THE QUEST FOR REALLY USEFUL KNOWLEDGE:
AN INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNITY ADULT EDUCATION IN THE
DIGITAL AGE

A Dissertation in
Adult Education
by
Shivaani Aruna Selvaraj

© 2016 Shivaani Aruna Selvaraj

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

December 2016
The dissertation of Shivaani Aruna Selvaraj was reviewed by the following:

Elizabeth J. Tisdell  
Professor of Adult Education  
Dissertation Advisor  
Chair of Committee  
Doctoral Program Coordinator

Edward W. Taylor  
Professor of Adult Education

Kamini M. Grahame  
Associate Professor of Sociology

Peter R. Grahame  
Assistant Professor of Sociology

Andrea Tapia  
Associate Professor of Information Sciences and Technology

Sasha Costanza-Chock  
Special Member  
Associate Professor of Civic Media, Comparative Media Studies/Writing, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.*
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this institutional ethnography was to explicate the social relations of broadband adoption through the public programs implemented by the Media Mobilizing Project (MMP) between 2009 and 2013, when they operated for the first time in alignment with federal regulations that orchestrated the practice of the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) trans-locally. MMP is a Philadelphia-based organization that emerged in 2005 from a multi-pronged program of media production, political education, and movement building work. They expanded their budget and paid staff with BTOP funding streams that were made possible by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (also known as the Stimulus Act), during the economic crisis.

As an institutional ethnography, this project explored multiple forms of social organization and accompanying practices involved in providing public access to technology that MMP took up in their everyday work. It is informed by a long tradition of adult educators who have practiced education as a vehicle for change in politically contested environments, especially within struggles for equity and justice. Data for the study included texts that circulated in print and digital media forms, interviews with MMP paid staff and DC-based consultants who evaluated Philadelphia’s overall BTOP experience, and observations of educational programs in public computer centers.

Findings highlight the discovery of two competing forms of accountability that produced a growing bifurcation between the professional service provision spheres associated with accomplishing the grant and movement based spheres that advanced radical organizing and media production. Amid rapid disorganization and reorganization of activity under BTOP’s
timeline, MMP’s educators designed divergent curricula that were answerable to these spheres.

This institutional ethnography shows how MMP leaders attempted to reclaim their earlier work as they were drawn into larger institutional complexes. The findings are discussed in relation to radical adult education discourses that emphasize the importance of “really useful knowledge” and the approach of institutional ethnography that attends to language and experience in the mapping of social relations. Implications for adult education theory, practice, and further research are considered.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures........................................................................................................ ix
Acknowledgements.................................................................................................. x

## CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

Research Context.................................................................................................... 1
   Telling the Untold Stories: MMP’s Combined Practices To Strengthen
   Organizing........................................................................................................ 5
   The Digital Road to Recovery as a Solution to Crisis....................................... 7
   Ideological Backdrop of Neoliberalism and Technological Optimism............... 9
   Institutional Ethnography.................................................................................. 12
   Purpose and Research Questions...................................................................... 14
   Overview of Thesis............................................................................................ 16
   Glossary of Institutional Ethnography Terms.................................................... 17
   Acronyms and Terms That Arose in Research.................................................. 25

## CHAPTER TWO. A REVIEW OF ACADEMIC LITERATURE

   Human Capital Theory...................................................................................... 29
      Historical Overview of Human Capital Theory.............................................. 29
      Critical Perspectives of Human Capital Theory.......................................... 31
   Individualizing effects..................................................................................... 31
   Belief in opportunity and access....................................................................... 32
   Education as technical training......................................................................... 33
   Human Capital and Lifelong Learning in Government Policy......................... 35
   Information and Communications Technologies............................................. 38
   New Digital Technologies and Engagement in the Public Sphere....................... 40
   Rhetoric Surrounding Digital Access and Civic Engagement and
   Participation....................................................................................................... 42
   Conceptions of Digital Divide.......................................................................... 43
   Rhetoric Surrounding New Technologies Within Municipalities...................... 44
   Discourse Surrounding New Technologies and Civil Society........................... 45
   Digital Access and Civic Engagement within Public Initiatives......................... 46
   Digital Access and Engagement Within Civil Society Organizations................. 48
   Discussion: What Kind of Engagement?........................................................... 49
   Institutional Ethnography as a Contribution to Research in Adult Education...... 50
      Evolution of Cervero and Wilson’s Socio-Political Model of Program
      Planning......................................................................................................... 51
   Contribution of Institutional Ethnography to Examining Power in Adult
   Education.......................................................................................................... 53

## CHAPTER THREE. INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY:

   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHOD............................................... 58
   Institutional Ethnography: Theoretical Underpinnings....................................... 59
   Ontology and Epistemology of Institutional Ethnography.................................. 60
Textually Mediated Social Relations, or Ruling Relations .......................... 62
Discourse in Institutional Ethnography: Examining Language Through a Materialist Approach ................................................................. 64
My Position as Researcher ........................................................................ 68
The Research Process ............................................................................ 71
Data Collection in Institutional Ethnography ........................................... 71
Texts ....................................................................................................... 73
Interviews ............................................................................................. 75
Observations .......................................................................................... 76
The Research Participants ....................................................................... 77
Key staff participants ............................................................................ 77
Observational participants ..................................................................... 78
Data Analysis .......................................................................................... 78
Dependability and Validity ................................................................. 82
Conclusion ............................................................................................ 84
Descriptors for Research Participants in the Following Data Chapters .... 85

PART II: FINDINGS .................................................................................. 87

CHAPTER FOUR: SECURING FUNDING: TEXTUAL BASIS OF INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY CIRCUITS .................................................. 91
Textual Production in Hierarchical Alignment ....................................... 92
Interventions in National Process ......................................................... 93
Assessing the favorability of terms in the grant design ....................... 94
Public commenting as an official venue for intervening in new regulations ........................................................................................ 95
An intermediary organization facilitates regional and national pathways ......................................................................................... 96
Organizing the Municipal Program for Broadband Access ................. 97
Trans-local movement of language ...................................................... 98
Broadening the definition of digital inclusion ...................................... 99
The Awarded ‘Freedom Rings’ Proposals ............................................ 100
Text-Based Interindividual Territories ................................................ 102
Hierarchical Accountability Circuits Reorganized MMP’s Work ........ 105
Reporting Mechanisms Within Hierarchical Accountability Circuits .... 107
Defining and Measuring Sustainable Broadband Adoption .............. 110
Resisting a narrow definition of adoption ......................................... 112
Work made visible/invisible within accountability circuits ............ 114
Curriculum as Components of Accountable Social Organization ....... 115
Pressures surrounding curriculum within SBA Partner and Working Group meetings ................................................................. 116
Imposing international standards for curriculum ............................ 118
Difficulty incorporating radical ideas into Basic Computer Skills curriculum ............................................................... 119
Conclusion: An Appearance of Openness ............................................ 125
CHAPTER FIVE. FIGHTING FOR THE PUBLIC SECTOR: RELATIONAL BASIS OF LATERAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Media Production that Builds Collective Subjectivity Within Experience-Based Interindividual Territories

Applying Textual Production of Montage to Organizing Contexts

Broadening Frames and Breaking Isolation

Developing Organizing Platforms to Challenge Urban Austerity

Lateral Accountability: Re-Directing BTOP Curriculum

MMP’s Leadership Council Disorganized

Re-Directing the Curriculum as an Intervention

Coordination of Movement Media Institutes

Direct expression of stories of survival

Media-texts that connect consciousness beyond the local

Drawing attention to the public sector #UnderAttack

Strength of Work Driven by Lateral Accountability

Conclusion: Radical Work Continually Interrupted

CHAPTER SIX. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF WORK: DISORGANIZATION AND REORGANIZATION

Orienting to Competing, Predetermined Conceptual Frameworks

Radical (Ideological) Conceptualization and Orientation

Asserting a radical vision through text

Intervening in institutional designations

Orienting staff to a radical conception of digital literacy

Institutional Conceptualization and Orientation

Institutionally Authorized Standpoints

Bifurcated “Director” Titles

Divided Attention Among BTOP’s Leaders

Media Educator Organizers as Idealized Positions

Standpoints Further Outside of BTOP’s Nexus

Geographic Fragmentation

Logan Community Development Corporation

Casa Monarca

Philadelphia Unemployment Project

Taxi Workers Alliance of Pennsylvania

Bifurcation of Professionalized and Movement Spheres of Work

New Divisions and Shifting Relationships to BTOP

Everything Became Tied to BTOP

Conclusion: Ongoing Struggle for Clarity

PART III: CHAPTER SEVEN. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary of Findings and Discussion

Distinct Practices of Textual Production

Social Relations of the Digital Economy

Distinct Forms of Accountability
Reorganization of the Public Sector........................................................................ 195
Distinct Curricula as Components of Social Organization................................... 196
Really Useful Knowledge in the Digital Age.......................................................... 197
Implications and Contribution to Adult Education Field........................................ 198
Technology, Human Capital, and Adult Education.................................................. 199
Post-Research Reflections on Critical Program Planning Frameworks................. 200
Institutional Ethnography as a Practice for Developing “Really Useful Knowledge”........................................................................................................ 203
Further Suggestions for Radical Adult Education Practice and Research................. 204
Limitations of this Study............................................................................................ 206
Final Thoughts (That are Never Final)........................................................................ 207

REFERENCES............................................................................................................. 210

APPENDIX A: Table 1. Texts......................................................................................... 235
APPENDIX B: Table 2. Interviews and Observations ................................................... 236
APPENDIX C: Guide for Interviewing.......................................................................... 237
APPENDIX D: Curriculum Outline/Training Process.................................................... 239
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Hierarchical accountability circuit reorganizes work at the frontlines………………107
Figure 2. Hierarchical chain of reporting in a sequence of text-action-text activity………………109
Figure 3. The direct nature of relational, lateral accountability that arises in human interaction…143
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research is for the many leaders of the Media Mobilizing Project and those they (we) have impacted during the last decade.

Thank you to Dorothy Smith,

and to my parents, who were scientists, and whom I discover I am more like every day.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

Just on the heels of a United Nations Human Rights Council Report recommending that Internet access be secured for all (La Rue, 2011), the Media Mobilizing Project, a radical community-based organization, celebrated the opening of five new public computer centers in Philadelphia on July 15, 2011. These centers were part of a federal program resourced by the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (Stimulus Act) that opened 77 public computer centers throughout the city to create access to broadband technology (high speed Internet) for Philadelphia’s most vulnerable populations (The City of Philadelphia, n.d.) during the economic crisis. Among the crowd of some hundred supporters, former Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter was present to give brief opening remarks, which he began with the slogan of the organization: “Movements begin with the telling of untold stories” (Media Mobilizing Project, 2011). He went on to explain the significance of the occasion:

There is something about access; there is something about connectivity; there is something about getting information. You can't truly be free if you don't have information. You can’t be connected if you have no ability to be connected. And that's what this project is really all about. . . . 44 percent of Philadelphians don't have access to the internet. . . . How can you truly live in a free society? How can you get the information that you need? How can you be a full participant? How can you even go after your own rights if you can’t read about it, if you can’t get information about it? (Media Mobilizing Project, 2011)

Along with these and other celebratory words at this ribbon cutting ceremony, there was another story unfolding. Among the crowd of people there to celebrate this landmark event were
organized taxi workers, Philadelphia public high school students, firefighters, janitors, hotel
workers, day laborers, nurses, residents who had been involved in fights over gentrification and
urban development, etc. Mayor Nutter recognized someone in the crowd who worked as a janitor
and shop steward with the Service Employees International Union and a leader with the Media
Mobilizing Project. This man had been recently involved in protests to support the municipal
unions along with thousands of city workers who had been working under expired contracts
since 2009 (Warner, 2013; Gelbart, 2010). Philadelphia city workers in 2013 were twice as likely
to have incomes that fall below the poverty guideline as they were in 2007, the last time union
membership had a pay increase (Sternberger, 2013). At one of these protests, this MMP leader
was recording audio for MMP’s Labor Justice Radio program and pressed the Mayor to respond
to a question about when he was going to sign contracts for public sector workers. Mayor Nutter
had no answer then, but spotting him at the ribbon-cutting, he was quick to note: “I see you don’t
have a microphone today.”

**Research Context**

The incident described above calls attention to two themes that set the stage for my
choice to pursue research on the question of democracy, technology, and education. First, it
marks contradictions between liberatory ideas about internet access in the Mayor’s rhetoric and
the material conditions that workers face daily in a neoliberal social order, in which the doctrine
that market exchange is the primary guide for all human action and decisions (Harvey, 2005). In
the background of this rhetoric linking Internet access with freedom and the celebration of the
new public computer centers is the slashing of public programs, public schools, and public sector
jobs (Gym, 2012; Hing, 2012; Philadelphia Weekly, 2011; Yudell, 2012). Second, the Mayor’s
remarks to this MMP leader reveal another sentiment: that he was safely in charge while this
MMP leader was unarmed without a recording device. This points to the uneasy, power-laden alliance that MMP formed with the city government in order to provide broadband access in Philadelphia’s poor and working class communities (Tapia & Ortiz, 2010). MMP took a leadership role in securing money that contractually bound them to the work of service provision on behalf of the City, while simultaneously pressuring the City about these very public sector issues.

The mission of MMP, at the time of this research, was to build a media, education and organizing infrastructure that will cohere and amplify the growing movement to end poverty (Media Mobilizing Project, n.d.). MMP grew out of my experiences in Philadelphia since the early 1990s as an organizer and adult educator in multi-racial anti-poverty work (Selvaraj, 2013). Along with five other friends, I co-founded the Media Mobilizing Project in 2005 (Taussig, 2008), which grew out of a specific history in Philadelphia of radical anti-poverty organizing and education (Baptist & Rehman, 2011) and analysis of the shortcomings of working on issues in siloes and from fragmented interpretations of race, ethnicity, gender, class, immigrant status, etc. MMP was also heavily influenced by the independent media movement that grew out of the possibilities of new technologies and a critique of an increasingly consolidated corporate media landscape.

Some adult education scholars have pointed out the importance of community and social movement education, while noting that many of these efforts pass without us ever becoming aware of them (Cunningham, 1989). For those organizations that wish to grow beyond the local, questions of scale and resources are inevitable. Since 2006, when I was part of a contentious decision within MMP to incorporate as a non-profit organization, there has been an increased focus on fundraising and institutional building in order to build its influence locally, regionally,
and nationally. Funding opportunities have helped the organization play a lead role in contributing comprehensive, community-based approaches to work surrounding the digital divide, digital inclusion and other issues in media policy. MMP entered into the history of municipal practices of technology deployment in poor communities in 2007, with their first large grant for community journalism programming from the Knight Foundation and a relationship with Wireless Philadelphia, the non-profit charged with overseeing the build-out of the citywide wireless network. With these resources, they secured free computers, technical support and wireless connectivity to program participants (Wolfson, 2007). MMP’s Our City, Our Voices program set an important precedent for the organization in establishing practices that combine collective learning through political education, media production that features multiple points of resistance to neoliberal trends, and organizing across sectors and communities through their involvement with traditional and nontraditional labor and community organizations (Wolfson & Funke, 2013).

This work may be seen as part of a long history of radical adult education within social movements (Allman, 2010; Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Carpenter & Mojab, 2011; Choudry & Kapoor, 2010; Cunningham, 1989; Jackson, 2011; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009) and takes inspiration from the phrase “really useful knowledge,” used by 19th century English working class radicals to refer to education for liberation versus the technical education imposed by factory owners. As Chartist movement workers organized their own study institutes in the UK, they were met by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, who attempted to introduce depoliticized instruction in these spaces (Grahame, 1988; Johnson, 1979). “For these radical workers, really useful knowledge was not primarily a knowledge of how to be a better worker, technically, but rather a knowledge of what it was, socially, morally, politically, to be a worker
in that situation” (Grahame, 1998, p. 244). In this spirit, this research aims to challenge the complex of interrelated hegemonic concepts and discourses that invoke hope in digital skills and promote innovation, STEM, coding, public computer centers in poor neighborhoods, etc. It aims to show how critical thought and awareness can be disorganized by imposed knowledge and practices that are emptied of political and moral dimensions (Habermas, 1971).

In 2008, MMP took a lead role in Philadelphia by organizing official and community-based leaders and stakeholders in a lengthy process, and contributing to successful applications in 2010 for public computer centers (PCC) and sustainable broadband adoption (SBA) funds in the second round of the Broadband Technology Opportunity Program (BTOP) (MMP & Philadelphia, 2010). BTOP is administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and began under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Stimulus Act), popularly known as Obama’s stimulus package. As a recipient of BTOP funds and a managing partner within the Freedom Rings Partnership, MMP strove to continue the work of organizing with communities and organizations under threat in this economic climate through documenting conditions in people’s lives.

**Telling the Untold Stories: MMP’s Combined Practices to Strengthen Organizing**

MMP seeks to humanize everyday issues with the untold stories of people’s lived experiences, emphasizing the ongoing conditions and immediacy of struggle in various communities, and the work of moving people to act. This work of moving people to social and political action combined elements of political education, organizing, and media production based in the experiences of members of a network of organizations who were most adversely affected by the changing context. MMP leaders strive to learn, in order that they may continue to develop their ideas and practices in relation to a changing world. By learning, I mean an ongoing
mediation of consciousness between individual and social, and between experience and social relations (Carpenter & Mojab, 2011). On a regular basis, study was incorporated into everyday work, as well as prioritized in dedicated spaces, both in pursuit of ideas to help guide practical work and as a vehicle for building relationships and coherence across identities and social positions. At times, giving expression to people’s experiences served as a powerful counterpoint to institutionally crafted messages circulating in mainstream media. Telling untold stories was brought into interaction with analytical and theoretical study and rhetoric, in an overall process of building organizing strategies.

These practices have been harder to maintain over time, as the work of maintaining an incorporated organization interferes with the earlier practices of coupling the radical education and media making with embedded organizing. The influx of various funding streams has introduced different aims that pulls people away from this focus on maintaining participation, facilitative roles, and accountability in social justice struggles. Over time, these practices have grown more separate and distinct, exacerbated by division of labor that comes from growth, competing expectations arising from collaborations with organizations with different histories, and streams of funding that come attached with agendas. MMP’s media programs during these years and during BTOP implementation, played a mediating role (to varying degrees) between the pulls of different forms of accountability in an organization that was transitioning from an informal collective form into an institutionalized non-profit organization. The programs were able to continue the practice of telling untold stories with an eye toward organizing a network.

MMP’s work ‘takes sides,’ as does this research. In this case, I take the standpoint of the frontline workers and leaders of MMP who aim to use education to threaten the status quo, promoting action that resists past injustices and unwanted futures (Antikainen, Harinen & Torres,
I adopt Freire’s (1985) position that “‘washing one’s hands’ of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral” (p. 122). I hope to contribute to the radical tradition within adult education and introduce some of the issues that must be addressed in a technologically advanced, yet polarizing society. Movements and community-based projects that explore the nexus of organizing, education, and new media technologies are multiple and increasing (Allied Media Projects, nd), in resistance to hegemonic, neoliberal, skills-based practices. Many of these were inspired first by the Zapatistas and the global Indymedia network that forged new forms of struggle in the 1990s in response to massive transformations in global political economy (Juris, 2005; Kidd & Barker-Plummer, 2001; Wolfson, 2014). I argue that really useful knowledge today must involve the sphere of media and communications and adult educators must think more expansively about new media technologies, exploring them for their emancipatory potential.

The Digital Road to Recovery as a Solution to Crisis

Another obvious but critical aspect of the context for the broadband technology grants and this research was the global economic crisis, which erupted in fall of 2008, triggered by the U.S. property market crash and subsequent decline in economic activity. The Obama administration signed the largest stimulus package of $787 billion into law on February 17, 2009, with the immediate aim of restoring the health of the banking sector, injecting cash into the economy, and protecting jobs. A longer term goal, also central to the Stimulus Act, was the investment in national infrastructure (e.g. roads, bridges, or information technology infrastructure). During the crisis, pressure on governments to make these public investments increased as the private sector was commonly expected to deprioritize the public good in favor of self-interest during difficult financial times. While economists and politicians debated what the
appropriate measures should have been in response to the crisis, hope placed in the digital economy to reignite economic growth was relatively uncontested. The digital road to recovery promised to have a greater positive impact on jobs, competition, and innovation (OECD, *ICTs*, 2009; The Information Technology & Innovation Foundation, 2009). More than 50 countries launched stimulus plans in 2009 and nearly all included investment in broadband networks (International Telecommunication Union, 2009).

This broadband infrastructure was to contribute to immediate direct and indirect job growth, create a multiplying ‘network effect’ throughout the economy, and provide a foundation for longer term effects (The Information Technology & Innovation Foundation, 2009). Closely tied to creating conditions for wider spread connectivity was the attention and investment in human capital. Those countries that are characterized as knowledge-based service economies especially asserted that “investment in intangible assets is of equal importance as investment in machinery, equipment” (OECD, *Innovation*, 2009, p. 3). During the crisis, workforce and adult education organizations recommended that the Department of Education “develop and deploy technology on a large scale to help expand adult education and workforce skills services” (Center for Law and Social Policy, 2009, p. 4). While Organisation of Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) members, who were evaluating policy responses at the time, asserted that innovation was key to emerging from the crisis, they also warned that this education-focused aspect of the digital economy was possibly at risk because of the downturn. They argued that the crisis presented an opportunity to scale up investments in people and promote entrepreneurial skills, risk taking behaviors, innovative education and training (OECD, *Innovation*, 2009, p. 14).

Within the United States government, the Department of Commerce is the self-proclaimed champion for the digital economy: “The digital economy is the great engine of
innovation and economic growth of the 21st century, and the Commerce Department represents its principal defender and champion in the federal government” (“Fact sheet: U.S. Department of Commerce”, 2013) on behalf of entrepreneurs and small businesses. Part of this stated responsibility is ensuring widespread access and connectivity, adoption, and use throughout the economy. To this end, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) writes policy and administers programs to build out broadband infrastructure and maintains an online portal that houses tools and resources for teaching digital literacy (DigitalLiteracy.gov, n.d.). Here, practitioners in service-oriented organizations, such as libraries, schools, community centers, workforce training centers, and community colleges share best practices and curricula. Despite considerable debate and mixed evidence regarding the connection between a lack of skills and high unemployment, the government’s language regarding long term recovery emphasizes workforce training, job-readiness, and global competitiveness (DigitalLiteracy.gov, n.d.; Department of Commerce: Innovation, n.d.). The national agendas of the Departments of Commerce and Education intertwine to strengthen the digital economy by strengthening individuals’ digital skills, in order to develop their entrepreneurial selves and promote adoption of the internet in the home. The discourses surrounding access and adoption were particularly relevant and embedded explicitly in the section of the Stimulus Act that outlines BTOP.

**Ideological Backdrop of Neoliberalism and Technological Optimism**

MMP’s experiences described in this research can be seen in relation to an entanglement of neoliberalism and technological optimism. In the past thirty years, a set of ideas, policies, and practices have emerged that are based on belief in the inherent efficiency and benevolence of the free market, minimal state intervention, and the individual as an autonomous, rational economic
actor (Harvey, 2005; Saunders, 2010; Turner, 2011). These core tenets of neoliberalism have become the dominant ideology in the United States (Brown, 2015; Harvey, 2005), largely as a result of expanding this economic logic past the economic sphere into the social, blurring the lines between market and state, public and private, and individual and social (Lemke, 2001; Saunders, 2010). The unfettered market will produce the maximum wealth possible and individuals are to behave primarily as entrepreneurs and consumers, making decisions based on economic rationality in constant pursuit of maximizing their human capital. Inequalities in wealth are explained away as the result of individuals not working hard enough or investing in themselves to maximize their human capital. The role of state power, under this regime, is redefined to “focus on facilitating the operation of the market and securing the ability of individuals to operate freely within it” (Saunders, 2010, p. 47). Therefore, at the same time that state-funded social welfare programs are eliminated as “unnatural distortions to the market” (Friedman, 1962; Hayek, 1944; Saunders, 2010), the promotion of programs that provide individuals with access (to education, training, technology) continues in order to create the [appearance of] conditions of equal opportunity for individuals to pursue and realize the American Dream. BTOP embodied these trends, by funding public/private partnerships directly following failed municipal attempts to provide citywide wireless internet access across the nation (Tapia, Powell, & Ortiz, 2009). In Philadelphia, nearly half of the public computer centers during the years of this research were managed by private non-profits, such as MMP.

Intertwined with these shifts in today’s economic and social order are popular ideas that the advance of technology drives change and leads to inescapable futures, which optimists believe are “the outcome of many free choices and the realization of the dream of progress” (Smith & Marx, 1998, p.xii). In response to the global financial collapse leading to
unprecedented government bailouts (Harvey, 2010; Stiglitz, 2009), austerity measures as championed by conservatives (Streeck & Schäfer, 2013; Edsall, 2012), and public outcries about economic conditions around the world (Miszlivetz & Jensen, 2013; Anheier, Kaldor, & Glasius, 2012; Kumar & Hardy, 2012), arguments surrounding ICTs and its promise for economic development and efficiency have been circulating in every sector of society (Hanna, 2011). Further, both former Mayor Nutter and President Obama claimed the connection between technology and the realization of freedom itself. Following the Egyptian political revolution, Obama issued the following statement: “we stand for universal values, including the rights of the Egyptian people to freedom of assembly, freedom of speech and the freedom to access information. Once more, we’ve seen the incredible potential for technology to empower citizens and the dignity of those who stand up for a better future” (Office of the Press Secretary, 2011). But alongside this US-centric rhetoric, were anxieties about job-readiness, re-skilling, how to “put America back to work”, etc. (Mishel, L., et al., 2011; Lakes, 2008; 2011; Illeris, 2006). Under neoliberal ideology, responsibility is placed back on individuals, who are increasingly falling into poverty in the U.S. (Grey, 2013; Gould, E. & Wething, 2012; Eckholm, 2010), to gain the necessary skills to make themselves marketable. In this context, there is a pressing need for radical educators to clarify our vision and practice in the digital age. Competing ideological strands could be seen in the social organization of the learning that took place across MMP’s public computer centers.

While much research on technology, education, and democracy seeks to answer evaluative questions regarding the planning, implementation, and outcomes of digital and media literacy programs (Rhinesmith, 2011; Hobbs, 2010; Jones-Kavalier & Flannigan, 2006), conducting an institutional ethnography guided my interrogation into an abstracted formulation
of engagement in the public sphere that is supposedly brought about through adoption and access to technology. Technology, in this research, was taken up as a set of practices and politics, versus artifacts, that impact our thinking and consciousness regarding power, engagement, transparency, and accountability. During my years of observing the BTOP programs in MMP, attacks on the public sector—employees, unions, services, schools—were constantly in the spotlight in Philadelphia, as well as the world, and became a focus of MMP’s education and organizing work. This was an ideal case study for exposing competing politics surrounding the adoption of technology and identifying educational interventions from a radical perspective by examining the social organization of state-sponsored technology access programs as implemented by a community-based movement organization.

At stake here is the need to make visible the hopes surrounding new technologies and to consider what actually happened, separate from government rhetoric and optimistic intentions. Institutional ethnography allowed me to begin with investigating everyday actualities, which included the sometimes mundane activities related to work, ways of talking about the work, and the variety of texts that entered the setting which coordinated and organized daily activities. Examining these components, taken together, form a materialist approach to mapping social relations, the systematic organization of our activities and relations vis-à-vis others. Revealing the mechanisms of ruling in society is the object of institutional ethnography. The first step in this method of exploration was to identify the problematic, or the problems that emerged in the research context that gave purpose to the study.

**Institutional Ethnography**

Institutional ethnography (IE) is a critical form of qualitative research conceived by Dorothy Smith (1987, 2005, 2006) that aims to unmask how things work and how they are put
together beginning in everyday lived experiences and charting unseen social relations that mediate these daily experiences (Smith, 2005; 2006). It is assumed that the world is social and the only way we can be in the everyday world is as social beings (Smith 1987; 2005).

Institutional ethnography recognizes that “people’s actions are coordinated and concerted by something beyond their own motivations and intentions” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 30). This assumption is consistent with critical traditions of theory and practice that call for ongoing self-reflection and analysis of our endeavors (Brookfield, 2005) so that we may navigate complicated terrains of competing ideas and material interests. To be clear, this study was not interested in evaluating the success of MMP’s implementation of BTOP funds. I was interested in mapping the activities that MMP participated in during this experience in the organization’s history and extending my own and their knowledge into institutional regimes that operate trans- and extra-locally. This entailed developing an integrated understanding of phenomena that may otherwise be have been viewed as disparate experiences. The possibilities of identifying entry points for activist intervention emerge from this integrated view of the world. Smith (2005) uses the analogy of research as cartographer, mapping social relations from an everyday, ground view into institutional complexes. Within the approach of institutional ethnography, social relations may be understood as sequences of interrelated actions that shape the daily practices that people participate in without awareness.

The starting point for institutional ethnography emerges from a problematic rooted in people’s experiences where a set of puzzles lie latent in the stories that the researcher commits to understanding (Smith, 1987). However, “[i]t is the aspects of the institutions relevant to people’s experience, not the people themselves, that constitute the object of inquiry” (p. 38). IE makes a point of being a sociology for people and not about them. The term problematic is borrowed
from Althusser (1971), meant to locate specific questions or problems within a larger field of investigation (Smith, 2006). In response I began conducting interviews, observations, and text-collection in order to identify the problematic arising out of MMP frontline workers’ experiences. I understood that they had a specific vision and goals related to BTOP based on the organization’s mission and I was curious about how they were going to proceed while navigating many internal changes, federal guidelines, and new working partners with different philosophical orientations. Through fieldwork and interviews, I observed tensions and noted different interpretations when people spoke about what this grant “opportunity” represented for the organization and the constituencies that MMP works with. I also heard informants repeatedly describe how the grant was fragmenting MMP’s work internally in a number of ways, creating new divisions among paid staff and leading to concerns about what newer staff were learning, and consequently what they were teaching, and what participants in trainings were learning in public computer centers.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The Broadband Technology Opportunities Program is an explicit project of the state, situated within a particular arrangement of political economy. It is the object of government programs promoting access to technology to create the conditions for the reproduction of the social relations of capitalism. An analysis of MMP’s experience with BTOP should draw the attention of adult educators who are interested in the possibilities of radical education for bringing about political consciousness and action but understand that quests for funding necessitate maneuvering and adaptability, as well as vigilance. This research will also benefit those who wish to understand new issues that technology introduces to the work of social change. While there is much scholarship on civil society experiments (community organizations
and social movements) within adult education literature, very little of this literature explores the hopes and actual uses of technology in these settings. An institutional ethnographic approach to adult education offers tools to explicate social relations and the mechanisms of power.

