that Vancouver's film and TV industry has grown from \$12 million in 1978, to \$300 million last year. The business employs an estimated 4,000 people, and BC is home to 193 film and video companies, 40 talent agencies, 18 post production facilities and 15 shooting stages (Edwards, June/July 1992, 27).

Only two graduates responding to the questionnaire reported working steadily within the major film and television industries¹. Mature women find the environment alien. In her interview, one of the study's participants reported being unable to handle four consecutive 15 hour days, being required to pick up cigarette butts, and being tested. She was exhausted and humiliated and decided to look for work in another media area. Male workers in the industry have told me that they also are aware that "women are treated badly". Another one of the study's participating women, Janet, who is working in a specialised field and well established in the film industry, said in her interview:

I think it's really hard in the film industry for women. Because it's a boys' club and the men support each other. . . . They still don't really like to work with you because it changes the tone of everything, jokes change when you're around. . . . And they treat bad male directors far better than they treat fabulous female directors.

Other aspects of work in the media industry are also tough. The volume of work in the city is erratic. Competition for work is very keen. When I supervised students' work experience, I observed that many of the facilities are very small and run on a razor's edge budget. In order to bid low on projects, and so to remain viable, companies shaved salaries. One of the participants confirmed my observations when she told me in an interview that she had been offered a full-time job, in just such a business, as receptionist/secretary/ video editor for \$1,100 a month. It was suggested to her that the working day might well exceed eight hours.

As for the rest of Canadian workers, there is an increase in self-employment for the program's graduates. In the 1970s and early 1980s graduates were hired as employees by production houses and corporations. The trend to self-employment, particularly for women, is noted in the 1992 Canada Year Book: "Since 1975 the number of self-employed women has risen three times as fast as the number of self-employed men (146)". For Media Program graduates, men as well as women, self-employment is now the norm. Forty-five percent of women and 41% of men responding to the questionnaire and graduating after 1980 report themselves as self-employed.

The workplace for Media Graduates is difficult to categorise. Information from the Canadian Index of Occupations (based on information from the 1988 census) focuses on the major trades and top administrative positions in the entertainment industry. It does not include or differentiate between the many "assistant" positions, such as researchers, production coordinators, production assistants, and others who support this amorphous and labour intensive industry. However, employment for all Media graduates falls in the Service Sector category, along with other industries such as retail, law, education, health, entertainment, and undertaking (British Columbia Business and Statistical Review 1990, 111). Statistics Canada reports that, in 1988, the average annual earnings of women in the Artistic and Recreational sector and in the Service sector were approximately half those of men in this sector. The responses to the questionnaire do not make an accurate assessment of earnings possible, but they do show a consistent pattern of lower earnings for women graduates. (See Appendix 2 for details.)

The women

A discussion of the women's skills and how they use them must be placed in the context of their lives. In this section of Chapter 3, I discuss how the women balance different aspects of their lives. Table 1, 27 provides specific information about the women, their age when they entered the program, their family status and amount of education, when they graduated from the

Table 1. Participants' education, employment, and family status

	Pre-Program										Post-Program										
	Education										Employment										Children at home
	Age at grad.										inst	FT	PT	PR	FT	PT	SE				
Stella	42	'75	●	4	inc	●	●	●	●	●	●	4	●	●	●	●	1	Family			
Jane	34	'75		2	●	inc	●	●	●	●	●	2	●	●	●	●		Inst. FT			
Diana	30	'77	●	1	●		●	●	●	●	●	2			●	●	●	4	SE		
Phyllis	32	'79		2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	2	●	●				1	Inst. FT		
Jennifer	28	'82			●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●				1	Inst. FT		
Penny	29	'85	●	1	●		●	●	●	●	●	1			●	●		1	SE		
Sylvia	42	'86	●	4	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	4			●	●	●		SE		
Morag	31	'86			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	●		●		●	2	Family		
Naomi	42	'87	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●						●		SE		
Janet	31	'87			inc	●	●	●	●	●	●						●		SE		
Liz	41	'89	●	1	●		●	●	●	●	●						●		SE		
Sheila	36	'89			●	●	●	●	●	●	●						●		Inst. PT/ SE		

KEY

Professional - work requiring formal education and certification

"helping" - work relating to health, education or social services

Married / partnered - married or in a stable heterosexual or lesbian relationship

Family - not seeking employment at present because of family obligations

Inst - institutional employment

PR - private sector employment

FT - Full time

PT - Part time

SE - Self-employed

Inc - Incomplete

program, and their subsequent and present employment. It includes the number of dependent children when they entered the program, started their media careers, and now in 1993. It shows the increase in self-employment for the more recent graduates.

Table 1, 27 does not offer any estimate of earnings because I found that only the women who were institutionally employed were able to state their earnings with any certainty. The self-employed women's stated monthly earnings varied from less than \$1,000 to over \$6,000. The latter was an exception to the general pattern; all the other self-employed women estimated that they earned less than \$3,000. The highest earning woman thought that assessing earnings on a monthly basis was not useful because:

I get paid a lot when I'm working but I can't keep that pace up continually. . . . It's very hard and stressful and I can't really do it full time, all year round, any more. You're working 12 to 16 hour days, seven days a week. You're given six or eight weeks and the film's got to be done. . . . So I have to get paid a lot because it takes me another month to recuperate. When you start spreading that money out over the year, I'm not making that much money.

She also talked about the vulnerability of the independent free-lancer in the film industry.

Sure, you sign a contract but if you're a free-lancer, you can't afford to take someone to court. I mean, maybe you've lost thousands of dollars, but to take someone to court? You can't afford that. You have no recourse. It's too big to go to small claims court. And you don't have a union behind you, if you do they're not going to back you up anyways.

I also chose to exclude earnings from Table 1 because their inclusion re-enforces the perception that the value of what women do equates with the amount of their earnings. It denies the seamlessness of women's lives and the value of lives where achievement in the workplace is balanced and blended with family and social life. All of the eight mothers mentioned the effects of mothering on their working lives, although the impact was less noticeable in the lives of those whose children were older. Even these women were still closely involved in their children's lives. For example, one woman played a significant role caring for her grandchild, thus supporting her daughter's achievements. By doing this, she gave her daughter the opportunity that she did not get when she herself was a young woman.

The women try to balance family life and personal career. For some the answer is clear.

Diana, speaking of her family life when I interviewed her in her home, said:

It has to be a whole and if it can't be a whole then the family would come first . . . I think that in the end there would be huge pitfalls in concentrating so much on work that the centre wouldn't hold. The centre is here.

She described how she coped:

I have a room upstairs as an office. I have a fax and computer and it works well for me. In the end I have a fair amount of meetings, which is good. I wouldn't want to be here all the time. I couldn't stand it.

Retaining a place in the world of work is harder for mothers of young children. Morag had hoped to combine mothering and free-lance work from her home, but said:

I began to realise I didn't really have the time to make this business go and look after Sally at the same time. Because I tried to do that for a while but just ended up feeling I was doing a really lousy job of both things. Sally was going through a phase. Well, she'd be perfectly happy but whenever the phone rang she'd start screaming. So I'd be there talking to clients and printers, trying to sound as though I was speaking from a nice white sterile studio, with this snotty peanut-butter covered child attached to my left leg, screaming at the top of her voice.

And I just felt really depressed. I felt it was totally unprofessional and, at the same time, I felt it was being unfair to Sally, trying to ignore her.

Other examples also illustrate areas of stress rising from the women's family responsibilities. One woman, divorced with two young children, said that she could not have completed the program, nor worked as she did subsequently, if she had not had childcare help from her sister. Three single mothers described the anxiety they felt at being torn between the needs of their children and long hours at work. A married woman twice sacrificed her own position in the interests of family cohesion and her husband's career. These women constantly balance the demands of the workplace and their own career aspirations against those of children and family.

Sheila, a self-employed woman, considered that being single was an advantage to her when seeking work.

If you're single . . . you don't have dependents. You are more likely to be called on. . . and you'll be there. And they call on you again and they repeat that, if you can pick up and go at an hour or two's notice out of the country or out of the province. That is an advantage.

On the other hand, Janet noted the impact of her work's demands on her personal life with regret:

If I want to keep doing this, there's no time for a personal life. I don't know that work's that important that I should give up the rest of my life to it. . . . It's hard, when you're working there's no time to do the laundry, pay your bills, clean your house, do all that stuff. . . . Most of the guys have wives at home taking care of all this. . . but if you live alone, it's hard to keep a relationship going under those circumstances. . . . While you try to establish your career, your career is the main motivation for everything. And when you get there, you find there's not all that much here anyway. . . . What about the rest of your life?

Jane was emphatic when she said that she was not interested in advancement because this would entail becoming an administrator. She values her present position as a media generalist because:

There are very few departments in the institution that have the range of contacts that the AV department does. I love that. I love dipping into somebody else's world doing a production. And learning . . . seeing with new eyes. . . . And the opportunity to work with people, to work together on more than a social basis is very rewarding to me.

She commented about her superior's position:

To get isolated into administration and all that paper work! It was thankless! . . . I never have wanted it, never. . . . I've never wanted that kind of power. I'd much rather have freedom.

Her energy and commitment encompass her work as well as a wide range of community interests and contacts.

Although the focus of the interviews was on the women's work and the skills that they use in the workplace, I noted that personal relationships were mentioned by 11 of the 12 women. Their words showed the value they attached to relationships with co-workers, friends, and family members. They viewed themselves as members of a web of personal relationships, influencing

and being influenced by it. Only one of the women, Janet, had the opportunity to benefit from the influence of a strong female role model early in her career. She, the only participant in the study whose work has a strong technical focus, had a woman role model who is recognised in the industry for the excellence of her work. This relationship, combined with Janet's perception of technology as an opportunity for expanding her learning, rather than as an obstacle to be overcome, help account for the level of her technical accomplishments.

The level and kind of education the women brought to the program is detailed in Table 1, 27. Four had bachelor's degrees. One had completed three years of university Fine Arts. Two had not completed high school; one because she had to work to help her family, the other because she could not tolerate the pedestrian education offered by the school. Subsequently both of these women completed various educational programs and they demonstrated an eager appetite for learning before, during, and after the program.

I did not seek information in the interviews about the women's childhood socio-economic status, but their comments suggested that it was as varied as their education. Five said they came from working class families. One of the women talked about being poor as a child. One said that her father had been a senior university faculty member. Three others mentioned middle class or professional parents.

The women's previous work was also varied. It included clerical work, mechanical drafting, selling insurance, wholesale selling, nursing, tomography, tree-planting, and writing. They augmented formal work with a variety of other experiences. Five of the women mentioned that this included volunteer work associated with social and community work or with health care. The inclination toward social, as well as individual, goals was evident in the interviews, where seven of the women talked with satisfaction about using and producing media for purposes they deemed socially useful, such as training volunteers for a health agency.

It is apparent that the women's inventory of skills and their use of them are rooted in their earlier lives and experience. Their skills are not merely a component, but are woven tightly into

the fabric of the women's lives; their skills are balanced and valued along with other responsibilities and interests. They continue to focus their skills to meet their interests and the needs in their lives.

In this chapter I have discussed briefly the history of the colleges and programs in relation to the economic demands of the province and needs of individual students. I have described the development of the Media Program from 1969; the students enrolled in the program; the pressure on the program's curriculum from rapid increases and changes in technology; tension between the technical and media generalist approach to the curriculum. I concluded by discussing other aspects of the women's lives in order to provide a foundation for an examination of their skills in the workplace. In the next chapter, I turn from this close-up view to discuss the theoretical perspective which I have chosen for the study.

Endnotes

- ¹ One of these is a man. He had told me previously that he would not have been able to survive while struggling to gain an entry into the film workplace if he had not been living with his parents at that time.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Perspective

Theoretical Perspective on Skills

The recognition and valuing of women's skills are central to this study. In order to address this, it is important to examine the meanings of skill and how the use of skill determines the value we place on those who use it. In Chapter 5 I shall demonstrate, using their voices, the ways in which the mature women graduates of the Media Resources Program use and understand skill. Here, I shall examine different views of skill from the literature and show how the writers understand skill in relation to women and the value placed on women by society.

It is difficult to discuss skills because there are many interpretations of what skill is. Vallas (1990) notes that "because researchers have used widely varying conceptions and measures of skill, empirical literature is rife with inconsistent and contradictory findings that point in several directions at once" (379). Perceptions of skill change according to prevailing social views. A current view was expressed in the words of Roslyn Kunin, a speaker from Employment and Immigration Canada, (CBC radio, August 1992), when she rated skills in mathematics, science, and technology as valuable. She considered inter-personal skills of far less value, and physical skills as "unskilled".

Dictionaries provide some guide posts to the many understandings of skill. In these, I see a shift over the years from wider meanings to narrower ones. For example, the Oxford Universal Dictionary (1955, 1906) and the Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary (1982, 1213 and 1539) show that before the 16th century the meanings of skill, arising from Old Norse and High German, deal with knowledge and discernment. It is interesting to note that the 1953 edition of Roget's Thesaurus includes, under the rubric of skill, among other meanings "mother-wit; discretion; . . . management; . . . feeling"(252). These words are omitted in the 1986 edition (303). It is difficult to draw inferences from the many meanings offered in the two editions, but the emphasis has shifted toward the specific and demonstrable. The older meaning referred to in the two dictionaries cited above presents a more comprehensive understanding of skill which may include formal, academic learning or informal, intuitive understandings may also relate to specific accomplishment, often associated with physical ability, dexterity, and technology. Our

understandings of skill, then, range widely and within unclear boundaries. Meanings of skill include knowledge and ways of acting so deeply ingrained that they are an unrecognised part of a person's being; physical dexterity in performing tasks well; mental dexterity in the manipulation of abstract ideas; and the ability to make subtle discriminations and judgements which, recognised or not, are part of mental and physical work.

The question of skill is important because skill definitions are used to ascribe value to our work. For example, definitions of skill provide a framework for specialist consultants when they compare the levels of skill required in different positions, thus determining where those jobs should be placed in a hierarchy, and consequently what the workers should be paid (Steinberg 1990, 449-475). Commonly accepted definitions of skill also shape the way that people see each other and themselves, and consequently set a value on their contributions in the work place and society. With these issues in mind, I am going to use the literature to examine some approaches to skill. I shall make links to the Media Program and to its mature women graduates, although I shall examine the latter in more detail in the following chapter.

Gaskell takes Braverman's 1974 study, Labour and Monopoly Capital as a benchmark for her discussion of the value placed on skill by society. She discusses his view of skill as craft mastery, achieved through lengthy training which allows only a limited number of the trained to enter the specific field of work. A series of screens limits the final number of practitioners: only a certain number, with specific qualifications, are accepted for training; considerable time is spent in training; and it is necessary to pass specific tests during and at the end of training.

In her writings on skill, Gaskell argues that the skills of many women, who often enter the work place in a non-specific or clerical roles, are undervalued in the craft mastery perspective. For the mature women graduates of the Media Program who find institutional work, the program may serve in lieu of an apprenticeship. The completion of a two year program may be one of the qualifications stipulated by the employer. But, because of the unspecialised and general nature of the training, the employer may also accept other candidates who have some experience in the use of audio visual equipment, such as support work in a high school library. In this instance, the

systematic broad training from the program may not outweigh other factors, such as past experience, that the employer deems relevant. Completion of the program is a weak screen at best.

Braverman's view of skill as the attribute of a master craftsman applies to only one of the mature women graduates participating in this study, Janet. After graduation from the program, she acquired her skills through specialisation and an arduous self-constructed apprenticeship working with experienced film-makers. Her specialisation in the design of sound for film and her use of sophisticated technology take her out of the generalist field inhabited by the other women. Despite her mastery of the occupational skills, she is self-employed and not protected in the way that a traditional senior craftsman in a unionised industry would be.

Janet's skill is demonstrable. It is physically present in a public product. It is more difficult to pin down skills which are not the result of physical activity. The subtle discriminations needed for examining skill are explored in Torbe's 1988 article "Doing Things with Language: Skills, Functionalism and Social Context". He notes the invisible, indefinable quality of skill.

A 'skill' is a practical knowledge in combination with ability. It is something we learn to do in collaboration with the more capable (Vygotsky 1978), but may not need to be taught explicitly. And when we are taught it . . . it is by engaging with the experience which is purely itself. Once we can perform the skill, we have achieved something the subsidiary parts of which may be, in Polanyi's term (Polanyi 1958,) 'unspecifiable': we may be able to do something, but not able to explain what we do. . . . A skill is always a way of achieving something of which the skill is a part and never an end in itself (184).

Torbe continues to pursue the physical aspect of skill, but here, I want to use his vision of skills which are invisible themselves but made visible in their product. For example, Janet, in constructing a sound track, physically and mentally creates, manipulates, and organises a number of components such as dialogue, sound effects, and music through her skill with sound technology. The skill is invisible in the final product: nonetheless the sound track is known to be her creation, and the credits on the screen attest to this.

Many of the mature women graduates are not able to claim as their own the product of their skills. Many of the formal and informal skills which the mature women brought to the program from their previous experience (often “learned in collaboration with the more capable . . . and not taught explicitly”), and education remain unrecognised and undervalued by themselves and others. The women’s skills are hidden in the negative space of the major design which the observer sees as a smoothly running department, a student’s effective class presentation, or the advancement of institutional and colleagues’ objectives. The women’s skills of co-operation, co-ordination, and organisation are subsumed in the service of the institution and their colleagues. And, while the skills are used successfully, they remain invisible. These are the skills which I define as women’s invisible skills. I use an extended example from institutional employment to illustrate this invisibility.

Of the 12 women I interviewed, five are, or have been, employed in the audio visual or media production departments of institutions. They are usually classified as audio visual technologists or technicians; one is classified as a writer/producer. The position is that of media generalist (see Chapter 3, 23). They all do work which centres on offering service to the institution. Stella was the first audio visual technician at a major Vancouver teaching hospital. She described a range of activities included in her work. Her description provides an insight into her own understanding of skills, both those learned from the program and those she acquired previously, and reveals abilities she does not see herself.

. . . the department had just been opened in staff education so it was up to me to set up some sort of administrative controls for equipment going in and out. As well as do productions for people. So again knowing how to file things properly and how to write memos, those were very useful skills to have with me. One of the tasks we took on was publishing the in-house monthly news letter, and again writing and photography became very important, and editing. And I also learned a bit about paste up and editing.

Her media skills were melded with organisational skills in the interest of the hospital. She went on to describe video production where she worked with content specialists, set up and

operated the sound and video equipment and devised ways to obviate the use of editing equipment, because they had none. She then continued:

. . . the need was so great for materials for education that I ended up working for every department in the hospital including the doctors. I used to do a lot of slides for them for lecturing. I would go and take photographs of patients and their health problems from time to time and incorporate those in slide/tapes for teaching purposes . . . there was an IV catheter, a brochure, in fact it's a book . . . and that took a lot of work. I took photographs of the whole procedure, and I put all the information into typewritten form, compiled the whole thing, and eventually it was published.

In the description of her work she talked about specific technical skills of photography, video, and publishing, but never drew attention to the interpersonal skills which enabled her to accomplish those things she and the institution required. Behind the list of her accomplishments, in the negative space, is a foundation of invisible skills: effective listening, understanding, organising ability, adapting and negotiating skill. Her overarching skill in understanding and responding to the needs of the institution and its personnel provided a framework for utilising her specific program learned skills. And yet this broader skill remained invisible to her and, probably, her employers.

Steinberg (1990) looks at the pervasive invisibility of women's work in our society when she discusses the processes used for ascribing value to it. She makes a connection between a secretary's performing a variety of tasks well and the invisibility of the skill she uses.

. . . authority associated with female work is invisible. Male managers are perceived as running offices or departments. Yet the daily work of the secretary in passing on messages, responding to emergencies, training new employees, and co-ordinating schedules for meetings and other activities remains invisible, especially if she performs these responsibilities competently (1990, 459).

Women in clerical positions in our society are so ordinary that they and their skills are taken for granted. Attewell describes how this ordinariness hides the expertise from its practitioners and the public. Daily activities are unremarkable:

They become socially invisible to both the actors performing the and to observers familiar with them: They become buried within the practitioners Thus many human capacities are not just a matter of reason, intellect or knowledge but are unconscious and literally *embodied*. . . . It follows from this perspective, that an activity seems “unskilled” once one can do it well (because the “skill” disappears) (1990, 430).

The disappearance of the practitioner’s skill is most complete when the product of the skill is in the service of others (for example caring for others, facilitating and organising), or enters the public sphere as part of another person’s product, whether it be a slide sound production used in a professor’s lecture or a boss’s letter to a customer. Although the situation is not gender specific, it includes women more often.

Gaskell (1992) examines levels of skill and the value ascribed to them. Her questions demonstrate the complexities entwined in the issue.

The question of how we attribute a level of skill to a job is complex. How do tasks in the labour market come to be valued, to be seen by employers and employees as ‘skilled’? How can we compare the value of verbal skills and physical skills, the value of social skills and technical skills? How does ‘managing’ as a social skill compare with dealing with customers? Our notions of labour market skills are socially constructed and the social processes producing our designations need to be carefully examined (114).

Gaskell points out the contradictions existing in the workplace where women receive approximately two thirds of men’s wages and yet surpass men in areas of skill supposedly valued by employers. She shows that the problem is not only in the invisibility of the skills but in the fact that the skills are associated with women and their work. Men are rewarded more highly for their work than women and accept the reward as an accurate valuation of the work they perform. Common sense suggests that work’s public value, expressed in terms of payment and prestige, reflects the level of the skill needed to produce it.

Being treated as a ‘higher’ achievement can easily translate in a more scientific world into being considered a ‘higher’ skill. Mental labour is

more prestigious than manual labour; science is more prestigious than caring for young children; giving directions is more prestigious than working out what they mean and following them closely. It is not clear that one is actually more difficult than another. These are cultural values - things associated with dominant values and with power are counted as higher skill (Gaskell 1992, 116-117).

The value set on women and their work by society diminishes the perception of their skill almost to invisibility.

The customary association of certain kinds of activity with women workers depreciates their value and visibility. Women's work has a 'low profile': it is ubiquitous but unseen. Gaskell takes this one step further when she notes the disrespect that we, as a society, accord the work of many people, particularly women. She links power with the recognition and rewarding of skill.

What less powerful workers do has been construed as lacking in skill. When people overlook women's skills, devalue them, give them low ratings it is not a technical glitch, but a reflection of the status and power women have had in the world (1992, 148).

And so women's social and organisational skills are obliterated from sight even though they are actively deployed in facilitating the processes of the workplace.

These invisible skills are like those described by Torbe, "learned in collaboration with the more capable" (1988, 84), such as mothers, grandmothers, teachers and colleagues. Society does not include them in the category of skill but assigns them to that of feminine characteristics.

Gaskell argues that:

Women's skills have often been considered part of their femaleness, and therefore not to be counted. Being polite and helpful and 'attractive' in particular ways are learned, but considered personality, not skill (1992, 148).

Women are understood to do these things naturally and, because the behaviours are natural to the actor and observer, they do not call for payment. They remain invisible.

My exploration of women's invisible skills is informed by Braverman's critique of the way in which census classifications were used in the 1930s to define measures of skillfulness (1974, 428-430). He notes that the worker whose work is primarily associated with machinery is

classified as more skilled than the worker who uses older, traditional or ordinary technology.

. . . An assembly line worker is presumed to have greater skill than a fisherman or oysterman, the forklift truck operator greater skill than the gardener or groundskeeper . . . (Braverman 1974, 430).

And I might add, all are likely to be considered more skilled than women, who by looking at the shadows on a child's skin, are able to determine the state of the child's health. The gardener, groundskeeper, fisherman, and oysterman derive their skill from the long tradition of invisible skills which relate to that older understanding of skill which denotes knowledge and judgement. Their elusive but real skills consign them to a low classification because the skills are not associated with either technology or industrial processes. It is the same valuing of skill that colours the common perception of women's work. Thus Stella and her employers noted the materials she produced in service of the hospital, but neither she nor they commented on the invisible skills underlying these accomplishments.

In the pages above I have discussed women's skill in relation to some historic understandings of the word: the valuing of skill; craft mastery; the visibility of the skill in its product in contrast to the invisibility of the "product" of women's skills; and the connection between power and the value of skills. Now I turn to skills that are visible to society and the mature women graduates of the program: skills which are associated with technology and with a physical product, such as effective productions in video, photography, film or sound.

The tangible product of skill may well be the result of skills or competency training. The words are often used interchangeably as was noted by Maurice Dutton in a lecture at a conference on vocational education (February, 1993). In this section, I shall use Jackson's work (1991), to draw attention to the impact of an increasing emphasis from the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology on skills training. I shall stress its effects on the training of women. Second, I shall discuss the influence of this approach to college education on the Media Program.

Jackson argues that the emphasis on skills training, taught as the measured performance of a series of objectives or competencies, serves the political agenda of employers who require

workers trained to meet what they, employers, see as the needs of the workplace. This approach to learning is seen by government and business as an important part of the cure for Canada's economic difficulties because:

Across North America and Western Europe there has been a resurgence of the view that the education system in its entirety should be understood in terms of its contribution to economic development and national prosperity (Jackson 1992, 352).

Colleges may be enthusiastic about the definitions of skill that accompany skills training because students' learning, demonstrated in the performance or completion of specified skills, objectifies learning and so makes it easier for the institution to report accountability for its expenditure of public monies. Leverage from the workplace exerts pressure on administrators and teachers in post-secondary education to deliver this particular form of skill training. I shall discuss this further in the Chapter 6, in conjunction with the role of the Community College in the lives of these women.

Skills training results in the breaking up of the subject to be learned into a number of specific tasks whose achievement can be measured and monitored. Advocates of this form of instruction consider that it enables the instructor to track student progress reliably and gives the learners satisfaction because:

*student achievement is based on the mastery of learning outcomes

*students are aware of the learning outcomes and methods of assessment
(Centre for Curriculum and Professional Development 1993, 3).

Jackson argues that training delivered to students in the form of a series of discrete behavioural skills, or competencies, fragments the learning and diminishes its value to the learner. Training for such limited competencies does not serve students well. Because their acquired skill is very specific and not grounded in a broader body of related knowledge, students are unable to transfer or develop these skills according to changes in the workplace or technology. Rather than forming part of an interwoven body of knowledge, skills are taught as separate pieces which fit the worker for one specific role in the workplace. To change her role, the worker will have to train for a new role. In an employment environment where workers' skills are so narrow, work

will be “subdividable into component parts, and cumulative, so that they can be acquired over a lifetime in a pattern of re-current work and schooling” (357). The skills will be seen by worker and employer as an “add-on”, a skill “velcroed” to a collection of disparate skills, and so detachable from the person, not integrated into the worker’s being as understood in Braverman’s view of craft mastery (Braverman 1974, 432).

Jackson observed competency analysis being used in British Columbia’s community colleges in programmes which are designed predominantly for women students.

The competency approach is being widely implemented in programmes for white collar, female dominated occupations in the clerical, social and health care fields, such as early childhood education, human service work, general nursing, medical and dental assistance, and office administration (1992, 361).

She argues that training limited in this way will lead women students into a “degraded conception of working knowledge . . . rather than an expansive or developmental one” (362), and that women will be held down to lower paid work.

Jackson goes on to examine the effects of competency training in the present work world, particularly in the clerical field. She observes the loss of a range of skilled jobs through the impact of computerised decision making. Jobs which once required experience and skill are now “down waged” and deemed “clerical”. But in a contradictory fashion, because invisible skills and skills learned through general education are necessary but not acknowledged, clerical workers in these positions are often expected to be college graduates in order to “ensure that the general literacy and problem-solving requirements of the job will be satisfied” (363). Thus, at the level of specific skills the worker may become redundant but her general education may admit her to a wider field of employment.