The purpose of this research was to examine the social relations of broadband access and adoption through the public programs implemented by the Media Mobilizing Project (MMP), operating for the first time under federal regulations that orchestrated the practice of the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) trans-locally. This study, pursued through an institutional ethnography of MMP’s implementation of BTOP, began with the following orienting questions:

a) What were the activities associated with securing, managing, and implementing the programs funded by the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program under the National Telecommunications and Information Administration?

b) What were the activities associated with continuing the original organizational mission during the same period of securing, managing, and implementing the programs funded by BTOP?

c) How were the activities associated with digital technology organized within the Media Mobilizing Project’s educational programs through the regulatory mechanisms of BTOP and other intersecting institutional complexes?

These questions and the general approaches that institutional ethnography uses to investigate social organization and relations guided my initial process. It was the work of this research to show how the experiences in this local context were hooked into unseen social relations shaped by work activities that were coordinated across multiple sites, and mediated by texts in all forms (documents, forms, reports, policy, audio, video). The analysis in my data chapters in Part II
revealed different forms of textual production and accountability that orchestrated MMP staff’s doings, including points along the way where they were able to intervene in order to change the terms or direction of the work.

**Overview of Thesis**

This thesis is organized in three parts consisting of the research overview, the data chapters and analysis, and the concluding chapter. This first section continues with the second chapter, which reviews academic literature based on some of the dominant discourses found within the implementation of the BTOP program. This includes the intersection between scholarly discussion and policy surrounding human capital, re-skilling, access, engagement, and program planning. The third chapter will detail the conceptual framework and method of data collection and forms of analysis based on institutional ethnography. Part II begins with the fourth chapter where I discuss the textual process of securing the BTOP funds and the hierarchical institutional accountability circuit that coordinated the work under the grants. In contrast, Chapter Five details different forms of textual production and accountability in MMP’s radical media production processes and unofficial forms of lateral accountability that guided their organizing work. These first two chapters contextualize the disorganization and reorganization of work that is described in Chapter Six, as a result of the competing forms of accountability that created conditions for bifurcated experiences among staff. Part III introduces the concluding chapter, which distills the findings from the data chapters and discusses them within the broader social relations that the research helped to reveal, regarding the digital economy and a reorganized public sector. Finally, I discuss the implications and contributions of this research to the field of adult education, limitations of the study, and offer my final reflections.
Glossary of Institutional Ethnography Terms

This dissertation takes up much of the jargon of the institutional ethnographic approach. Here, I present a glossary of terms chosen from Laura Bisaillon’s (2012) “An Analytic Glossary to Social Inquiry Using Institutional and Political Activist Ethnography,” that serves as a practical reference to people who are new to institutional ethnography. I follow these terms with acronyms that I use throughout for easy reference, as well as definitions for two terms that I came to use frequently. One is the reference to the work of “organizing” [for social change], and its particular local meaning. I chose another term, “relational” to describe an aspect of my findings. I am highlighting it here as it is different and unrelated to the use of social relations and ruling relations in institutional ethnography.

**Actualities**

These are people’s lived experiences as they describe knowing and living them. This is “the same world in which [the researcher] is doing the work of exploration” (D. Smith, 2005, p. 223). *Actuality* is a methodological term that orients analytic attention to “a world of things, activity and experience that includes, but is not coterminous with, texts and language” (McCoy, 2008, p. 705).

**Boss or Governing Text**

This term refers to a text or set of texts that supplies the context for what we can see, hear, and know. There are subsidiary documents that come into being and are organized under these texts, which are positioned at the top of a hierarchy of texts. Dorothy Smith (2010) explains that boss texts are authorized through institutional procedures through which specific people are instructed to carry out specific practices. Boss texts coordinate organizational relations so “how people work is controlled in conformity with the selective requirements of the boss text . . . There are
layers and layers of them” (D. Smith, 2010, not published, on file with author).

**Concept or Conceptual**

This word points to and is firmly rooted in the concrete or material practices in which people engage and the social relations that connect them. A guiding assumption is that ideas and concepts are produced through people’s material practices. This is a key ontological commitment that rejects a conceptual starting point in a place that is independent of people’s practices and knowledge of the circumstances of their lives (see Marx & Engels, 1846/1970). For elaboration about how research into the organization of people’s activities can open up social relations as the subjects of social science investigation, see Dorothy Smith’s (1990) *Conceptual Practices of Power*.

**Discourse**

This is a “systematic way of knowing something that is grounded in expert knowledge and that circulates widely in society through language, including most importantly language vested in texts” (Mykhalovskiy, 2002, p. 39). Discourses are socially organized activities that circulate among people and through institutions. We all participate in discourse, and through our actions, discourses are brought into being. Looking at how people participate in discourse, how they talk about what they do, what texts they circulate, and what is reproduced in people’s labour, is of the utmost analytic interest in institutional and political activist ethnography.

Discourses “come to stand over [and] against [people], overpowering their lives” (D. Smith, 2005, p. 41). This point makes discourses important activities to investigate and understand. Consistent with philosopher Michel Foucault’s (1972, 1980, 1981; see also Rabinow, 2010) use of discourse, institutional and political activist ethnography centers on uncovering asymmetries
of social power within social practices of language, and on exposing the effects these have on people. Different from Foucault’s conception of discourse is the way that these companion ethnographies conceive of discourse originating in, and existing only because of, people’s participation in textually mediated social relations in particular ways and at particular times.

**Everyday**

This word is frequently and recurrently used in research using institutional and political activist ethnography as a rhetorical device to underscore analytic focus on the ongoing, meaningful effort that people engage in to carry out their lives. Language used to generate the same emphasis includes daily, day-to-day, quotidian, and “everyday/everynight worlds” (D. Smith, 2002, p. 42).

**Experience**

The starting place for research using institutional and political activist ethnography is within people’s everyday practices. The term *experience* is used to validate and provide grounding in people’s social experience and bodily being. Analytically, experience is used as a basis for providing clues about the coordination of people’s lives and the working of society. In this usage, and more importantly, experience is not understood as individual or as a form of truth. This is because knowledge from any standpoint is partial because people know the world from within their particular location in it. A successful institutional and political activist ethnography supersedes a single account of any one individual experience. Instead, the aim is to uncover details about how a person’s immediate and interactional world is connected with the world of other people living and working elsewhere. In this pair of approaches, people and their social experience are not *per se* the objects of research; “Experience is a door through which the ethnographer goes to explicate the institutional processes that shape [people’s] experience” (Deveau, 2008, p. 14).
**Expert Knower**

In institutional and political activist ethnography, people are conceived of as authorities on the events in their lives because “only the experiencer can speak of her or his experience” and, likewise, her or his working knowledge of what happens there (D. Smith, 2006, p. 224). Deploying this term or its conceptual synonym, *skilled practitioner*, also commonly used in research drawing from institutional and political activist ethnography, embodies the epistemological commitment to paying attention to people’s experiential ways of knowing the world they inhabit.

**Explicate**

This term signifies clarifying the functioning of something that is hard to reach and obscure. In institutional and political activist ethnography, explication involves producing analytic descriptions of how things are socially organized to occur. Through this process of explication, implicit features of social organization are brought into focus for investigation, and new and explicit forms of knowledge are generated. Exploration and explication of social relations is the goal of an institutional ethnography (see Campbell & Gregor, 2004, pp. 8 & 86).

**Ideology**

This is a form of knowledge that is uprooted and ungrounded from the social circumstances in which it is produced. This application “is not to be confused with its politically oriented English cognate. [I]t is simply an idea-system” (Bakhtin, 1975/1981, p. 429). Critique of people’s ideological practices is a key constituent in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels’s (1846/1970) analysis of social relations, and is also a key research practice in projects drawing from institutional and political activist ethnography.

**Institutions**
These are processes that stretch across time and place to coordinate people’s activities. They identify “complexes [emphasis added] embedded in the ruling relations that are organized around a distinctive function such as education or health care” (D. Smith, 2005, p. 225). Examples of other functions include immigration, incarceration, humanitarian work, and community organizing. In this application, institutions do not refer to a singular institutional place such as prisons, asylums, hospitals, or factories—as per the work of several generations of sociologists including Erving Goffman, Howard Becker, Herbert Gans, Robert Castel, and René Lourau—or research on these. “The institutional is to be discovered in motion” (D. Smith, 2005, 225).

**Local**

This term refers to the circumstances of the immediate and interactional settings where people live, work, and research. Analytic focus is on understanding how what occurs in our immediate and interactional environments is connected with and shaped by what happens elsewhere. In institutional and political activist ethnography, it is understood that there are empirically traceable connections between what happens here and what happens in extra- or trans-local places there. The connections between these are not necessarily obvious or apparent to us, which is why they are objects of critical social inquiry. Learning about and explicating these connections is the analytic aim of projects drawing from institutional and political activist ethnography.

**Problematic**

This is a methodological term that embodies and points to problems, tensions, and contradictions that arise in the relations between people and how society is organized. This term provides an organizing frame and gives direction to projects that start from within the activities and relevancies of standpoint informants. In this application, problematic is different from a research
problem as it is commonly understood in scientific research, and this is because it is only after
the researcher is immersed in the field, and has talked with people, that the problematic
necessary for investigation crystallizes. A problematic in this usage is grounded in social
experiences that people encounter as troubling or difficult. Here, a research problematic
“organizes inquiry into the social relations lying ‘in back of’ the everyday worlds in which
people’s experience is embedded” (D. Smith, 1981, p. 23).

**Ruling Relations or Regimes**

This methodological term describes and “demonstrate[s] the connections between the different
institutional relations organizing and regulating society” (Frampton et al., 2006, p. 37). Ruling
relations are types of social relations that are textually mediated through print, film, television,
the Internet, and the professions, among other sources. The state, professional bodies,
corporations, agencies, the academy, and science, for example, are involved in a web of relations
through which ruling is achieved. Ruling relations enable organization that “generates
specialized systems of concepts, theories, categories, [and] technical languages” that shape what
is known and said about the world (D. Smith, 1996, p. 47). Ruling relations operate by replacing
people’s social experience with textual accounts of experience, which obscures and transforms
what is known. Campbell and Manicom (1995) first employed the term *ruling relations* to move
to a language evoking and embodying human action and coordination. This innovation was
intended as a move beyond the related concepts of power and the state.

**Social**

Social is defined as people’s ongoing actions as these happen in coordination with the activities
of others in “across-time-and-place conversations” (D. Smith, 1996, p. 46). Social organization
and relations produce the social, and learning about and critically investigating the lineaments of
how these work is the focus of institutional and political activist ethnographic work.

**Social Organization**

This is a key organizing term in institutional and political activist ethnography. The interaction of social relations is central to social organization, which builds from the assumption that people’s lives are socially organized to happen as they do. The material and reflexive coordination of people’s actions, as observable and reproduced across time and place, constitutes the social organization of people’s experience.

**Social Relations**

The conceptual heart of institutional and political activist ethnography is social relations. Drawing from Marx, this term describes sequences of interdependent actions that shape people’s daily practices. The interplay of social relations constitutes social organization that connects people’s immediate worlds to places beyond. Social relations are simultaneously material—since they are people’s activities, and reflexive—since they are the social lineaments that articulate people’s practices to those of others. We “participate in . . . [social relations] without knowing what we are doing,” writes Dorothy Smith (2006, p. 3). This is because social relations are located in people’s interactional activities, which invite explication before they can be fully evident. Sociologist Liza McCoy (2006) explains the concept as follows: “You get out of bed, turn on the tap, make coffee, read the newspaper you collected from your front step—and you are participating in [social] relations (municipal water systems, international trade, the mass media)” (p. 111).

**Standpoint**

Standpoint is a social position from which most institutional and political activist ethnography work begins. It is informed by the bodily experience, relevancies, and problems of a designated
group of people. This particular stance explicitly informs the research design of projects drawing from these approaches. Such a starting place for inquiry establishes a subject position, and it also offers an alternative starting point to “the objectified subject of knowledge of social scientific discourse” (D. Smith, 2005, p.228).

**Texts and Textual Practice**

These are material artefacts that carry standardizing messages. Texts can include, but are not limited to, print, film, photographs, television, mass and electronic media, and radio. See Marjorie DeVault and Liza McCoy (2004), McCoy (1995), and Leanne Warren (2001) for examples of texts that have been used in institutional ethnography. Legislation, regulations, policies, and instructions are examples of texts that come into view in these approaches. Texts are integral parts of what people do, and in institutional and political activist ethnography, what people do with texts—their textual practice—is carefully studied. “Texts are like a central nervous system running through and coordinating different sites” (DeVault & McCoy, 2004, p. 765). In contemporary societies texts are replicated across time and place, and they appear in many places simultaneously. This connects people’s local setting with that of people outside their interactional world. It is the examination of this coordination that is analyzed because an assumption is that the circulation and reproduction of texts, and the standardizing messages they carry, are key organizers of how societies work to rule and regulate people’s lives (see Kinsman, 1995).

**Work**

In this context, *work* is used as a metaphor to direct attention to everyday practices in which people engage and that their labour produces. This includes formal participation in the labour market and activities that people do that they might not normally think of as work. Work in this
usage also includes people’s practical consciousness emerging from their efforts. In this sense of
the word, all that “people do that takes some effort and time, that they mean to do, that rely on
definite resources, and [that] is organized to coordinate in some way with the work of others”
comprises work (D. Smith, 2005, p. 46). This generous approach to understanding work emerges
from feminist domestic labour debates and the theoretical work leading up to the development of
wages for housework.

**Acronyms and Terms That Arose in Research**

**ARRA** American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, or Stimulus Act

**BTOP** Broadband Technology Opportunities Program

**City** City of Philadelphia’s Division of Technology, the Primary grant recipient in Philadelphia
for the Public Computer Center stream of funding within BTOP

**ICDL** International Computer Driving License- international body with standardized digital
literacy training with human capital focus

**MEO** MMP’s Media Educator Organizers (hired to design and delivery trainings for BTOP)

**MMP** Media Mobilizing Project

**NOFA** Notice of Funds Available

**NTIA** National Telecommunications and Information Administration (under the Department of
Commerce), which administered the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program

**OTI** Open Technology Institute- technology-focused think tank, part of New America
Foundation. OTI functioned as an intermediary between local organizing work and policy work
in Washington, D.C.. They were hired as the official evaluators for BTOP in Philadelphia.

**PCC** Public Computer Centers (one stream of funding under BTOP)
Primes the primary applicants and subsequently recipients of BTOP funds in Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia’s Division of Technology and Urban Affairs Coalition

SBA Sustainable Broadband Adoption (one stream of funding under BTOP)

Site Organizers MMP’s part time hires who staffed Public Computer Centers

UAC Urban Affairs Coalition, the Primary grant recipient in Philadelphia for the Sustainable Broadband Adoption stream of funding within BTOP

Organizing

This term is used to convey a form of social change work, which employs various methods that seek to recreate society and make society conscious of itself, in order to act collectively. At times, I use this in relation to MMP’s founding work, which combines political education, media production, and traditional organizing to form a new practice of organizing that’s relevant in the digital age.

Relational

I use this term to describe the character of the form of lateral accountability in this research, meaning the accountability that grows from direct, human interaction versus the impersonal and text-based accountability of institutional circuits.
CHAPTER TWO
A REVIEW OF ACADEMIC LITERATURE

This study was based on an institutional ethnography with the Media Mobilizing Project (MMP), at a moment when they received federal funding, as part of a larger Philadelphia-based partnership, to manage six public computer centers and offer digital literacy education for the city’s most vulnerable populations in 2010. The purpose of the research, as previously stated, is to explicate the social relations of broadband access and adoption through the public programs implemented by the Media Mobilizing Project (MMP), operating for the first time under federal regulations that orchestrated the practice of the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) trans-locally. I chose the conceptual framework and research method of institutional ethnography because I was interested in explicating the institutional regimes and ideological organization behind the construction of programs for teaching adults about new digital technologies as well the continuation of their original movement building agenda. As I embarked on this investigation, I was informed, in part, by discourses that I encountered in the field. According to Smith (2005), discourse in institutional ethnography is found out by considering language in its material written and spoken form. It is part of the dominant social organization of relations, actions, and consciousness, in which people are active participants. The following is an excerpt from MMP’s website:

Free and open to the public, MMP’s six computer centers (also known as ‘KEYSPOTs’) provide technology access and skills training for young people, families, workers and community leaders – both to meet daily needs and to share the stories that connect and cohere communities and galvanize civic engagement. Trainings include basic computer
skills, Internet literacy, job-readiness, college access and digital storytelling. (Media Mobilizing Project, n.d.)

This description of the purpose of the computer centers pointed to ways that MMP’s activities were coordinated across the six sites, influenced by dominant discourses surrounding broadband adoption, such as access, skilling, and engagement. These topics are often studied as problems in relation to the practice of management and administration of society (Smith, 1990), separated from the everyday relevances in people’s experience. This chapter takes the issues of skilling and engagement as a departure point from which to examine conceptual and empirical literature and ends with an argument for the significance of institutional ethnography as a contribution to the field of adult education. Here, I particularly discuss the process in relation to literature focused on program planning.

This chapter begins with a critical overview of human capital theory, including how the theory has been applied to education policy and draws some implications for adult education pedagogy. Then I turn to how adult education scholars have tried to understand the implications of government policies that center around human capital and lifelong learning on adult education programs. I conclude this section with how scholars have been examining information and communications technology (ICTs) as a new hope for developing human capital. Many of these accounts continue a problematic skills deficit argument and leave unexplored other potential uses of technology in society. From here I transition into a review of literature regarding ICTs and engagement in the public sphere, focusing on public municipal efforts as well as use of ICTs among radical civil society organizations. Finally, I discuss institutional ethnography as a contribution to adult education research, noting attempts within adult education to account for practices of power within the field, especially critical approaches to researching program
planning. I argue that institutional ethnography facilitates an alternative research strategy, which I outline in more detail in Chapter 3.

**Human Capital Theory**

Since adult education became systematized as a field, there has been an interest in the intersection of work and learning for adults (Mojab, 2009). This has not been without tension and competing perspectives. Several adult education scholars have marked a divide within the field regarding the insistence on working within the system of capitalism to reform the relationship between education and the economy (Baptiste, 2001; Mojab, 2009; Wilson, 2009), by focusing on the “instrumental provision of adult education with at best socially ameliorative goals” (Wilson, 2009, p. 406). These same scholars have offered various critiques of the market driven concern to (re)train, (up) and (re)skill adult learners to stay marketable for employers. Much of these conversations and debates have taken place in light of the discourses of human capital and lifelong learning. Human capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and other “productive capacities of human beings as income-producing agents in an economy” (Hornbeck & Salamon, 1991, p. 3). Literature concerning human capital is vast and theoretically and methodologically diverse. Here, I provide a brief history and overview of human capital theory and the critical discussions within adult education. Then I focus on research regarding how governments have taken up human capital theory in policy and this filters into administrative and managerial discourse. Finally, I consider the excitement surrounding ICTs in developing human capital in the U.S. and globally.

**Historical Overview of Human Capital Theory**

Baptiste (2001) seeks to develop the historical context surrounding the rise of human capital theory. Painting a broad landscape, Baptiste distinguishes between three different camps
of Western theorists who have theorized the relationship of human beings to their labor. The first, represented by philosophers and political economists, John Stuart Mill and later Alfred Marshall, is rooted in a commitment to human freedom and dignity that led to a belief in a necessary separation between acquired skills and human beings themselves. The second, represented primarily by the Chicago School, though roots of this view may be seen in the writings of Adam Smith, developed the formal theory of human capital, believing that human beings are themselves capital and can improve their opportunities and enhance their freedom by investing in themselves. Finally, Marx’s (1976; 1978; 1981) volumes of Capital elaborate the theory that the capacity to labor is not a form of capital until it is used in the process of production. Therefore, under the capitalist order, humans who do not own the means of production must sell their labor power in order to survive. These camps represent different belief systems regarding what constitutes human freedom and dignity.

The Chicago School of economics, also known for spreading the doctrine of neoliberalism (Caldwell, 2011), developed the formal theory of human capital. Theodore Schultz (1961) most publically advocated for a human investment approach to economics in 1960 during the Seventy-Third Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association. The essence of the theory begins with the individual in terms of a classification of acquired skills, knowledge, and abilities (Hornbeck & Salamon, 1991; Olssen, 2006) through direct investment in education, health, “earnings foregone by mature students attending school and by workers acquiring on-the-job training,” (Baptiste, 2001, p. 187), etc. Underlying this concept is the assumption that there is a causal effect of human capital on economic productivity. For instance, increasing people’s skills and capacities will increase economic production and more educated workers will be more productive than less educated workers. Differences in income among workers are due to
differences in individual investment in their human capital (Baptiste, 2001). “…[E]ach person is now an autonomous entrepreneur responsible ontologically for their own selves and their own progress and position” (Olssen, 2006). Both Baptise and Olssen point out the continuous thread that connects early forms of liberalism that began in the seventeenth century with neoliberalism that began in the twentieth century that idealizes a free market and views individuals as both “the object and target of governmental action and, on the other hand…the necessary (voluntary) partner or accomplice of government” (Olssen, 2006, p. 11). Each individual must willingly bear the cost of her own education and understand that she will be rewarded later with higher earnings. Today’s version of human capital theory emphasizes the private over public investment in education (Baptiste, 2001; Marginson, 1993).

**Critical Perspectives of Human Capital Theory**

A vocal group of adult education scholars have critiqued the influence of human capital theory, also discussed as lifelong learning policies and techno-rational approaches to adult education (Baptiste, 2001; Mojab, 2009; Jackson, 2011; Wilson, 2009; Kopecky, 2012; Olssen, 2006; Shied, 2006; Brine, 2011; Ayers, 2005; Cervero & Wilson, 2001). Three recurring and interrelated critiques waged by these scholars are of the radically individualizing nature of human capital theory, the optimistic belief in equality of opportunity to access education, and the emphasis on technology and technical skills as a mediating factor between human capital and productivity.

**Individualizing effects.** Many scholars have argued against the strong and often persuasive movement towards cultivating highly individualized learners within the adult education field who are expected to take individual responsibility to continually (re)train, or (up)skill for the workplace within globalized, knowledge economies" (Jackson, 2011, p. 3.).
Mojab (2009) references the “hegemonic claim that lack of skill causes unemployment” (p. 5), which shifts the burden to individuals to make themselves marketable for the employer in order to participate fully in society. Kopecky (2011) marks that neoliberalism places emphasis “not only on the economization of education, but it also considers education to be a mechanism for separating able students from less able ones” (p. 253). Ultimately, individuals’ prospects for acquiring employment is determined by the amount of capital that they hold. This may result from “1) inborn, physical and genetic dispositions, and 2) education, nutrition, training, and emotional health” (Olssen, 2006, p. 10). Finally, Baptiste compares the individuals described by human capital theory to lone wolves characterized as “selfish, avaricious”, seeking to “maximize their material happiness and bodily security…mere creatures who, operating solely on instincts and biological urges, can only react and adapt to their environs” (p. 196). This view correlates with political theorist, Wendy Brown’s (2015) insistence that human capital is distinctly unconcerned with cultivating democratic citizenship. Within adult education, the practice of human capital theory implies overly individualistic, adaptive, and apolitical pedagogical practices.

**Belief in opportunity and access.** Mojab (2009) criticizes human capital theory (and adult education proponents of the theory) for normalizing capitalism. “The diverse perspectives one finds in human capital theory all converge in their insistence on working within the system of capitalism to reform it” (p. 7). Therefore, concepts such as “access” to adult education, redefined as a training and skilling enterprise, “limit our understanding of the dynamics of exploitation within the capitalist social and economic formation” (p. 8). For instance, language that celebrates access ignores “racialized, gendered, national divisions of labour that enhance the exploitability of sectors of the vulnerable labour force” (p. 8). Based in this obscured point of
view, belief in the Market and the Individual flourishes. Kopecky (2012) and Baptiste (2002) critique the resulting utopian view that developing human capital is a means to securing a successful future. Additionally, Krul (2010) points out that “workers can have high skills and great knowledge of production processes they are involved in at their work, but low human capital, because they are not inclined to maximally use them to help their employer make more profits” (para. 3).

**Education as technical training.** An overview of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) documents shows a shift in their endorsement of human capital theory in the 1980s when they emphasized the importance of education as a tool to create flexible, adaptable workers (Baptiste, 2001; Marginson, 1993) in the context of rapidly changing technologies. Jackson (2011) notes that "(n)eoliberalism has led education to be understood as gaining technical training" (p. 6). Shied (2006) decries American adult educators for ignoring the problematic nature of the skills deficit argument. He joins other theorists who critique the complicity within adult education in perpetuating inequities and failing to address the very real crises American workers face.

A study that originated in the belief that education is vital to improving the conditions of workers within the globalized economy assessed the work of ten worker education programs from different parts of the world (Salt, Cervero & Herod, 2000). This study drew attention to a divide regarding the purpose of workers’ education, not unlike the split within adult education. “Workers’ education itself can be understood as having two distinct branches, belonging either to the technical-professional school or to the consciousness-raising/activist school” (p. 13). They found that many of the programs focused on adaptive pedagogies focusing on improving workers’ stock of human capital while others focused on developing worker solidarity and
understanding about global capitalism. Within this range of educational practices, the scholars found no consensus on approaches or content, and rather, disunity and deep ideological differences.

From the dominant neoliberal perspective, the utopian views of technology parallel the utopian views of education. Challenging the claim that technologies have transformed capitalist practices and relations, Mojab (2009) and Spring (1998) believe that contradictions within capitalism have been exacerbated and intensified, resulting in anti-democratic relations upheld by Western complicity in maintaining the global economy. Mojab (2009) and Baptiste (2001) write from a perspective that emphasizes the importance of returning to a political economy approach to understanding the current world order and the place of human capital within these workings. “Any adequate theory of work, learning and lifelong learning should give equal attention to the complex relations of production under capitalism” (Mojab, 2009, p. 9). Overall, the literature by the critical adult education scholars seeks to historicize human capital, noting how the theory has been applied to education policy and drawing some important implications for adult education pedagogy. Baptiste (2001), Mojab (2009), and Salt, Cervero, and Herod (2000) call for a need to devote further attention to learning associated with developing solidarity, cooperation, collective consciousness and resistance as well as those programs that are “exemplary in their alleviation of social inequality” (Baptiste, p. 199) to counter the many examples of apolitical, adaptive, and individualistic education. Finally, Spring (1998) significantly noted that human capital continues to provide politicians and educators a powerful discourse for garnering public support of education that meets the interests of business. Discourse and language within policy is the subject of the next section.
Human Capital and Lifelong Learning in Government Policy

Here I review a selection of literature that seeks to understand the implications of government policies regarding adult education. All of these scholars highlight a changed global climate, in which ideology has shifted notably towards conservative, neoliberal agendas since the 1980s. Wilson (2009a; 2009b) has sought to provide critical insight into the U.S. context regarding lifelong learning and adult education as a subject of policy. He notes that the study of US adult education policy is fragmented and underdeveloped and the policies themselves are bewildering because they have not been housed in any consistent department over time (2009a). In an overview of both the various US policies on adult education and the use of lifelong learning rhetoric, he emphasizes the shift of legislative action towards reducing the welfare state and instead subsidizing workforce training to promote competition and economic growth.

Despite these trends, he acknowledges the adult education scholars who have studied these policy shifts while continuing earlier concerns in the field of adult education with social purpose and social change (Guy, 2006; Demestrion, 2005; Quigley, 2007; Holtz, 2007; Wickens & Sandlin, 2007). However, “with their long term interest in the study of adults and their learning, most American adult educators have tended to not see the on-the-ground politics of actual adult education practice” (p. 413).

While the lifelong learning discourse has been heavily critiqued in the UK, Wilson (2009b) gives the term serious attention recognizing it as an “active constituent voice in America; [that] has reached a level of currency far exceeding any other term for the education and learning of adults” (p. 518). He defends this claim by stating that an electronic search of the US Department of Education surfaced 500 references and searching the primary research journal
in the U.S., the Adult Education Quarterly, revealed over 100 references, although nearly all from non-American contributors. He observes that the term is rarely the object of serious inquiry in the U.S. and that the question of lifelong learning has never risen to prominence here. A discursive analysis of lifelong learning shows that while rhetoric in the U.S. has remained remarkably consistent, the meaning of lifelong learning has changed dramatically. Wilson is sympathetic to Boshier’s (2005) analysis that:

lifelong learning has been captured by the neoliberal agenda of privatizing everything; lifelong learning is now a significant pillar of a regime of oppression in which governments are excused from their historically important social contracts as more and more policy and resources are allocated to the production of capital. (Wilson, 2009b, p. 519)

There are several studies regarding lifelong learning in the UK, mostly concerned with work-related training (Field, 2012). Brine’s (2011) textual analysis of policy documents in England between 2006 and 2010 corroborates Wilson’s argument. Her study focuses on poor adults who are given "opportunities" to participate in training and basic skills programs and her analysis details the emergent discourse in policy regarding this population. She finds that in the context of a rapidly diminishing welfare state, national state governments have developed a “surface discourse of opportunity and responsibility” (p. 125) alongside a discourse of human capital that emphasizes work-readiness. "Preparing oneself for work, the allure of paid employment, its association with inclusivity and morality, are the means of controlling the time and the activity” (p. 128) of poor adults receiving welfare benefits.
Finally, Ayer’s (2005) study traces neoliberal discourse from government officials to community college leaders and scholars. By examining the discursive manifestations of human capital theory and neoliberal ideology in a systematic sample of 144 community college mission statements, he shows how certain language practices represent the community college mission as an economic endeavor. This analysis revealed two main findings: language that reduced learners to an economic entity “whose only role in society is to remain competitive in a perpetually adjusting labor market” (unpaginated) and language that “escalates the market’s role in determining educational objectives” (unpaginated) of curriculum. An implication of this is the displacement of the community, the educator, or the learners themselves in determining curriculum. Ayers laments the fading ideal of the community college as an egalitarian project and insists that human potential must not be defined solely in terms of earnings and economic productivity. His concerns seem to be founded when reviewing a 2012 report, Let's get serious about our nation's human capital: A plan to reform the US workforce training system, by the Center for American Progress. Wilson (2009) notes the rising significance of “various kinds of ‘think tank’ organizations who study economic, political, educational, and other societal conditions in order to comment on and make recommendations for U.S. adult education initiatives” (p. 410). The report begins with stating how the United States has historically solved the challenges of workers with low levels of human capital by investing in postsecondary education, such as land grant institutions, the Pell Grant, and G.I. Bill. The authors of the report cite another think tank’s research, which declares that today the “adult workforce includes 80 million to 90 million full-time workers who lack sufficient skills, human capital, or personal interest to
pursue a bachelor’s degree” (p. 2). The report recommends a shift in emphasis to community colleges, vocational training, and registered apprenticeships as the sites for workforce training, which is posited as the solution to the Great Recession.

**Information and Communications Technologies**

Broadly speaking, a search for literature about information and communications technology (ICT) use and human capital/lifelong learning or ICTs and adult education results in a body of research that either takes assumptions about human capital as a given, (e.g. workers in a knowledge-based society are seen as capital assets) or seeks to question these models. In this context, ICTs are viewed primarily as a potential delivery platform and instructional tools for the development of human capital. Uncritical proponents of ICTs as a means to develop human capital, view technology as responsible for the creation of wealth through generating knowledge and information. Students should expect to increase their skills continually and organizations that wish to be successful in a knowledge society must constantly invest in education and workforce training and development in order to expand the knowledge base (Sawyer, 2004). Selwyn (2008) warns that this use of ICTs by institutions often leads to one-way hierarchical, “broadcast” models of communication. Furthering a critical perspective on how the promotion of ICTs for greater access to lifelong distance learning is impacting higher education, Levidow (2002) warns that universities are tasked with “package(ing) knowledge, deliver(ing) flexible education through ICT, provid(ing) adequate training for 'knowledge workers', and produc(ing) more of them at lower unit cost” (p. 230). On the other hand, new technologies lend themselves to the formation of horizontal networks. Jochems and Koper (2005) point out that e-learning has led to distributed networks of collaborating learners, teachers and institutions, with new implications for learning. “Lifelong learning in a network is quite different, because the student doesn’t
belong to one institute and the roles of persons are no longer fixed” (p. 2). Further, students can create and share learning content that is useful to others and not only consume it.

From a global perspective, the use of ICTs for youth and adult literacy and nonformal education is seen as important for national economic development. As discussed earlier, the U.S. is not exempt from this trend. As countries grapple with the emerging context that material development of countries is not solely dependent on natural resources, they are increasingly exploring how deployment of ICTs can play a role in human capital development (Olubamise, 2010; Sein & Harindranath, 2004). A two-year study in England and Wales consisted of a survey of 1101 adults, 100 follow-up interviews and year-long case studies of 25 families. The researchers, noting that “there has always been a considerable discrepancy between the rhetoric and the reality of the notion of an ICT-driven 'learning society’” (Selwyn, Gorard, & Furlong, 2006, p. x), sought to find out how adults are ICTs in their day-to-day lives. Among several findings, the study highlighted the mundane and sporadic nature of people's use of ICTs. Many adults expressed no interest in using ICTs for learning—despite acknowledging that there are now many potential opportunities to do so. The authors observe that this potential to view learning as a burden rather than an investment is disruptive to human capital theory. Finally, research sponsored by the International Literacy Institute and National Center on Adult Literacy at the University of Pennsylvania (2005), analyzed two approaches to using ICTs to support adult literacy and adult/basic education with a focus on developing countries. The first approach views ICTs as simply a delivery platform to help people acquire skills associated with traditional literacy. The second approach defines literacy as “a broader set of text and technological skills that include the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, communicate and use information to solve problems and create new knowledge” (p. 15). The authors argue for revamped notions of literacy
and calls for greater investment in adult education as well as infrastructure and access to technology to increase basic literacy and information skills crucial for economic and social development. Unlike the UK study, this research focuses on literacy for the poor, taking the stance that investing in human capital is the solution for development countries (p. 26). Tapia and Ortiz (forthcoming) point out that the assertion that access to the Internet “has the potential to alleviate some of the causes and symptoms of poverty and social exclusion” (p. 3) is also made in the U.S., especially in regard to urban and rural areas. However, as critical scholars warn, it is important to be vigilant about arguments that focus on poverty alleviation “by attempting to change the behavior of the poor while ignoring the social, political, and economic conditions that help to maintain poverty” (Baptiste, 2001, p. 197).

Proponents of the use of ICTs for distance learning and for developing human capital are in danger of perpetuating the skills deficit argument, leaving unexplored learners’ diverse range of existing skills and interests. Further, they leave entirely unexamined other potential uses of technology for learning in poor communities. In my research context, the original intentions for using technology were to increase collective action and learning for social, political, and economic change. The next section will explore the claims and research regarding technology and engagement in the public sphere.

**New Digital Technologies and Engagement in the Public Sphere**

In today’s world there are various competing arguments surrounding digital technologies circulating in every sector of society (Hanna, 2011). Some of these debates have focused on the impacts of digital technologies in the public sphere. Various social actors, including politicians and social movements make claims that there is a connection between digital access and engagement. Despite the technological determinism and optimism in these claims, much of the
empirical and conceptual scholarship emphasizes that technology is not neutral and the Internet is contested terrain (Garrett, 2006; Kellner, 2004; Proulx, 2009; Tapia & Ortiz, 2010; Waller, 2005). It is easy to see that engagement can be defined by different actors with different interests. Rhetoric and discourse that links digital inclusion and civic engagement rest on two concepts: digital divide and citizenship. How digital divide is defined is itself a political question motivating different stakeholders to selectively wield facts and information to shape debates, influence public support, and ultimately advance their agendas (Tapia, & Ortiz, 2010; Shaffer, 2007; Van Dijk & Hacker, 2003). Exploring the more radical perspectives of community based and social movement organizations, numerous case studies illustrate that new media technologies increase communicative action, activism, network building, and participatory democracy (Carty, 2010; Juris, 2005; Proux, 2009). However, there is also significant evidence regarding the ongoing effects of unequal access to the Internet; the necessity of digital literacies, financial and other organizational resources; and in many cases elite ownership of the infrastructure (Garrett, 2006; Irving & English, 2010; Stein, 2009; Strover, 2003; Tapia & Ortiz, 2010; Waller, 2005).

A strength but also a challenge of this literature is the diversity of disciplines and methodologies informing the topic as well as the various definitions of engagement, civic or otherwise. Though there is overlap of the themes and findings among the disciplines, by and large, existing research that examines how and why political actors use the Internet tends to focus on themes in communication, especially the processes that govern the exchange of information, self-expression, the symbols through which social movements communicate internally and externally, and consequent formation of new collective identities and organizational forms. This leaves some topics unexplored. For instance, there are conflicting accounts of whether new technologies create sustained social movement activity, and what is the
nature of and purpose of this sustained activity. I believe that research grounded in adult education can address a misperception fueled by some accounts of protest that seem to suggest that ICTs and, more recently, social media are the primary drivers of collective mobilization.

This next section of the literature review will focus on rhetoric and discourse linking digital access and engagement, considering the underlying assumptions within recent municipal initiatives for digital inclusion, that were perhaps motivated by the capabilities of the technology that facilitated a low entry barrier to the market, as well as the shifting of power from the federal to municipal and state levels of administration.

**Rhetoric Surrounding Digital Access and Civic Engagement and Participation**

The argument that new technologies can increase engagement and participation in civic life is in part born out of desperation for solutions to democratic crises (Tapia & Ortiz, 2010). Tapia and Ortiz (2010) refer to a crisis in American civic engagement, marked by declining social cohesion within local communities and connection between groups and diminished civic attachment of younger people (Galston, 2004). Within this context, local communication, and computer networks in particular, is seen as a way to bring back social cohesion and identity (Strover, Chapman, & Waters, 2004). A kind of technological or broadband optimism has arisen as a positive form of technological determinism, “forging a link between civic engagement and communication technologies” (Tapia & Ortiz, 2010, p. 96). This technological optimism consists of the belief in the transformative power of internet access for individuals and, in community settings, the “uncritical equation of community technology with local power and local autonomy, with improved democracy” (Strover, et al., 2004, p. 466). Communities without access are said to be on the wrong side of the digital divide.
Conceptions of Digital Divide

That ubiquitous broadband access can help shrink the digital divide is a frequent argument made by public officials in promoting municipal initiatives for digital inclusion (Shaffer, 2007; Strover et al., 2004; Ortiz & Tapia, 2008). Definitions of digital divide are shaped by concepts of access and based on research that reveals great complexity and a number of interpretations. Conflicting conclusions may be drawn from empirical research that shows that there are actually multiple observable divides, some widening and some closing (Van Dijk & Hacker, 2003). Conservative arguments surrounding digital divide characteristically deny that it exists. The motivation behind this position is the prevention of government interference (p. 12) and is argued using rhetoric about ‘big, bad government’. Left-wing political forces, social-democrats, progressive NGO’s, etc. tend to take up positions that declare access to information and communication as a human right. They argue that the persistence and growth of the digital divide is accompanied by overall rising inequality on a world-scale (Van Dijk & Hacker, 2003). A different faction of the left views digital divide discourse as a ploy by for-profit stakeholders to provide affordable hardware and later expensive content and services. Van Dijk and Hacker (2003) address this by acknowledging some truth in these claims, “however, this position underestimates the import and complexity of changes taking place” (p. 12) and dismisses the real benefit of free internet access as a public service.

Traces of these conflicting views can be seen in Shaffer’s (2007) textual analysis of official documents from three municipalities and parallel studies conducted by the private telecom industry arguing for and against proposed municipal wireless initiatives. Contradictions found in the documents of these two primary stakeholders reveal how easily “‘facts’ can be manipulated to ‘prove’ even clashing arguments” (Shaffer, 2007, p. 214). Municipalities
employed positive language and optimistic interpretations to stress the economic and social benefits of internet access and the ability of wireless technologies to close the digital divide, whereas telecom representatives emphasized financial risks, network security weaknesses, and generally “cast doubt on the public good aspects of such an investment” by exploiting the common perception that government is to be distrusted. Private industry used worst-case scenarios and pessimistic interpretations of data to make their arguments “without revealing their financially motivated concern that muni-wifi will cut into their market shares” (p. 210).

**Rhetoric Surrounding New Technologies Within Municipalities**

Ortiz and Tapia (2008) were part of a research team that collected texts from 357 cities that represent “snapshots in time and space of rhetorical and public speech” (p. 262). All of the cities stated economic development as the main reason for deploying a municipal wireless network and 166 cities also addressed the digital divide. Discourse analysis revealed that the municipalities used simplistic, deterministic language, which the researchers strongly reject, “clearly stating that technologies are not the central causal factor of social change” (p. 267). Four of the recurring claims made in these cities “point to a direct connection between wireless Internet access and the closing of the digital divide” (p. 267).

I will briefly describe the four themes the research team uncovered, as I believe these reveal the varied hopes of what broadband connectivity can achieve. The first of the themes was that: *ubiquitous connectivity creates an identity and revitalizes the community*. The researchers note that this was the most tenuous of the arguments, drawing connections between stable, low-cost internet access, economic stimulation and the lessening of poverty (p. 264). The second theme was: *internet access seen as a utility—the city's responsibility toward citizens*. Several other scholars also note the prevalence of such public utility rhetoric (Shaffer, 2007; Van Dijk &
The third theme was that ubiquitous wireless broadband will increase accessibility and usage. This argument identifies the cause for people not using the internet as lack of access. Finally, the most prevalent theme was that providing low-cost access to low-income areas translates into increased social benefits. This claim rests on the assumption that by providing access, cities will create economic, educational, and social opportunities (p. 266). Other research has uncovered the logic that “computer and Internet training can translate into improved job opportunities” (Strover et. al., 2004, p. 467). Certainly this discourse is present within my research and can especially be seen in human capital influenced language of “job-readiness.” The Broadband Technology Opportunities Program is an initiative under the 2009 economic stimulus bill.

**Discourse Surrounding New Technologies and Civil Society**

In recent years, the attention of some adult educators has shifted towards the development of civil society (Holst, 2002), which emphasizes inclusive local participation and engagement as a response to democratic crises. Carpenter and Mojab (2011) argue that the historical role of adult education “in organizing to expand formal citizenship has been transformed in recent years as the popularity of the development of civil society” (p. 65). New technologies within civil society tend to be celebrated for the impressive increase in collaboration and coordination across distance, giving rise to bottom-up and distributed forms of civic participation, sustained public campaigns against corporations and world development agencies, and innovative public accountability systems for corporate and governmental conduct (Bennett, 2003; Dahlberg, 2011; Dennis, 2007; Garrett, 2006; Loader, 2008; Stoecker, 2002). These articulations of the role of technology are part of the radical pluralist discourse in adult education, which places hope in the revitalization and democratization of global civil society (Carpenter, 2011; Holst, 2002). Some
caution that although increased networking of civil society organizations is undeniable, the contribution of digital technologies to the operations of social control agencies such as the military, governments, and corporations is much greater (Garrett, 2006; Kidd, 2001).

From an adult education perspective the “‘citizen’ is both the agent of democratic change and the entrepreneurial individual seeking to develop her- or himself” with various skills, knowledge, social and personal attributes (Carpenter and Mojab, 2011, p. 65). We have looked at discourse and rhetoric from the perspective of municipalities making claims about the outcomes of digital access for citizens. There are numerous claims and hopes about the social and economic benefits that newer technologies may make possible for citizens. Another version of technological determinism (or utopianism) can be seen in the assumptions that the internet is increasing flow of information and communication, and subsequently, citizens with increased levels of information and connectivity are more likely to participate in organizations, service, voting, political and community deliberations, etc. (Polat, 2005). As we will see in the next section, studies regarding whether digital technologies are increasing engagement and participation show conflicting findings.

**Digital Access and Civic Engagement within Public Initiatives**

Many scholars agree that access to an internet network connection alone does not solve issues of digital divide or other inequalities (Van Dijk & Hacker, 2003; Tapia & Ortiz, 2010). Access may be defined and judged in a variety of ways including regularity of access and use of computers and digital technology, actual ownership of technology infrastructure, or new necessary literacies allowing people to make use of the available technologies as well as distinguish between accurate information and fabrication on the Internet (Kellner, 2004; Garrett, 2006; Loader, 2008; Diani, 1999). Tapia and Ortiz’s (2010) article focused on the qualitative
data from four municipalities that were part of a larger mixed methods study of municipal initiatives to provide technological infrastructure for wireless Internet. They found that in each of these cases where the municipalities “framed their broadband project as a solution to the problem of civic engagement and public participation” (p. 108), this led to failure. In addition to the technological determinism embedded in the city rhetoric, the researchers suggested that

[t]echnological solutions…may be seen as far easier and simpler to implement than improving the educational system, redistributing wealth, restructuring the health care system, and changing the economic system underlying society, which may be the actual solutions to poverty, civic engagement, and a loss of social cohesion. (p. 109)

Finally, they suggested that the multifaceted nature of community engagement programs are often overlooked and broadband access in poor neighborhoods without additional education, training, and resources can be detrimental. In the face of failed expectations, citizens may pull away more from civic participation and community technology.

Another study reported on a state-crafted effort to support thirty-six public access technology centers, extending reach to members of underserved populations in Texas, over a two-year period (Strover et al., 2004). The researchers noted the diversity of the institutions, ideological premises, and state commitments of the institutions involved in this study. The study did not intend to evaluate the success of these centers given the short period of time that they had to become functioning centers. Instead, the experiences of the 36 communities raised provocative questions about the diverse ways that communities defined public space and the ‘success’ of public access. They noted the replication of the existing power structure through these centers, in that many of the sites were placed in institutions that were easy to implement the programs:
schools and libraries that already have computers and internet connections. Sites that may have served poor and minority populations better were not used. They also noted that when local participation in the project organization and implementation was low, use of the facilities suffered; whereas when the opposite was true and plans were implemented as a result of community discussion, outreach and service for the community was more substantial (p. 483). The researchers recommended expanding the notion of ‘public’ and involving social service agencies and possibly for-profit businesses as future sites, much like what was implemented in Philadelphia under BTOP. Most importantly, they stressed that “building community is a necessary precursor to building a successful community network” (Strover et al., 2004, p. 482) based on technology. Significantly, both studies speak to the problems associated with framing the Internet as the solution to social problems versus attempting to find deeper system solutions.

Digital Access and Engagement Within Civil Society Organizations

Numerous case studies focusing on civil society organizations reveal mixed findings about whether use of ICTs by social movements are increasing or decreasing engagement, revealing the complexity within and across different contexts. Findings within Porta and Mosca’s (2005) quantitative study of anti-globalization activists show that the more a person is connected to the Internet, “the more s/he uses all the participatory possibilities offered by CMC [computer mediated communication]” (Porta & Mosca, 2005, p. 177). These include a range of engagement from accessing information related to protests, participating in online petitions, expressing opinion, to participating in online netstrikes. Further, Juris (2005), who participated in transnational anti-globalization movement settings over a three-year period, observed that digital networks provide the technological infrastructure allowing communities to sustain interactions across vast distances. In a South African social movement setting, ICTs are enabling access and
influence through communicating with elites and professional groups by developing local and international networks (Loudon, 2010).

Two strikingly similar studies analyze websites of two civil society organizations, aiming to understand the contribution of the Internet to movement building. One explores the online influence on recruitment, identity and action in white supremacist culture and discourse (Adams, 2005) and the other analyzes the role of the Internet in establishing collective identity, mobilization, and network formation in the anti-globalization protests (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002). They both discuss the specific strategies of interpretive framing in their respective activations, and argue that what is being communicated and how it is framed is critical to the building of solidarity and mobilizing against and/or for collectively shared problems and values. What rises in importance with these findings is the significance of the organizational ideology to define and redefine cultural symbols and themes. Addressing a slightly different question, Earl and Kimport (2011) sought to answer whether Internet-enabled social change activity is qualitatively different from traditional forms of activism. The focus of their research was on websites that use a variety of e-tactics, “such as online petitions, letter-writing campaigns, email campaigns, and boycotts” (p. 14) and they randomly sampled from the list they generated, allowing them to generalize their findings. Their primary argument based on their findings is that the more the affordances of the Internet, particularly cost-reducing and co-presence capabilities, are leveraged, “the more transformative the changes are to organizing and participation processes” (p. 13), leading to a need for new theory about the dynamics of contention.

**Discussion: What Kind of Engagement?**

“The Internet brings new opportunities for everyone” (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002, p. 487). However, it is also contested territory and embedded with ideology and power relations.
This is seen in conceptual and empirical literature examining ICT use in the public sphere. In considering scholarly literature, it is important to understand the assumptions of the authors, movement organizations, and individual movement actors. The distinctions among organizations are important. Transnational movements versus non-profit organizations’ ideological orientations matter in sensitizing those interested in social change to the range of democratic possibilities in digital democracy rhetoric and practice (Dahlberg, 2011; Diani, 1999; Stein, 2009). The optimistic pairing of the “fluid, non-hierarchical structure of the Internet and that of the international protest coalition” (Van Aelst, & Walgrave, 2002) may also be seen as weak ideological definition and lack of decision making coherence (Bennett, 2003) in global social justice activity. These must be unpacked to understand more fully the implications for practice and implementation of different visions.

**Institutional Ethnography as a Contribution to Research in Adult Education**

As referenced earlier, many adult educators approach education as a vehicle for social change. However, adult education “is practiced in a highly charged political context, among a nexus of interconnected and interdependent social processes such as federal and state legislation, program funding and planning, literacy work, and employment training” (Wright & Rocco, 2007, p. 1). There has been much discussion in adult education about the political and social dimensions of program planning for adult education activities. And there are scholars who have called for an analysis of adult education that merges the “microsocial context of the learner with the macro social and cultural dimensions that influence learning, teaching, and work” (Wright, 2003, p. 244). I argue, in this section, for an institutional ethnographic approach to research, which combines two modalities of research, “from the ‘life world’ to ‘the system’” (Smith, 2005, p. 35). But first, I discuss the theoretical elements of a socio-political model of program planning
within adult education that attempts to account for both individual and contextual factors in order to identify more accurately how power in negotiated in the work of program planners.

Scholars categorize the frameworks of program planning for adult education in various ways. Technical rational frameworks entail idealized, linear, progressive models (Sork & Caffarella, 1989; Sork, 2010) that privilege skill-acquisition, technique, instruction, and quantitative evaluation. Radical approaches to program planning contribute key ideas and principles that may be considered and sometimes incorporated into the methods of practice (Caffarella & Daffron, 2011). Concepts within radical approaches to planning might include: “power, conflict, negotiation, democratic ideals, cooperative and participatory planning, and social learning” (p. 79). Cervero and Wilson (1994a; 1994b; 1996; 2006) are most notable for fusing technical rational approaches with critical analysis of the political and social realities in everyday processes. Departing from the strictly techno-rational models, they asserted that program planners can exercise their agency only when they understand the social and political context in which their programs exist. In this next section, I briefly describe the evolution of their model.

**Evolution of Cervero and Wilson’s Socio-Political Model of Program Planning**

Cervero and Wilson’s scholarship is strongly influenced by urban planning theorist John Forester (1987, 1989, 1993) who emphasized that “planners routinely work to assess future choices, to think practically about who we shall become” (1989, p. xi). Building on his work, Cervero and Wilson’s (1994) framework centered around the ethical importance of representing interests that may not be present at the planning table and the practical importance of learning the skills of negotiation and leveraging/brokering power when necessary (1994a). Power in planning contexts is defined as the “capacity to act distributed to individual planners by virtue of the
organizational and social positions which they occupy” (Cervero & Wilson, 1994a, p. 254). Interests are defined as the complex predispositions, motivations and purposes leading people to act. Therefore, those involved in “planning a program exercise their power in accordance with their own concrete interests” (p. 255). They also note that planners’ exercise of power is always contingent; negotiation is always involved among stakeholders and outcomes may not be predetermined. The stakeholders that Cervero and Wilson consider to always matter when planning educational programs include “learners, teachers, planners, institutional leadership, and the affected public” (1994a, p. 260).

Over time, Cervero and Wilson have openly reflected on their scholarship and practice and revised their thinking, especially in their attempts to theorize about the workings of power and clarify what they mean for program planners to ‘act responsibly’ in our precariously democratic society. Wilson and Nesbit (2005) have together examined different interpretations of what power is and how it works. They acknowledged that there is a need for a better explanatory analysis of mechanisms of power and not simply descriptions of the consequences of power in operation: “theorists can identify the workings of power in their practice but struggle with theorizing concretely about those workings” (unpaginated). Ideas of responsibility were clarified again in Working the Planning Table (2006) to mean ‘ethical commitment to democratic principles’; again calling attention to the gap between those who benefit and those who should benefit from the educational program. And later, they discussed their belief in ‘participatory decision-making’ (2011) as a concrete expression of this commitment to democratic principles.

Ten case studies in adult education contexts that were influenced, at least in part, by Cervero and Wilson’s scholarship varied in scope and focus, but all explored context, negotiation, power, and planner agency. This research emphasized that the process of planning,
and particularly the activity of ‘negotiation,’ is inherently about both individual and contextual factors. “[W]e cannot understand the acting subject, the planner, separate from the social circumstances because action takes place in the interaction between the two rather than in their separation” (Cervero & Wilson, 1994a, p. 253). Examination of discrete individual factors may deal with the planners’ skills and experiences but also delve more into the significance of subjective terrain. Context may be explored as situations within institutions, but also as broader and longer social and historical contexts beyond the bounds of the specific institution. These studies may be grouped into three broad categories based on individual and contextual factors.

Hendricks (2001) and Mabry and Wilson (2000) explored the relationship between individual and contextual factors that contributed to choosing tactics to influence planning situations. Their studies supported Cervero and Wilson’s argument that a theory of context was necessary in order to develop an integrated understanding of planners and their settings. Watkins and Tisdell’s (2006), Sandmann, et. al.’s (2009), and Bracken’s (2010) studies revealed the significance of individual subjectivities and relational factors in planning contexts. How planners saw themselves and how they put relational skills and intentions into practice were revealed to be important to their professional identities and the broader context. Finally, Maruatona and Cervero’s (2004), Umble, Cervero, and Langone’s (2001), and Sandlin and Cervero’s (2003) studies each examined how programs and program planners reproduced or resisted dominant power relations.

**Contribution of Institutional Ethnography to Examining Power in Adult Education**

To embark on institutional ethnography is to map and explore power by discovering how one’s knowing is organized, by what social forces and relations, of which we may not be conscious. An implication of centering on negotiation as the primary activity of planners is that...
Cervero and Wilson’s model of program planning constrains research to the realm of planners’ activity that they undertake consciously. For example, Sandlin and Cervero’s (2003) study explored how ideologies about work and education were enacted and negotiated in educational programs for welfare recipients. Similar to the other studies emphasizing historical and social context, the authors described the historical development of power influencing the political climate within the US, in which welfare has been cut back and workplace training and adult literacy education has become mandatory. In the U.S. context, “education for unemployed people has been used for social control… to reproduce social inequality based on class, race, and gender, and …[has been assumed to be] a panacea to employment problems” (p. 250). Rooted in critical sociology of education, this study used qualitative content analysis to examine closely conversations within classrooms where teachers were revealed to negotiate various ideologies about work and welfare, but often upheld them, especially in terms of viewing their students’ economic struggles as personal deficits.

Unfortunately, because analysis within this study focused on the micro level of negotiations taking place in the classroom, it lost sight of how to articulate and explicate the institutional influences and structures. The discourses operating in the classroom could have been linked more explicitly to the state-sponsored programs that mandated these courses. While concluding that critical agency is shaped and constrained by larger structures, the authors focus on how the instructors, despite moments of resistance to dominant discourses, “defaulted to the programmes’ official viewpoints and had the power to silence contradictory voices” (p. 263). They state that it will take “great effort” to push beyond dominant myths about class in America, thus falling into the same trap of placing responsibility on individuals that the study is trying to critique. This study was inconsistent in its analysis and limited in what it was able to reveal about
the mechanisms of how things come to be, in part because the social relations perpetuated by the institutions were not in focus.

A valuable contribution that institutional ethnography could make to the study of program planning is to show how planners, educators, and learners participate, both consciously and unconsciously, in enacting social relations that are mediated by institutions. Data collection within institutional ethnography would explore, more generally, the planner’s world of activities, in order to reveal how things actually work and come to be as they are, and to raise to consciousness the sometimes unintentional consequences of the work people engage in.

Institutions play a ubiquitous, often hidden role in mediating and coordinating everyday life across space and time. These processes hinder or enhance the democratic potential of the programs we plan. An institutional ethnographic approach to inquiry may address Wilson and Nesbit’s (2005) call for better explication of the mechanisms of power and may also serve as a component of the analytical project that is so important to radical approaches. Institutional ethnography certainly has overlapping concerns with Cervero and Wilson and specifically provides insight into 1) the social organization of knowledge, 2) the practices of ideology, 3) text-mediated processes, 4) extra-local coordination and concerting of action, and 5) the historical evolution of program processes.

For the purposes of strengthening this argument, I will take a closer look here at one institutional ethnography that focused on a government-mandated program review, undertaken every five years, of three Canadian community college programs for the training of staff and medical office assistants. During this time, competency-based curriculum measures were introduced and touted as “a means to make educational goals more explicit, instructional methods more effective, and educational institutions more accountable” (Jackson, 1995, p. 164).
I chose this study, in particular, because the intent and substance of the research is a critique of dominant techno-rational processes of program planning, but from a perspective not yet seen in the empirical studies or conceptual literature reviewed above.

There are three ways that this story could have been told, the first two being similar to insights revealed through studies focusing on negotiation of power and interests. These include an analytical version that could have focused on how decision-making power over curriculum shifted from the teachers to the administration; and at a broader policy level, a version that could have shown how program priorities became more accountable to public policy goals that served the needs of industry rather than individual learners. But the contribution of this study, and the IE approach to inquiry, was an analysis concerned with the social organization of knowledge, “directed to somewhat more technical questions about the actual mechanisms through which such sweeping changes are effected in an institutional environment” (p. 165). These seemingly local, technical questions were located within a broader historical framework of the reorganization of social relations of capital, where a transformation of institutional governance has been occurring across all sectors.

What came into focus in this study was an analysis of texts, not in a discursive sense, but rather the use and discussion about the texts, through “everyday working language” (p. 168). Much of the study looked at various documentary processes introduced through competency-based curriculum reform, especially the “task analysis”, a document familiar to instructional designers, that strives to make an “objective” statement of needs and requirements. This study uncovered layers of nearly invisible transformations through the centrality of this task analysis, how the documents became a “stand-in” for workplace reality, authority over the curriculum process was invested within the documents, and the documents became actors. “[T]he task
analysis ‘will get things done’” (p. 171). Even as the instructors were invited into the curriculum revision process, their own knowledge and skills are displaced through decision-making mandated through documents, removing the decision makers from view and coordinating instructors’ participation in the circumscribing of their own area of expertise. The importance of such a study is in exposing the contradictions that we live with everyday unknowingly, and in explicating the mechanisms through which it happens.

I believe that Cervero and Wilson, and Smith share a common belief that the world is social and the only way we can be in the everyday world is as social beings (Cervero & Wilson, 2001; Smith, 1987; 2005). Institutional ethnography recognizes that people’s motivations and intentions are often superceded by intangible institutional processes. I believe the application of an institutional ethnographic approach to the study of adult education will advance our knowledge of what actually happens and how ideology is enacted within educational programs. Adult educators who are serious about educating for social change will benefit from this inquiry. The next chapter outlines institutional ethnography more closely as an alternative research framework and method.
CHAPTER THREE

INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHOD

The purpose of this research is to explicate the social relations of broadband access and adoption through the public programs implemented by the Media Mobilizing Project (MMP), operating for the first time under federal regulations that orchestrated the practice of the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) trans-locally. The Media Mobilizing Project pursues the radical agenda of transforming social conditions by making society conscious of itself (Carpenter & Mojab, 2011; Horton & Freire, 1990). Yet it is part of that society. Frontline workers in MMP knowingly take up contradictory positions through funded work and various alliances, and they actively self-reflect and study in order to better understand the results and consequences of their actions.