Jackson’s paper provides a framework for understanding the pressures on career/vocational programs such as the Media Program at Bridgnorth College. She notes that these kinds of training have been historically linked to men’s employment:

Education and training have long been important not only because they serve as the gateway for entry to various kinds of work, or because they are the means of acquiring the technical know-how required to perform

the job. They have been critical as well because they are part of the social and political processes through which status and power have come to be attached to various kinds of work and knowledge, and through which such stature has been routinely reserved for male workers (Jackson 1992, 359).

The emphasis on particular types of education and training is achieved through the government funding of approved programs. Responding to the needs of the workplace as perceived by employers, the provincial and federal governments use funding policies to pressure the colleges to provide certain kinds of training. The focus on particular skill subtracts from the amount of time and funds left for general education and may well deprive the student of the capacity to adapt to a changing workplace, making her another victim of technical change. Transferability of skills may be sacrificed in the service of an ideology devoted to a short term view of economic viability.

I turn now to look at the Media Program, a dynamic, contested arena where the pressure from the external environment, as well as the desire to serve students' long term needs, is constantly balanced and re-balanced. The Program is a two year career program (see Chapter 3, 21). Its purpose is to train its graduates to work in a widely diversified market which includes such institutions as colleges and hospitals for service and production positions; the entertainment industry for technical positions, as well as production assistant and co-ordinator positions; and the public relations, advertising, and promotional industries. In these areas graduates may utilise their technical skills, or, relying on their knowledge of the vocabulary and ethos of the media business as well as their previous education and experience, they may work in more general fields as co-ordinators, organisers, facilitators, and assistants.

Three factors exert pressure on the program to shift its focus toward the teaching of technical skills at the expense of more general education such as in thinking and writing: first, changing technology; second, a changing market place for graduates in the field of education; and third, students' understanding of the importance of specialisation.

The ever increasing rate of technical change continues to lead to more sophisticated and integrated media technology, and therefore calls for an increasing investment of program funds

as well as of students' time and interest. Technology is glamorous and beguiles the students from more mundane activities like writing. In the early days of the program, there was more time available to devote to the discussion of media in society, as was evident from the number of credit hours assigned to non-technical courses. There were 12 credit hours in 1974 compared with 6 in 1991. In the early years of the program, faculty had hoped students would see media as a tool for bringing about grass-roots social change, that the graduates would work in "areas of social animation" (Bridgnorth College calendars 1977 - 86). Two of the program's first instructors had been members of the Council of Young Canadians, who encouraged a sociological emphasis that enhanced the non-technical aspect of the program and influenced graduates to seek work in fields that served society. Now there are fewer openings in the public sector, and program graduates must look for employment in the private sector where the focus is more specifically on technical expertise and cost. One of the program's male graduates, a successful programmer and producer, told me that he had been obliged to become "one of the 'suits'". Graduates also see that the most advanced and interesting technology is available only in the private sector.

In education, interest has shifted away from the support of a variety of media to a narrower emphasis on computers. In the 1970s educators had great faith in the teaching capacity of television, and also encouraged the use of media production itself as a way of actively involving learners in the learning process. The perception of efficacy which society attributed to television at that time has now been transferred to computers. I observed this in my work as school district technician, where I saw inservice workshops for teachers shifting from video to computer training between 1976 and 1982. This shift was also typified in the remarks of a college media supervisor who told me that they would not be hiring any more media generalists but would seek a person with desk-top publishing skills. Because students do not see graduates being hired specifically as generalists, they devalue and overlook general and invisible skills. I shall discuss the place which these skills fill in the working lives of the mature women graduates in the last section of the next chapter.

Specialisation in one technical area appears to program students to be necessary for entry to the highest paying jobs. For example of all the self-employed graduates (1980-89), those who report the highest earnings entered the work place with a technical specialty such as video editing, sound design, or photography. The one exception was a man who was determined to work in film, no matter how long it took to achieve his objective. These specialists are the program's stars and are models for incoming students. However, the focus on the success attached to their particular expertise hides the fact that other highly competent graduates have not been able to find employment and have had to resort to many of their general and invisible skills in order to find work. Even the stars, conspicuous for their technical expertise, would be unable to use these skills unless they were embedded in a body of invisible skills.

In this chapter I have used the literature to examine some of the meanings of skill as understanding, judgment, mastery of a craft. I discussed invisible skills and the way society sets a value on skills. The literature and experience show that less value is attached to those skills commonly associated with women. I then examined skill as it is understood in the term skills training and described its effects on the Program. I conclude by noting that such an emphasis would be disadvantageous to the Program's mature women graduates. The three pressure points, changing technology, computerisation, and the apparent importance of specialisation, all make a focus on skills training attractive to the program and its students but, looking at the lives of the mature women graduates in this study, it is apparent that such an emphasis does not serve them well. The following chapters show how the women resort to a range of skills to maintain themselves in the workplace.

Chapter 5: Visible Skills

When I examine the lives of the mature women graduates of the Media Program as they are revealed in their interviews, I am impressed by the way in which they have tried to harness all their skills in order to compete in the marketplace and to work in a field which they value. They are indeed active agents, struggling to balance personal achievement, economic survival, personal values, families and friends. For those who graduated after 1986, the year of Vancouver's Exposition, this has been particularly difficult. They have been able to sustain themselves only by being very adaptable, networking ceaselessly, and struggling to maintain their confidence.

In this chapter, I use material from the women's interviews to discuss their many skills. Each woman has her own collection of skills. I regard this collection as a bank from which they draw different skill resources to meet the exigencies of their lives. I discuss, first, the skills the women brought to the program from their previous experience and education; second, the skills they acquired in the program; and third, the skills they acquired after the program. I conclude that it is only by calling upon all their experiential and educational resources that the women are able to survive in the workplace. Program learned skills are not enough.

Pre-program skills

Some of the women came into the program with a clear idea about how they might link their past experience to the program's offerings and subsequently to the world of employment. For example, Jennifer, who had been a nurse, carried her familiarity with the hospital environment into a career as the media producer and writer for a large rehabilitation centre. Liz, who had been in sales for many years, made the connection clear:

I'd gone to BCIT and I'd taken Television Broadcasting, at night. . . and because I'd been involved in electronic sales . . . I thought maybe I can combine the technical skill and the marketing skill together. . . I did a lot of market research. I went around a lot of production houses . . . and I found a lot of people who were working in various fields were graduates from Bridgnorth . . . but most of them combined it with another skill. Which was what maybe helped them get their foot in the door. It didn't seem like Bridgnorth was the main reason they got the job.

She maintained the marketing focus in her work as a freelance video producer. After two years of trying to market her productions as well as operate the video equipment on her own, she joined with a partner who handles the technical work, leaving her to deal with marketing and producing.

Another of the women, Naomi, showed a strong connection between her present work and her pre-program field of interest. She had taken her degree in history, had worked as a ceramic artist, and later became deeply involved in women's health issues. She believed that she brought writing¹ and organising skills to the program, as well as her knowledge about health.

I was the first in my family to go to university. I wanted to go to art school. . . . I've had to struggle all my life between art and economic feasibility. . . . I had a number of years . . . on the staff of a health collective, I'd worked in a doctor's office, done a bit of counselling. It was the design, the art that I was really unsatisfied with on the health educational material I'd seen. I knew it [health education] was my love for life.

However, when it came to finding work after the program, she tried to break into the workplace as a freelance producer of educational materials. She "was predominantly using writing and photographic skills". She said: "the writing skills I did not develop at Bridgnorth. Those were skills that I had before". As she spoke she stressed "not". She went on to say that she used:

more skills that I'd brought, from before Bridgnorth College, because they had to do with program planning, public speaking, facilitation, things I'd done before.

Eventually by remaining constant to her overarching commitment to women's health, and by supporting it with her skill as a writer, facilitator, planner, and speaker and some of the program's non-technical skills (I shall discuss these in the section on program skills), she won a position which corresponds to her skills. She has an appointment to plan and implement the Resource Centre for the new Women's Health Unit at a metropolitan hospital, and to design staff education for the unit. The skills acquired from her pre-program experience and education have prepared her for this work. To these she added a broad knowledge of media and its use for educational purposes learned from the Media Program.

Diana applied to the program with clear goals which related to the writing skill she brought with her. She described her understanding of the way this worked for her:

I came into the program hoping to advance some of the things I'd already begun to learn. I had done some writing and wanted to know more about writing for visuals. And that was my main reason for going into the program. To learn that skill. So you're already on a track. And the track starts before Bridgnorth and it sort of weaves its way through, and out the other side with much the same pattern.

The "weaving through" aptly describes the way in which the women's skills are threaded through their lives.

Discussing her present work, writing for clients in the corporate sector, Diana looked at the roots of the skills essential to her work:

They had nothing to do with the things I learned at Bridgnorth. And they probably have more to do with what I learned in my last two years at school in England, because I went to a fairly conservative girls' school, a formal girls' school, where we ran orderly meetings, and we discussed things, we were comfortable in a meeting/discussion setting, and we felt equal. And I think those skills are the ones that come into the board room.

The skills that I used with the company over those years were personal skills, skills from before, from life and education. More intuitive than the ones I learned at Bridgnorth. And most of it I think is in dealing with people and understanding people. . . . Bridgnorth was a springboard more than a set of skills. It was a springboard.

Diana's words acknowledge the value of general education, and her invisible skills, which I shall discuss in the next chapter. Although she is the only full time writer among the 12 women, eight of them stressed the importance of writing in their work. It is an essential and fundamental skill for proposal writing, scripting, and business communications.

Some of the women did not see the connection between their work and skills acquired from past experience and education as clearly as Liz, Naomi, and Diana. Their previous experience provided informal preparation. For example, when I asked her to look back at her pre-program life, Jane realised that in her early detours as a reservation clerk and a filing clerk, she had built an inventory of skills which suited her to her present position as the only full-time A/V

technologist at a Vancouver Island community college. Speaking of her early life, she said that:

I went to university. I was very much a dilettante. I took a tremendous range of courses, explored a lot and learned a lot. I never played with dolls: I played with blocks. And I think all this fits. I always drew, a lot. And I read a lot. And so I think I'm visually oriented and kinesthetically too. And I love language and stories. And I think they all contribute. And then wide knowledge, because I come from an upper middle class family.

Jane continued to describe her work where she uses her broad education in service of "getting to do a lot of interesting innovative things".

Janet, who now works as a sound designer and sound editor for film and television (work she described as "creating a soundscape"), demonstrated this same informal process of building a skills inventory. Although she had not worked with sound before the program, she described a series of activities which have provided her with many skills needed for marrying sound with images: aesthetic skills and sensitivity, as well as skills in operating production equipment. She had "always enjoyed fooling around with radio"; "I always had a camera. In the city, I'd spend days walking around and shooting stuff. So working in photo labs was a way I could subsidise that". She worked at grass roots organising with a women's coalition and during this time had:

ended up working with cable television a lot because we wanted our stuff filmed. And of course we had no one to film it so we had to run the equipment ourselves, film it ourselves. I got involved in it and I liked it. . . . Working at community TV and Co-op Radio, I really enjoyed that stuff.

Her application to the program showed that before applying to the program, she had also acquired solid preparatory skills through part-time courses in photographic design, scriptwriting and computer usage. Of all the women, Janet had the broadest technical skill base for the actual production of media. This skill thread is prominent in her present work, although in her interview she seemed to be unaware of its significance.

All of the women have drawn on skills acquired before the program, weaving them with threads drawn from the program to create the fabric of their present lives. Those who work in the media departments of institutions are able to use the broad range of their skills from the program and skill resources developed earlier in their lives. For the self-employed women, drawing upon

skills from the past has been essential for survival in the media workplace but it has kept them, with the exception of Janet, in a predominantly female part of the field and reliant upon non-technical skills.

Program Skills

The Media Program entry in the Bridgnorth College calendar (1991 -1992) states that students are required to complete 72 credit hours, six of which are designated as General Education. These six hours consist of the two Communications courses which fall under the authority of the Communications Department. 55.5 credit hours are allocated to training in video, photography, film, sound, audio/visual, multi-image, and computers; 1.5 to script writing; and 3 to a cluster of courses preparing graduates for the workplace. The latter are related to the Communications course and include a month long practicum, fieldtrips to a variety of media workplaces, role playing job interviews, resume writing, portfolio creation, and presentations by guest speakers from different parts of the industry. A 6 credit hour cluster of courses (Instructional Design, Research Methods, and Media Selection and Utilisation) in the first semester are loosely called the Instructional Design courses. They deal with theories of learning, audience analysis, research for and design of instructional materials, as well as the ways in which the media are used for educational purposes. These courses emphasise writing and reflection. They also stress different aspects of the media, such as its effects, place in society, and appropriate uses. To date this course cluster has been taught by a succession of three instructors all of whom considered themselves humanists. Two (I am one of these) had taken their undergraduate degrees in English Literature, and the third in Psychology, to which he added wide cultural experience. I refer to these courses as the General Education component of the program (See Chapter 3, 22.)

This section addresses the way in which the mature women graduates use their program learned skills. First, I will look at program learned skills which are used in institutional workplaces and in self-employment. I will then turn to the program's design to show how it

facilitates career choice for the women. Finally, I shall look at the balance of the program's different course components in relation to the program skills which the mature women graduates use in their work.