I chose institutional ethnography as an approach that can serve to reveal how people’s activities are coordinated and how ideological frameworks are enacted and resisted in organizational settings, beyond the boundaries of consciousness. The concept of a standpoint or a location that anchors the research is where institutional ethnographies begin (Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Smith, 2006). The researcher chooses an “anchor group” whose perspectives and experiences provide the starting place from which to explore the larger institutional context. However, “the research is not confined to the everyday lives of the anchor group at this point of entry. Rather the institutional ethnographer traces how those lives are organized through the social relations of their contexts” (p. 4). In this research, I chose the Media Mobilizing Project as my anchor group, especially the frontline paid staff who were institutionally authorized in various ways to carry out work during the years of securing and implementing the funds made available by the federal Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP).
This chapter begins with discussing the theoretical underpinnings of institutional ethnography, including how its founder, Dorothy Smith (1990, 2005) arrived at its ontology and epistemology. I continue with an overview of two related theoretical components which guide data collection and analysis: textually mediated social relations, or ruling relations, and discourse in institutional ethnography. Both of these concepts involve the examination of language through a materialist approach. I begin the second half of the chapter with reflections on my position and orientation as the researcher. Finally, I describe the research process, including how I proceeded with data collection, the research participants and locations, data analysis, and dependability strategies.

**Institutional Ethnography: Theoretical Underpinnings**

Institutional ethnography, from now on referred to as IE, has roots in the women’s movement, Marx, ethnomethodology, and phenomenology (Grahame & Grahame, 2007). It is a publicly engaged method of inquiry that grew out of Dorothy Smith’s (1987, 1991, 1999, 2006, 2006) lifelong intellectual work to understand and theorize about forms of knowledge. There are two primary aims of institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005). One is to produce accessible accounts of the institutional complexes in which we take part, in order to extend our ordinary knowledge of our everyday lives. Investigating what constitutes the social, how things work and come to be as they are, must produce knowledge about the workings of society that makes sense and can be used practically. It is important to note that the use of the term “institution” does not refer to particular organizations. Rather, institution is meant to direct “the researcher’s attention to coordinated and intersecting work processes taking place in multiple sites” (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p. 17). The second aim is to reveal the mechanisms of power operating through institutional complexes, also known as ruling relations. Ruling relations are objectified forms of
consciousness and organization that generate “specialized systems of concepts, theories, categories, technical language” (Smith, 1996, p. 47) that shape how we understand the world. They may also be understood as textually-mediated social relations, which the institutional ethnographer looks for in the “sequences of interdependent actions that shape people’s daily practices. The interplay of social relations constitutes social organization that connects people’s immediate worlds to places beyond” (Bisaillon, 2012, p. 619).

**Ontology and Epistemology of Institutional Ethnography**

Institutional ethnography posits itself as an alternative sociology, one that critiques the notion that inquiry must begin in theory or academic discourse. This does not mean that IE proceeds without theory—there are several theoretical influences, a few of which I mentioned above. Pursuing an institutional ethnography commits the researcher to an explicit ontological position that rejects abstract and speculative ways of knowing, thus “transferring agency away from concepts... back to the embodied knower” (DeVault, 2008, p. 5). This facilitates a distinct, materialist method of seeing, listening, and knowing the social and political worlds. Smith’s critique of mainstream sociology is of the practice that imposes a separation between the knowledgeable researcher and ordinary people’s everyday experience, and an abstract framework in research that “determines how the actual will be attended to, dominating and constraining selection and interpretation” (Smith, 2005, p. 50). Instead, she argues that social inquiry should always begin with individuals and their actual experiences. Here, she borrows from Marx and Engels’ (1998) ontology that they put forward in *The German Ideology*. A critique of the belief that ideas are the driver of historical change versus material conditions, they argued that social reality exists through the cooperative social activity of individuals (Marx & Engels, 1998). From the philosophical underpinnings laid out in this volume, Smith (1991, 1999,
2005) extracts a method for social science research that illuminates how ideology must be examined not only as content, but also as a set of practices.

A theory of how we come to know reality—through ideas, categories, academic explanations—must also arise from the material world and human social relations. Influenced by her involvement in the women’s movement in the 1970s, Smith’s (1987, 1990) realization that women were not adequately represented by the forms of knowledge claiming to speak about them led her to discover that creating abstract categories without a firm material base led to spurious theory. Another scholar of institutional ethnography, explains Smith’s original intentions and the goals of research using this approach.

She wanted a way to do research that would not objectify people and their activities, subsuming them as instances of theoretical categories. Instead of studying designated social groups in order to explain their behavior, their culture, or their meanings, research would investigate the social forms of knowledge, coordination, and control that shape our and others’ lives and in which we participate; such research would extend rather than replace our everyday knowledge of the world. (McCoy, 2008, p. 702)

This is what Smith means by establishing a sociology that is for people rather than about people. She shares with many other qualitative scholars a critique of research influenced by positivism that seeks to situate the researcher outside the world, producing objectified accounts that erase people’s subjectivities and actual speech about their own lives (Smith, 1999). From a positivist view, special interests or perspectives within these accounts are commonly understood as ideology, or distorted ideas, running counter to valid, objective knowledge. In arguing that social
inquiry must begin with individuals, in the ways that they know and experience their everyday worlds, she states:

Knowing is always a relation between knower and known. The knower cannot be collapsed into the known, cannot be eliminated, the knower’s presence is always presupposed. To know is always to know on some terms, and the paradox of knowing is that we discover in its object the lineaments of what we know already. There is no other way to know than humanly, from our historical and cultural situation. (Smith 1990, p. 33)

Smith finds in Marx an understanding of ideology as a method of reasoning about society that prioritizes concepts, and which fails to discover the social relations that arise from and organize activities and express them conceptually. In what follows, I consider Smith’s (2005) innovation of the term ruling relations, as it was meant to be in conversation with the Marxist use of social relations. This is followed by an overview of the distinct materialist approach to discourse and language that allows the researcher to investigate social/ruling relations.

**Textually Mediated Social Relations, or Ruling Relations**

As stated above, institutional ethnography aims to reveal textually mediated social relations, also known as ruling relations. Bisaillon (2012) provides this straightforward definition of social relations: “Drawing from Marx, this term describes sequences of interdependent actions that shape people’s daily practices. The interplay of social relations constitutes social organization that connects people’s immediate worlds to places beyond” (p. 619). Social relations can be discovered in various everyday activities, in many different processes, local and international, which are hidden from view, though we participate in enacting them. “Social relations are not done to people, nor do they just happen to people. Rather, people actively
constitute social relations...as they act competently and knowledgeably to concert and coordinate their own actions with professional standards or family expectations of organizational rules” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 31). It is the invisibility of social relations, which keeps people locked in unconscious patterns of behavior that are actually against their own interests and intentions. The significance of articulating a particular form of social relations through the term, ruling relations, is to highlight those relations that are part of governance and administration in society.

Ruling relations are defined as “forms of consciousness and organization that are objectified in the sense that they are constituted externally to particular people and places” (Smith, 2005, p. 13), as in institutional texts. The definition of consciousness is taken from Marx, as concepts, beliefs, ideas, knowledge, etc. (1999). In The German Ideology, Marx theorized consciousness as residing in individuals. Smith moves beyond this conceptualization to say:

The concept of ruling relations identifies an historical development of forms of social consciousness that can no longer be adequately conceived of as arising in the life conditions of individuals. It directs investigation to a complex of objectified relations, coordinating the activities of many, many people whose consciousness as subjects is formed within those relations. (Smith, 1999, p. 78)

Institutional ethnography can help to reveal ruling relations (how power is organized and exercised, almost always through textually-mediated administrative and governing processes) through investigation of everyday practices and consciousness, as both are concerted and coordinated through objectified relations, mediated by texts and increasingly digital technologies.
Smith (1990, 2005) coined the term ruling relations based on an historical exploration of changes in the governance of society, especially tied to the invention of the printing press in the latter half of the nineteenth century. She argues that replicable text is central in a distinct mode of organizing society through regimes of written rules and administrative practices, combined with systems of data collection, and new objective accountability systems, enabling performance to be evaluated. Smith departs from Marx in order to discover the mechanism through which human relations are coordinated across time and space, but applies his critique of ideology in this manner: ideas may be abstracted and objectified in the form of texts that can now be deployed in multiple locations across time and place, and these increasingly coordinate people’s activities. This is how ideology works as a method in ruling, and can be examined in the flow of texts in sequences of textually mediated activities, such as those undertaken by MMP leaders in the process of securing and implementing the BTOP funds.

**Discourse in Institutional Ethnography: Examining Language Through a Materialist Approach**

The notion of discourse in institutional ethnography is rooted in considering language in its material written and spoken form. For Smith, discourse is part of the social organization of relations, actions, and consciousness, in which people are active participants. Institutional discourses such as “digital literacy to re-skill workers” coordinate activity in the local institutional setting but also organize relations between individuals and labor, and individuals and knowledge. Texts within institutional settings create a juncture between the local and specific, and extra-local and abstract, and they provide a way to explore ethnographically how people in multiple local settings read and activate the texts. This is possible because the text being read is the same. This does not mean that people read the text the same way. To appreciate
the significance of different readings, it is necessary to assume that the text is identical and it enters into the organization of sequences of action as individuals activate the text in multiple places. This is a key difference from the Foucauldian (1970) theory of discourse that explores distinctive forms of power embedded in language that regulate how people’s subjectivities are coordinated. The discursive regulation and coordination of subjectivity is an important dimension of ruling relations that “captures the displacement of locally situated subjects precisely in its insistence on the absence of subjects from the determination of meaning” (Smith, 1999, p. 80). This is contrast to Foucault’s conception of discourse which:

leaves unanalyzed the socially organized practices and relations that objectify, even those visible in discourse itself. Its constitutional rules confine subjects to a standpoint in discourse and hence in the ruling relations. They eliminate the matrix of local practices of actual people that brings objectification of discourse into existence. (Smith, 1999, p. 80)

Discourse in institutional ethnography refers to a particular complex of social relations that replicates the same forms and courses of action in multiple local settings in which people activate them. “Looking at how people participate in discourse, how they talk about what they do, what texts they circulate, and what is reproduced in people’s labour, is of the utmost analytic interest” (Bisaillon, 2012, p. 610) in institutional ethnography. For example, language (in text and talk) was the material of much of my investigation as I examined the movement and enactment (or resistance) of terms in national and local settings during grant making processes, or the production of radical media that uses stories of lived experience to build analysis and to intervene in ruling relations.
This exploration was distinct from conducting a discursive or textual analysis separated from the local practices of actual people that bring discourse into existence. Rather than looking for how people were making meaning of language, this project was oriented toward understanding what informants knew, and making visible the underlying social organization of everyday life as it was coordinated with those of others in other settings. To explore language as material and social, Smith (2005) departs from a Foucauldian (1970) understanding of discourse and instead adapts concepts from Volosinov (1973) and Bakhtin (1986). Smith borrows from Volosinov the concept of “interindividual territories” that come into being through language, organizing a reciprocal relationship between speaker/hearer or reader/writer “in which their differentiated experiences and perspectives intersect in a world known and named in common” (Smith, 2005, p. 78). In this way, the word is explored as a two-sided act, where the words we utter are “determined equally by WHOSE word it is and FOR WHOM it is meant” (Volosinov, p. 86). She also relies on Bakhtin’s (1986) later writing about speech genres, where he distinguishes between primary and secondary speech genres that are grounded in direct experience and those that are mediated by texts, respectively.

Smith (2005) continues to theorize about the differences between interindividual territories that are rooted in experience versus in texts. The institutional ethnographic use of the term discourse is closer to Bakhtin’s (1986) use of secondary speech genres that depend on the standardization and replicable properties of written/printed/digital language. These texts and discourses have acquired a standard form that has lost its immediate relation to individuals in their everyday actual realities. Specific actors take up and deploy standardized texts and discourses in the very routine and mundane day-to-day activities that take place at specific times and locations in order to move forward or complete a course of action. As they do so, they
continue sequences of actions that are part of another agenda—belonging to ruling, bureaucratic, governing bodies. For example, this study included evidence of tensions surrounding different forms of sustainable broadband adoption that were enacted by different organizations and that carried different agendas based on marketing/consumption, human capital, and social justice.

Smith (2005) returns to Volosinov (1973) in describing how consciousness arises within the activity of speaking and hearing as both parties hear, understand, and respond to what is being said. Smith marks consciousness also arises in the activity of reading words on a page (or screen). The text, though “fixed and unresponsive” (Smith, 2005, p. 105) to the reader, is activated by the reader in the coordination of local sequences of action. In this way, the reader becomes the agent of the text, being pulled into the agenda of the text, whether or not in agreement with it. Institutional processes are distinctive as being coordinated by text-action-text sequences, which can be investigated ethnographically and mapped. Fixed terms that are used by institutional bodies in institutional discourse such as “sustainable broadband adoption,” “community anchor institutions,” or “international computer driving license,” are deployed in various settings, perhaps in the production of new texts, by individuals who mean for different actions to occur. This is distinct from the use of language that is based in common, direct experience.

The distinction between inter-individual territories rooted in texts or experience has implications for the movement of consciousness. This is significant in applying ethnographic methods to understanding the role of language in coordinating subjectivities. Returning to Volosinov (1973), “(e)xpression organizes experience. Expression is what first gives experience its form and specificity of direction. . . . Each person’s innerworld and thought has its stabilized social audience that comprises the environment in which reasons, values, and so on are
fashioned” (pp. 85-86). Acts of eliciting expression of direct, lived experience, such as those found in the production of MMP’s media making processes, produce multi-media texts that “rely on and presuppose the [reader, viewer, hearer]’s capacity to bring his or her resources of experience to bear in finding its sense. The distinction between experience-based and text-based interindividualities is between the resources that the hearer/reader brings to making sense of what is heard or read” (Smith, 2005, p. 91). Therefore, though these texts, produced by MMP, are similarly and intentionally activated by individuals in local settings, they are rooted in a consciousness that is formed as one filters one’s own experiences and orients to the subject’s experience being told in the media-based text. Different sequences of activities are coordinated on this basis, which I also discuss as data in this study.

**My Position as Researcher**

The epistemological and ontological assumptions highlighted above have implications for the role of the researcher and the research process. A central assumption of institutional ethnography is the understanding that “doing research of any kind commits you to a certain social relation” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 15). This stems from the same critique of ideological methods that displace people’s everyday understandings and experiences through modes of objectification. Knowledge created through these methods is oriented towards the ruling interests and not everyday people. Often, well-intentioned research is designed around a priori specified concepts fundamental to the study. The creation of these frames beforehand and the process of interviewing, analyzing, and writing involves fitting individuals’ accounts into these boxes. People are not encouraged to speak about the world that is known to them in their own language and experiential knowledge is not considered to be valid (Smith, 2005). Even if they indicate that they do not fit into the categories provided or do not know how to answer the
question, they may be encouraged to do the best they can. This may involve subtle manipulation of data in order to produce works that comment back on the original scholarly theories that grant the authority to be respected by a larger academic community. I conducted a few interviews in 2011, trying to focus them on academic categories I had read about in program planning literature. Blank stares and earnest attempts at trying to fit their answers into what they thought I was looking for, coupled with my own reworking of their answers back into academic frameworks later in the writing process helped me to understand how types of well-intentioned inquiry can lead to a skewed picture of the social if defined by predetermined or abstracted categories. This was an important motivation to move towards institutional ethnography and understand the deeper components of its ontology and epistemology.

The researcher in institutional ethnography acts as explorer and mapmaker, who must develop a way of investigating and making visible linkages between our local settings and extra- or trans-local institutional processes (Smith, 1999, 2005, 2006). I came to this research as a co-founder of the Media Mobilizing Project, with a continued interest in increasing my and others’ understanding about how things work so that we may make change. In classical ethnography, it has been common to struggle with one’s insider and outsider status as a field researcher in order to ultimately translate and interpret local practices within a remote or marginalized culture (Grahame & Grahame, 2009). In this view, my own status as co-founder of the Media Mobilizing Project granted me proper insider status. However, the aim of this study was to articulate the social relations that MMP was/is part of, within the wider complex of digital inclusion work, institutions, funding, and policies, etc. My focus was not to make sense of MMP’s culture or to interpret their local practices. Grahame and Grahame (2009) explain this distinction further.
With the institutional ethnography approach, ‘‘insider’’ and ‘‘outsider’’ recede as natural categories and problems to be solved by the researcher. Ruling relations do not have a straightforward inside and outside, but involve a complex series of locations articulated to each other. (p. 299)

Further, in my quest to adopt a materialist approach to research, I found that the tacit knowledge that I possess about MMP helped me little in investigating beyond the local setting and frequently confused me by pulling me back into the founding ideology with which I am intimately familiar. As a co-founder, I was an originator of MMP’s early ideas and practice but have been apart from the frontline work of the organization for many years. I have repeatedly needed to reflect on the social organization of my own knowing in this research and set aside “what I think I know” in order to investigate the processes, not yet visible, that shaped and connected the local work to beyond.

The focus on the workings of institutional complexes necessarily steered me towards exploring positionality through the ways that individuals were institutionally authorized (or not) to act on behalf of MMP. Exploring the social organization of broadband access and adoption in MMP’s experience according to race, immigrant status, age, gender, etc. was beyond the scope of this study and was not the focus of my data collection. That said, IE evolved through Dorothy Smith’s materialist intellectual work and experiences during the women’s movement in Canada in the 1970s, as a way to name, in part, the bifurcated experience and consciousness as a woman in professional and home life. I have observed during my time as a researcher that my motivation to harness Marx for the purpose of MMP developing a more sophisticated understanding of its experiences seems to be more intuitive to women leaders in the organization. MMP grew from defining its practice based in analysis of material conditions and movement strategies unfolding
in the world. This research leads me to propose that MMP adopt a materialist approach to self-understanding; and that these are not separate.

**The Research Process**

In Chapter One, I briefly discussed my process of identifying the problematic for my study through the experiential accounts and observations with MMP’s frontline workers. This problematic was based on a set of concerns in interviews and observations that I became committed to understanding from the perspective of committed MMP staff, volunteers, and participants. Institutional ethnography is a critical form of research that asks researchers to take sides. “Identifying what is to be made problematic puts the researcher into the picture as an actor in what is going on. She is now taking the side of the potential informants” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 48). Data collection and analysis through institutional ethnography comes with the possibility of identifying entry points in this complicated terrain of agency, coordination, and control, for activist intervention, thus marrying scholarship with political engagement. Exploring the problematic has taken me further into the social world of MMP members in their actual settings. Below, I explain more about the processes of data collection and analysis, including who were my research participants and where were the sites of research, and how I approached dependability or validity issues.

**Data Collection in Institutional Ethnography**

Institutional ethnography departs from classical ethnographies that provide descriptions of cultural and meaning-making processes. IE involves a broader investigation of how social phenomena come to take their specific forms and how local sites are shaped by extra-local and trans-local social relations. People’s local knowledge about their experiences and work processes that they competently navigate everyday are revealed through texts and talk, which can then lead
to investigations of the extra-local and trans-local social relations that hook the local to multiple other sites. Ultimately, the aim is to extend the local knowledge into a better understanding of the institutional order and the ruling relations from the point of view of the people who are implicated in and participating in it. IE aims to take us further into the organization of power, making the workings of society visible.

Data collection in qualitative research typically involves interviews, observations, and analysis of documents or artifacts (Campbell, 2010; Merriam, 2009). Institutional ethnography includes similar forms of data, however, any of these may emerge as primary, depending on the research topic and context. There are specific differences in approaching the data in IE from other qualitative, interpretive approaches. For instance, qualitative researchers use interviews in various ways, but often to reveal and interpret individual’s subjective states or to learn about personal experiences (DeVault & McCoy, 2006). However, interviews in an institutional ethnography are aimed at foregrounding the institution and identifying individuals’ everyday working knowledge, in order to further investigate the “relations of ruling” that shape local experiences (Smith, 2005). Some of the general questions that typically guide institutional ethnographers were useful in my own initial approach to data collection:

What are the people in this setting doing? How do they know what to do? What coordinates their work? What texts do they consult? Where did that text originate and from whose hands did it travel? (Campbell, 2010, p. 7)

Qualitative researchers typically approach observation in research settings through a defined research question and theoretical framework that drives the inquiry (Merriam, 2009). In contrast, institutional ethnographers typically observe for some time in their research setting with the intention of locating the research purpose within everyday life rather than from abstracted
knowledge. Textual analysis in qualitative research looks closely at the content of communication, often with an eye toward deconstructing discourse. Investigating texts is central in institutional ethnography and similar in an appreciation for discursive elements of social life. However, institutional ethnography considers language in text and talk as the material substance of investigation. In IE, more emphasis is placed on texts in everyday use and may exist as documents, mediated forms, routine computer screens, or appear in how people talk.

The project of mapping social relations can take many forms; there is no ‘one way’ to proceed with this research. “IE investigations are rarely planned out fully in advance. Instead, the process of inquiry is rather like grabbing a ball of string, finding a thread, and then pulling it out” (DeVault & McCoy, 2006). This does not mean that inquiry lacks direction. “Each next step of investigation learns more from those involved of how their everyday work...brings into being the institutional processes that are the focus of investigation” (Smith, 2005, p. 35). Smith became interested in ethnomethodology as a response to social science research that ignored the actualities of her life. Data collection begins in the local setting, investigating the specificities of what goes on in daily lives. An initial stage in the research involves generating descriptions of what people do in their everyday lives.

Although I gathered substantial data from interviews, texts, and observations, the examination of language, as part of ruling relations, and collected through each of these forms became prominent. Next, I discuss how I proceeded with these methods of data collection and analysis in this institutional ethnography. I include more detail about each of these types of data in Table 1 in the Appendix.

**Texts.** Texts were central to my investigation and included print, mass and digital media—both video and audio forms. In order to explore the processes that contributed to the writing of
the grant proposals and resulting contracts, and investigate the trans-local flow of language, I focused on the following documents that were part of this textual chain. OECD and International Telecommunication Union documents from 2009 discuss international responses to the economic crisis, particularly focusing on information and communications technology. As I collected meeting minutes from national and local meetings that MMP leaders participated in, I was especially attentive to where discourse associated with the digital economy and broadband adoption appeared in discussions about the federal legislation and contributed to producing public comments, the actual grant proposals, contracts and reports. Each of these texts were important to my investigation.

As MMP was continuing other work during this time that was connected to the original mission, I became curious about the differences in how textual processes worked in these movement based spheres. Separate from the institutional documents relating to BTOP, I also collected texts that were components of their education, organizing, and media production processes in building new organizing platforms and local leadership. I initially looked at approximately three hundred internal documents that detailed this work. From this, I especially focused on 141 organizational minutes (Staff, Community Board, Executive Committee, and Leadership Council) between February 2008 and January 2012 that detail the work activities that MMP leaders took up as part of this organizing work. Additionally, I reviewed 23 curriculum designs and materials used in their own radical education to prepare for future organizing, media making, and teaching. Finally, I transcribed and analyzed portions of 10 radical media pieces that they produced.

These documents allowed me to identify the range of work that the organization was conducting. From there, I assembled the chronology of events surrounding the process of
securing the grants, between 2008-2010 and the other ongoing activities occurring simultaneously; unaffected and disconnected, at this point, from the task of promoting broadband adoption. Bifurcated accounts of MMP’s work ultimately emerged in the writing, which illuminated different practices surrounding language arising in activities taken up by various actors. Tracking the textual process that led to the successful grants provided an account of how consciousness and activity aligned towards hierarchical governing texts [the Stimulus Act]. This also allowed me to track the trans-local flow of terms from international bodies into local settings, where people activated discourses in the work processes of implementing the PCC and SBA grants. However, analyzing texts based in other work, outside of BTOP, during these years, (meeting notes and media made with networks of resistance), clarified how the work of our original mission was continued, even if increasingly interfered with, disrupted, and under threat. This is the everyday work of sustaining a non-profit institution. As I continued to write accounts of the work once implementation of the grants began, and I incorporated data from interviews, I began to investigate further into the social organization of these two practices and see that a growing bifurcation was disorganizing and reorganizing MMP’s work during this time.

**Interviews.** In addition to texts, I recorded and transcribed semi-structured interviews with twelve of MMP’s paid staff starting in 2011. I prioritized paid staff within the organization, because I was particularly interested in understanding how people were authorized and organized to act as a consequence of their employment. The staff I interviewed represented different positions within a growing division of labor for required work, and different periods in the organization’s history. This allowed me to locate texts and textually mediated processes that contributed to orchestrating different staff’s actions. I prioritized MMP’s staff who performed administrative, organizing, media production, educational, and public computer center staffing
functions. For this study, I did not interview the many people involved with MMP who contributed to work in non-staff capacities. Because I collected data with IRB approval over the course of five years, as many changes took place, I had multiple interviews or conversations with some of these staff as I was piecing together accounts and analysis.

I also interviewed two consultants who worked with the Open Technology Institute (OTI), who were key in guiding Philadelphia organizations to be able to construct successful grant proposals. OTI was also later hired as Philadelphia’s official evaluators of the overall Freedom Rings Partnership’s experience with BTOP. These consultants represented these two areas of work and their interviews were critical in providing an understanding of how MMP’s specific implementation strategies of BTOP programs were linked to other entities within Philadelphia and nationally. I list the people with whom I conducted interviews at the end of this chapter, along with the descriptors that I use to identify each of them. I have also included interview protocols that I used at the beginning of my study and toward the end in the appendix. These interview guides show the evolution over time of similar questions regarding people’s activities (including actions not taken) and the text-based coordination of their activities, as I became more specific about what I was examining.

Observations. Observations also constituted a good portion of data. I visited four of the most active Public Computer Centers (of MMP’s six), where basic computer classes were held and I attended four iterations of an intensive media production institute. Within these structured learning opportunities, I was especially looking at how educational experiences were coordinated and ways that curriculum functioned as components of broader social organization that was orchestrating MMP’s activities. Besides classes, I also participated in an advanced study group for leaders within the organization, and a few meetings of the Freedom Rings Partnership
stakeholders within the city who were meeting to strategize about future sustainability. Lastly, the organization asked me to facilitate a reflection of the BTOP process for the key leaders of the organization during a series of “planning days.” This was a five-hour recorded and transcribed focus group in December 2012. I wrote field notes during other observations, particularly looking for organization of work and the flow of language across settings, as people activated discourses within work situations.

The Research Participants and Settings

As already discussed, IE investigations begin with people in local actualities (McCoy, 2008). I discussed earlier who my research participants were, and how I selected them, but here I provide more context about how they related to the data collection processes.

**Key staff participants.** My first official experiences of collecting data for this research involved conducting interviews with key staff. In order to learn more about the BTOP context, I began with the staff person who had taken a lead role in the City that made the successful BTOP application from Philadelphia possible. He was in the coordinating role of the overall program. Subsequently I interviewed the coordinator of the public computer centers and other staff involved in implementation and instruction. I chose people roughly in order of how they could inform me about the overall work that had been and was currently happening. I had them describe what they do and explain how what they do is coordinated with others. For instance:

*What was your job at this point? What were the origins of this program- how was it being talked about? How were you trained? How did you conduct your work within the federal regulations? How did you document the work/progress?* These accounts served as a starting place and because eventually, I began to pay attention to signs that the work was shifting and causing disjunction, I
interviewed MMP staff who were not strictly tied to BTOP implementation consistently. These research subjects are introduced in Chapter Five.

**Observational participants.** Because I conducted observations at the sites discussed above, the staff, volunteers, and participants in MMP’s public computer centers, who were diverse in terms of age, race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, industrial sector, employment status, etc., were also participants in the study. I observed the basic computer skills classes that were held in four of the public computer center locations. These included locations in a poor African-American North Philadelphia neighborhood, a Mexican community organization in South Philadelphia, a center for taxi drivers that primarily attracted the Bangladeshi community in West Philadelphia and West of the city, and a center housed in an advocacy organization for unemployed people in Center City. Movement Media Institutes were organized differently and were not rooted in a primary community and neighborhood as other classes were. These took place at MMP’s central offices. While they drew from participants in the public computer centers, they were not exclusively tied to them. They were attended by members of various unions, GED programs, community based organizations, schools, community colleges, day labor organizations, etc. While formal interviews were conducted with only the fourteen listed people at the end of the chapter, I had multiple informal conversations with staff and participants in these community centers.

**Data Analysis**

In any qualitative research project, including an institutional ethnography, the researcher has an extensive set of data that contains various story threads and markers for further research. A shift to another stage of data collection is necessary here in order to uncover institutional processes that may not be wholly known by the original informants (Campbell & Gregor, 2002).
“As inquiry develops, the scope of the institutional ethnography pushes the boundaries of conventional divisions between micro and macro, sociology and political economy, without deserting its ethnographic commitment” (Smith, 2005, p. 36). Exploring details carefully in the local settings is crucial to understanding how social relations organize experience. But it is the next pursuit of these hidden threads that go beyond informants’ experiences, which coupled with data from the local setting, that can make the overall story apparent: “A successful analysis supercedes any one account and even supercedes the totality of what informants know and can tell” (p. 85).

[I]nstitutional ethnographies produce a kind of knowledge that makes visible to activists or others directly involved the order they both participate in and confront. Because the research is ethnographic, it describes and analyzes just how that order is put together. Knowing how things work, how they’re put together, is invaluable. . . . For example, knowing the implications for practice of changing the concepts and categories that operate in coordinating institutional processes can be very useful at the point where changes have not yet been settled and where there is room for maneuver. (Smith, 2005, p. 32)

This is what distinguishes institutional ethnography from other forms of classical ethnography. Social relations at the heart of the research guide this stage. The idea here is not to come up with invented categories and themes but to describe the workings of power through trans-local ruling practices. These linkages across settings “are lived, brought into existence in time and space by actual people doing actual things” (p. 98).