In the institutional environment, the mature women graduates make use of the broad range of skills learned in the program. They use technical, organisational, and conceptual skills. Stella's account of her work's many aspects (Chapter 4, 37) effectively describes this sort of work. Graduates from the Media Program have fitted well into the educational institutions of British Columbia. They hold positions in school districts, colleges, universities, and hospitals. Three of the women hold full-time positions as institutional employees, while three others are part-time or contract institutional employees. Six have worked in both the public and the private sector. Some of the satisfactions and skills of the generalist are described by Jane, who had rejected a move to an administrative role in the college because she preferred to continue using her technical and creative skills as an AV technologist. She spoke with relish:

We're supposed to be generalists. We're supposed to do equipment maintenance . . . production, which includes photography, graphics, video, you name it. Any kind of production, we're supposed to be able to do, including new technologies. Acting as producer, script writer, and instruction [sic]. . . . we quite often go into the classroom and teach students [presentation skills].

Her work clearly draws on her technical production skills and, for the writing, production and instructional component, on her General Education skills.

In institutional employment, the mature women graduates are well served by the generalist approach of the Media Program. The generalist approach is not so useful for the women when they look for work in the private sector. At the present, this means freelancing or self-employment. Sylvia said that:

Coming from the program you're a 'jack of all trades' and a master of none. I didn't feel I had a handle on anything. I knew how to do this but I didn't feel strong. I knew how to direct but I didn't have confidence. . . I was a bit afraid. The competition is not only with youth² but with the competence level that I didn't have.

Sylvia also said that she used photographic and graphic skills in her work as well as elements from the General Education courses in production planning and writing. As she spoke, she emphasised the technical skills but referred only in passing to the usefulness of more general skills, although her work depends for its success upon her sophisticated organisational and verbal skills.

Two other women referred to the value of the cluster of General Education courses. Diana said:

I know that I've learned stuff there that I've used. How people learn, how children learn. And grownups learn in the same way. And you can use that in any kind of setting. You can use that in a conference. How you deliver a message. How to communicate.

Naomi, speaking of the Instructional Design course, said

It's that planning process and that way of educating people that I've carried to new height, or new areas . . . where I was involved with focus testing and mass marketing.

I'm working on two proposals . . . [one] has to do with the development of a Resource Centre. So I found myself . . . looking back to some of the Media Selection stuff . . . I guess I see that as part of Instructional Design. I often think of myself as a generalist.

These three women specifically made reference to the non-technical skills learned in the program. Five mentioned using photographic skills. Two others tried to work in video, but only Liz remains in this field. She works, not as a technician, but in the marketing and production side of the business. Penny's words on the usefulness of the program's technical skills seems to reflect many of the self-employed women's thoughts:

So the technical skills that I learned at Bridgnorth College are not necessarily being utilised. They're really, really useful for the understanding that I have, they give me a basis for [production].

She, like Diana, has been able to use program derived learning as a springboard.

Of all the mature women graduates, Janet is the only one whose work is achieved through technical skill. She designs and creates soundtracks for film and television. I had expected her to

mention the audio course, but when I asked her about the way she used skills learned in the program she said:

I think that's more general than specific. I think the stuff that helped me from the program was knowing the process from start to finish of a project. And to work under those intense time limits and pressures. For what I'm doing now actual skills, I had to learn everything when I got out. I knew how to turn the machines on and how to hold a microphone, which I guess was helpful. But the whole technology was so different, I had to learn everything.

She told me that she valued the program because:

The equipment was there, the resources were there, everything you needed was there. And it was an opportunity to learn all this stuff. Do everything you wanted and get as much as possible out of it. . . . It was fun. The stuff was fun to do. There was the opportunity to take things from beginning to end. So for me I really enjoyed it.

She was able to combine the positive attitude toward technology which she brought with her to the program with the technical opportunities and socialisation for the media environment offered by the program.

Janet's example illustrates the way the program's design influences the women's career choices. She was one of the nine women who entered the program feeling favourably disposed to its content but with little idea about how they would apply the program's learning in the job market. They were seeking direction for a career change or entering the work place after a long break. Two of the women were nurses, looking for new careers, who wanted to "get into something more creative". Another woman, Morag, who had an undergraduate degree in English Literature, as well as experience in graphics and work with a tree-planters' co-operative, addressed this situation.

The reason you go into that course is that you don't really know what you want to do. If you want to be a video person, go do a video course. . . . For me the reason that the course was so good was that it threw all these things at me. And I could go, "Whoops, don't do this, don't do that. This is interesting", and come out with a vague idea.

She went on to elaborate on the part the program played in helping her choose a direction for her career.

When I was part way through the course, I realised I would prefer to do graphics. Like, video is really interesting, I like video. But just getting the crews together! We had that huge equipment then, and physically it took three or four people to get together, get a car, to go out to do things. . . . It was too much. It made me realise I didn't want to be in the movie business. It was too much chaos, too many people to co-ordinate, although I sort of like it in some ways. But just as a daily thing to do? I guess I'd had too much of it tree-planting.

Morag's words illustrate how the whole program experience contributes to social knowledge about the media industry and its working conditions. The wide range of technologies covered by the program's courses offers students a taste of the different media but no specialty. It gives the students the information for selecting a field for specialisation or for seeking a workplace where they may increase their skills.

The curriculum in the Media Program is designed to include as many different media as possible. With the increasing complexity of media technology and the integration of computer technology into production, it has been necessary to give more time to technical training centered on video, computers, and hybrid production. Over the years, the pressure from the technical side of the program has competed with attention and time given to the General Education courses and the program's generic training: there are always voices calling for more specialisation. The women's comments about the utility of the General Education courses and the importance of having some knowledge of many media stresses the value of these more academic, less technical courses to the program's students. Educational institutions continue to employ the mature women graduates (six are currently employed, three full-time, three part-time or contract): generalist training is necessary for these positions.

Skills acquired after the program

The women find it important to continue adding to their inventory of skills after they leave the program. In this section I first discuss skills for those in insitutional employment, and second skills for those who are self-employed.

Of the 12 mature women graduates, only one did not mention some conscious development of her skills after the program. Liz had resorted to her strong background in sales and marketing to make her production skills viable in the marketplace. By taking a partner, she emphasised the marketing aspect of her work and her role as the primary care-giver to her family over the acquisition of further specific skills. She augmented her skills by hiring a technically skillful person.

The women who are in full-time institutional employment are fortunate because they are in an environment that respects learning and where union contracts guarantee professional development for employees. Each of the three women employed in full-time institutional employment has developed her own particular set of skills in response to her institution's needs and her own interests. Jennifer has developed her skills as video-producer and teacher, Phyllis has developed her managerial skills, and Jane has continued to develop skills in a diversity of technologies.

Jennifer, working in the health system, is funded to attend at least one conference a year. She usually goes to either the International Television Association or Pacific Instructional Media Association conference. She said: "With those I get writer's workshops which I love. Last year I went to a director's workshop which was fascinating, that was with ITVA". She described the way in which the workshop's presentors had used the example of the same script directed by three different directors to illustrate differences in style and impact. "One was high drama, one the way I would do it, and this other way". She learned skills from the conferences which applied to making video productions, such as one on sexual health for the physically disabled which she was producing with a team of specialists at that time. Learning from conferences keeps her in

touch with changing technology and contributes to her skills as an institutional producer, writer, and director communicating through the television medium³.

Phyllis, now the supervisor of a community college media production department, has adapted to the changing conditions in her institution by acquiring more skills in computer technology. Following her request, the college hired a specialist to teach the members of her department how to use “Pagemaker”. Subsequently the college paid for her to take short courses in desktop publishing at a downtown university campus. She saw a connection between the skills learned from these courses and her department’s development and survival in a financially restricted environment. She predicted less emphasis on media production work and more on graphics and desktop publishing.

We’ll change our focus a bit . . . we’re going to increase the computers. Have more computers set up for students. And hopefully we can be more a support system for students who use computer graphics.

For Phyllis, ongoing skill acquisition is essential to the survival of her job and department. For example, when I commented upon her managerial skills, she assured me that they had all been “learned on the job”, although her nursing training had included a course on management.

The community college where Jane works supports professional development for staff and faculty. She is an employee and an ongoing learner working for a teaching institution. Learning is encouraged and funded. Beyond this, she treats her work as an endless source of learning opportunities which keep her informed about technological developments. She spoke about becoming familiar with the technology needed to set up teleconferences:

I’m spending a long time figuring out the satellite system. Physically figuring out these objects in space, dotted around the middle of the earth. And finding out what’s up there in terms of programming. Finding out all the ins and outs.

She uses her many skills to deal with the array of demands made by the college offerings in a wide range of academic and career/vocational fields.

The three women who are institutional employees are funded by their employers to increase their skills. Self-employed women pay for and organise their own skill development.

Janet, like Jane, is an enthusiastic learner and collector of skills. It is imperative for her to learn the skills needed to use fast-changing editing technology if she is to maintain her position in the film industry. She described how she gets access to the most advanced systems.

This month I'll be training on what they call the Post-Digital system, because I have to cut [edit] on it. So I can go into the studio and they'll train me, but also I've been bringing work into them for years. They've used my name, it's kind of a trade off, so I get free access to the equipment and training on the equipment, and they get to use my name to bid on projects and stuff. It's a trade off.

She went on to stress that this is technical training.

They can't teach you the art of editing. . . . They have all these people up there but they don't understand the art of editing - they just understand the art of punching buttons.

She described how she learned about film-making by working as picture assistant for a very low budget film (it was completed because people believed in its message and were willing to work for low wages or voluntarily).

I had to break it down into some sort of system. . . . Kind of like a librarian, organise it all and code it so that I could pull the stuff for the editor as he needed it. . . . There was a whole room full of footage. Basically cans and cans and cans everywhere . . . had to be able to have instant access to whatever the editor needed. . . . It was a good way to get to know how films are put together. . . . I didn't really care a lot about the money and I worked with a really brilliant editor.

She described soundtracks where she needed to “ make explosions and all kinds of things, from spitballs to tincans exploding, and make effects for people disappearing”. When I asked where and when she had learned to do this, she replied, “As I went along . . . I get a mic and recorder and go out and learn it”.

Janet is utterly absorbed in film-making and, following patterns set in her early life, pushes to increase her range of skills all the time. She was fortunate in getting a practicum with a National Film Board editor, which gave her opportunities for real-life learning and an entry to the world of film.

Three of the self-employed women have had difficulty getting work, and have continued trying to acquire skills which will give them access to paid work. Sylvia built herself a specialty. She completed a nine month program in advanced computer graphics, from a private institution, and then tied these skills to her program skills in her own business as a “communications consultant”. She realised also that she did not have the necessary business skills and so took a number of business courses to remedy the deficit. After several years of hard work, she has established herself in her freelance business. The focus of her work is the creation of promotional materials.

Sheila tried to survive in the freelance market. She understood that she needed a specialty and wanted to become a video editor. In order to gain the skills she needed, she “hung out” at various video editing facilities, learning by watching and helping. She said that she knew she could handle the systems being used and “you can pick up a tremendous amount by just watching the editing process”. She managed to get some work scripting for an educational video made for in-house training in the pulp and paper industry. For this she utilised specialised information derived from her pre-program experience working in the industry. Despite her efforts, she has not been able to harness her program skills with other learning to secure a place in the free-lance work world. At present, she is working as a part-time AV technologist at a Lower Mainland college.

Naomi lived precariously on short term contracts before winning a longer one from the Vancouver Health department. During this time she continued taking media related courses, largely concerning the business side of production, as well as instructional design and presentation courses. She also attended a number of conferences dealing with the focus of all her work, women’s health. She said that she developed more skills in “planning, proposal writing and facilitation”, after she left the program and that she became very interested in the task of using “plain English, plain language, plain writing”.

Learning is part of the lives of all these women. They consciously seek useful learning and try to harness the acquisition of new skills and knowledge to their work. This appears to be

most effective when new learning can be tied back to pre-program skills and interests. In following their lives and the lives of other program graduates, I see that there are many factors besides skill which affect getting paid work.

The twelve women have all actively used their skill resources to meet the needs of their work. Those in institutional positions have been able to use the full range of their technical and general skills. The women in the world of self-employment have had to develop specialties and acquire further skills in order to gain an entrance and maintain their place in the field. The skills discussed here are visible. In the next chapter, I discuss the invisible skills that undergird the women's work.

Endnotes

- ¹ It is interesting to note that general secretarial skills have been essential for three of the women's work. All of the women use these skills.
- ² Sylvia's comment reflects an anxiety about aging which was evident in the words of three other women.
- ³ Jennifer's work connects with her strong interest in theatre when she was a girl. She dropped this interest when she entered nursing because it was a "real job".

Chapter 6: Invisible Skills

Invisible Skills

Invisible skills play an ambiguous part in the lives of the mature women graduates of the Media Program. In the previous chapter I have shown skill as visible when it is attached to a product such as a soundtrack, a resource centre, a script, or a promotional package. When the results of skill are a process, such as a smoothly running office or department, a series of lessons, or efficient, pleasant service, the skill is often not noticed; it is invisible. The skills of co-ordination, organisation, and service only become visible when they break down or are absent. At that point, those who are the usual beneficiaries rail against the providers of service: they seldom find daily support remarkable. They do not credit those in support positions with the diplomatic, managerial, and organisational skills which their work requires.

In this chapter, I first discuss invisible skills as they are manifest in the lives of the mature women graduates in institutional and self-employment and, second, the impact of invisible skills on their training. This discussion is enriched by the words of three mature women who were entering the last semester of the program (See Chapter 2, 14). I conclude with a synthesis drawn from Chapters 5 and 6.

Institutional employment

The women who are at present institutionally employed work in audio visual or media production departments. These are service departments. The women's work is to provide materials and services which support the goals of the institution and those who work for it. The women's role is not to be conspicuous, but to be useful. There is a parallel to the traditional role of a mother whose achievements disappear in household activities and the lives of family members. It is not surprising that, of the mature women graduates, the three full-time institutional employees are mothers, as are two of the three part-time employees.

As the mother's work is subsumed in maintenance of the family so the achievement of others subsumes the work of the AV tech. Even the goals for her specific departmental tasks are nullified by other people's time lines. Morag's account of an evening's work, which was

supposed to be spent on desktop publishing, vividly illustrates how this happens.

You keep leaping up and down. Sometimes you could have ten people in there The photocopier would jam and then, my favourite crisis, this woman got her final and only version of her essay stuck in the three hole-binder . . . it took about 20 minutes to free the jaws of the three hole-binder. All these things, then the Reprovit focus light went out. It turned out it was a loose connection. So it was like all these little things, which is nice. It makes the time go quicker. That's what I like, it's all different. But in terms of actually sitting down and completing long documents, it's difficult to do.

The women in institutional employment may claim their invisible skills by articulating them. For example, when Stella became co-ordinator of a college media department, she found that her department was not respected by the institution. She told me how she used her woman's social skills, invisible to others, to increase her department's standing in the college. She attended college social events in order to tell faculty how her department might be useful to them. She said that until then faculty members did not see "technicians as very skilled people who had much to offer them", and

it needed someone who had other experiences, other skills, and maturity, extra years, to say "yes, we do have something to offer you. And this is how we can do it".

She did everything she could to "get some sort of liaison going". She went on to say that she was helped by the two women, "wonderful technicians and [with] very good professional skills", who worked in her department.

Phyllis, in a similar position at another college, talked about the way her department used informal skills to secure the department's place within the college during a time of fiscal restraint in the early 1980s.

I guess we made a point of talking to instructors at the beginning of the session. And we'd say what can we do for you? And what do you want? And we'd work it out, make plans and schedules. It was just communication. . . . We sent out letters saying we're here and we can provide these sorts of services. If you want a tour, we'll give you a tour. If you want a demonstration, we'll give you that. And they slowly started integrating that into their courses . . . had to use our services.

Her skills remained invisible to her and unclaimed by her. She concealed them from herself by referring to her contribution to her department's success as "our" and as "just communication". Her emphasis was on the group, not on her ability to lead it through a difficult period. Her words of appreciation toward her administrator also showed the importance she placed on co-operation and the group.

These examples from institutional employment, together with Stella's description of her work as an AV generalist (see Chapter 4, 37), demonstrate the benefits the women's caring and social skills bring to their departments and institutions. The women fall back upon the skills learned as part of being women: facilitating the social process and supporting the work of others. In order to perform their work well, the women must handle social relationships adeptly. Statham, Miller, and Mauksch in their examination of women's work state that:

Our findings point to many aspects of women's work lives previously unappreciated or underemphasised. One point is that work *requires* the management of relationships. This concern is not an "extra" that women *choose* to emphasize over task accomplishment. Rather, task accomplishment depends upon the management of relationships. The job is a series of relationships to be managed rather than a list of tasks to be performed (1988, 34).

This view of women's work fits well with the work of the women who are institutionally employed.

The women's service orientation makes work relationships more difficult for them if they share responsibilities with men. Male colleagues may expect excessive support from them simply because they are women. The women's invisible skills of support and co-operation make them vulnerable to such assumptions. Co-workers may expect women to be quasi housekeepers or indulgent mothers. An interaction between Jane and a male colleague provides an example. The effective running of the department depended upon storing equipment ready for the next user. A male technician made a habit of returning equipment and leaving it for the two women technicians to store correctly. He "liked to do this wonderfully creative thing, walk out, and then

'mother' is meant to come along and magically pick up". In this instance Jane was able to defend herself from her co-worker's perception of her as mother and housekeeper. She said:

"X I'd like to talk to you. . . I don't want you to do that". And before I could get it out, he was walking out the door. He was just going to evaporate. I pulled him back by the collar and said "Don't you do that." Ever since then he's been scared of me. I've had a healthy respect.

She had made a clear distinction between her role, given in her job description, as institutional "care-giver" and support person and any obligation to assume that role for a peer, rather than a client, who was avoiding his responsibility for maintaining equipment properly. She overtly claimed "tidying up" as a skill belonging to her, to be used by her for her work, but not silently and invisibly available to all. Jane's public claiming of the skill, and choosing to limit its availability, made the skill visible and valuable.

Self-employment

The assumption that women will act in support of their colleagues, clients, or employers becomes more problematic for the mature women graduates when they are self-employed. In these situations their invisible skills, which they are accustomed to use to advance the goals of those who work with them, may be used to their own detriment. The women are forced to re-assess what it is that they value about themselves and to learn new ways of behaving, because they find skills of co-operation for a group's advantage turned against them. For example, Sylvia talked about how she had had to change her understanding of the world around her in order to survive in the freelance world. She said that she had to be "driven to the edge" before she changed her ways; the business world "is not conducive to kind nice people". She had been hired by a small company and, because she was willing to please and anxious to gain experience, had been exploited by her employers.

You know I was doing it all for nothing and I made up my mind I wasn't doing it for nothing any more. . . . I had to equate myself with the male . . . realise I wasn't their [clients'] mother. And that I wasn't out there looking after them to see if they were all right. They weren't my kids.

Later, she started her own business but repeatedly had to remind herself that she must not “do it for nothing any more.” She said, with regret in her voice, that she had become hard.

Diana spoke vehemently about instances where certain men banked on women giving in. She noted that women’s wish to be co-operative made them vulnerable.

We do give in. And they trade on it. Sometimes we don’t have the stomach for confrontation. . . . Men are very confrontational and try to win something. And women are more conciliatory and will give in. “Oh all right, I know you went over budget in this area. I’ll help you out.” We shouldn’t have to but we do. . . . And at that point you have to play hard ball. You have to threaten. You really do. And it’s horrible. In order to get what you’ve earned. Often I’ve had to stand really firm and say “I’ve done the work. Pay me. I’m not going to negotiate”.

She said it had been a hard lesson to learn but, like Sylvia, she could not afford to work under these circumstances. She had to say

“You can’t afford me. Go somewhere else.” It was a hard line to take . . .that’s the main lesson I’ve learned, and I don’t like it. That’s that “hard ball has to be played”.

The regret which I heard in her voice and Sylvia’s indicate some of the pain that the mature women feel in discarding, or at least concealing, their caring skills and their desire to work co-operatively. The skills that are encouraged and valued by society in the domestic sphere and are used constantly in institutional employment make the women vulnerable when they move into the world of self-employment. In these situations the woman’s social and caring skills are given a false value: they are un-named but assumed to be available for exploitation, because the women are “nice”. For the women this womanliness or “niceness” comes with a high cost: low self-esteem and literally less money. As Sylvia said “I had to learn, I must be paid”¹. It is only when the women themselves are able to see and value their skills that they become able to defend themselves against exploitation by clients and employers. The examples from the women’s lives demonstrate the soundness of Gaskell’s assertion that the skills of women are “skills that often do not count, that tend to be taken for granted as personality characteristics of women, rather than given their due as learned competencies ”(1991, 382).

The invisible skills of caring, co-operation, and organisation also impinge upon the women's self-confidence and their ability to set a price on their work and time. This group of skills may be an impediment particularly to women who have worked in the home or in co-operative situations through the early part of their lives. In contrast, Liz, who had been a salesperson from her early twenties when she was a single parent with two little children, did not experience this difficulty when she graduated from the program.

I think a lot of Canadians feel that being sort of aggressive and asking things on the telephone and approaching people in a way is a bit degrading. Or demeaning. There's a sort of hidden attitude. When I first started doing that sort of thing I felt the same way. . . . It's sort of undefinable, but it's there, it's sort of silly when you think about it. . . . I think it's business. And for me it's just a question of adding up the costs and then saying "How much am I worth?"

Four of the six self-employed graduates did not see the problem so clearly. For them, the question of payment carried the burden of attaching specific worth to what they produced, to their own time, and to their expertise.

Talking with Morag revealed the women's ambivalence about the value of their work.

I'm supposed to be making all this money an hour, but if you really added it up, I wouldn't be. Because when it's mine and only mine, I want to make it perfect. So I'll say "Oh well, I'll just pretend this isn't really time, this isn't really time I'm putting in here, I'll just do it any way" . . . I got into trouble from my accountant last year. . . . "People will never take you seriously if you don't charge them. They just don't respect you if you don't charge". Since then I have charged people more. But I guess when I got started, because I was just beginning, I felt like people were doing me a favour to give me any work at all. Plus they were friends and they didn't have much money, so I'd do things really cheaply.

When I asked her if she was now charging for her time at the current rate she replied:

You can always fool yourself by saying, "Oh I know I can do that in fifteen minutes, or I should be able to do it in fifteen minutes. So it's my fault if it takes an hour". . . . Now because I've got the format down it actually works out pretty well. They still get a good deal because I do custom illustrations for all of them which they really should be paying rather a lot for, but I like doing it.

Morag's words reveal her care for clients' needs. However, her desire to do fine work combines with a lack of confidence and hinders her from taking herself, her time, and her work seriously. Years of working co-operatively in situations where group or family interests are paramount deprive the women of the confidence and business skills that they need to survive as self-employed workers.

Four of the self-employed women emphasised the importance of social skills. Their stories showed the ways they recognised the value of these skills. One of them described the effort she put into building a business network in her determination to find work. She initiated a business women's breakfast group, which provided her with support and access to work. Another woman maintained a network of graduates who could sustain each other and share information about possible sources of work. When the group was badly discouraged, she organised shared social events to demonstrate their caring for each other.

Ten of the twelve women talked about or demonstrated in their lives the value which they attach to serving society. All the women who are institutionally employed find satisfaction in this aspect of their work, although one of them, an ex-nurse, remarked, "I'm not serving society in the way I would if I was nursing. That's the important part of nursing, you really feel that you're doing something good". Four of the women who are self-employed showed the same inclination toward socially useful activity in their choice of work, volunteer work, or accepting low payment for work they considered socially valuable. For example, Diana described the satisfaction she got from scripting a series of training productions for a non-profit organisation.

It was a really big, huge, long, time-intensive production, and I think I probably worked for about three bucks an hour. . . . I knew what I was doing, I wanted to do it and I enjoyed doing it. . . . [It] was a satisfying project I felt really committed.

My interviews with the women of the Media Program showed that their invisible skills, hidden in organisation, co-operation and caring for institutional or group goals, are of questionable value to them. The women value highly the opportunity to use their skills in socially responsible work, but these same skills, which set project and group ahead of their own

interests, make them vulnerable to exploitation. Only when the women gain confidence, recognise, articulate, and value their own skills are they able to work more effectively, and to receive appropriate remuneration, in the world of self-employment.

Within the program

I have not been associated with the program for the last three years, but my previous experience led me to question the effects of the program's design. Within the program itself, the invisible skills of caring, co-operation, and organisation deprive the women of the self assertion needed to learn technical skills. The design of the program, which is built around group production and group marking, pits the women's need to take time to acquire skills for themselves against the group's need to complete projects. This struggle occurs despite a formal program policy which is supportive of women entering the media workplace. From its beginning, the program policy has been that women and men should be treated equally. Women have been encouraged to apply, and the program aims to enroll equal numbers of women and men. However, my observations indicate that these policies are not enough to give many women the necessary skills or confidence to compete in the workplace. Because men come into the program with informally acquired mechanical and technical experience, they have an immediate advantage in a program where prestige is attached to work with technology. The starting line is theoretically neutral, but the female starters are several paces behind while the males are ahead of it. In her paper "Dilemmas of Policewomen", Martin comments on a department policy which, like that of the Media Program, is "formally 'sex-blind'":

What is sex neutral on its face has put the burden of change on the women. By treating them the same as the male recruits, departments have failed to recognise and confront sex-differentiated patterns, the few irreducible (biological) differences between the sexes, and the women's handicaps stemming from men's attitudes and departmental policies (1988, 210).

A pilot study for this research, conducted in 1990 with three of the program's mature women who were about to graduate from the program, confirmed this perception. Mary, one of the women, drawing on her observations of student production groups, commented, "the men are

more comfortable. They don't feel if they touch the buttons things will fall apart". Simulating industry conditions, program production time-lines are tight. Mary remarked upon the effects of this for the women's training:

When you're under pressure and you're under all these constraints, and I'm guessing, but the men [say] "Oh god, I don't want to deal with her, and it's easier if I do it, and I don't have the time to teach her, or explain, or wait". . . . The women, they, mm, they learn less. They don't learn to be comfortable around the equipment.

Mary continued to describe the effects of time pressure on women students.

And I know two of the women have worked with men and they haven't had their hands on the equipment and it really shows. They didn't seem to be aware of the basic procedures. . . . It was like, that's the price that gets paid. It's more expedient, it's under pressure, the guys are more comfortable, they take over and the women do other things.

Here she made it plain that the women's learning suffers as a consequence of the style of instruction and of the department's "level playing field" policy.

It might be said that it is the women's responsibility to be more assertive about insisting upon access to time with equipment. However, such assertiveness might often jeopardise the group's production deadlines and thus run counter to many women's desire to facilitate the group process. Mary noted a "real shyness in women", and said that they also come into the program with a language deficit:

Men kind of "schmooze" about equipment better than women. I'll talk about my feelings and ideas . . . but I've never sat there saying " Oh have you got your KY 2000, does it have auto iris?" My mind goes blank. So you're going into this situation and the guys have all this confidence.

She related her observations to the program's culture and policy

. . . it seems to me that they don't acknowledge that there's a real deficit between men and women's general comfort, general knowledge about equipment. . . . And so if I'm being critical, there's not an acknowledgment of something that's really there: that women are not as comfortable and they're not as generally informed. . . . I don't think men are consciously aware of the fact. I don't see anything wrong with drawing people's attention to it. . . . Men take over, because it's the most expedient thing and it's when you are under pressure.

In a later interview, Mary made the following sad comment: “I worked with women who had been working with men. It was amazing, their lack of knowledge. I learned not to trust women.” The situation which she described so poignantly contributes to women’s lack of confidence when they leave the program. Lack of confidence was likewise a theme in six of the other women’s interviews.

Mary’s focus was on the acquisition of technical skills, and it is technical skills that are most honoured in the program. She said that the men “take over and the women do other things”. These are things such as organising the production, facilitating production meetings, and ensuring transportation. In other words, they will use their invisible skills to create a solid foundation for the technical side of the production. In contrast to the technical skills, and also equally essential, are invisible skills, which are seldom acknowledged or rewarded with recognition by those in authority or by student colleagues.