Components of the practice that steered my analysis involved grounding the ethnography in people’s experiences in work settings, keeping the institution in view when using interviews
as data, exploring a discourse ethnographically, or mapping sequences of work-text-work to explicate institutional processes. I described above how I began to write accounts based on texts starting in 2008 to find out how the process of securing the grants unfolded. Based on the broad variety of texts that I examined, I was able to see that language was the material of my investigation and that textual production was a significant part of MMP’s work. Work-text-work sequences were carried out in producing the successful grants and later in implementing the grant contracts. Work-text-work sequences were also visible in the processes surrounding MMP’s radical media making that was carried out to coordinate further organizing activities. “‘Work’ orients the researcher to what people do that involves some conscious intent and acquired skill; it includes emotional or thought work as well as physical labor or communicative action” (McCoy, 2008, p. 705). In my research setting, I kept an analytical focus on the work surrounding textual production, the ways that technology access and adoption were facilitated through learning opportunities, and the ways that MMP leaders reorganized themselves to accomplish multiple kinds of work. Smith’s (1987) generous concept of work helped me to recognize that MMP’s activities, such as education for the grant as well as organizing, depended on the work of both the educators and the learners to orient themselves to the courses as socially coordinated processes and “carry the institutional relevancies into their homes” (McCoy, 2008, p. 705) and lives.

The data offer an entry into the institutional regime and the research objective is discovery (Campbell, 2010). When analyzing texts and talk, the aim of the research is to map how they enter into the local settings and coordinate people’s activities and subjectivities. Smith (2005) critiques the Cartesian tendency to separate thought from action, and “most strikingly, from the social... [N]ot only are consciousness and subjectivity represented as if they existed outside time and place, but they also appear as if they were not implicated in how people’s
doings are coordinated” (p. 75). She instead offers a strategy of analyzing language that does not reinforce this separation:

One move is to insist that ideas and so forth are also doings in that they happen at actual times and in particular local settings and are performed by particular people. They must therefore be taken on as phenomena in language, particularly since it is in language that people’s ideas, concepts, theories, beliefs, and so on become integral to the ongoing coordinating of people’s doings. (p. 76)

Writing data into stories was the beginning of my analytic process and practice of using my data as evidence (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Distinctive to institutional ethnography, I aimed to discover and explicate the social relations relevant to my research. This analytic strategy differs from other forms of qualitative research. I did not identify themes or theorize data. Explicating the social relations of a setting uses “what informants know and what they are observed doing for the analytic purpose of identifying, tracing and describing the social relations that extend beyond the boundaries of any one (or all) informant’s experiences” (p. 90). For example, a diagram that was created by MMP leaders to envision the use of BTOP funds interested me (see Appendix). I used this diagram for what it told me, at face value—how MMP leaders understood how they wanted to use BTOP funds, both for successfully completing the grant and more importantly, for other organizing goals. I also looked at the text within this diagram for traces of the grant language as well as language that referred back to movement strategies in order to launch further investigation into text-action-text sequences that organized MMP’s staff’s activities away from their goals or facilitated success in maintaining its vision. These discoveries were built back into my analytical account.
Dependability and Validity

All research needs to be concerned with issues of dependability (Merriam, 2009). Institutional ethnographers, like other critical and feminist social scientists, take a reflexive stance, acknowledging that we are part of the social world we aim to study (Smith, 1990; Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007). Different beliefs underlie different ethnographies (grounded, symbolic interactionism, anthropological, etc.), and further, Campbell and Gregor (2002) note that “different ontologies…require the use of different analytic strategies” (p. 86) in which dependability and validity are established “within the tenets of its particular methodology” (pp. 86-87). Campbell (2010) states that “the trustworthiness of an institutional ethnographic account is an empirical matter” (p. 7). Data points within accounts of social relations can be checked out and confirmed. I frequently asked people within MMP and other organizations to verify certain information, especially points that came up in interviews, to make sure they were accurate. Also, because I was piecing together accounts of what actually occurred, I could go back and forth between institutional documents and interviewing about processes captured in the documents. If someone told me there were debates and lack of consensus around some course of action, I could find evidence of this in meeting minutes, etc.

In a conventional ethnography that may involve “interpretation of the meanings, functions, and consequences of human actions” (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007) or the recording and understanding of what informants know about their social worlds (Fetterman, 1989), the researcher may attempt to observe and bring back objective accounts that describe the field. Because ethnographers using a traditional social science approach “must exercise skepticism about the accuracy of data they collect, they use analytic strategies for testing the accuracy of what informants say” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 88). Comparing data derived
from different data sources such as interviews, observations, and documents is one strategy of verification. Analysis based on this approach builds from informants’ accounts and triangulation helps to determine the most accurate interpretation of the situation. In contrast, institutional ethnographers may begin with informants’ accounts of their experiences or observations of informants in their local settings, but these are not considered to be the “final analytic object” (McCoy, 2008, p. 705). The first stage of research is to develop a sense of insiders’ knowledge, but it is not to produce an account based on this perspective, therefore a different kind of triangulation is relevant, which ultimately builds an account of the social organization and provides clues into what must be investigated next.

Because institutional ethnography seeks to discover how people bring institutions into being in their daily actions, analysis extends into the extra and trans-local social relations of the setting. Different from how a conventional ethnographer might approach their interviews with ‘native’ informants, in IE, “it is methodologically important…to be attentive to how someone, speaking about their life, misses its social organization” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 91). The special inquiry that follows is not generalizable as such, “but it displays the relations that generalize, that can be found operating similarly across sites…[T]he institutionally coordinated activities that IE shows people undertaking organize generalized local responses in line with the ruling ideas of the discourses that circulate” (Campbell, 2010, p. 7). For instance, the social organization that I discovered which shaped MMP’s participation in developing basic computer skills modules across the city, is the same social organization that influenced the program design of all of the recipients of SBA funds. In both professional and movement contexts, the deployment of texts, as part of ruling relations, has impacts in multiple locations.
Conclusion

In summary, institutional ethnography is a research process that makes social organization visible. It begins from the standpoint of an anchor group, from which the research brings the institutional regime into view. The resulting map of social relations must be material and empirically observable: actual text, actual language, actual work that can be shown to be linked up across sites. This method of inquiry rejects an ideological approach to research that imposes a predetermined framework for analyzing and interpreting data. Instead of generating knowledge about people, this is a process of generating knowledge for people. In the next chapter, I investigate the textual production practices that comprised two parallel ways of working that were emerging.
Descriptors for Research Participants in the Following Data Chapters

**MMP Co-Founder Informant 1**: one of the original six co-Founders of MMP who took leadership in digital inclusion locally and nationally. His organizing (along with MMP BTOP Manager 1) made the successful applications for BTOP funds possible in Philadelphia. He also spearheaded other forms of organizing over the years of this research, including the founding of a new network form organization. He has been a Board Member but was never paid staff with MMP.

**MMP Co-Founder Informant 2**: one of the original six co-Founders of MMP who was the Executive Director during BTOP as well as the Political Education and Leadership Development Director.

**MMP BTOP Manager 1**: took leadership around digital inclusion locally and nationally along with MMP Co-Founder Informant 1, making BTOP possible in Philadelphia. He had prior involvement with MMP’s *Our City, Our Voices* program and became the overall Manager of the BTOP programs for MMP.

**MMP BTOP Manager 2**: one of the original six co-Founders of MMP and was hired in mid 2011 to supervise the Site Organizers and oversee the work in MMP’s Public Computer Centers.

**MMP MEO 1**: hired as a Media Educator Organizer, MMP MEO 1 had prior involvement with MMP as a volunteer translator and audio producer with Spanish speaking radio programs.

**MMP MEO 2**: a new hire for MMP at the end of 2010, as a Media Educator Organizer.

**MMP Network Organizer**: was the only full time MMP staff person responsible for continuing MMP’s original organizing practices.
MMP Site Organizer 1: a new part-time hire for MMP, with BTOP funds to staff the Public Computer Center housed at Casa Monarca, a community center for people of Latin American descent in South Philadelphia.

MMP Site Organizer 2: a new part-time hire for MMP, with BTOP funds to staff the Public Computer Center housed at the Logan Community Development Center (Logan CDC), located in North Philadelphia.

MMP Site Organizer 3: a new part-time hire for MMP, with BTOP funds to staff the Public Computer Center housed at the Philadelphia Unemployment Project, a Center City service and advocacy organization for unemployed and homeless people.

MMP Site Organizer 4: a new part-time hire for MMP, with BTOP funds to staff the Public Computer Center housed at the joint office between the Media Mobilizing Project and the Taxi Workers Alliance of Pennsylvania.

MMP Video Coordinator: was in charge of MMP-TV and was at times funded independently of BTOP. Her media production work was not developed and did not proceed in relation to BTOP programs.

OTI Consultant 1: developed guidelines and other reports and provided technical assistance to organizations who were interested in applying for BTOP funds in 2009-10

OTI Consultant 2: was charged with collecting and analyzing the qualitative data collected in a participatory evaluation process with the Freedom Rings Partnership
PART II: FINDINGS

Part II of this dissertation organizes the findings of this research into three chapters that draw from data collected from the Media Mobilizing Project’s (MMP) archives and other documents collected after the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Stimulus Act, passed in 2009); as well as observations and interviews conducted after 2011. Building from the discussion of institutional ethnography in Chapter Three, this study is geared towards producing accounts of how MMP took part in institutional complexes that were regulated by the federal Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP). Administered under the U.S. Department of Commerce, specific concepts and technical language associated with BTOP funding were necessarily taken up by those awarded with the stimulus grants, which coordinated MMP’s local work with the social relations of the digital economy. Throughout this investigation, language was centrally important as carrying traces of and clues for further research into extra-local social relations.

The value of examining language in institutional ethnography is that it renders social relations visible. While Part II focuses primarily on presentation of the data itself, at times it is necessary to refer to the literature to guide the reader through the analysis, and so I also do so here to serve as an introduction to these findings chapters. When analyzing texts and talk, institutional ethnographers map how they enter into the local settings and coordinate people’s activities and subjectivities. As part of Dorothy Smith’s (1987, 2001, 2005, 2006) commitment to designing a sociology that extends our ordinary knowledge as practitioners, she emphasizes, “The importance of texts, as of any phenomena of language, to the social is as coordinator of the diversities of people’s subjectivities, their consciousnesses” (p. 65). From a materialist perspective, consciousness arises in sensuous activity, in interaction with the world and with
people (Mojab & Carpenter, 2011). As Smith (2006) suggests, a materialist approach to analyzing language, therefore, moves away from a Cartesian tendency to separate thought from action, and regards concepts as well as experience as phenomena based in language. Ideas take shape in language; experience also takes shape in language, as we may articulate our happenings and doings to ourselves or to others. As explained in Chapter Three, the analysis focused on multiple kinds of documents that were part of MMP’s everyday operations and the broader institutional complex, as well as interviews. Interviews focused on people’s experiential accounts of their everyday work were crucial in identifying terms and phrases found in secondary speech genres (Bakhtin, 1986) and therefore, the ideas, theories, and concepts that circulated as part of institutional complexes. These accounts made ideas and concepts visible to me, which I then investigated and located in actual texts that were circulating as part of the institutional complex. Institutional ethnography pays particular attention to texts as objectified consciousness that are utilized to coordinate further actions. The next three chapters are built around an exploration of activities that were textually coordinated, including activities in which texts are regularly produced.

A growing bifurcation in social organization is a continuous thread throughout the findings. I emphasize a division that emerged from the data in several ways including practices of textual production, curricula produced with different intents and purposes, competing conceptual frameworks, and forms of accountability. Chapters Four and Five explore both the earliest stages of securing funds during the economic crisis and the final stages of accomplishing the work of creating access to technology and methods for achieving sustainable broadband adoption. Components of the completion of this work were the production and delivery of two different curricula. Examining the texts in how they were produced in these chapters, followed
by the sequences of coordinated actions, was a direct vehicle for discovering different root forms of accountability that justified and shaped these different practices and activities. Chapter Four highlights the textual basis of circuits of accountability, as processes of securing, implementing, and reporting about the grants operated in a hierarchical alignment to official ruling texts. In contrast, Chapter Five explores the relational basis of lateral accountability that formed in the direct, collaborative work with partner organizations and individuals, and was in operation since the founding of the organization. Though unraveling during these same years, this relational form of accountability still motivated and influenced MMP’s ongoing work of producing radical media-texts that were used for various organizing purposes. Language was the primary material for these chapters, as textual production of different kinds was underway.

These competing forms of accountability and practices surrounding language are the backdrop of Chapter Six, as these created the conditions for the dis-organization and re-organization of activity and consciousness. This chapter focuses on how MMP staff organized themselves and their work once the grants were awarded and implementation was beginning in early 2011, with the combined efforts of existing leaders in the organization and new employees hired with the incoming funds. In this chapter, I describe the documents that were used to orient people to different visions and expectations, to which grant implementation should be accountable. I also relied on interviews, notes from meetings, and observations in a few of the public computer centers in order to investigate the underlying social relations beneath several staff’s self-reflections that there was growing internal “fragmentation” and a need to “cohere” the organization. Given institutional ethnography’s purpose and aim of surfacing relations of ruling, more attention in this study is given to the textually mediated processes that were clearly
articulated to the workings of institutional complexes than to the radical media production processes of the organization.
CHAPTER FOUR

SECURING FUNDING: TEXTUAL BASIS OF INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY CIRCUITS

This research used an institutional ethnographic approach to explicate the social relations of broadband access and adoption through the public programs implemented by the Media Mobilizing Project (MMP), operating for the first time under federal regulations that orchestrated the practice of the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) trans-locally. This was the granting program funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (also known as the Obama Stimulus Package). The focus of the following two chapters is the pivotal time in MMP’s organizational evolution, during which MMP received funds from the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP). The study arose from the standpoint of radical educators, organizers, and media producers whose work was disorganized and reorganized during these years. The puzzles underlying these experiences, which surfaced through early analysis of fieldwork, led me to investigate language as manifestation of social consciousness and coordinator of MMP’s frontline workers.

Distinct processes surrounding language that were part of the production of texts leading to successful grant proposals for Public Computer Centers (PCCS) and Sustainable Broadband Adoption (SBA) in Philadelphia are the emphasis of this chapter. These textual processes were joined to and coordinated by a particular form of hierarchical accountability operating in a circuit, which I explain in detail in the second half. While the focus of this chapter is on the data itself, I occasionally cite literature that supports and clarifies how analysis of text in institutional ethnography is conducted. Documents formed the major part of this investigation and my use of archival data begins in 2009, as the economy was rapidly unraveling and erupting into a global
crisis, and extends over the next six years, as MMP leaders applied for and implemented programs funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

This chapter begins by examining the process of securing funding, and examines the textual production processes involved in BTOP grant making and how MMP entered into these processes between 2008 and the end of 2010. It is an account of the hierarchical, textual process involved in securing federal dollars for broadband technology programs and where MMP’s expert, professional leadership acted strategically as they sought to perpetuate the corporate organization and secure MMP’s national position within the fields of media justice and digital inclusion. The second half of the chapter extends past 2011, once the design and implementation of BTOP programs had to proceed according to the regulations of the grant. Here, I describe hierarchical accountability circuits that coordinated and reorganized work performed at the frontline in accordance within the managerial terms of the BTOP award. The conclusion to this chapter discusses the significance of unseen social relations in coordinating local experience, despite the appearance that these grants were open to interpretation based on a seemingly straightforward and unspecified contract.

**Textual Production in Hierarchical Alignment**

This account shows where MMP entered into the institutional funding processes of the federal government and participated in building a case for Philadelphia’s successful proposals in the second round of the competitive granting process. This manifestation of work is driven by vertical accountability pressures on nonprofit corporations to become sustainable institutions by securing resources for staffing, operations, and programming. The passing of the crisis-inspired Stimulus Act set in motion textually mediated processes coordinated by national and municipal government departments, coalitions, think tanks, professional and grassroots organizations, etc.
MMP’s digital inclusion leaders in collaboration with coalitions and think tanks, debated definitions of terms and submitted public comments, made presentations to City officials, contributed to the actual grant writing, in addition to documenting internal conversations and brainstorms in order to identify and challenge terms and categories set forth in the grant. In these textual processes, MMP, along with allied organizations, aligned to the wording of the statutory purposes and guidelines that determined the kinds of activities, the particular locations and constituencies with whom recipients could implement this work. Here, I focus on certain interventions in which they participated and led within national and municipal processes, that culminated in the awarded Freedom Rings Partnership proposals. This section on textual production returns to the concept of text-based interindividual territories, in which the activities of reading and activating discourse (even if in resistance) within coordinated sequences of action are territories in which consciousness arises.

**Interventions in National Process**

In early 2009, two of MMP’s leaders in digital inclusion saw the possibility of accessing stimulus funds for grassroots organizations around the country. On February 19, 2009, just two days after the Stimulus Act was signed into law, they called for a national meeting in Washington, D.C. of a progressive media rights coalition they were part of, the Media and Democracy Coalition (MADCo). The purpose of this meeting was to seize this critical moment, while there was a scramble in DC to design the grant programs, to strategize about ensuring that the NTIA’s rules would include projects such as those represented in the coalition. Specifically, MMP Co-Founder Informant 1 called for coalition members to use this time to “discuss 1) best ways to impact NTIA and RUS's priorities, 2) share strategies for getting the communities we represent resources through this process”, etc. (email communication, February 19, 2009).
Starting in March 2009, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), the managing agency within the Department of Commerce responsible for implementing national expansion of broadband Internet access and adoption, called seven public meetings that introduced key categorical terms, definitions of which would make possible particular kinds of work with specified populations. Different actors would assess and take up these terms in order to ensure their own eligibility for the funds. This included participating in official channels for challenging the terms, including public commenting during new federal rulemaking, and relying on intermediary organizations, such as the Open Technology Institute, who facilitated a pathway between local grassroots organizations and beltway politics.

Assessing the favorability of terms in the grant design. Some discussions among MADCo member organizations that gathered on March 7, 2009 revolved around the “need to make sure the rules are not written in a way that excludes our projects - the law was written to encourage our participation. We need legitimate definitions of what is ‘unserved,’ what is ‘underserved,’ what does it mean ‘to provide access to’ and to foreground ‘strong language around public private partnerships’” (notes from MADCo Gathering, March 7, 2009). The significance of bringing awareness to these and other terms was to make sure that certain geographic and demographic factors could not be used to argue that an area was served and therefore not eligible for the grants. Similar concerns over these terms were raised again later in different localities around the country, including the Philadelphia meetings that MMP convened, and eventually were submitted as public comments, the next available action for groups to take in the national process. In these standard processes in federal granting, it becomes usual and customary to not consider what more inventive ideation might happen at such a national gathering of committed experts, apart from discussing the technicalities of terms. After this
convening, local networks within the media justice sector continued to strategize and assemble proposals from New York, Detroit, and Philadelphia. Detroit and Philadelphia were eventually both awarded BTOP grants in the second Round of applications.

Public commenting as an official venue for intervening in new regulations. Open periods for public comment are standard in the rulemaking work of government agencies after Congress has enacted legislation (Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, n.d.; Center for Effective Government, 2015). Among the many comments submitted to the NTIA regarding the application and award process for BTOP, at least three influential documents were filed by allied organizations of MMP, who were represented at the March 7, 2009 national gathering, during these open periods. The NTIA’s first request for information was issued on March 12, 2009 and again on November 10, 2009. The Administrative Procedures Act requires that agencies establishing new regulations provide public notice in the Federal Register, the official daily publication for agency rules, and seek public comment. Comments received are put into a rulemaking record or agency docket that is publicly searchable. After the agency reviews the comments, they may revise the rules and the “final rulemaking notice will contain the text of the final rule as well as a statement of its basis and purpose. . . [including] a summary and analysis of the issues raised during the earlier stages in the process” (Center for Effective Government, 2015). Comments submitted by organizations, think tanks, and coalitions have more weight and credibility than those entered by individuals. The comments submitted to the NTIA regarding BTOP challenged wording in the official documents, contributing to changes in the second version of guidelines for applying organizations.

Among several criticisms and recommendations, the Media and Democracy Coalition identified the glaring omission of the seemingly obvious criteria of affordability in the definition
of underserved and recommended that applicants be able to supply data from the census or other verifiable data regarding whether service is affordable in relation to average household income. They also warned that proposals emphasizing the role of community anchor institutions in serving various vulnerable populations would face challenges because they may not be located in the defined unserved/underserved areas. Echoing these concerns, the Open Technology Institute of the New America Foundation (OTI) submitted lengthy comments to the NTIA on November 30, 2009, during the second public commenting period. OTI’s comments took up terms where the definitions would render communities eligible or ineligible to be considered for funding.

“The rules appear to de-emphasize networks centered around community anchor institutions; and provide definitions of ‘unserved’ and ‘underserved’ areas that seem to ignore the very real issues of low bandwidth and affordability” (Open Technology Institute & Columbia Telecommunications Corporation, 2009, p. 4). Understanding that networks of community organizations working in collaboration, such as in the Philadelphia context, were the backbone of many regional proposals, they put weight behind the concepts that would favor these groups. In particular, they argued for removing barriers to supporting comprehensive community projects and community anchor institutions.

An intermediary organization facilitates regional and national pathways. OTI is a unique DC-based think tank that brings together technologists, policy experts, lawyers, community organizers, and urban planners to examine technology and internet policy. OTI began working in Philadelphia in summer of this year. “Our official starting point for working in Philadelphia was on June 23, 2009. . . MMP hosted a meeting to discuss how to extend broadband services in the city. That meeting and then, over a year of work with community groups, led to the grants that the city received” (OTI Consultant 1, personal communication,
December 13, 2014). Based on conversations with grassroots media-based organizations, including MMP, they recommended that the NTIA: “Promote more activity in the use of digital media production and education in computer centers and as an adoption strategy” (Open Technology Institute, Comments, 2009, p. 3). Finally, having ambitions to become the official evaluator for the Philadelphia initiative, they included the recommendation that the evaluation process “permit experts to review applications even if they consulted on other applications, so long as the applications they are asked to review are in different states” (Open Technology Institute, Comments, 2009, p. 3). OTI performed intermediary functions that supported applications in Detroit, Philadelphia, and NY as well as consulted with Native public media to seek funding for the Indian nations. For instance, they produced numerous tools and guidelines to update local and regional organizations and communities on changing policies, requirements, and other various critical details to aid specifically in making complex, textual processes, such as the BTOP application, more accessible.

**Organizing the Municipal Program for Broadband Access**

While MMP leaders were actively in conversation with allied organizations in the national process, they were simultaneously organizing the local activity surrounding the state of internet access and adoption in Philadelphia. They and allied leaders identified the opportunities for intervention in expanding and reframing terms in order that they would encompass their desired work. On March 30, 2009, they convened local organizations in Philadelphia for a Broadband collaboration meeting to prepare three to five approaches that would align with “the bigger perspective of what the Mayor is looking for” (Philadelphia broadband collaboration meeting, March, 30, 2009). Despite Philadelphia’s budget shortfall in 2009, Allan Frank, then Chief Technology Officer, was announcing a $100 million citywide vision (Kirk, 2009). On
April 23, 09, Allan Frank gave a public presentation on *Sustainable Broadband Innovation for Philadelphia: A Unified Approach to the NTIA for Lasting Solutions*. The strategy articulated a vision for the three grant streams under BTOP: 1) Infrastructure, 2) Public Computing Centers, and 3) Sustainable Broadband Adoption. He also called for a leadership group to bring together targeted community stakeholders to create the collective vision. A few days later, on April 29, 2009, MMP’s digital inclusion leaders took up this charge and presented the *Philadelphia Broadband Expansion and Adoption Program: Connectivity and Change* to the City’s Division of Technology. What becomes apparent in reviewing meeting notes and the presentations is the flow of language from the national to the municipal arena in shaping visions for how the grant money could be used. MMP and others advocated for a broadened definition of digital inclusion locally.

**Trans-local movement of language.** Reviewing documents from national and local meetings reveals the trans-local movement of language, terms, and arguments, as MMP accomplished this work in relation with others. In different venues, they incorporated the critical points and language present in the NTIA’s public discussions, the legislation itself, as well as the priorities of the municipal administration. Their presentation to the City’s Division of Technology emphasized that Philadelphia is a tale of two cities, citing the latest statistics regarding the digital divide and the high school dropout rate (54% at the time) (MMP Co-Founder Informant 1 & MMP BTOP Manager 1). The framework they presented included work they hoped to carry out, such as building a citywide network relying heavily on the coordination of community anchor institutions across the city, providing hardware, and hosting a community portal for community-based news/access to city data/local blogs/events. On June 23, 2009, the Digital Justice Coalition, in which MMP was central, organized the Digital Philadelphia
Initiative Summit (Summit), to discuss the citywide vision for broadband technology in the post-muni WIFI era and in light of the federal stimulus grants. The Summit began with a presentation of the Coalition’s principles in order to frame later discussions focused on categories that were consistent with official municipal concerns.

**Broadening the definition of digital inclusion.** The Digital Justice principles articulated a citywide vision that would prioritize low-income and disenfranchised communities as the primary beneficiaries of the grants and for digital inclusion to be defined broadly to encompass “teach[ing] residents how to create content and use digital tools that benefit their families and communities” (Philadelphia Digital Justice Coalition). MMP edited a short video of excerpts from the day emphasizing these aspects of the digital justice principles and demonstrating how leaders and members of various organizations were approaching these grants and reframing terms on behalf of multiple constituencies. For instance, one of the defining principles included “creating community technology centers and training spaces where people already are—so integrate that with the other services already existing in the city. Have a very broad definition of digital inclusion—not just learning to use a computer or web, but *production*…” (MMP Cofounder Informant1, Digital Philadelphia Initiative Summit, 2009). The language of “vulnerable populations” is invoked in the Stimulus Act and subsequent institutional documents. This video statement by a social service provider serves to, both, ensure that the most vulnerable in the city are included in this discourse, as well as make a case for the significance of community anchor institutions “where people already are” (Digital Philadelphia Initiative Summit, 2009):

> We have to remind people that with the vulnerable you have homeless families, drug and alcohol treatment centers, the physically challenged, the mentally
challenged, the mentally ill. There are residential centers all over the city and all over the state where lots of people are for long periods of time. . . you have to recognize that home for many people is somewhere other than where you think of as home. (Digital Philadelphia Initiative Summit, 2009)

The circulation of media-based texts created from this day was part of the local process of shaping what the Philadelphia work would look like, beginning with an inclusive anti-poverty vision that the City government and the Urban Affairs Coalition needed to support, as the Primary Applicants for the BTOP funds.

**The Awarded ‘Freedom Rings’ Proposals**

Both the *Freedom Rings Partnership* PCC and the SBA proposals were awarded to the Primary Applicants (Primes), the City of Philadelphia’s Division of Technology (City) and Urban Affairs Coalition (UAC), respectively, and announced in summer 2010 and fall 2010. The PCC grant was primarily for staffing and opening public computer centers in different parts of the city. MMP was designated one of four Managing Partners, responsible for six of seventy-seven citywide public computer centers that were funded through BTOP. The SBA grant was primarily for delivering training as a vehicle for promoting sustainable broadband adoption. This proposal named eight Managing Partners as well as the Open Technology Institute, as the official evaluator of the overall FRP. With grant support from the Knight Foundation, MMP was able to take the lead in writing the SBA proposal.

The routine work of writing grant proposals is typically in the hands of one or few people. Organizations frequently hire individuals who are uniquely in charge of “Development” functions, including grant writing. The everyday work involved in “wordsmithing” grant proposals is based on the individual grant writers’ activation of texts and perhaps collective
discussions about appropriating funds for local purposes or weighing the pros and cons of taking up discourses entering from funding sources. The BTOP proposals took advantage of terms lacking clarity (such as sustainable broadband adoption and the curriculum itself), and created specific language to argue for expanded conceptions, such as the inclusion of digital media production. The term sustainable broadband adoption was not raised for public comment and was left undefined, although the Stimulus Act reinforced a market-oriented interpretation leaning towards increasing subscribership to broadband services. The SBA proposal aligned to this interpretation by committing to increase broadband subscribership in 5000 new households in public housing.

MMP was committed to advancing a different interpretation of SBA, which was included in the proposal. “Several partners will provide Freedom Rings SBA participants with opportunities to create content, which many have found to be the most effective way to promote sustainable broadband adoption among youth. This includes the Media Mobilizing Project’s digital media workshops and an educational television studio…that will facilitate citywide video production” (Freedom Rings Partnership, SBA Proposal, 2010). MMP’s stake in this proposal was to access resources for their ongoing educational work. These various strategies entered into the proposals. The language in the awarded proposals, then, translated to the terms outlined in the scope of work in each of the contracts, the culminating documents of the grant process. In the terms of their subcontract with the City of Philadelphia, MMP was named Provider, designating them as responsible and accountable for providing city services on behalf of the municipal government.

The BTOP award to Philadelphia was a significant victory for the City in a nationally competitive process. However, MMP and other key local organizations were not acknowledged
as central to this process in mainstream communication of this success. Institutional
documentary processes in a hierarchical form of accountability can highlight or erase the work
processes of individuals and organizations. Meanwhile, communicating the news about the grant
awards to people and organizations close to MMP was now necessary in order to enlist them into
the emerging work. Because pursuing this money was not a collectivized endeavor, across
MMP’s division of labor, this was both a time of excitement and trepidation. Some people were
knowledgeable and experienced with the impacts of federal funds changing the nature of
organizing work. With historical examples and lived experience in mind, other MMP leaders,
perhaps skeptical, who were new to local and national digital inclusion conversations were now
pulled into imagining and implementing the organization’s work in this new period.

**Text-Based Interindividual Territories**

Grant proposals are occasions that create text-based interindividual territories that may be
investigated for how the actual becomes translated into the institutional. As discussed in Chapter
Three, Smith borrows from Volosinov (1973) the concept of “interindividual territories” that
come into being through language, organizing a reciprocal relationship between speaker/hearer
or reader/writer “in which their differentiated experiences and perspectives intersect in a world
known and named in common” (Smith, 2005, p. 78). Smith (2005) continues this theorization
into the activities of reading fixed words on a page, and then activating them within coordinated
sequences of action, in which consciousness arises. Language, such as the language found in the
successful grants, that has been abstracted from different spheres of activity, is activated by
people who become agents of the text in their local settings. DeVault (2008) speaks to this point
and explains:
Textualization is collective activity. . . the moment of textualization, for each actor, is one moment in an extended course of action; people anticipate textualization, and, when it is completed, they expect to use its product elsewhere. . . These routine exchanges of textual material link the places where things get done; they are significant because they organize those doings, making some but not other things possible, shaping opportunities for action. (p.7).