Mary and her two peers understood the threat to their training. Determined to ensure their learning, they worked together, taking turns with all of the production roles and so learning to use all the necessary technology.

We have this real democratic way, you check, I check, we all check. It was kind of a slower process . . . but we’re all students and we’re learning. And that’s the point, we should all have a swing at the cat and an opportunity.

Synthesis

Chapters Five and Six show how the women weave together skills acquired from all stages in their lives. The emphasis is different depending upon where they work. The women who are institutionally employed use the full range of the technical skills learned from the program. General educational skills such as writing, reading, and planning are important to them for their service to their institutions. The whole fabric of their work is woven into a strong ground of invisible skills, which provide the ability to handle the institutions’ demands for social, organisational and co-operative work. The foundation of invisible skills goes un-noticed except as a personal characteristic of its practitioners.

Self-employed women use the program's training as a "springboard" for moving into the work force. To do this, they link previously learned skills from life experience and education, program skills, and supplementary skills acquired after the program. Again and again, the women's stories show that, although their work is associated with some form of communications media, it is grounded in a fabric of invisible skills dealing with relationships, co-operation and organisation. Only one woman has technology as her primary focus. She sees technical skill, not as an end in itself, but as a tool for aesthetic achievement. She also values her organisational skills highly.

Exploring the women's inventory of skills and the ways in which they value them shows that their invisible skills are a necessary and strong web on which they weave other skills to construct the fabric of their working lives. When the women are able to recognise and articulate the value of invisible skills, they gain power over the skills and their use. At that point they are able to say, "these are mine and I can choose when and how to make them available."

The program mirrors the values evident in the larger society. It makes use of the women's invisible skills. It does not offer credits for "niceness", nor does it formally articulate or recognise the individual student's social, organisational or co-operative contribution, beyond saying that team work is important. To acquire the technical skills they are paying for, the women have to devise strategies as armour for protecting their invisible skills from exploitation by other students and by the pressure of program deadlines. If the mature women were enabled to display their inventory of skills in an unbiased market, their invisible skills would be truly revealed as the framework and foundation for the more visible skills of others.

Endnotes

¹ The women also find pleasure in being helpful and supportive to others so that the determination to be paid for helpfulness may cost them a sense of themselves.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

In the preceding chapters, I have discussed ways in which 12 women have woven program acquired skills into the web of their previous experience and education in order to find a place in the work world. The women's words about their working lives revealed the importance to them of the foundation of invisible skills in which they grounded other more specific and technical skills. The Media Program played a dramatic part in their life journey. On a personal level, it was the bridge to work in a field that was new to the women, a source of knowledge that was fresh to them, and an institution that tacitly valued certain skills over others. On a societal level, the Media Program deliberately mirrored the norms and values of the private sector environment as a model of the graduates' future workplace. Packed into the small theatre of a two year career/vocational program were the conditions and attitudes prevalent in the outside world. The program's staff, themselves beneficiaries of institutional employment, had translated industry's script and the way it values women's skills into the program's design and culture.

In this concluding chapter, I first draw together my understandings of skills as illustrated in the lives of the participating women. The research questions are answered within the following summary. I include the themes of institutional and self-employment, and of visible and invisible skills. Second, I revisit the study's original question in a discussion of the program's role in the women's working lives. In this section I also discuss general education as an important part of a career program. Third, I look at some policy issues: first, job placement as a response to the external environment; and second, the pressure for more specific skill training which may come from implementation of the British Columbia Human Resources Development Project. Fourth, I draw conclusions about the program and the value it places on women's invisible skills. Fifth, I note the value of continuing in-depth research about the work of program graduates for their career /vocational programs.

Skills in the lives of the study's participants

Analysis of the women's interviews showed that the women weave program skills into an integrated, growing web of visible and invisible skills constructed by them from a life time of

education and experience. The 12 women participating in the study used skills acquired in the program when they entered the workplace. Those who were institutionally employed used the full range of skills learned from the generalist program. Other women, the self-employed, used photographic, video, and graphic skills in trying to win contracts for work. As Diana said, the program experience “was more of a springboard than a set of skills”, which the women hoped would take them into a new field of work.

Although the women used specific program skills, they would not have been able to find a context for the use of their skills, nor maintained a place in the work world, if they had not called upon their own previous experience and education. Their rich inventories of skill accrued before participating in the program enabled them to build networks, relate to a wide range of clients, and adapt themselves to changing conditions. Sheila commented upon the changing technology and noted that:

. . . ideas and intellectual skills, I don't think they're going to be as affected by a shifting job market. . . . You can't sell just your skills. You have to be able to sell your ideas.

It is important that more than half of the women stressed the importance of writing skills. Only two are primarily writers, but the others constantly communicate through writing; for example in scripts, proposals and publicity materials. Even the woman whose technical achievements are most noteworthy considered changing the focus of her work from communication through sound, and the skills associated with its recording and creation, to communication through writing. In the past, however, development of writing skills has been hidden in the program's other teachings and has received scant recognition. Courses where written work and assignments were most important have been cut back. Recognition of this deficit in the program's offerings can be seen in the 1991-92 calendar, where a 1.5 credit course (a full course is worth 3 credits) in documentary script writing has been brought in as a program requirement. However, the written word is not treated with the same respect or valued as highly as other media addressed by the program. Like women's invisible skills, writing skills are buried within other more noticeable accomplishments.

Looking at the specific skills used by the women obscures the fact that, in order to maintain themselves in the workplace, they call upon many invisible skills which are often deemed to be part of their “womanliness” and which are woven into their work, providing a framework for the practice of the visible skills. The importance of invisible skills was apparent in the women’s discussions of their work in institutions where work involves a high level of collaboration. Empathetic understanding is also essential in order for them to act effectively as producers for a diversity of institutional clients. In this role they not only act for the content specialists but also have to ensure that the delivery of the content is suited to the audience, whom the specialists may not understand at all.

In the private sector, the women also must rely on their invisible skills. As in institutional work, they call upon personal social skills to mediate between differing points of view. The following anecdote from Morag, in her role as production assistant to a photographer, illustrates such a situation; here both knowledge from the program and past experience are brought into play through the use of her invisible and essential skills.

[I] was refereeing between the photographer and the guys who worked in the mill. Because they were, like from separate worlds. . . . I’d met loggers. I’d stayed in logging camps. So I knew them a bit and I could also see the photographer’s point of view. He just wanted to get the best shots, and he’d boss them around a bit. They thought he was a pansy from Vancouver and he thought they were brainless red-necks. So I think if he’d been left on his own with them he might have ended up in vat of bubbling pulp at some point. So a big part of my job ended up being soothing, negotiating shots with the workers.

Morag’s words are an example of a situation where “task accomplishment depends upon the management of relationships. The job is a series of relationships to be managed rather than a list of tasks to be performed” (Statham, Miller, and Mauksch 1988, 34).

Program skills as well as previous skills and experience are not enough for most of the women to maintain their place in the work world. Those who are currently working have continued to augment their skills. The women who are institutionally employed have work related education and conferences funded by the institutions. The self-employed have to pay for

their own education. Nonetheless they continue to take courses in many work related fields. They mentioned particularly fields such as writing, computer technology, and business. In addition, most of the women continue to explore the world through formal and informal learning in many fields such as ecology, languages, and communications.

Institutional employment and self-employment

Not only do institutional work and self-employment call for a different balance of skills from those who work in them, they also provide markedly different conditions of work. More than half of the women are mothers. When I considered the locus of their work in relation to mothering, it became clear that commitment to work in the media industry is a source of difficulty. The volume of work and the time-lines are unpredictable. Days are long, and except for the technical stars, pay is not high. Only in the support, clerical side of the field may there be steady, regular work which might fit in with the patterns of mothering. Casual conversations with men, graduates of the program and successful in their parts of the media industry, tell me that they have stay-at-home wives who are responsible for their families, thus buffering them from the stress experienced by working mothers.

Institutional work is not as exciting as production work in the industry and does not accommodate stars. On the visible level it allows the women to make use of their many non-specialised technical skills. Hidden in the fabric of insitutional life, they make use of their invisible skills. Seven of the study's participants are, or have been, institutional employees. Despite the inconspicuous nature of the work, it suits their background in education, technology, communication and personal communications, and it meshes well with their family lives. Institutional work also provides an environment which, compared to the industry, is friendly to women. Union contracts protect institutionally employed women from erratic scheduling and excessive fatigue.

The Program

The experience of mature women students in the program foreshadows that of the world of work. Although the program has had a number of successful mature women students, the majority of students are younger people. Some of them have just left school but most are in their early twenties. There are few older male applicants. The mature women are conscious of their age. They are particularly aware of difficulty dealing with fatigue when trying to meet the program's tight production time lines. The women also deal with demanding life circumstances and responsibilities outside the program, in contrast to many younger students who are still being supported by their natal families. Their age gives them a sense of being anomalous, a feeling that goes with the women into the work place. It troubles them particularly in entry level jobs which require physically tiring, and often menial, work and where lack of sleep becomes a factor. They sense that they are being 'tested'.

The program does not draw attention to the invisible skills that the mature women bring to production situations: their collaborative, communicative, and organisational skills which undergird the final visible product. The latter embodies and makes visible the results of technical expertise, and this, rather than organisational skills, attracts the program's accolades.

Individuals' contributions to productions are also hidden by the practice of group grading. Only in the early parts of the program are assignments graded individually. These are largely in the general education area, audio, and photography: all are considered foundation courses on which the 'big' courses of film, slide/sound, and television production are based. One woman pointed out that these prominent 'sexy' courses are all taught by men.

The women's accounts of their work drew attention to the importance of general education in the workplace, but the time allocated to this in career programs is constantly threatened by specialised skill courses. The value of general education for college students is supported by Dennison and Gallagher because:

they [students] form a substantial segment of the body politic who will carry responsibility for the condition of society in many aspects. . . . It is they who, in large part, will directly deal with problems of unemployment,

the technological society, the limitations of the political process, and the value conflicts which threaten to erode the foundations of Canada's social institutions (1986, 242).

They cited Sorensen's 1984 study, which pointed out that although community college instructors lauded general education, they did little to implement it.

When asked to indicate why general education did not receive the support and encouragement which most respondents felt was desirable, respondents cited three major reasons: budget constraint, the high demand for skill training, and a reduction in the hours available for each subject (Dennison and Gallagher 1988, 247).

All three reasons have affected the Media Program, where specialist skill training takes precedence over liberal education. Although technical skills respond most obviously and immediately to the needs of the market place, it is vital that graduates should be equipped with a base of general education and career skills to which they can attach further technical skills in response to changes in the work environment.

The glamour and attention attached by the program to work in the media industry detracts from the respect which should be paid to media expertise used to facilitate and support the work of others, as in institutional work. Mature women graduates work successfully in the province's institutions; here their performance is as worthy of recognition and respect as is that of an audio visual programmer or other specialist in the media industry. The program itself should model an even-handed respect for its graduates and their work. As Gaskell states:

Equal value cannot be just about equal pay. It is about broader issues of respect and influence. . . . It is about being more inclusive in the definition of value, respecting the work of more people and consulting with them more fully as decisions are made (1989, 79).

The program's tacit assumption of the availability of women's invisible skills publicly confirms the skills' lack of value. The program's practices and culture do not validate or honour invisible skills but rather stress the women's deficiency in technical skills. The assumption that all students start the program from the same base line of technical skill disadvantages the women and depletes their self-esteem. Again, this is a pattern repeated in the work world where most of

the women move toward work that co-ordinates or supports the technical work of others. And yet, despite devaluation and lack of recognition, the women's invisible skills are essential to them in the workplace and to their workplaces.

In the areas of skill recognition, skill deficits, and gender and age differences, the program turns a blind eye to entrenched practices which impinge upon the women's learning. Gaskell, in her discussion of post-secondary education for women, asks "Do the courses (in traditional as well as non-traditional fields) and the way they are organised reflect women's experience and ways of knowing?" (1989, 87). The answer here is "No".

Policy questions

The thrust from government for program accountability as expressed in the numbers of employed graduates pressures the program to interpret the figures in a generous light. The program's stellar graduates are cited in appropriate places but, on the whole, it is not to the program's advantage to inquire too closely into the kinds of work that graduates find. Applicants at the department information meetings are told that approximately 80% of graduates find employment in the field within a year of graduation. A similar method of interpreting trainees' employment was noted by Tom in her study of trainees at a bank, in which she found that:

...the training program consistently claims a "one hundred percent placement rate". While such a claim might imply that all the program's trainees are employed at hours and jobs they find satisfactory, in reality it only indicates that all of the program's trainees have found some work some of the time . . . trainees are counted as "placed" without distinguishing between the number of hours they work, the wages they earn, or the jobs they hold (Tom 1987, 384 - 5).

Experience taught me that a contributing factor to the lack of research about graduate placement was sheer lack of time. The time for in-depth tracking of graduates to obtain details about their work and the changing workplace was not available. More immediate program concerns came first.

In part, it [lack of research] has been a factor of the rate at which the colleges developed, which has left precious little time for the more analytical and reflective activities associated with research. . . .

Allowances have rarely been made for release time to conduct serious research; so whatever research has been done has been largely a personal rather than institutional pursuit (Dennison and Gallagher 1986, 263).

Scrupulous attention to graduate's employment might also raise difficult questions such as: How well does the program serve particular groups of students? And what is the role of a career program?

All post-secondary training for British Columbians is currently (1993) being examined by the British Columbia Human Resource Development Project. Its findings are likely to have an impact on career/vocational programs such as the Media Program. The October 1992 report calls for some initiatives which would be helpful to mature women. The following statements acknowledge a variety of factors affecting them.

We must also anticipate and plan for the entry or re-entry of older people in our work force - and their education and training needs are different from those of younger people (9).

Demand for full-time study remains strong but part-time learning has also become a personal, social, and economic necessity (11).

We need to ensure appropriate balance in all adult learning programs (37).

We need greater capacity to assess prior learning, accessible to all learners as well as all institutions in the province. Transferable credentials or formal recognition should be provided for work place training, *informal and non-formal learning, and learning acquired outside the public system and outside our province* (40) (emphasis added).

The Steering Committee's economic agenda is evident in its repeated use of skills training language (competencies, goals, and outcomes are referred to frequently) but the intent to recognise the value of students' prior accomplishments and to encourage accommodation to learners' differences would be helpful to mature women. However, the major thrust of the paper is to support the provincial economy through the employment of its citizens. The fields for the citizens' employment remain vague.

The report states that "enhanced employment and self-employment opportunities must result from training" (18), but in this document, as well as in their preceding papers, the Steering

Committee implies that major responsibility for this education and training will lie with business and labour in co-operation with educational institutions (48-49). Putting the onus for ongoing training upon these bodies ignores the interests of many individuals who are forced by marketplace conditions to become self-employed. None of the participants of this study, unless institutionally employed, would have had the benefit of business or labour support for further training. For the most part, the reality of women's work is in the world of part-time, self-employed, non-union employment, as it is also for many other career program graduates. This situation is not addressed by the Human Resources Development Steering Committee's report which is designing policy to direct the province's post-secondary education.

Conclusions

The original research question concerned the role of the program as a bridge and a catalyst in the women's lives. The process of interviewing the twelve mature women graduates from the Media Program and hearing their reflections about their skills and work led me to conclude that their survival in the workplace is strongly grounded in a continuum of their invisible skills and pre-program education and experience. With this long ribbon of skills, the women weave program skills which give them technical ability, vocabulary, and attitudes enabling them to move into a new workplace. The program is indeed a bridge and a springboard, but, in striving to emulate the workplace at the far end of the bridge, it also incorporates factors which inhibit the women's learning and diminish their self-esteem. The focus on technical skill without compensatory recognition of the women's invisible skills foreshadows the workplace, but it is only when they are able to articulate and thus claim their invisible skills that the women are able to exercise them fully. These skills should be made visible and recognised within the program for the strength, adaptability, and humanity that they enable the women to take into the world of work.

At present, individual women may devise their own strategies for ensuring that they acquire the learning that they pay for. On the one hand, courses such as assertiveness training might help the women to hold their own in the workplace. Providing such courses would place the onus on the individual women. On the other hand, all students would benefit from incorporating, within the program's curriculum, critical discussion of women's place in the world. Graduates would then carry from the program an understanding of women and their skills into the workplace. The program should also take a leadership role as it did in its early years by recognizing women as deserving of the same access to the workplace as men. Now it should show leadership by promoting "A pedagogy that gives voice to women's concerns and validates them" (Gaskell 1992, 140).

This study focusses on one particular program and 12 of its mature women graduates, but it also raises questions about the role of our post-secondary educational institutions and the value that they place on "women's experience and ways of knowing" (Gaskell 1989, 87). Should these educational institutions be a mirror to society, or should they act as exemplars, both to society and their component programs, by recognising and valuing women's invisible skills in their practices?

Implications for further research

Reflection upon my interviews with these 12 women, all of whom have attempted to continue working within the media field, convinced me of the importance of doing a similar study with a group of women who have left the field. With replies to my original questionnaire, I received two poignant letters. One was from a graduate who had dropped out of the field in order to look after her pre-school children. She is now unable to find any point of entry to the field. Another woman wrote describing her despair at being unable to find even a first job in the field. There were other more guarded comments, and there were the women who did not reply at all. These women are a valuable source of information which would construct a more complete model of how career/vocational programs intersect with the lives of their students. It seems to me

valuable that the circumstances of the women's work or unemployment be known to the program.

My research showed that there is little available information about work in the field of media other than about the very specific occupations such as camera operator or editor. More in-depth description about the wide variety of positions, the training of those who hold them, and the working conditions that prevail would be valuable both to women and men hoping to enter the field and to their teachers. It would be particularly interesting to examine the roles where invisible skills play a major part.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Skills in the Workplace: A Study of Media Graduates

Questionnaire

Researcher: Anne Morley - Telephone 926-2774

Skills in the Workplace is a study to provide valuable information for the Media Department, as well as its students and graduates, and for my research, regarding the many different kinds of work and the skills used in the workplace by the program's graduates. The information regarding your work, which only you can contribute, would be of great value to me in completing this task. It will take you about 15 minutes.

I enclose a stamped, addressed envelope for your reply. Completing and returning the questionnaire will indicate your consent. If, later, you should want to withdraw your information, please do call me at 926-2774 or my research supervisor, Dr. Allison Tom at 822-5361.

I want to make it clear that this data is being collected for research purposes only. It will not be released in any form to employers or others outside the Media Resources Program.

Questions

1. What is your name? _____
2. Male _____ Female _____
3. What year did you graduate from Media? _____
4. Who is your current employer? _____
5. What is your title at work? _____
6. What does your work involve? (activities, tasks, etc.)

7. Is your work full-time _____ or part-time _____?
8. Is the position permanent _____ or contract _____?

Appendix 2

Graduate Survey.

Responses to the Graduate survey varied from the scanty and vague to long gossipy letters describing the lives of several graduates who are living and working in Toronto. There were also letters requesting help in the search for work. Some of the responses to the question about monthly earnings were unclear. In the questionnaire, I had not stated whether I was asking for information about gross or net earnings and, as one of the respondents told me, earnings for the self-employed may vary substantially from month to month. However although the replies cannot be taken as accurate assessments of earnings, taken as a whole they suggest a pattern of female and male employment like that given by Statistics Canada. It also has to be remembered that information from the survey is true only for the approximately 50% of program graduates who replied to the questionnaire.

Figure 1 and Table 2 show the distribution of program graduates in the work place. The distribution pattern for women and men in institutional and self-employment is similar. It is noticeable that more men than women are employees in other parts of the media field. Figure 5 and Table 6 show the difference between men and women's earnings in this sector. The higher earnings of the men come from corporate employment.

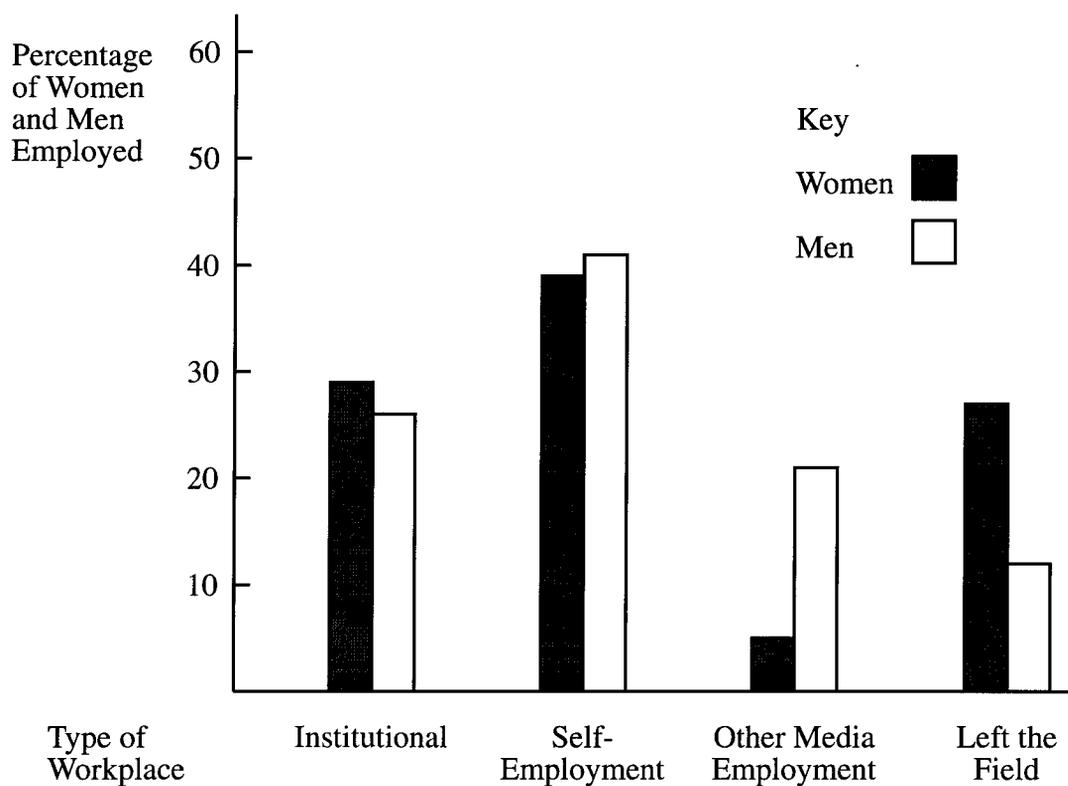


Figure 1. Distribution of women and men by workplace

Table 2. Distribution of women and men by workplace.

Workplace	Women	Men
Institutional	12 (29%)	15 (26%)
Self-employment	16 (39%)	24 (41%)
Other media employment	2 (5%)	12 (21%)
Left the field	11 (27%)	7 (12%)
	41 (100%)	58 (100%)

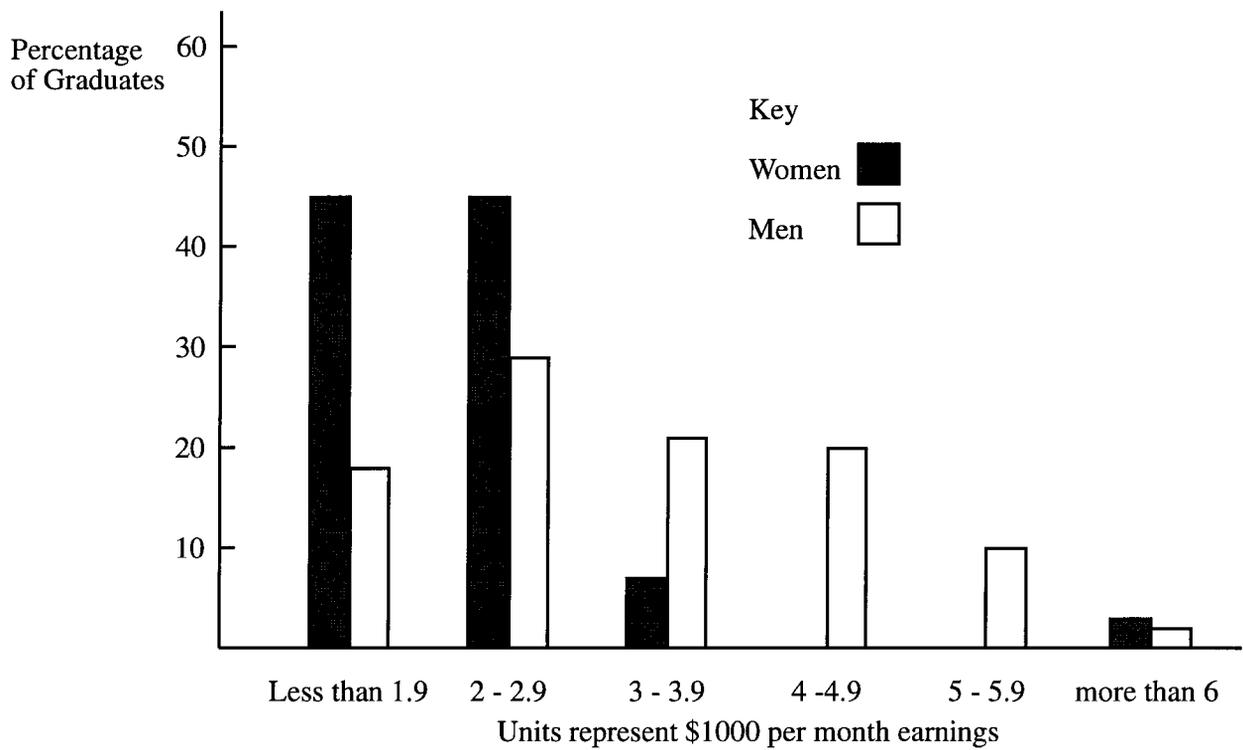


Figure 2. Estimated monthly earnings of graduates.

Table 3. Estimated monthly earnings of those in the field.

One of the self-employed women in the field declined to estimate her monthly earnings.