For instance, during the Philadelphia grant process, definitions (or lack of definition) of terms such as “digital inclusion” or “sustainable broadband adoption” became significant locally in aligning a community driven vision of a citywide network of public computer centers with the terms of the legislation and the NOFA, as well as advocating for a vision for local implementation. This textual process involved the incorporation of standardized terms and concepts, which needed to be repeatedly referenced in order to argue for the relevance and alignment of ongoing local work to specified funding criteria, or to protest and expand terms and shift concepts that were otherwise exclusive of this local work. As Dorothy Smith (2005) notes, “the texts exert significant control. It is a control exercised through how its words and sentences activate the reader’s responses” (p. 108). At this stage, reading texts were integral to action; standardized texts and terms were incorporated into the production of new texts, and each of these activities [reading, discussing, analyzing, producing] were oriented to the governing texts, in an upward alignment.

Becoming agents of the texts, or activating the texts, does not automatically indicate agreement or automatic implementation of them. Resistance and disagreement also work from the text’s agenda (Smith, 2005). People’s attention was focused on particular terms in order to scrutinize and fit or expand them, making future desired institutional actions obtainable. In
addition to struggles with defining sustainable broadband adoption, at the local level, some terms, were taken up within public comment periods in the national process, as allied organizations of MMP with closer affiliation to beltway politics, attempted to persuade the NTIA to shift its funding priorities in Round Two of the granting process. Investigating the trail of OTI’s public comments reveals the shifting language based on their public comments to the NTIA. The second NOFA reflected a changed focus on comprehensive community infrastructure and emphasis on community anchor institutions: “Expanding broadband capabilities for community anchor institutions will result in substantial benefits for the entire community, delivering improved education, healthcare, and economic development” (Notice of Funds Availability, 2010, p. 3795). Aware that changes were taking place, OTI had already released Changes, Requirements and Critical Details: Final Broadband Stimulus Opportunity for BTOP on January 15, 2010 to notify and assist organizations intending to apply for BTOP funds, paving the way for stronger proposals from Philadelphia for the three streams of funding, of which two were successful.

The second half of this chapter continues the exploration of these textually-mediated sequences of action within the hierarchical accountability circuit that regulated and coordinated the implementation of programs by all of the organizations involved in the grant awarded Freedom Rings Partnership. Particularly important here was the lack of definition for sustainable broadband adoption in MMP’s final contract with the Urban Affairs Coalition, the Prime recipient for this grant. This contract also did not specify the curriculum that was required to be delivered in the public computer centers. Two examples from the data illustrate how MMP resisted some pressures and conformed to others in the development of one curriculum.
Hierarchical Accountability Circuits Reorganized MMP’s Work

This section details the textual processes within a vertical circuit of accountability, which joined with the regulations and managerial terms that were institutionalized as part of BTOP in order to standardize and measure the performance of the citywide Freedom Rings Partnership for both the SBA and PCC grant streams. Within institutional ethnography, Griffith and Smith (2014) articulate institutional circuits as circular processes that coordinate the everyday actualities of experience with the objectified categories and concepts of the institution. Institutional frames organize selectively what will be recorded or otherwise entered into the textual representations that make actualities institutionally actionable. Accountability circuits are a special type of institutional circuit focusing on making performance or outcomes produced at the front line accountable in terms of managerial categories and objectives. (p. 340)

This section, then, focuses on analyzing how this hierarchical accountability circuit shaped definitions of terms and metrics governing MMP’s frontline work, including the production of curriculum, as part of the federally funded Freedom Rings Partnership.

As organizations within the Freedom Rings Partnership (FRP) began to implement the funds that they received at the beginning of 2011, the administration of the BTOP work was heavily reliant on technologies of accountability that were created and implemented at the local and federal levels. The Open Technology Institute (OTI) was instrumental in creating the processes for the FRP to generate standardized reporting for the federal government. In their role as official evaluator for BTOP in Philadelphia, OTI facilitated textualized processes that contributed to documentation and reporting within both vertical (aligned to federal and municipal
government) and horizontal (aligned to partnering organizations in the Freedom Rings Partnership) accountability circuits. By creating and collating information from several reporting tools and processes, they facilitated the hierarchical, documentary capture of the work in data forms that were required by the government. In a *Program Evaluation and Research Plan for the Freedom Rings Partnership*, OTI submitted an analysis of existing data collection instruments in order to identify gaps and find ways to streamline the reporting. To illustrate the administrative heaviness of BTOP, they reviewed the SBA Partners’ forms, PCC Partners’ forms, the Workstation User Survey designed for PCC, the SBA reporting tool and the PCC reporting tool. Eventually, they designed a reporting mechanism that both minimized the vertical reporting for organizations within the FRP and collated the data for the required quarterly reports that the City and UAC had to submit to the NTIA.

The diagram below visualizes how accountability circuits work, beginning with a flow of categories and concepts from regulating bodies at the international level and managerial regimes, during the economic crisis, to the frontlines, where all of the local FRP organizations had to reframe their work to fit to the required objectives and outcomes of the grants. I created this diagram based on the textual data that I collected and analyzed. However, there are important, other institutional complexes that were also at play within the social relations of the digital economy. For instance, I did not examine corporate intersections in this study, but all of the computers in the PCCs were always PCs or Apple. The digital literacy curriculum that Freedom Rings Partners were pressured to adopt, included skills specifically in using Microsoft software. This diagram is meant to show how things work and can and should be expanded to include these and other entities. While, this chapter focuses on vertical accountability, I will refer to this
Figure 1. Hierarchical accountability circuit reorganizes work at the frontlines.

Reporting Mechanisms Within Hierarchical Accountability Circuits

As MMP frontline workers set out to accomplish the grant, multiple reporting requirements were introduced to maintain compliance with federal regulations. As individuals created new work plans within the context of overall disorganization and reorganization under new terms, BTOP program staff had to accommodate these requirements. After signing the contracts with the City and UAC (Primes), staff were required to attend meetings of the Freedom Rings Partnership and the working committees. The various working committees each had their own institutionalized text-based processes and reporting mechanisms that fed into the evaluation
and reporting tools for each of the PCC and SBA grant streams. This information was fed into quarterly reports for the NTIA, and so on. The regulatory framework of BTOP comprised a complex hierarchy of government policies, compliance texts, and funding arrangements. This “intertextual hierarchy” (Smith, 2006, p. 79) organized a vertical accountability circuit that defined the delivery, reporting, and management of the BTOP programs within the workings of the digital economy. Sequences of text-action-text activity within accountability circuits can be investigated, such as this chain of reporting illustrated in Figure 2. This figure shows how a very mundane, new, required activity within a public computer center (recording training hours and numbers of participants) is incorporated into a new institutional text, in the form of a report, and then proceeds through a chain of text-action-text of reporting activities. In this way, an attendance sheet within a community anchor institution that has been funded with stimulus dollars flows up a hierarchical chain and is incorporated into an understanding of the U.S.’s economic positioning within an international context.
This connection between local and extra-local contexts is not typically within the consciousness of people conducting frontline work. What is required and not are often the most immediate concerns and what garners attention. For instance, this interview with MMP BTOP Manager 1 towards the end of the funding period highlights how one aspect of reporting took place within top down procedures:
The reporting is so number heavy, there’s definitely space for narrative but they haven’t cared, so I don’t do much. Just how many people were in classes that month and how many hours we train them for. . . . But in the first 6-9 months of the project, we were required to use a project management tool to track the implementation of the program, we had to say that we opened up this hiring process, we developed this curriculum, we set up this computer center. . . . There was a lot of debate early on about this whole project tracking thing. There’s no requirement to have records about how we implemented every step of the process. But UAC required us to keep this project management tool up to date. (MMP BTOP Manager 1, personal communication, October 4, 2013)

There were differences in how UAC (SBA) and the City (PCC) managed the programs, with more tensions on the Sustainable Broadband Adoption side surrounding pressures to define adoption of broadband technology as subscribing to the internet and to standardize the digital literacy curriculum across the city. This is the focus of the following sections in this chapter.

**Defining and Measuring Sustainable Broadband Adoption**

Within the Urban Affairs Coalition’s management of the recipients of SBA funds, a notable tension grew surrounding how to determine whether sustainable broadband adoption had been achieved and which methods were effective in reaching this goal. In an interview I conducted with OTI Consultant 2, who was charged with collecting and analyzing the qualitative data during the evaluation process, this informant discussed this as “one major tension from the beginning that stayed a tension throughout” (OTI Consultant 2 April 10, 2015). She elaborated that
for the SBA Prime [Urban Affairs Coalition], their focus was really on subscriptions- that was their grant deliverable. 5000 subscriptions to Comcasts’ Internet Essentials Program. That was a real deliverable/grant requirement that they were funded to produce… That requirement didn’t make it into all the contracts of all the Managing Partners. But basically, there was a pressure that UAC had to get concrete subscriptions as proof, as an indicator that people were adopting. Philosophically, many partners just wanted people to be able to touch technology and have access to it, and that was “adoption.” Subscribing at home, especially with how much technology costs, even with Internet Essentials ($13 / month), for a lot of people it’s a matter of whether they can get a certain prescription or have certain food on the table. One group really wanted subscriptions and other groups didn’t want to be held to that because that wasn’t how they defined adoption. . . . This became a much broader conversation about what digital literacy and adoption were. And, it very much revolved around how the requirements were developed in the grants, too. (OTI Consultant 2, personal communication, April, 10, 2015)

MMP BTOP Manager 1 also commented on these same tensions. In an interview he explained:

there was a big fight about it. There was a number for subscribers coming from this funded part of the program. . . and also a murky expectation that all of the efforts should be getting people to subscribe. There was a constant back and forth fight to make sure that subscription requirements didn’t leak into the definition of adoption and the definition of adoption be inclusive of other work. . . . Some of
this was because, basically, people were organizing how their evaluation happens and how the reporting happens, how the project itself happens around what their understanding of what the federal guidelines were. (MMP BTOP Manager 1, personal communication, October 4, 2013)

From these two interviews, one representing the official evaluator, and one representing a frontline organization, we can begin to visualize the flow of an explicit interpretation of broadband adoption on “subscribership,” referred to above, as part of the Stimulus Act—to the SBA proposals—to (some of) the Managing Partner contracts—to concern at the frontline regarding how organizations would be evaluated. These hierarchical relations are further explored in the ways that MMP and other organizations resisted these narrow definitions of adoption that were encouraged locally, while the City and federal government selectively used stories that drew from MMP’s actual work. Stories that demonstrated more expansive interpretations of technology adoption in more marginal communities were used to show success of BTOP in Philadelphia, though not attributed to MMP or the Taxi Workers Alliance, who were featured.

**Resisting a narrow definition of adoption.** MMP and other organizations who were interested in other innovative, educational approaches to increasing people’s adoption of technology, had an interest in resisting hierarchical pressures to define adoption narrowly. Several meeting minutes offer evidence of MMP and other SBA Partners’ unhappiness with the “top down process instead of a collaborative effort” and “leadership style that is not working and is very rigid” (FRP SBA Partners Meeting Minutes, February 23, 2011). Meeting minutes taken on April 20, 2011 document an upcoming site visit with a NTIA Official, including the anxiety that “the NTIA is concerned with reporting. . . . NTIA is still, internally discussing definitions of
subscribers vs. adopters” (FRP SBA Partners Meeting Minutes). Local debates about the definition were rooted in immediate concerns about defining the work they were responsible for and how they would be evaluated. However, OTI, in their intermediary position, watched for opportunities to link these conversations to those who set broadband policy in Washington, D.C.

OTI Consultant 2 offered that:

MMP and [Allied FRP Partner Organization] fighting for a broader definition of adoption helped to slowly open the door for NTIA to see it more broadly too. . . .

There were times that we would touch base with them, as evaluators, along with the Primes. They did site visits with all the Partners. And there were conferences where we would just share back what we were doing with our evaluation. They were excited that we released our evaluation instruments and started looking at us as a model for implementing these sort of programs. (OTI Consultant 2, personal communication, April, 10, 2015)

The deliberate absence of a measurable definition for this particular standardized term opened possibilities for including other practices of adopting technology within a hierarchical accountability circuit.

The issue of defining sustainable broadband adoption was also present in discussions and decisions over curriculum. Meeting minutes taken on August 10, 2011 from the FRP SBA Training Work Group document an exchange where the subscription requirements were “leaking” into hierarchical pressures to shape the curriculum in particular ways. This conversation takes place within months long discussion about the pros and cons of standardizing a citywide curriculum for digital literacy. This excerpt shows that some SBA Partners had a clear
interest in ensuring that a digital literacy curriculum was developed that would result in increased
subscriptions to the Internet:

*SBA Partner:* Where are we with the curriculum based on subscriber and adopter
and how can we develop it to help people subscribe?

*MMP BTOP Director:* We need to have a discussion of adoption, understand all
the barriers, and talk through alternative adoption methods.

*City BTOP Manager:* We need a broader view of understanding what adoption is
. . . and not just the subscription to the internet.

Hence in the above discussion overall we see how terms like “adopter” and
“subscriber” are taken up by individuals who are institutionally authorized and
accountable in specific ways. We may assume that the SBA Partner speaking in this
exchange belongs to an organization who is accountable to increase subscriptions to the
internet. MMP and the City of Philadelphia were not. These different positions shaped
differing opinions on the content of curriculum. I continue this discussion about
curriculum below, focused on greater institutional pressures surrounding the digital
literacy education within the accountability circuit. Conversations such as those cited
above revealed the link between institutional pressure and this subscription requirement
that was written into the SBA proposal and consequently, the UAC contract with the
federal government.

**Work made visible/invisible within accountability circuits.** Alternative
approaches to broadband adoption were not required to be documented as part of
reporting procedures but in some situations were selectively circulated as stories of
success. Even when required reporting processes seemed minimal, these accountability
mechanisms determined what was documented and how, what became visible and invisible. Most public attention was on the City of Philadelphia’s OIT and the Urban Affairs Coalition, including for recognition of success. A White House Champion of Change award went to Adel Ebeid, then Chief Innovation Officer for the work of the Freedom Rings Partnership, in 2012. He was primarily recognized for his support of KEYSPOT, which he described as an effort of “re-casting the role of government through community engagement and civic collaboration” (Millner, 2012) in low-income communities. Meanwhile, MMP’s role in bringing BTOP to Philadelphia was rendered mostly invisible. At the same time, the government used stories that came from the experiences in MMP’s centers.

Searching Philadelphia on the official federal BTOP website brings up a case study from a series called Tales from the Frontlines that features taxi drivers in one of MMP’s PCCs, learning to adopt broadband technologies by Skyping relatives in Bangladesh and India (BTOP Case Study, 2012). The story emphasizes Philadelphia’s identity as a global city committed to its most vulnerable residents, but erases the context of these workers who fought to organize their sector using new media strategies in collaboration with MMP. These occurrences call into question who gets to tell the stories about what is happening in the public computer centers and who benefits. Circulating this “fragmented truth” (Saunders, 2010) affirms the changing role of government while ensuring that the purpose of the computer centers is depoliticized.

**Curriculum as Components of Accountable Social Organization**

The above discussions about defining and measuring sustainable broadband adoption as part of BTOP’s circuit of accountability, reveal the relevance of these debates to the design of curriculum. In this section, I focus on the social organization that led to the production of MMP’s
Basic Computers curriculum, which they implemented in their six Public Computer Centers (PCCs). They developed two curricula in total and these products were components in completing the institutionalized accountability circuits dictated by the grants. MMP’s SBA funding contract with the Urban Affairs Coalition left the content of curriculum required for completing training hours undefined, promoting the appearance of openness and flexibility. However, the following section describes some of the textually based activities that led to this particular form of curriculum. I discuss the local pressures that contributed to the curriculum design based on international standards that were invoked and encouraged in required meetings. This section concludes with accounts during and after implementation of the Basic Computer Skills curriculum that showed the difficulty in incorporating the radical ideas that MMP had originally envisioned for these trainings. MMP’s Basic Computers curriculum was responsive to the social organization within the hierarchical accountability circuit dictated by BTOP, which connected this local instance to the workings of the social relations of the digital economy.

**Pressures surrounding curriculum within SBA Partner and Working Group meetings.** As a Managing Partner, MMP was required to attend the biweekly SBA Partners meetings and the SBA Training Working Group meetings, which focused on the development and implementation of curricula across the city. In a very early Training Working Group meeting on November 9, 2010, the main activity was for the organizations to share existing curriculum they intended to use in the PCCs. This was reported back in the SBA Partners meeting on December 1, 2010 as the Training Group’s intention to “cover basic computer fundamentals” (SBA Partner Minutes), along with the reminder that “All reports, financial reports, and budgets are due to the Funders” (SBA Partner Minutes). The Training Group reported they were developing a chart for all the Partners to display what each group is doing (January 12, 2011).
However, the comments reveal the disagreement about standardizing and measuring success of the digital literacy curriculum between MMP, another partner organization and the Director of the SBA Program, who was under UAC:

[Partner Organization 1] suggested sub-recipients utilize their own curriculum based on their own skill level and proposal requirements

SBA Program Director (UAC): Although there is some flexibility about how they achieve the Best Practices, program participants should have obtained a *certain skill set*, after graduating from the classes. (SBA Training Group Minutes, January 12, 2011)

This conversation continued into the next meetings on February 23, 2011 when the Training Group discussed the possibility of building a portal that would be a “central hub for a FRP branded curriculum” (SBA Training Workgroup Minutes) and the SBA Project Director urged Partner organizations to consider recording various curriculum-specific milestones in the project management tool: “decide on skill sets and documentations. What are the module names, length, content, skills and skill documentation,” “Create a Plan for Curriculum Sharing: how to avoid re-creation when a viable curriculum exists”, “All Partners Develop Training Tracking Methodology” (SBA Training Workgroup Minutes). A SBA Partners meeting this same day was held where it was recorded that the Training Group reached no resolution about how to use this online portal for standardized curriculum. A section of the meeting minutes records several complaints about the extent of administrative work, top down approach, and evident “challenges of documentation” including MMP’s opinion that “The style of leadership is not working and is very rigid. That leadership doesn’t take the time to look at programs from the ground up.” The SBA Project Director stated “As Project Director, I have to be aware of what’s going on. . . . If
more information is entered into the project management tool, then I will not need to spend long periods of time on the implementation calls.” However, the style was punitive: “We had a meeting where they threatened to put us on probation because we were late on submitting a report” (MMP BTOP Manager 1, personal communication, October 4, 2013). In part, this was related to the contention surrounding standardizing a digital literacy curriculum.

**Imposing international standards for curriculum.** For the next few months, discussion continued about establishing a framework on Core Competencies, which was drafted by June 1, 2011 based on some of the Partners’ existing curricula and international standards taken from the International Computer Driver’s License (ICDL), “the international standard in end-user computer skills. It is a certification in the practical use of computers and computer applications” (http://icdlusa.org/about). In a Training Meeting on June 1, 2011, the SBA Project Director asked “How can the partners better offer pieces of the framework and/or modules akin to the ICDL in terms of modules? How many people are taking advantage of the full ICDL style instruction as opposed to slimmed down offerings that most of the other agencies are teaching?” (Training Working Group Meeting Minutes, June 1, 2011). On June 27, 2011, a representative from a Partner organization asked “is there a requirement that curriculum be standardized in the grant?” (Training Working Group Meeting Minutes, June 1, 2011). It was confirmed that this was just a suggestion that groups employ and not a requirement, but meanwhile UAC circulated a chart listing the SBA Computer Literacy Training Modules (Level 1 Training).

All Partner organizations were listed, with a yes or no designating whether or not they offered each module. In this particular form from summer 2011, MMP was the only organization that hadn’t completed it. In the August 24, 2011 Training Group meeting, the SBA Project Director asked MMP’s BTOP Manager 1 directly about “where you’re doing trainings, what
you’re training people on (core and extra-curricular) and what the hours are. . . . Take the core curricula sent out, highlight what skills you’re doing and then send it back” (SBA Training Group Minutes). This conversational exchange was recorded in the minutes that were uploaded into the project management system for anyone in partnering organizations of the FRP to access. Though the curriculum was not specified in the BTOP contracts and there was no official requirement to standardize digital literacy training, partnering organizations largely went along with the local management pressures. MMP began to offer Basic Computer Skills classes, which incorporated some of the expected basic digital literacy modules pertaining to categories that UAC encouraged based on the international standards: hardware/equipment, internet, MSOffice, social networking, internet adoption, etc. (SBA Computer Literacy Training Modules—spreadsheet). The accommodations that MMP’s BTOP educators made in the production of this curriculum were part of fitting their frontline work to the standards of hierarchical regimes within this circuit of accountability.

**Difficulty incorporating radical ideas into Basic Computer Skills curriculum.** In 2011, I interviewed the MMP’s Media Educator Organizers (MEOs), who were newly hired with BTOP funds to design and deliver trainings, about their task of designing curriculum for the PCCs. At that time, MMP MEO 2 acknowledged that the process of developing curriculum for MMP, which intended to incorporate elements of radical learning (political education in MMP’s organizational jargon) within the computer classes, now largely modeled on standardized digital literacy modules, was not straightforward. At that point, radical ideas stood separately in the curriculum, rather than being integrated into the pedagogy surrounding the technology. “It doesn’t have the ideal pedagogical practice where the student creates a new language that is liberatory within the context of a classroom” (personal communication, November 12, 2011).
Other MEOs also struggled with this integration “especially when there’s a pressure that the PCCs and what we do there have synergy with the [real] organizing goals of MMP” (personal communication, November 12, 2011). MMP’s own website described the purpose of the computer centers using aspects of the dominant discourse surrounding broadband adoption, such as access, skilling, and engagement:

Free and open to the public, MMP’s six computer centers (also known as KEYSPOTs) provide technology access and skills training for young people, families, workers and community leaders – both to meet daily needs and to share the stories that connect and cohere communities and galvanize civic engagement. Trainings include basic computer skills, Internet literacy, job-readiness, college access and digital storytelling. (https://mediamobilizing.org/2012/08/27/philly-keyspots-the-internet-turn-it-on/)

The drive to (re)train and (up)skill stems from market-based ideals (Jackson, 2011). Digital literacy within this framework is meant to foster job readiness. The overall marketing of the PCCs influenced potential learners’ expectations as well as the priorities of the learning designers. Later, MMP’s Site Organizers, who were hired to staff the PCCs, became familiar with the curriculum the MEOs designed in order to begin teaching during their staffing hours in the PCCs. I observed the MMP instructors in four of the PCCs, and later interviewed them about their attempts to achieve a balance between teaching instrumental skills and introducing political concepts during Basic Computer classes. One curriculum had been designed for Basic Computers and each of the instructors could adapt it to their constituency as they saw fit. I observed learners practice the same word processing exercise that involved correcting punctuation in a quote about technology from Martin Luther King, Jr. at three of the PCCs. The
instructors’ mixed experiences with using this prompt to facilitate meaningful conversation revealed important barriers that, in some cases were addressed through other organizing strategies beyond the technical learning that was at the center of these classes.

At Casa Monarca, a center rooted in South Philadelphia’s Latin American community, MMP Site Organizer 1 reflected with me about this particular exercise.

I remember [the MLK lesson] was part of the second class when we would talk about the keyboard. Because nobody typed—they didn’t have the kind of jobs where they needed typing—they had no reason to know how to use a keyboard and mouse. So I would use the lesson with a MLK quote and the exercise would be to put the cursor in the right place to correct the document. Some people would struggle, some did it in a minute. It opened up some space for discussion, often not deep. Many would agree, we have all this technology and yet there is this spiritual yearning and loss. Where has it really gotten us? It’s good to know the technology but it’s not the be all end all. We would have some kind of discussion about it. I remember at least one conversation that went on for a while and I remember thinking it struck a chord this time. MLK doesn’t have quite the same significance for this [primarily Spanish speaking] population. (MMP Site Organizer 1, personal communication, April 18, 2013)

Some learners from Casa Monarca did get involved with other work with MMP in deeper ways through the Media Institutes and Radio Unidad. Some became very committed leaders within immigrant rights work. This point of entry happened through the computer centers. In MMP’s PCC targeting taxi drivers, one of the early decisions was to focus on using the space for English as a Second Language courses for some of the wives of cab drivers. Primarily from the
Bangladeshi community, this allowed some of the drivers’ wives to be able to get service industry jobs. For this community, learning English seemed to be a more direct route to workforce development than acquiring computer skills. Similar to MMP Site Organizer 1’s account of the Spanish speaking population’s interaction in classes, this diverse, immigrant population did not connect with the history and symbols of the American Civil Rights period and Martin Luther King, Jr. used in some of MMP’s educational materials.

At MMP’s PCC that was housed within the Philadelphia Unemployment Project, MMP Site Organizer 3 first talked about the work of building trust with people:

You first have to make people comfortable with their lack of knowledge. If there is something they don't know, they have to feel comfortable about the person they are asking the information from. They have to trust them and then you have to be able to share that information and give it to them in a way in which there is still some dignity without you presenting it as though I know more than you and you don’t. (MMP Site Organizer 3, personal communication, March 30, 2013)

Site Organizer 3 commented about the MLK quote exercise. She said that though it’s good for historical value and knowledge, most people don’t want to talk about the economic situation without an explanation about what is going to be done about it. “People are skeptical and distrustful about talk about social movements and organizing, perhaps because they don’t see that past social movements amounted to anything in the present” (MMP Site Organizer 3, personal communication, March 30, 2013). Site Organizer 3 was dismayed by people’s individualism but she also thought that this was related with the particular challenges people who were coming to this organization. “They maybe have a community together because they are
staying in a homeless shelter together. But when it comes down to it, they basically want to know what it is that they could do to change their life individually, as opposed to a group.”

In MMP’s PCC, located in an African American North Philadelphia community development center known as Logan CDC, I met different learners over a few classes in a session. MMP Site Organizer 2 noted that people were not consistent and had intense life circumstances making it difficult to keep up the six-week flow of the curriculum and see steady progress. I witnessed him patiently explaining content (often the same material he’d gone over in past classes) to mostly elderly African American women who attended as they were able. In his earnest attempts to teach them skills, he would introduce conversation in other ways throughout the class, through more informal approaches. Located in a struggling neighborhood that MMP was not greatly familiar with, MMP Site Organizer 2 used his own organizing skills to conduct outreach about the PCC in the community. His recollections of this revealed some of his own ambivalence about the technology itself:

In the beginning, I went to barbershops and beauty salons and door-to-door with flyers. A lot of people have stuff at home. People have gadgets today. People are into it. They want to be in their own houses and don’t come out much anymore. It makes people anti-social. You can see people on the internet and they don’t have to be physically in proximity. It can make people shallow and it’s taking your power to be interactive away. I have a thousand friends and don’t see them anymore. (MMP Site Organizer 2, personal communication, March 27, 2013)

Over time, several MMP leaders had the insight that the digital literacy programs through the PCCs were “not actually building a broader community that we get to keep educating or growing with” (MMP BTOP Manager 2, personal communication, April 20, 2013). The reorganization of
their work within the PCCs, according to the pressures within BTOP, clashed with MMP’s prior practices and lateral accountability within a broader community of social justice organizations.

Being present in the PCCs allowed me to see impacts of standardization first hand on the ability of this curriculum to resonate across different communities as well as the difficulty in incorporating radical ideas into the education. In the most immediate, local context, MMP only had capacity to focus on one Basic Computers curriculum with Site Organizer staff who were only employed for 12-15 hours per week. It is evident that not all lessons were capable of resonating with particular populations. However, reflection and meaningful redesign of a (mostly prescribed course, based on the international standards of the International Computer Driving License) that they were teaching to conform with the extra-local pressures in a hierarchical accountability circuit, was not a focus during this time. SBA Partner organizations frequently pointed out the significance of being able to tailor the curriculum to the specific needs of each of the communities in which they were teaching.

Finally, my interview with MMP MEO 1, who was involved in the design of three different MMP curricula, shed light on the disjuncture caused on the front line by MMP’s own ideology about media and movement building, particularly in how this collided with the mandate to reach numbers of people at each of the PCCs.

A lot of our work as trainers was designed. . . to be working with new people for a significant percentage of our time, and that really butted heads with the dogma or whatever you want to call it of our mission: to unite leaders to build a movement to end poverty. . . . It was never quite clear how much we really wanted to have lots of new people. And not many other MMP people were there to try to understand the challenges of going into a classroom where you are teaching
people to use a mouse and a keyboard (and they are coming with that expectation), and then how do you create a space that engages people about what their reality is and the power that is acting on their lives. (MMP MEO 1, personal communication, March 30, 2013)

From another point of view, MMP BTOP Manager 2 offered that “we don’t actually need that much for this to be a really political thing. What we need is for people to be getting connected through this” (MMP BTOP Manager 2, personal communication, 2011). Direct connections built through relationships was a different form of accountability that MMP was originally based in and continued to facilitate during the BTOP period.

**Conclusion: An Appearance of Openness**

An important aspect of the analysis of social organization from this research is that these explorations of textual production and accountability circuits penetrate beneath the appearance that the BTOP work might have been straightforward and open to MMP’s interpretation of how to foster sustainable broadband adoption. However, this chapter shows the social organization that coordinated MMP staff people to align with institutional terms flowing in a complex hierarchical regime of accountability. A glance at what was written in the contracts (and left undefined) gives the impression that MMP’s obligation to BTOP was, simply, to keep six computer centers open and staffed for 15 hours/week and hire trainers to deliver curriculum. The curriculum content was not specified in the contracts and MMP already had a successful track record of teaching digital media production and organizing for digital access. Further, compared to other established government grant programs, these funds were relatively unregulated. It is the workings of social relations that implicated and coordinated local experience in extra-local, hierarchical institutional complexes as part of the digital economy. However, another form of
accountability, based on direct relationships, and organizing a different practice of textual production within MMP’s ongoing radical media production, was also at work during these years. Chapter Five describes these different practices and a lateral form of accountability that, together, with this chapter highlight a stark organizational bifurcation that was produced during MMP’s implementation of BTOP.
CHAPTER FIVE

FIGHTING FOR THE PUBLIC SECTOR:
RELATIONAL BASIS OF LATERAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The purpose of this research is to explicate the social relations of broadband access and adoption through the public programs implemented by the Media Mobilizing Project (MMP), operating for the first time under federal regulations that orchestrated the practice of the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) trans-locally. Parallel to the processes and events taking place surrounding the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) grants discussed in the last chapter, Media Mobilizing Project (MMP) leaders continued their original combined practices of media production, organizing, and radical education in organizing on behalf of the public sector. The accounts in this chapter are written to demonstrate the growing bifurcation within MMP, as a result of being drawn into hierarchical institutional complexes during the period of securing and implementing the BTOP grants. This chapter highlights the distinct processes surrounding language that were part of the production of MMP’s radical media during this time. This textual production (of media-texts), or media production, was articulated to a different form of accountability from the institutional circuits described in Chapter Four. Instead, lateral accountability based on direct relationships with organizations and individuals that MMP leaders built alliances in response to hostile material and political conditions, defined the imperatives for this radical media production.