Earnings	Women	Men
- 1,999	13 (45%)	9 (18%)
2000-2999	13 (45%)	15 (29%)
3000-3999	2 (7%)	11 (21%)
4000-4999		10 (20%)
5000-5999		5 (10%)
6000 -	1(3%)	1 (2%)
	29 (100%)	51 (100%)

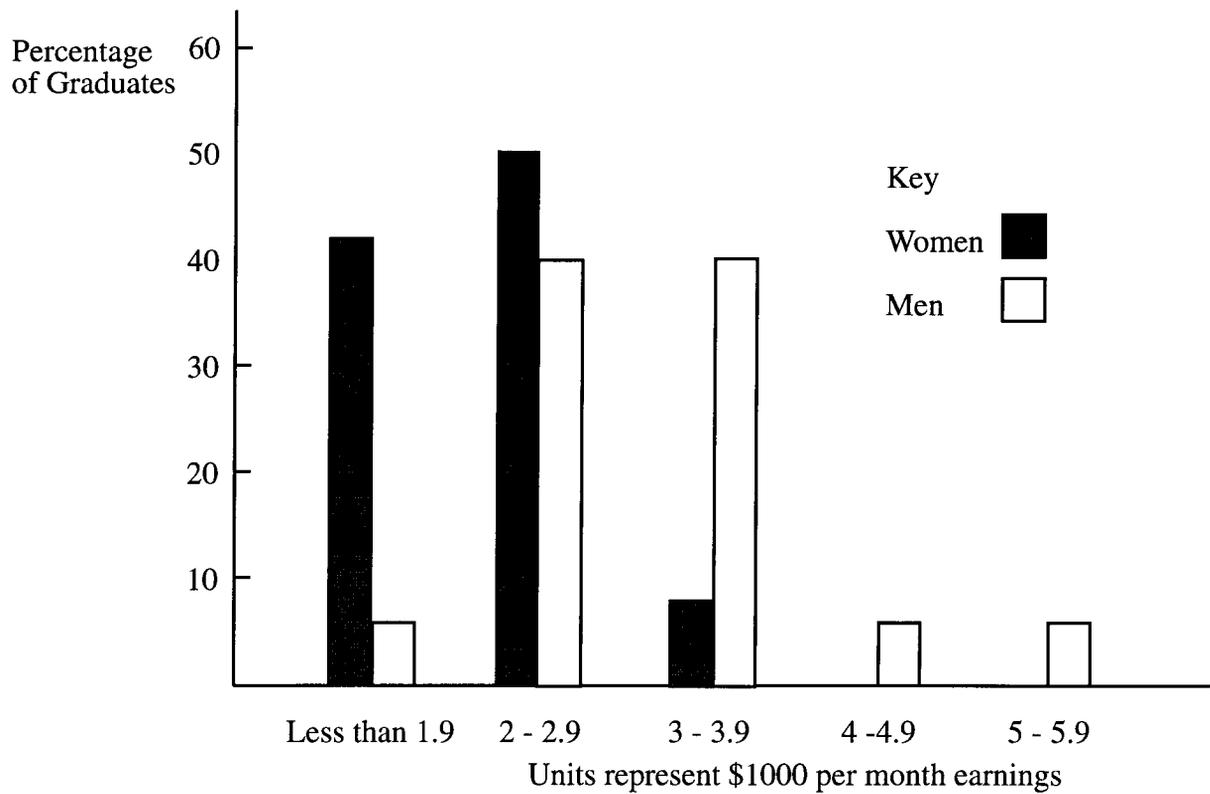


Figure 3. Estimated monthly earnings of graduates in institutional employment.

Table 4. Estimated monthly earnings from institutional employment.

Earnings	Women	Men
-1999	5 (42%)	1 (6%)
2000-2999	6 (50%)	6 (40%)
3000-3999	1 (8%)	6 (40%)
4000-4999		1 (6%)
5000-5999		1 (6%)
	12 (100%)	15 (100%)

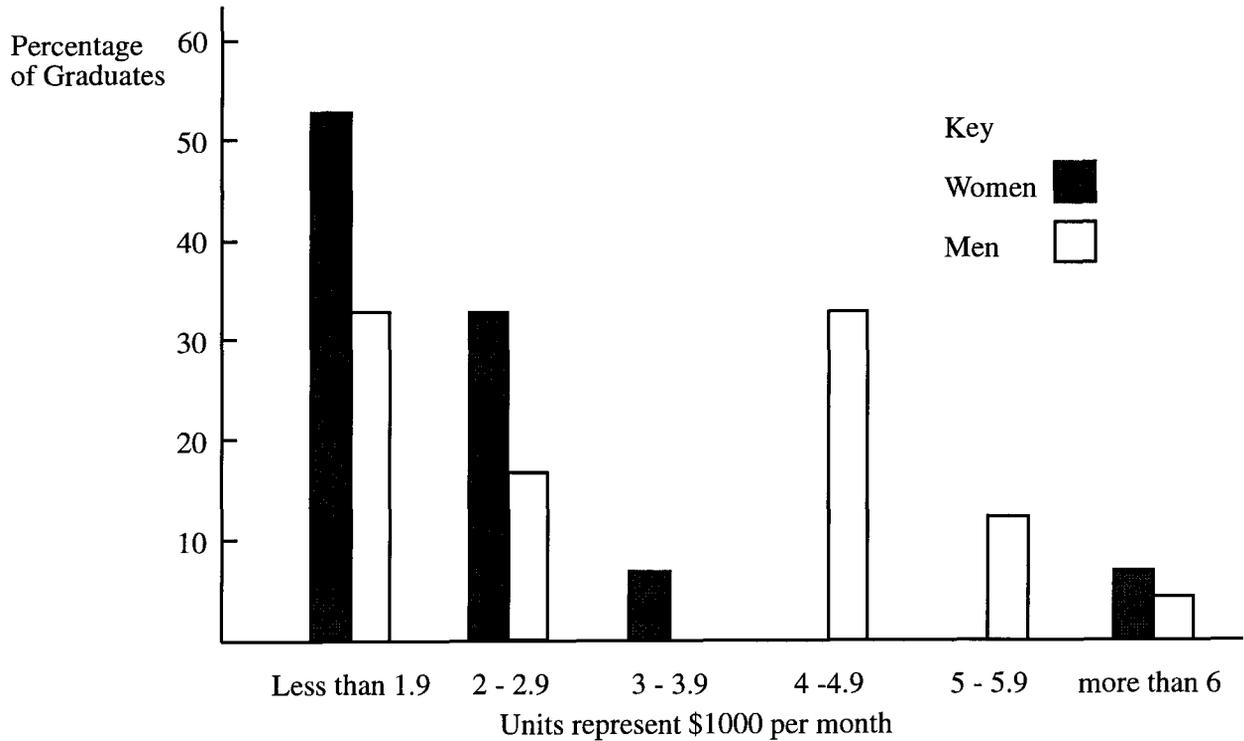


Figure 4. Estimated monthly earnings of self-employed graduates.

Table 5. Estimated monthly earnings from self-employment.

One woman declined to estimate her monthly earnings.		
Earnings	Women	Men
-1999	8 (53%)	8 (33%)
2000-2999	5 (33%)	4 (17%)
3000-3999	1 (7%)	
4000-4999		8 (33%)
5000-5999		3 (12.5%)
6000 -	1 (7%)	1 (4.5%)
	15 (100%)	24 (100%)

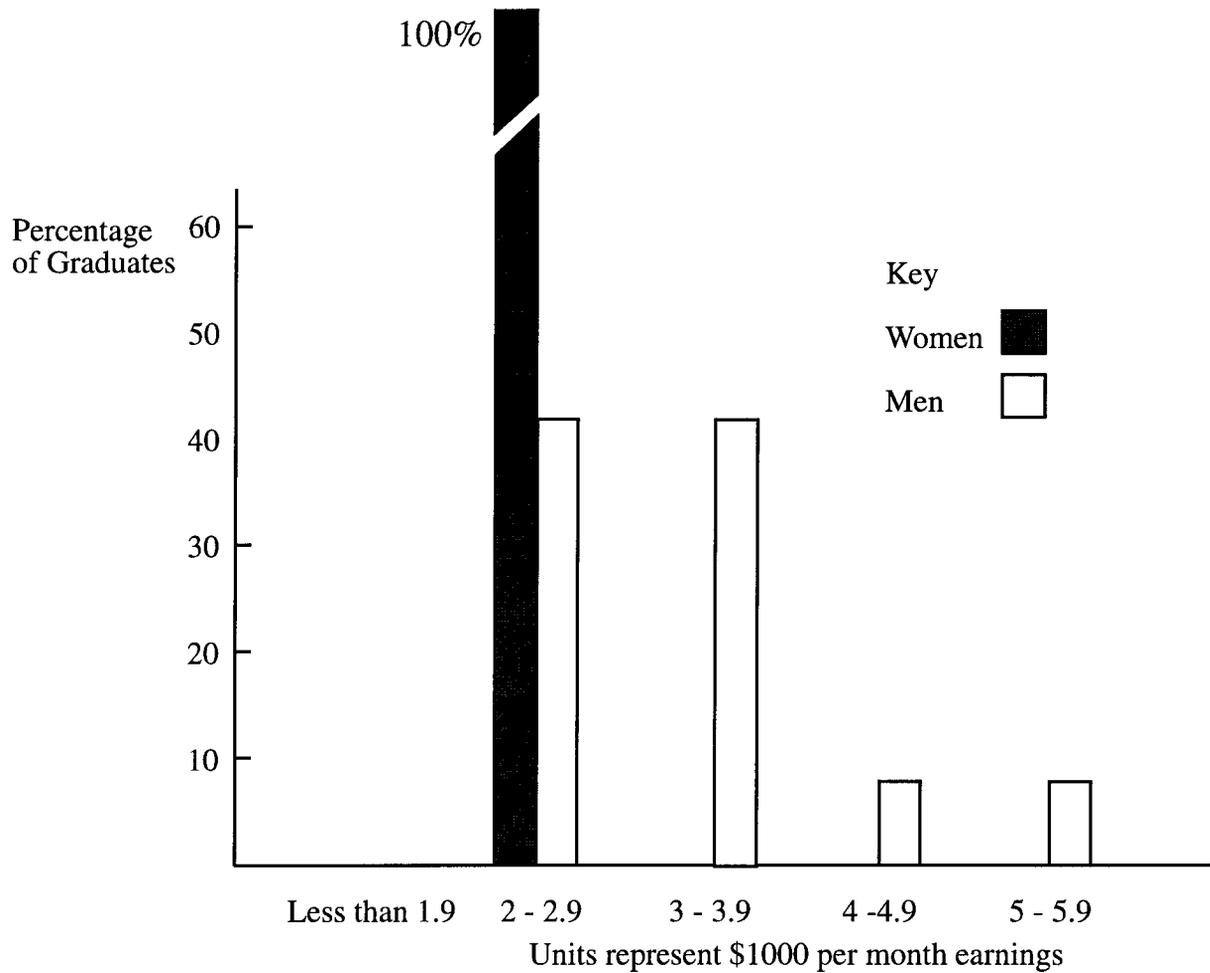


Figure 5. Estimated monthly earnings of graduates working in other media fields.

Table 6. Estimated monthly earnings from other media employment.

Earnings	Women	Men
2000-2999	2 (100%)	5 (42%)
3000-3999		5 (42%)
4000-4999		1 (8%)
5000-5999		1 (8%)
	2 (100%)	12 (100%)

Appendix 3

Excerpt from Bridgnorth College Calendar, 1969

Educational Resource Technician

The educational Resource Technician Program is designed to fill the increasing need of industry, education, and the professions for people proficient in the wide diversity of skills required for the effective use of audio-visual media.

The graduate from this program will be proficient in the field of graphics, photography, and the maintenance of audio and visual electronic equipment. In addition he will be skilled in the production, care, organisation, and distribution of audio-visual materials. He will also have had experience in instructing workshop groups in the various audio-visual skills.

Specific courses have been included to provide necessary background which will enable the graduate to work in schools in a para-professional role with teachers.

Educational Resource technicians will also be prepared to take positions with management, business, and industry, assisting in the promotion of products and services.

The program is ideal for men and women alike. Special consideration will be given to those students who have graduated from Grade XII on the Industrial Program. The program is also open to mature students who under special circumstances have not graduated from Grade XII.

Curriculum

<u>1st Semester</u>	Hours per week
Communications	3
Audio Visual Equipment	3
Graphic Illustration	3
Current Economic Issues or Elective	3
Philosophy and Organisation of the B.C. School System	3
Advertising and Display	3
Elective	3
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2nd Semester

Communications	3
Resource Economics of B.C. or Elective	3
Library Resources and Services	3
Laboratory Operation Techniques	3
Photographic Theory and Practice	3
Applied Electricity	3
1 Elective	3
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Course Descriptions

Communications

A course in the development of writing and speaking skills. The material of the course is closely related to business and technical career goals. There will be numerous writing assignments, including a report based on original research, and at least one spoken presentation.

In the second semester, the course will concentrate on development of skills learned in the first semester. Library research will be the basis of a long report.

Audio Visual Equipment

The introduction and use of audio visual equipment presently available today. The use and care of recorders, P.A. systems, playback systems, and specialized equipment. Students will gain experience in the normal operation of equipment and in special techniques such as editing sound on sound, etc. The various kinds of listening centres and language laboratories will be studied.

Graphic Illustration

The preparation of audio-visual materials, filmstrips, tapes and transparencies. Creative application of posters, charts, diagrams, signs, flow charts, silk screening etc. Visualisation of ideas in various media. lay-out and paste up.

Current Economic Issues

A course of talks, discussions and debates to stimulate interest in everyday economics and to provide information about the day's news on such subjects as Business pricing and costing, Prices and inflation, Money and Banking, Unemployment and Poverty, Ownership of Canadian Industry, International trade.

Philosophy and Organisation of the B.C. School System

The Council of Public Instruction. Objectives of the elementary and secondary school curriculum. The role of Superintendents, Principals and teachers' Programs available to students. Resource courses. Promotional policy and procedures; adult education programs and organisation.

Library Resources and Services

This course introduces the student to the resources and services of all types of libraries; studies begin with a brief history of books, libraries, printing and publishing. Instruction on various systems of circulation and library materials. Classification schemes and general principles used in simple descriptive cataloguing. Instruction in the use and routine maintenance of machines used in the library such as Xerox, Telex, Offset Press, Micro-text Reading, Micro-Film Readers, cameras, and Read Printers.

Laboratory Operation Techniques

The necessary preparation to function as a laboratory assistant. maintaining and setting up science and other technical equipment. care and use of various acids, liquids, and gases. Safety precautions. preventative maintenance. Ordering supplies and maintaining inventory.

Photographic Theory and Practice

A beginning course in photographic theory and practice. Basic principals of camera operation, exposure, developing and printing.

Applied Electricity

Training in basic electronic theory and practice leading to an understanding of the electronics used in connection with audio-visual equipment including radio and television. Reading and understanding electrical and electronic symbols and diagrams. Minor repair and servicing of equipment and accessories.

Resource Economics of British Columbia

An analysis of the resources and economic activities of the regions of B.C. Theory of regional economic development. A study of B.C.'s communications and trading patterns within the Province, with other parts of Canada and with other countries. (Bridgnorth College Calendar, 1969 56-59)

In 1970 the Audio Visual Resources Program became a two year program and added some television and film training. Graduates received an Associate Arts and Science Diploma upon completion of the program.