MMP’s slogan, since its beginning, has been “Movements begin with the telling of untold stories” (Media Mobilizing Project, 2011). This chapter is divided into two main sections and a conclusion. In the first half of this chapter, I focus on media production that builds collective subjectivity. Here the focus is on the textual practices of telling untold stories as part of MMP’s media programs, including how the resulting media-texts proceed as a coordinator of subjectivity
and activity, in alignment with the subjects of the media. MMP puts media-texts that document stories of lived experience to use primarily in the formation of a broadened, politicized subjectivity. Related to this goal is the use of media-texts in specific contexts as a vehicle for building new organizing platforms and use of media interventions in public opinion, policy, and campaigns. For these varied purposes, the media-texts function in sequences of text-action-text sequences versus a form of expression or a creative act in itself. These media-texts take care to preserve the authenticity of individual and collective voices and experiences, but are then also used in particular activities to build cohesion among fragmented communities, and to mobilize people to act. In Volosinov’s (1973) exploration of the relationship between language and consciousness, he emphasized that the expression of lived experience organizes experience itself. Experience becomes experience through language, as we come to express it through talk or through text. This concept is significant to the media production process where people who do interviews as part of media production must build a relationship to the subject of the media to allow for the expression of lived experience.

The second half of the chapter discusses the relational form of lateral accountability, which, though dissolving during these years, contributed to their local media production and organizing work that challenged municipal austerity measures. The chapter’s conclusion returns to the differences in textual production and underlying accountability here, and in Chapter Four that are at the heart of divergent activity. I also reiterate the significance of MMP’s combined practices that were part of its founding and that continue as possible, under the pressures of sustaining itself.
Media Production that Builds Collective Subjectivity Within Experience-Based Interindividual Territories

MMP’s media production aims to build collective subjectivity using referents to common lived experiences. Both the process of creating these media texts and the use of these completed products are part of the relational work to build broadened, politicized networks that come together in collective resistance. MMP media makers are trained to regard interviews as experiences in themselves. Conducting interviews in these media production processes that elicit the expression of people’s lived experience, provides both the interviewer and the interviewee with an opportunity that moves each of their consciousnesses. Smith (2005) borrows from Volosinov (1973) the concept that interindividual territory comes into being within the interaction between speaker and hearer, or the reader and fixed text, as explored in Chapter Four. “[I]t comes into being. . . as their consciousnesses are coordinated in language” (Smith, 2005, p. 77). The politicized practice of interviewing in media production are opportunities where interindividuial territories based in people telling stories about their experiences are established and recorded by the MMP media producer. In a short instructional document that I wrote in 2009 for MMP’s leadership development processes with media producers, I stated that “[i]nterviewing overlaps with other practices of MMP’s and is used as a critical method to build relationships, politicize, educate, expose power and conditions, and improve technical skills. We aim for the process to transform both the interviewer as well as the interviewee.” Media producers must engage subjects of MMP’s media in the expression of conditions in their lives that is also coalescing their inner worlds. “Realized expression [of experience]. . . begins to tie inner life together, giving it more definite and lasting expression” (Volosinov, 1973, p. 90). The intention is that the innerworlds of both speaker and hearer are tied together in a more defined
understanding of solidarity. This process is a crucial component of what is hoped for through MMP’s political education program to “suture” the subjectivities of a class that is not yet aware of itself and serve as a base of political activity (Funke, Robe & Wolfson, 2012). Consciousness, in addition to content knowledge and skills, is coordinated and given direction through this combination of media production, organizing, and political education. Resulting artifacts are then put to use to produce different kinds of social interventions, including interventions in particular campaigns and regulatory processes.

Language in MMP’s media texts is both based in experiences and also (re)framed in reference to language circulating in mainstream media and boss texts. In this way, this language orients towards institutional texts, although in the spirit of contesting them, creating a dynamic relationship between the reported speech (of people’s direct experiences) and the reporting context. The engagement with thought from leaders in media, think tanks, government, professions, academia, etc., compels the re-framing of issues and the independent production of media texts accountable to poor and working communities in the network form that MMP had facilitated. The use of language that has experience versus institutional texts as its base works differently where individual voice and identity are preserved. The creation of new mediated texts that incorporate these recorded interviews aims to maintain the integrity of the stories and reveal the interconnectedness of these individuals with others, in contrast to the standardizing erasure of particular individuals’ identities and words in institutional texts. The media is in relation to organizing, informing and informed by it, and relies on a politicized education. However, the social organization of funding encourages separation between these activities through categorized streams. The goal of building the leadership of a coherent network, requires individuals to move beyond isolated areas of work to build the whole.
The following sections explore a few examples of MMP’s media-texts during the same period as securing BTOP funds, and the various work that these media-texts contributed to coordinating locally. First, media production that incorporated principles of montage (process of joining together fragments in order to create a new composite whole) were applied to create powerful cross-sector and cross-community organizing contexts. Second, I examine how, infused within particular organizing strategies around current issues, the textual production was sometimes used to broaden the ways that these issues were commonly framed and understood within mainstream media and discourse. Third, I consider how at other times, when continual media production in collaboration with organizations grew strong, new organizing platforms were launched that would become new independent initiatives in the city. MMP has incubated several new organizations in Philadelphia, all of which were seeded during the tumultuous BTOP years.

**Applying Textual Production of Montage to Organizing Contexts**

Within MMP, montages in different media forms—video, audio, and written—that suture (Funke, Robe, & Wolfson, 2012) various voices and stories from individuals and communities in different social locations illuminate commonality in experience. An organizing process is coupled with this, that brings together these communities into the same room in order to facilitate co-viewing opportunities as well as to consolidate a lateral formation of organizations that may participate together in future social action. This is a beginning to strengthening relationships and mobilizing groups around specific campaigns and generating strategies for new social actions. Speaking as a co-founder of these practices, the media-texts and organizing activities were meant to support and reinforce each other.
MMP has implemented several audio and video programs, using the internet as a platform, over time. Their audio programs have targeted different constituencies, particularly immigrant and labor communities, through *Radio Unidad* and *Labor Justice Radio*. Their video programs began with the support of their first major grant in 2006 for *Our City, Our Voices*, and during BTOP years, *MMP-TV* produced episodes for a public access station and web series between 2009-2013. With BTOP funds, *Movement Media Institutes* began in 2011, with a greater emphasis on maximizing potential for interaction and conversation during production and political education processes. Finally, since its founding, an annual tradition of screening video montages at an end-of-year community building dinner has taken place since 2006. Centered around a montage of stories from the year’s activities, and featuring leaders present in the room, these and similar events have earned MMP a reputation for the spaces they have created over the years as part of an organizing culture that builds stronger collective forms and action. Stories of lived experience are compelling in how they provoke us to scour our own experiences as we find relationship to the tellers, providing ways to reorganize and clarify our own existence when we recognize our own lives within others (Smith, 2005).

During the BTOP years, there were many examples of collective mobilizing across various sectors and communities. Some of MMP’s media recorded these stories. The video piece *Join the Fight to Save Lives: End the Brownouts* (Media Mobilizing Project, 2013) featured firefighters, paramedics, members of a Cambodian community association, neighborhood residents and other supporting organizations after city policies had been instituted that began rolling closures of neighborhood fire stations. The video revolves around a few incidents where Philadelphia residents died because fire trucks could not arrive in time, and included firefighters, the families of victims, and labor and community organizers who were directly impacted by
these incidents. In an economic climate in which public services were being cut from municipal budgets, this video especially highlighted the perspectives of firefighters who wanted to do their jobs. “We support this community. Many of our members that are around the corner—they apologize that they were not able to be here that night. They know they could have done the job. They were brokenhearted to find out what had happened right around the corner from their firehouse” (Media Mobilizing Project, 2013). Producing media such as this was both aimed at building a trusting collaborative relationship with the fire fighters union, and challenging the budget decisions and messaging from public officials who attempted to justify cuts to public services.

Another campaign at the time was centered around high school students leading a Campaign for Nonviolent Schools. MMP contributed to this organizing by mobilizing unions in various sectors and community organizations to support the protests (Media Mobilizing Project, 2011a; Media Mobilizing Project, 2011b) One video of an organized protest shows the youth co-hosts of the mobilization alerting the crowd to what they were doing right there and then: “We are here to tell you – we are not a flash mob” (Media Mobilizing Project, 2011a), referring to national attention in mainstream media that summer focusing on Philadelphia “criminal flash mobs” and “youth insanity” (Goodman, 2011). Many of MMP’s media pieces drew attention to the cross section of organizations and sectors, who were brought together, in part through their organizing efforts. The application of the concept and practice of “conjoin[ing] and sutur[ing] people across the region into new class-based subjectivities” (Funke, Robe, & Wolfson, 2012) contributed to a changed organizing landscape in Philadelphia. One experienced leader among MMP’s staff offered this perspective:
From working in [a social justice-oriented, local foundation] and doing the work that we helped do, I know this did not exist. Where we now have this thing that to us is very commonplace and almost boring now: taxi workers coming out and supporting students; students and taxi workers coming out to support firefighters; firefighters, students, taxi workers, nurses, being outside, like in the Brownouts video, doing a press conference to protest the results of these austerity measures in Philadelphia. I think it’s new, I think it’s new almost anywhere. (MMP BTOP Manager 2, personal communication, October 21, 2011)

However, a critical tension that began to emerge during these years was rooted in the decoupling of media production programs and organizing in response to funding pressures that encouraged the separation of these practices. This had implications for training media producers with these particular skills and perspectives. MMP Video Coordinator’s work as a producer and educator for MMP-TV compelled her to struggle to facilitate individuals’ leadership development, as they began to understand their interconnectedness with others in new ways through the media production process. Moving people from the work of media making into the organizing work and vice versa was increasingly difficult.

**Broadening Frames and Breaking Isolation**

Viewing anti-immigrant legislation in the context of the economic crisis, MMP leaders sought to expand the language in mainstream media that reinforced the isolation of immigrant communities. Different opportunities for organizing arose through the ongoing investigation and coverage of emerging issues in immigrant communities, as state and national legislation became increasingly draconian. Sometimes the media production and organizing work evolved out of these necessary, compelling struggles within one sector or community that had a basis of
cultural/linguistic/political unity, such as the Spanish speaking radio programs. In 2010, MMP organizers regularly visited day laborers at the Home Depot in Northeast Philadelphia, where workers would gather, hoping to be hired for work. On April 27, 2010, MMP radio production members interviewed a few men who spoke about what a typical day is like for them as well as the national climate in: "I Have No Reason to Hide" Interviews with Immigrant Day Laborers (Media Mobilizing Project, 2010a). Some of the day laborers from Home Depot were recruited into media/organizing work and through MMP’s facilitation met workers who were organizing in other sectors and regions. “We are consolidating our network as poor and working people. When immigrants are intertwined in that way, it doesn't leave people open and vulnerable. In my opinion, this is THE thing that people are using to divide people. In rural PA... we need to keep that in mind” (MMP Network Organizer, EC Meeting, July 28, 2010).

When the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) revoked hundreds of undocumented people’s drivers licenses (Media Mobilizing Project, 2010b), MMP’s radio producers attended community forums to document the stories of people affected by this decision and support six South Americans who, without the benefit of legal representation, launched and won a lawsuit against PennDOT in May 2009 (Media Mobilizing Project, 2010c). In spring of 2010, MMP worked with the ACLU to create an array of informational media tools and a bilingual website (Pennsylvania Fight For Drivers Licenses, n.d.) that introduced Spanish speakers to the actual rules and regulations that would help individuals and communities intervene in these situations. Eventually, this organizing helped to introduce a bill amending the Pennsylvania vehicle code to allow all Pennsylvanians a right to a driver’s license and valid identification: “The Fight for Drivers Licenses seeks support from the people of Pennsylvania and their allies. At this time, we are asking individuals, organizations and business owners to
sign and mail in letters of support for HB 1648, the bill to extend the right to a drivers license to every resident of the state, regardless of immigration status” (Pennsylvania Fight For Drivers Licenses, n.d.).

Other texts authored for MMP media sought to both highlight the attack on immigrant communities while also broadening understanding of the implications of not having a legal form of identity. An article written for MMP’s website begins with the experiences of friends of the organization:

One young man, Marco (not his real name), is a producer at Radio Unidad, Philadelphia’s only Spanish-language community news show. Andres and Paulita (not their real names) are leaders in another immigrant rights campaign that’s been meeting since January. Even though they work hard, support families, and in many cases own homes and pay taxes—the state has unceremoniously cancelled their drivers’ licenses, saying that the Tax ID numbers they used to get their licenses aren’t proof enough of their right to live in the US. But they have families to support, and work to do. So they get in their cars and drive—hoping for the best. But they were stopped by the police, and charged fines of several hundred, up to a thousand dollars, for driving without licenses. They need to drive to work, to pay those fees. And they might get stopped again, and again. (Media Mobilizing Project, 2012)

The topic of legal identification also received widespread attention when the state legislature was threatening to require people to present a photo ID in order to vote. This same article was written from the experiences of MMP members who were trained to canvass in poor communities to interview residents about a variety of topics, in order to draw together analysis of
the pressing issues affecting many communities. The author emphasized the diversity of poor communities without official forms of identification who were affected by this statewide legislation. The complications surrounding the right to work, drive, use a bank without exorbitant fees, access benefits, etc., was not the experience of immigrant communities alone. “[W]hen the state limits access to ID and access to society unless you have a valid ID, it also takes away the rights of multiple communities, in many locations in the state, from many different kinds of people who need ID for different reasons” (Media Mobilizing Project, 2012). Finally, the article advocates for the organizing practices involved in crossing boundaries in order to build collective power:

When the electorate is divided—immigrants from citizens, poor from near and new poor, working class from middle class—everyone loses. In order to change that reality, we need to do more than re-empower folks without ID to get their chance to vote. . . though that matters. First, we need to frame the voter ID fight as one that unites everyone who has lost access to the tools necessary to build a dignified life—no matter where they live and who they are. We need to do the hard movement-building work of uniting poor and working people across rural and urban, race, and origin lines so Pennsylvanians are powerful enough to never lose their right to vote again. (Media Mobilizing Project, 2012)

Media pieces such as this, which built analysis around experiences of struggle that individuals and communities were facing, were also used to coordinate activities. Although more diffuse, informal, and unpredictable than institutional text-action-text accounting procedures, a flow of these text-action-text sequences can also be charted in these organizing contexts. For instance, this particular media-text was written after canvassing in particular neighborhoods and
during the beginning phases of the Fight for Drivers Licenses campaign, which drew MMP leaders into another institutional regime ruled by the social relations of immigration.

**Developing Organizing Platforms to Challenge Urban Austerity**

At times, when the synergy between the production of radical media-texts and organizing became stronger, new organizing platforms emerged. MMP media-texts were used as a vehicle beginning with interrogating how issues were framed by public officials and in mainstream media. One MMP leader highlighted the practice and power of circulating stories from actual experience in political contest with the official framing from the Mayor’s office:

> whoever gets in front of the mic and tells the story that the most people attach to, wins. We looked at the messages coming out of the City: tight times, tough choices. . .

> . . . It makes it sound like we’re all in this together, like this is just a temporary thing just at this particular moment. This associates the mayor’s office with struggle. They co-opted that idea. . . . So we began to brainstorm the key concepts or ideas in what we talk about. . . . We’ve been saying: ‘we’ve been in crisis’, and that’s something people understand and relate to. Whatever study we do and conclusions we come to collectively, when we begin to talk about it, we’re telling a story. (MMP Network Organizer, MMP Network Working Group Meeting, March 18, 2009)

On November 6, 2008, Mayor Nutter had announced budget cuts to address the $100 million deficit. Several areas of organizing within the public sector emerged now and over time. Coalition to Save the Libraries was the most immediate during this period. Similar to MMP’s work to expand the frame surrounding immigrant workers, a digital audio story was produced to highlight the proposed closing of eleven neighborhood branches of the public libraries. One Philadelphia resident describes the significance of libraries in her and her family’s lives:
Libraries are one of the few positive government sponsored institutions we have in our communities. They are a sanctuary, an oasis. Libraries also bring people together. . . . It’s not just a place we get on the computer, it’s a space where we also expand our minds. We need that in our neighborhoods because our children, a lot of them don’t go outside the neighborhood. . . . At least they can come to the library and read a book. (Media Mobilizing Project, 2009)

The narration drew attention to the range of cuts to public services in low income communities: recreation centers, public pools, fire stations, health centers. Most significantly, the story highlighted the experiences of five organizers, including the residents in neighborhoods as well as those for whom this may have been a first time taking part in multiple citywide resistance strategies. One of these organizers reflected on her own experience of working with others to develop a range of strategies:

People were talking about a people’s process to hold the mayor accountable. . . . I think that what has worked really well for us has been to use multiple strategies coming together. . . . using a class action law suit along with organizing and channeling public outrage around the cuts. . . . and also taking seriously the idea and possibility for direct action to really defend the resources that are being taken away from people. (Media Mobilizing Project, 2009)

On December 30, 2009, Common Pleas Judge Idee Fox ruled that it was illegal for the Mayor to close the libraries without consent from city council. In her ruling, she stated that “The decision to close these eleven branches is more than a response to a financial crisis, it changes the very foundation of our City” (Media Mobilizing Project, 2009). The story goes on to
highlight people’s changes through this experience and commitment to continuing their involvement in ongoing organizing around public sector budget cuts.

In the month of February 2009, when the stimulus bill was signed into law, Philadelphia’s Mayor was publicly discussing the urgency surrounding budget tightening in order to tackle the budget deficit. Within this climate, MMP strengthened its program of anti-austerity work that continues through the present. On February 26, 2009, MMP convened the Community Board and developed a working group that used the municipal budget cuts as an opportunity for developing collaborations across several network groups. At this time, MMP members were attending meetings with a newly formed Essential Services Coalition as well as public community budgeting forums that were branded “Tight Times, Tough Choices.” Meetings allowed people to discuss these experiences and draw attention to contradictions and polarization in society as part of “a practice of expressing individual struggles and drawing connections to larger struggle” (Community Board Working Group Meeting Notes, March 18, 2009). For instance, although the Mayor had just announced a $2.4 billion shortfall two weeks earlier, discussions surfaced stories of excess such as the recent purchase of $7.7 million condo in a Philadelphia Center City high rise building. Meanwhile, a member of this group shared his knowledge from working as a janitor in luxury condos that were advertised to attract people who are not from Philadelphia. At a press conference called by the Essential Services Coalition, a member of MMP’s network “marked the disparity in this moment… and that it is not tough times and tight choices for everyone in the same way” (Community Board Working Group Meeting Notes, March 18, 2009).

In 2009, MMP’s priority was on “building our own understanding and capacity in order to take leadership in the city” (Community Board Working Group Meeting Notes, March 12,
In order to develop a historical view of the current crisis, members of this working group identified key concepts to study collectively, including the rise of neoliberalism and austerity, changes in production, consumer revenue crisis, and discourses surrounding the entrepreneurial city and public/private partnerships. The emerging process during this time involved the identification of the material conditions, the mainstream framing, strategies for revealing the contradictions in official framing, using lived experience as a vehicle for revealing a different perspective and reality, ultimately to embed in organizing networks such as the Coalition to Save the Libraries and create media texts that advance the organizing. Finally, MMP’s media often highlighted individuals’ experiences as they took part in collective actions and documented this transformation. These practices were employed in different spheres, as issues arose in the city, contributing to an ongoing focus on public sector work.

**Lateral Accountability: Re-Directing BTOP Curriculum**

Over the course of this research, much of MMP’s organizing work focused on firefighters, immigrant communities, public sector unions, and public education, and was driven and motivated by a form of lateral accountability to the network of organizations with whom they collaborated and convened. A new dynamic emerged as BTOP implementation began, drawing attention and resources away from this organizing. This section begins with some insights from the perspective of institutional ethnography into the unraveling of MMP’s Leadership Council during this time. Next, the focus is on MMP leaders’ intervention in re-directing the curriculum back to earlier educational practices in response to the disorganization and dominating impact of the funding. Here I describe the coordination and curriculum of the Movement Media Institutes that were designed to redirect MMP back to its original work, while still completing the grant obligations. Finally, the chapter discusses the strength of MMP’s work.
that took place, in spite of BTOP pressures, and was organized through mechanisms of lateral accountability.

**MMP’s Leadership Council Disorganized**

MMP originally formed and facilitated a Community Board in 2008 that came together with a purpose of building a united network of social justice organizations. As the organization transitioned into new stages, a different configuration of social justice leaders came together under a reconstituted Leadership Council (LC) in 2010. These bodies were not officially or legally recognized within a corporate 501(c)3 designation. Standing outside of official institutional process, the extra-corporate leadership was built on the direct relationships that had come to be through the various organizing work in which MMP participated. The topic of accountability surfaced continually throughout the years, in different stages of organizational growth. The primary mechanisms of lateral accountability were based on very high frequency of regular contact through meetings, studies, retreats, and planning sessions, as well as the internal documentation of each of these gatherings.

MMP’s work of facilitation and communication has resulted in trusting relationships with many people across different organizations. A widening circle of supporters grew who wanted to be involved in various media making, organizing, and educational activities. Their involvement provoked discussion about what networked organizational forms should be built. Both MMP’s institutional and network form were arising at once and some felt a need to define and plan for the stages of development (Notes from MMPSC Retreat Notes, May 11, 2008). By 2008, there was acknowledgment that we needed a language to articulate a “structure that is understood and is flexible.” In a restructuring process in early 2010, the Community Board was disbanded and reconstituted to create a Leadership Council and Executive Committee. A different configuration
of people, the Leadership Council, was designed to hold staff accountable to the work of building a network in the city and region, while the Executive Committee included both paid and unpaid staff who were regularly involved in setting organizational direction. The EC met for the first time on May 25, 2010, at which time, the heart of the debates was about what larger organizational form to build and how to bring it about. By now, the federal grants were anticipated, and as people were settling into new roles and clarifying the relationships and communication flows among the different bodies, a new mandated plan to hire expanded staff for BTOP was getting underway. Figure 3 below depicts and contrasts the basic nature of direct, relational accountability arising in human interaction with the text-based mechanisms that were part of BTOP’s accountability circuits.

![Diagram of Relational Lateral Accountability](image-url)

**Figure 3.** The direct nature of relational, lateral accountability that arises in human interaction.
The Leadership Council met for the first time on June 8, 2010. Many people who were involved had dual organizational identities, overlapping with MMP. This configuration did not reflect all of the organizations with whom MMP was currently most involved. The LC had difficulty in finding ways to strengthen this group with the aligning practices to sustain itself, let alone expand. Reflecting on this first LC meeting, MMP Co-Founder Informant 1 said to the EC that “we created a structure and everyone’s engagement with that is pretty abstract” (Executive Committee meeting notes, June 6, 2010). Over time, the basis for the network was becoming increasingly separated from concrete, collective experiences arising from people’s material conditions and social relationships. MMP Network Organizer was the one paid staff member at this time completely dedicated to convening the network through the Leadership Council. In the context of BTOP resources and hires, she felt isolated in this responsibility to give strategic direction to the network building efforts. As MMP Network Organizer explained in an interview:

We were providing media support, organizing perspective, and trying to build relationships with people with the intent of bringing them into the network- but not fully knowing how to do this. I had a list of people to call instead of a collective. We never had the infrastructure set for new groups. I couldn’t figure this out on my own. (MMP Network Organizer, personal communication, February 7, 2015)

Public sector organizing was a major focus in 2011. In a meeting from September 22, 2011, MMP Network Organizer was reflecting on the Leadership Council’s actual capabilities and purpose. In a meeting about organizing strategy, she raised a question about whether the
Leadership Council was representative enough of the current organizations in order to make good decisions on MMP’s behalf.

Is the LC actually a place where we’re able to garner thoughts and make decisions about what we’re doing around broader organizing work? Firefighters are a huge part of this, but are not on the list of people we’re bring on LC. And I think we need more time with them. (MMP Network Organizer, EC Notes, September 22, 2011)

A problem that became clear in examining the ways that MMP discussed the growth of and accountability to a movement, is that the Leadership Council, was standing in for both an alternative mechanism of accountability for MMP, as well as the manifestation of success of their network building strategy. One Executive Committee member asked, “Do we really want an LC for MMP or are we moving towards an LC for a broader organizing campaign that MMP is part of along with these other groups. Are we moving towards incubating this other organizational structure” (EC Notes, September 22, 2011). This unresolved question and conflict of interest led to the dissolution of the Leadership Council by the end of 2011. At the completion of the BTOP grants in 2013, MMP had consolidated as a non-profit organization and a legal Board of Directors was constituted to take leadership.

MMP Network Organizer, who was central in organizing work, described the sequence of events that led to the disbanding of the Leadership Council, again calling attention to a fundamental bifurcation in the organization:

In order to create a larger membership base and structure for the network. . . we tried to bring in some new groups. . . . We built these relationships. . . . I remember having conversations with [Allied Organization Leader] about building
this network. She would ask how to join. We had no way to say: this is how organizations join. I remember trying to force conversations about the structure of the network. What is the structure? How do people relate to it? At the beginning of 2011, it was not only the beginning of BTOP. We joined the brownout fights, we were doing a lot of heavy support against deportations. And then there was a big education push—a huge march with the Campaign for Nonviolent Schools. It was a student-led march. We had done media around it and my role was outreach to unions to be there. That was also the same spring that we did this live broadcast on education for MMP-TV. . . . The focus of the summer was the divide between BTOP and the Network. It never meshed. (MMP Network Organizer, personal communication, February 7, 2015)

This relational accountability, although fragile and unrealized, contrasted with the indirect textually mediated social relations that characterized the accountability mechanisms in BTOP.

**Re-Directing the Curriculum as an Intervention**

The topic of redirection emerged early as concern grew over the diffuse and dominating impact of the funding, as well as uncertainty about the effectiveness of the Basic Computers curriculum in contributing to their radical visions. MMP Network Organizer and MMP Video Coordinator were key in returning attention to a different curriculum to support organizing. MMP Video Coordinator discussed the beginning ideas for producing another curriculum differently: “Instead of doing many different trainings for many different organizations where we would all as staff be scattered out to the different places, *which we originally thought was important for fulfilling our numbers*, we decided we needed to be working together” (MMP Video Coordinator, personal communication, November 18, 2011). MMP staff who engaged in
conversation about the direction of the media training work in relation to organizing agitated to return to MMP’s past history prior to BTOP funding and past pedagogical practices. “It’s not really about doing more work. It’s the same work. The first part being: telling the untold story. That’s what the organization was founded on, and that’s what it’s been doing and what it’s going to continue to do in this next period” (MMP Video Coordinator, personal communication, November 18, 2011). MMP Network Organizer explained the origins of a second curriculum that counted towards fulfilling BTOP grant obligations. A new course that would be implemented with the federal funds

was a product of the confusion around how BTOP and digital literacy were building a movement and building leadership. The idea of the Media Institutes was about bringing people back together in the style that we were doing with Our City Our Voices. And so—bringing people in the same room and doing political education… and a way to do it all at once, versus a whole bunch of trainings all over the city. (MMP Network Organizer, personal communication, February 7, 2015)

MMP Video Coordinator, who occupied a shifting relationship to MMP’s BTOP staff understood the new curriculum as “trying to pull back in and centralize our work a little more and figure out a common work plan instead of these different, separate areas of work” (MMP Video Coordinator, 2011). In her role as lead producer of MMP-TV, she was also looking for ways to facilitate learning and growth for the people taking leadership in the media programs: this would be an intermediary space where we can use story gathering as a starting point for developing a deeper analysis, where growing numbers of people can relate and stay in touch, and perhaps work on particular projects that they’re
interested in, or which we assign, and cultivate organizing and leadership skills. . .

These story spaces would not just be for media makers, but would be the seeds
of other organizing and committee work. (MMP Video Coordinator, Staff
Conversations Media Training Programs Connecting to other work, 2011)

Therefore, even as this curriculum would count towards BTOP training requirements, it was
developed in relation to MMP’s original goals of building leaders within a cross-sector network.

This section highlights the coordination and key features of the Movement Media
Institutes that encouraged the direct expression of stories of survival, the use of media-texts that
sought to connect people’s consciousnesses to those doing movement work elsewhere, especially
regarding attacks to the public sector during the economic crisis.

**Coordination of Movement Media Institutes.** In order to coordinate an internal
redirection, with a different curriculum that recalled earlier practices at its heart, staff also
returned to prior practices of collective study in order to deliver lessons that incorporated history,
economics, mainstream and independent media coverage of issues. Though the Leadership
Council was unraveling, the ongoing engagement with trying to make it work inspired (or
provoked) this redirection of internal efforts. Different from the Basic Computers classes,
political education was the center of this curriculum. A track of political education sought to
contextualize the significance of poor and working people learning new media skills in order to
produce media based in their own experiences and develop plans for unified action. The
Institutes were tailored each time, according to current events and campaigns and the
participants, themselves. Recruitment for the Movement Media Institutes was conducted
differently from relying on marketing for the PCCs. Dedicated outreach to specific organizations
drew leaders who were accountable to their constituencies (see index for a list of organizations
represented). The participants were either community leaders who were recruited from the public computer centers or leaders in organizations that MMP works with in some capacity. Practices such as these recruitment strategies adhered to these principles of facilitating networks of resistance and continued MMP’s culture of organizing at this time. Preparations for these sessions were handled very differently—both in terms of physical arrangement and pedagogical strategies. I attended four three-day institutes that involved thirty-five participants, on average, representing different sectors.

When I arrived on the Saturday morning of the first Institute, at MMP’s offices and the TWA-PA public computer center that were housed in a former church, it was already swarming with people outside the entrance with various mobile devices, conducting interviews. Inside, some MMP folks were still arranging the room. To start, the room was set up in a large circle. Many different MMP leaders had up front roles that morning, with attention given to pairing seasoned leaders with newer people who were learning presentation and facilitation skills. Presentations that morning were conducted by rotating pairs of MMP leaders who gave short theoretical talks about where independent media intersects with growing leadership, consciousness, and movement building. Translators were present the entire day for the Spanish speaking population who were active around immigrant and worker rights. The morning culminated in conversations about excerpts from a documentary film, Un Poquito de Tanto Verdad (A Little Bit of So Much Truth) from mass mobilizations that began with striking teachers in Oaxaca in 2006. Watching a real-world compelling example that brought together concepts of framing issues, social conflict, independent media, and independent politics inspired vibrant small group interaction—enacting the lesson. A Mexican participant, in the large group debrief, offered, “We are not here by chance” referring to being in a church. She was calling
attention to the work of movement building being closer to a calling than a profession. (field notes, November 12, 2011).

The block of hours dedicated to the media track on this day was dedicated to introducing media literacy, interviewing as a political practice, and basic technical aspects of sound and visual recording. Other Institute days focused more on working with the video editing software on the PCC computers. The large group was split into three breakout groups for this track and the facilitators later compared notes in a debrief session, illuminating the work that went into pulling off the day and what work needed to happen for the next session. I listened to the MMP staff talk about the complications in setting up the room for participatory and other kinds of learning processes with this number of people and the transition from the morning political education to teaching concrete skills in the afternoon media track. MMP’s media instruction involved the text-based work of producing stories that carefully preserved individuals’ voices, emotions, and experiences. These trainings could be counted as BTOP training hours and also maintained relevance to organizing in Philadelphia.

**Direct expression of stories of survival.** The second Institute was named *Put People First.* MMP’s Video Coordinator and MMP Site Organizer #5 presented some thoughts to open a discussion about the meaning of Putting People First.

What does putting people first mean? Currently most of us are making choices no human being should make. People shouldn’t choose between paying bills, going to the doctor, or buying food. . . . We are made to make inhumane choices. An example of this is the budget process: start by looking at the resources available and here’s what needs to be cut, choices that need to be made. At the Town Halls: will we cut fire stations or schools? People are asked to choose between things
that we all need. Our needs are our rights. Having food is not a privilege, it’s a human right. (Put People First Media Institute #2, April 14, 2012)

The focus of this Institute was on learning the media production process that facilitates the direct expression of survival experiences such as these through recording stories. This ongoing process of producing media reflects the diversity of communities with whom MMP works and informs a culture that builds connection across otherwise isolated sectors. Learning to produce media-texts during the Institutes, that incorporated these interviews aimed to preserve the integrity of the stories and reveal the interconnectedness of these recorded subjects with others.

**Media-texts that connect consciousness beyond the local.** In several ways, educators drew attention to similarities in movements across different locations. Each of the Institutes included excerpts of Un Poquito de Tanto Verdad (Friedberg, 2007), a documentary film about striking public school teachers in Mexico, who, after gaining media access, successfully mobilized the broader population. Each time, this screening sparked a rich, bilingual discussion among participants, particularly in the second Institute in April 2012, after Philadelphia school officials had just announced plans to close sixty-four public schools. The discussion questions used for breakout groups at the third Institute directed participants to reflect on the agency of the Mexican teachers while noticing similarities and differences in the Philadelphia context. These video clips were again used in the political education session during the third Media Institute, along with media produced about health care organizing in Vermont, and the cuts to fire stations in Philadelphia and small towns in Pennsylvania. These media-based texts were used to explicitly draw connections between the local and places beyond, as a way to make people conscious of shared experiences across geography. The MMP Facilitator guided the learners towards bridging these geographies.
We’ve seen clips from Oaxaca and Vermont, where human rights organizing is winning a healthcare system that puts people first. Here, in Philadelphia, we are working around fire safety and brownouts. Since 2009, Mayor Nutter and the Fire Commissioner issued a policy to save money in the city budget after the economic crisis. No amount of money is equivalent to human life. Since the policy was instituted, there have been three fires where young people died because a fire station near them was browned out. . . . Both of these clips that MMP produced show similar trends across the state—the thinning out of public services made to protect people. . . . These cuts were made and framed as all public institutions are inefficient. Public schools are inefficient. But it can take longer to get a firetruck to your house now. (Movement Media Institute #3, November 10, 2012)

**Drawing attention to the public sector #UnderAttack.** One year later, the fourth Movement Media Institute took place on the heels of MMP’s social media campaign, #UnderAttack, which specifically demanded a moratorium on the school closings. Technical instruction in different tracks included practice and consultation in using social media platforms and long-form video documentary to mobilize stories in service of campaigns. The last of these that was offered within the BTOP granting period was called #UnderAttack, a direct reference to the city government’s austerity policies leading to cuts in public education and weakened unions. This was all part of a desire to experiment and try something new versus working from a perfectly formed conceptualized vision beforehand. Political education in this Institute focused on the political economy of public sector reform and the media track focused on various media tools, social media, and media production that could happen in a short period of time using accessible tools. The Institutes were intentional spaces, facilitated into being as educators and
participants, alike, came to new understandings through shared experiences. MMP’s Movement Media Institutes contributed to activity and new organizing platforms that have continued into the present. These successes were a direct outcome from responsiveness to people’s experiences in the world and building intertextual relationships between media-based texts in Philadelphia with movement media from elsewhere.

**Strength of Work Driven by Lateral Accountability**

An astonishing amount of work happened during these years within the efforts to expand the network based on lateral accountability, despite the vertical pressures of BTOP. While MMP, with MMP Network Organizer’s and others’ leadership, attempted to consolidate and expand the Leadership Council, the organizing work across several sectors was sustained and strengthened based on the direct relationships that several MMP leaders built with individuals and organizations. Over time, new organizing platforms were indeed incubated, which evolved from this tumultuous time into four new organizational structures: Put People First (health care), Fight for Drivers Licenses (immigrant rights), 215 People’s Assembly (workers’ assembly), and Philadelphia Community Schools Task Force (public education). Producing media within a sector, such as stories about the impact of austerity measures on schools (Our schools are not for sale, 2013) strengthened relationships and credibility in education spheres, providing a foothold from which to contribute strategic perspective and practical ideas for action. Later in 2011, MMP convened a Working People’s Media and Communications forum on October 8, 2011 (Media Mobilizing Project, 2011c) and the subsequent Working People’s Media Institute in November 2011, which took place on three consecutive Saturdays in November 2011. A flyer for this first intensive training read:
Today’s leaders need to be able to tell stories that can counter the messages that the powers that be (and their media) use to isolate us from each other. This 3-week intensive workshop will bring together those seeking real solutions to the problems faced by poor and working people. Participants will learn how to use audio and video to tell the Untold Stories of Philadelphia and PA as part of the collective effort of the MMP network. They will gain crucial media and messaging skills for the fights they are waging as workers, students and people organizing for their human rights.

While the Media Institutes were able to be counted towards fulfilling BTOP requirements, they were motivated and organized by the commitment to lateral accountability to themselves and the organizations with whom they were in a network relationship.

**Conclusion: Radical Work Continually Interrupted**

This chapter’s focus on MMP’s radical media production (a form of textual practice in IE jargon) and the form of accountability that motivates and coordinates the production of radical media-texts is written in contrast with the textual production and institutional accountability circuits highlighted in Chapter Four. Different from the vertical textually mediated actions depicted in Figure 2, MMP’s radical texts are “put to use” in organizing strategies that do various kinds of work—(breaking isolation of communities, creating new platforms for organizing around emerging issues, etc.). These combined practices of media production, political education, and organizing have a basis in the formation of direct, accountable relationships to ourselves as well as others. Finally, this dissertation is produced within the academic field of adult education. The significance of understanding curriculum as components of social organization has direct implications for the constitution of both educators and learners, as the
consciousness and activity that arises in teaching and learning are coordinated by unseen relations. This chapter touched on the significance of radical media-texts and organizing for social change that forms collectively within lateral relationships. However, this work that is based in combined practices is continually interrupted, disrupted, at times, displaced under pressures to seek funding that continually introduce new institutional accountability circuits.
CHAPTER SIX

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF WORK:
DISORGANIZATION AND REORGANIZATION

Chapter Six tells the story of disorganization and reorganization of Media Mobilizing Project’s (MMP) work as implementation began and was completed over the course of the grant timeframe. Once the grants were awarded, MMP leaders at the frontlines interrogated, enacted, and resisted institutional processes associated with the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP). This study of MMP’s experiences aims to explicate the social relations of broadband access and adoption through the public programs implemented by MMP, operating for the first time under federal regulations that orchestrated the practice of BTOP programs. The federal monies awarded for BTOP in 2010 introduced a particularly intense and rapid succession of changes and MMP leaders (paid and unpaid) continually adapted structurally and strategically to further movement building work. My aim, here, is not to demonstrate how the consciousness of individual MMP members align with particular institutional discourses to prove that specific ideological forms exist within MMP. Instead, this chapter highlights how the two forms of accountability, explicated in Chapters Four and Five compelled staff to reorganize themselves and frontline work in order to accomplish competing imperatives; hence the focus of this chapter is explicitly on how work was shaped.

During this time, internal schisms began or were exacerbated along several divides: between BTOP and non-BTOP staff, old and new staff, Public Computer Centers (PCCs) and Sustainable Broadband Adoption (SBA) staff, paid and unpaid staff, etc. Although all people associated with MMP were expected to understand the mission and participate in MMP’s movement building activities, above and beyond BTOP, only one full time paid staff person was solely tasked with this area of responsibility. Despite this disproportionate concentration of
organizational resources on BTOP work, most staff did participate in MMP’s organizing and media production work at various times, but under great strain. Analysis of interviews, documents, and observations of MMP staff in different positions during stages of learning and performing two modes of radical and institutional practices revealed the constitution of multiple, at times competing, standpoints that were authorized institutionally within MMP; and a disparity between intention and actuality.

This chapter builds from analysis in previous chapters regarding language as an entry point into investigating social relations. Again, the examination of language, as it arose in texts and in people’s accounts of their experiences is central. The language of experiential accounts is permeated with evidence of social relations. Institutional ethnography uses these accounts to find out what informants know and to continue the mapping process to produce new knowledge about the interrelation between everyday life that is coordinated with others (extra-local social relations). Interviews that I conducted with MMP staff reflected how their intentions and problem solving capacities were hooked into competing textual frames and objectives that were operating within the organization. An explication of how these different forms of accountability “conveyed explicit and implicit messages about how they must understand and conduct themselves” (Griffith & Smith, 2014) revealed the shifting social terrain of consciousness within the organization during this time. Once BTOP implementation began, and MMP’s frontline workers were drawn into the work that ensued, the organization’s original work was disorganized and reorganized within accountability circuits associated with the grant.

This chapter begins with a focus on the experiences of certain MMP staff as they were oriented to and made responsible to carry out competing frameworks or visions for implementing BTOP programs. A division of labor was, in part, dictated by the awarded contracts, although
MMP leaders attempted to redesign the positions in order to accomplish the original work. Staff members’ experiences and perspectives were uniquely shaped (and institutionally authorized) by these different positions. Hence the second section of the chapter focuses on how these institutionally authorized standpoints incorporated the conceptual apparatus from both movement-based and professional spheres, affecting the definitions of their titles, job descriptions, and subsequently their self-understanding of their work and work plans. I argue that in the face of BTOP’s magnitude and, contradictory aims, MMP leaders struggled with being able to name and mitigate against a growing bifurcation between organizing for social change and successfully accomplishing the terms of the grant. Additionally, the Public Computer Centers (PCC) award required MMP to staff computer centers in six areas of the city, introducing a layer of geographic fragmentation, resulting in what MMP informants termed “lack of coherence.” The third section focuses on this geographic fragmentation, and finally, the last section explicitly discusses the bifurcated spheres of professional and movement-based work that contributed to difficulty in building a cohesive program of activity.

**Orienting to Competing, Predetermined Conceptual Frameworks**

This section is divided between the radical and institutional conceptualizations that were part of orientating staff to carrying out BTOP work. As a new staff team was assembled at the beginning of 2011, they were necessarily introduced to the vision, purpose, and practices of MMP’s original mission within MMP’s staff orientation, as well as the vision, purpose, and work to be done that was associated with BTOP. Once the BTOP grants were awarded, a steady chain of activity took the organization by storm, interrupting and disrupting what came before. In order to complete the terms of the grant, MMP was disorganized and reorganized, as staff took on new roles and were oriented to different conceptualizations of work. At the end of 2010, there was a
scramble to make five new external hires in order to begin BTOP implementation in 2011. Since the time that I began this story, in 2008, when only a few people were paid within MMP, terms and titles associated with the primary people carrying out the organization’s work have been notable. For instance, the co-founders (including myself as a co-founder), before we knew we were creating a new organization called ourselves the “core,” then the “support committee” who were facilitating a lateral network of organizations, to the “staff” can be attributed to MMP’s transition towards a formalized non-profit corporation with professional employees. These shifts happened over time amidst rapid growth and long, frequent conversations about organizational structure and accountability-- until it was finally stated that the responsibility for daily operations had to be located within the paid staff of the organization, just prior to the beginning of BTOP (MMP EC notes).

Beginning in 2010, direction for the organization was provided by an Executive Committee and Leadership Council. Hiring for BTOP at the end of 2010 was intensive and within the multiple conversations about interviewing candidates for the positions and orientation processes, one member of MMP’s Executive Committee called attention to the two modes of practice that had to be accomplished: “these [hiring] processes will be key in finding and creating people who will not only do the necessary grant work but also build this movement” (EC Meeting Key Points- November 2, 2010). Continuing this conversation, another MMP staff person reflected that “we will need to lay out a strong and clear vision for new staff about how the BTOP and media program work should feed into our larger mission and what their roles are in that, over the next few years (and possibly beyond). We can’t be vague, and we need it to be something we can hold people accountable to” (Video Coordinator, Staff Updates November 30, 2010). Vision documents that conceptualized how the programs would unfold and be made
coherent with past practices was drafted in October 2010 in order to guide the internal understanding of how to complete the grant and further internal social change and leadership development goals.

**Radical (Ideological) Conceptualization and Orientation**

The Media Mobilizing Project’s stated mission during the time of this research was “to build a media, education and organizing infrastructure that will cohere and amplify the growing movement to end poverty” (Media Mobilizing Project, n.d.). MMP’s vision documents for MMP’s curriculum and media education programs were created in 2010 in response to the BTOP awards. They show very clearly the attempt to conceptualize BTOP as consistent with this mission:

The PCC and SBA grants will allow MMP to create one cohesive program that will serve as a focal point for our media training and political education methodology, develop and broaden our base of members and leadership, and cohere and expand our media production programs. These grant opportunities will be used to secure the long term institutional viability of MMP, by positioning us for other funding and earned income opportunities and building the infrastructure for the above internal and external mechanisms. (Computer Center and Media Education Program Vision, October 6, 2010)

This section describes the attempts to codify the radical mission through internal documents and reclaim agency in the BTOP process by intervening in staff’s titles and job descriptions and orienting them to the internal radical intentions for using the funds.

BTOP was meant to fit into MMP’s organizing methodologies for communities to document their own stories, connect their struggles, and circulate their stories and news
throughout the city and beyond. MMP BTOP Manager 1 and MMP Co-Founder Informant 1 effectively translated the vision that had developed through the Our City, Our Voices (OCOV) model, of connecting the constellation of skills and knowledge involved in media production to an infrastructure for distributing the media in the OCOV classes (http://technical.ly/philly/2009/06/08/technically-not-tech-media-mobilizing-project-closes-grant-looks-forward/). Towards this end, MMP had succeeded in ensuring that media production was work that would count towards digital literacy under the terms of the grant. The grant proposal and the contract with the Primary Recipient, Urban Affairs Coalition (UAC) for Sustainable Broadband Adoption (SBA) funds specifically named media production as an expectation of the trainings that MMP would be delivering. However, the task of articulating and fostering internal understanding and support of this initiative was difficult. MMP Network Organizer recalls that “There were a lot a lot a lot of conversations trying to figure out what to do and how it related to the work we were doing. I remember a lot of confusion about what were the goals and how were we going to build the network and how [BTOP] related to the rest of what we were trying to do” (MMP Network Organizer, personal communication, February 7, 2015). Ultimately, three leaders who were based in MMP’s digital inclusion work, media production, and organizing/supporting the network, came together to draft a guiding framework that attempted to translate BTOP’s discourse of digital literacy and broadband adoption into MMP’s radical approach. The following subsections discuss three ways that MMP leadership initiated text-based processes as a way to steer work towards their original goals through asserting a radical vision for BTOP in documents, intervening in the job descriptions that were promoted institutionally, and orienting staff to radical conception of digital literacy.
**Asserting a radical vision through text.** MMP’s vision documents included a visual of a learning model that depicted tiers of education, each with accompanying curricula (see Appendix). Significantly, this diagram shows in two separate columns, organizing work and political education in relationship to the MMP network; and education that builds people’s media and computer skills, beginning with basic computer skills and advancing into digital media production that was rooted in the documentation of social struggles. The hope was to use the funds to codify the integration of political education and technical training with organizing occurring in the city. However, bridging the activities in these columns was not straightforward and the separation was reinforced in individual job descriptions and the division of labor within the organization, overall. A planning document from November 2010 stated the importance of “making sure that new staff play a role in education beyond the programs they are directly working on”, as a way to make sure that they would, individually and collectively, strive to build these bridges. They were to accomplish MMP’s political goals in addition to securing the institutional infrastructure of the organization.

**Intervening in institutional designations.** Choices in what to call certain staff roles, indicated that leaders within MMP were conscious of constraints held within institutional designations. Instead of Trainers and Web Guides, MMP posted job openings *Media Educator Organizers* and *Computer Center Site Organizers* who would “identify and facilitate computer-center-based community organizing initiatives for jobs with dignity, access to communications, and other human rights.” These titles were chosen intentionally to communicate the political intentions of the organization and mark that the work responsibilities would be different from the standardized descriptions formulated by the Freedom Rings Partnership (FRP).
Orienting staff to a radical conception of digital literacy. After the new year in 2011, new staff began with an intensive two-week orientation for all paid staff. A newly created Staff Manual was integrated into the running of this orientation. The manual outlined the mission, history and vision, operations, organizational structure and provided a basis for introducing key concepts in capitalism, social movements, media and communications, and radical education. Sections titled “Our Work” and “Computer Center and Media/Computer Education Programs” were organized separately. “Our Work” included areas of activity that had existed prior to BTOP, including network building and political education. A “Curriculum Development” subsection of the Computer Center and Media/Computer Education Programs category directed staff and other MMP leaders to begin to “practice articulating for yourselves and then each other, the relationship between digital literacy and building a social movement today. . . . The answer to this (which will evolve over time) can be used as the anchor for building the PCC and BTOP curriculum” (Media Mobilizing Project Staff Manual, 2011). Required BTOP meetings were folded into the first and second weeks with the City government and UAC, Steering Committee meeting with SBA partners. Here, they were exposed to the coordinated citywide work that they were hired to carry out. Within this overview of MMP’s conceptual beginnings, priorities, and relationship to BTOP, staff reviewed their job descriptions and began to create their work plans accordingly.

These processes highlight the ways that MMP continued to intervene in the BTOP process within the institutional workings of the grant implementation. Through initiating their own text-mediated processes from conceptualizing a vision of how the grants fit within their original work to hiring and orienting staff according to their criteria, they set out to counter the weight of the federal program by unleashing action in a radical direction.
Institutional Conceptualization and Orientation

In contrast to MMP’s beginnings in radical organizing and education, the Freedom Rings Partnership (FRP), under the direction of the Urban Affairs Coalition (UAC) and the City government’s Office of Innovation and Technology (City) was conceived within the institutional complexes of the digital economy. In this section, I highlight some of the emphases that UAC and the City included in their initial presentations to begin BTOP implementation with the FRP. Together and separately, UAC and the City convened all of the Managing Partners of FRP on a regular basis, as well as established various working groups for each of the Public Computer Center (PCC) and Sustainable Broadband Adoption (SBA) grants under BTOP. UAC’s initial presentations to the partnering organizations in the city appealed to the larger frame of the federal program to advance the objectives in the Stimulus Act to address Philadelphia’s challenges when “preparing its citizens for a new, digital age such as job creation and a focus on boosting regional efforts that support Science, Technology, Engineering and Math as promising areas of study and job attainment” (UAC Presentation, Sept 22, 2010) and then continued to prepare the Managing Partners for the extent of administrative paperwork to come.

On the PCC side, the City, similarly appealed to each of the organizations participating in the grant implementation to see and understand themselves within the local frame of the municipal Freedom Rings Partnership. Their initial presentation to the Partners provided an overview of the promised work to open seventy-seven public computer sites. Within a given timeline, each of the sites were required to meet with the information technology support company, order and deploy equipment, and schedule a public ribbon cutting. This commitment would involve establishing PCCs in community anchor institutions that already served a “vulnerable population” to provide technology infrastructure, deliver training, and offer
technology support, with the stated aim of strengthening individuals, families and neighborhoods. This work involved the participation of site partner organizations under the Managing Partners. MMP took on management of six sites within the overall seventy-seven. At each of these sites, they had to hire a part-time person to staff the sites for fifteen hours. The grant proposals had emphasized that these hires should come from the communities served by the Managing Partners and/or the anchor organizations.

UAC leadership underscored that the grants were very high profile and that government spending would be under scrutiny, which was why transparency was so regularly invoked in their rhetoric. The FRP had to anticipate audits from the Government Accounting Office, the Inspector General’s Office, and possibly others. Multiple layers of reporting would also be required regarding the Stimulus Act: financial reporting, performance progress reporting (quarterly and annually), baseline reporting, and post-award monitoring. A coordinated tracking system would be used to facilitate these processes. Further, there were additional federal compliance requirements for the Department of Commerce Grants Policy and Guidance, ARRA Guidelines, Uniform Administrative Requirements, financial requirements, audit information, environmental compliance, etc. This complex of institutional texts was activated by the Primes’ leadership as they drew up contracts and prepared the Partnership to accomplish the work and comply with the federal government. Meanwhile, it became the work of a few of MMP’s leaders to attend to these concerns.

Presentations by the City similarly focused on data collection, tracking, and evaluation. The data required to be collected would all be gathered by the Managing Partners to be reported to the City through quarterly reports. Entirely quantitative, numbers were to be collected of labs established with workstations that were connected to broadband, equipment purchased,
workstations installed or upgraded, or existing PCCs that were improved, outreach activities/trainings conducted, additional hours that PCC sites were open as a result of the funding, training program hours and numbers of participants. [include visual of reporting structure in appendix] A representative from the Open Technology Institute (OTI) of the New America Foundation was present to provide an overview of the kinds of data tracked by the NTIA and the possible information that FRP could choose to collect at the individual, partner, and community level, in order to “paint a picture of how our constituents are using or not using internet technologies in Philadelphia.” To this end, they initiated a process for the Managing Partners to be involved in determining what sorts of data they might choose to track. OTI had been brought on as the official evaluators of the FRP and overall BTOP work in Philadelphia. In this role, they facilitated a participatory horizontal process across the partnership as well as created a streamlined system to facilitate the reporting up the chain to the federal government. The result of these endeavors was to streamline the reporting that made local work accountable to governing bodies, lessening the administrative burden on the local site partners and Managing Partners. Ultimately, such processes facilitate participation in the social relations of the digital economy.

**Institutionally Authorized Standpoints**

This section focuses on the ways that MMP staff came to understand each of their individual work and work plans in 2011, since the organization’s labor was under reorganization at this time. I describe these understandings as institutionally authorized, as the ideas that informed MMP staff’s work could be traced through hierarchical institutional channels that communicated requirements, values, priorities, etc. With the expansion of staff, internal reorganization proceeded with a division of labor in mind that was designed in relationship to
BTOP. Just as the UAC appealed to the digital economy, and the City drew attention to the Freedom Rings Partnership, the first expanded MMP staff meeting in January 2011 began with acknowledging this newly formed team as part of a larger MMP network. “We are a team (we have a much bigger team that is part of a larger MMP network) but we on staff are a team. We are responsible for carrying out all the work as part of our mission” (1st staff meeting notes).

Here, I introduce the full time MMP staff in their own words, who were on the frontlines of work during these years. I prioritized people who were in specific staff positions, designed to implement different facets of the BTOP program, as it was defined internally and institutionally. Marking and mapping the language in their interviews and conversations allowed me to see how their perspectives were shaped by institutionally authorized roles. These introductions reveal the juxtaposition of different forms of work within professionalized and movement-based spheres. Here I focus on how this was manifested for one of MMP’s Directors, the BTOP leadership, the Media Education Organizers, and two staff whose roles were least connected to BTOP.

**Bifurcated “Director” Titles**

The staff in attendance at the first meeting in 2011, reintroduced themselves to each other with refreshed understandings of their roles and division of labor within the organization after their two-week orientation. Each person’s descriptions of themselves, from this meeting as well as in my other recorded interactions with staff, show them grappling from different vantage points with the implementation of the BTOP programs while meeting the goals of the movement work/legacy within MMP. MMP Co-Founder Informant 2 was now in an overall Director role. She introduced herself with two titles that spoke to these different underlying drivers. “The role I play is Political Education and Leadership Development Director, but legally, I play Executive Director. . . . I keep an overall view of our work on the internal level, keeping in mind at all
times the entire picture of what we’re doing (programs, operations, the network, people) and ensuring the success of this project” (MMP Co-Founder Informant 2 from staff meeting notes January 28, 2011).

With this expansion of staff and increasing division of labor, another shift in the use of language to describe people’s roles and work was taking place. Titles matter because they are understood and activated in particular ways in institutional settings, drawing people into expected tasks—informally and formally. Legally, the Executive Director is required to sign off on audits, contracts, etc. She is also expected to speak for the organization, explaining and defending organizational decisions, such as the rationale for MMP’s involvement at this scale in broadband access and adoption work. As the Political Education and Leadership Development Director, she was concerned with ways to craft study and experiences that allowed people involved with MMP to deepen radical consciousness and actions.

**Divided Attention Among BTOP’s Leaders**

The two main leaders of BTOP within MMP’s staff were MMP BTOP Manager 1, who oversaw the entire project and supervised the Media Educator Organizers, funded by the SBA stream of the grant. MMP BTOP Manager 2 was later hired as the overall coordinator of the PCC staff in the six computer centers. MMP BTOP Manager 1, who had been central in MMP’s digital inclusion work and securing the BTOP grants, came to MMP during the *Our City, Our Voices* initiative. During this time, MMP first articulated an educational approach that allowed people to understand how issues are framed while accessing the tools they needed “to be able to put out their own stories, but also understand the need for an infrastructure to carry those stories throughout the city and beyond the city” (MMP BTOP Manager 1, personal communication, October 8, 2011). His priorities at the beginning of 2011 were divided between setting up
systems to support MMP’s organizational development and implementing the SBA and PCC sides of BTOP successfully. His articulation of his task as BTOP’s lead within MMP, was to “figure out how their media production and education can reflect a more advanced analysis of media and communications [technology] in movement building” (Staff meeting, January 28, 2011), during this period. MMP BTOP Manager 2, a co-founder of the organization, started later in the year, as the “Computer Network Site Coordinator… That’s what they’re calling me. My job is to—I don’t do as much of my job as I should basically—be thinking about the six, new BTOP centers” (MMP BTOP Manager 2, personal communication, October 21, 2011). She described the range of work that might occupy her week:

A lot of days it’s a combination of meetings about the larger organization and projects that it has on its plate and then meetings with site organizers. Then other days I’m out in the field visiting sites or helping with different things. Like Tuesday was moving desks and setting up computers and today was a meeting with Logan CDC to talk about logistical stuff: charting matching funds, keeping track of who’s signing up for classes, and how are the staff and volunteers doing. Then running down to SEIU and just sitting on a class and watching people learn how to use a mouse. But then tonight is Leadership Council, Tuesday afternoons I’m doing study, political education with the staff. (MMP BTOP Manager 2, personal communication, October 21, 2011)

Having a view of MMP’s early experiences and its origins in a longer history of organizing in Philadelphia, MMP BTOP Manager 2 expressed more questions about the project. “What an interesting experiment for MMP, I think… it depends on the day how it feels to a lot of us, there are some days where we’re like “was this really a good idea…is this going to help
MMP grow” (MMP BTOP Manager 2, personal communication, October 21, 2011)? Various internal meetings encouraged critical reflection on these and other questions.

Media Educator Organizers as Idealized Positions

The Media Educator Organizer (MEO) position was written to bridge past and present, as well as the two forms of accountability. In his managerial role, MMP BTOP Manager 1 was able to articulate the rationale behind how the MEO position was defined:

Media, education, and organizing are what MMP does on a daily basis. These are the broadest staff organizing roles that we have. All the people who are serving in those positions take up that work in each of its aspects but also have particular focuses and skills that they come to it with. . . . A core thing that all of those folks do is some form of training, running classes, and using those classes as an organizing opportunity, as a way to meet people, to discuss issues with folks, as a way to train people in skills that they need. (MMP BTOP Manager 1, personal communication, October 8, 2011)

MMP MEO 1 began volunteering with MMP to support the Spanish speaking and labor-focused radio shows starting in 2008. Her role as Media Educator Organizer under BTOP was critical in the initial design of curriculum and reporting for SBA. In reflecting on this she states:

I was not to be based out of a computer center or particular location but to design and lead trainings in computer skills and media skills in different places. The way that we designed the program was for us to be spending some time with new people doing basic trainings, and also some time with more regular groupings of people, doing what we could call training which was coordinating production of radio and video programs. So, in terms of the grant funding, there are numbers of
training hours and numbers of people trained and those can happen in different ways. So, it could happen either as a class that is a public class where new people come in for a few weeks or it could happen as the same group of ten people that meet every week to learn new production skills and produce a radio show or produce a video program over time. (MMP MEO 1, personal communication, April 15, 2013)

Administrative tricks, such as these, were common. In this way, all of the staff and much of the organization’s work counted towards accomplishing the grant. MMP MEO 2 talked about her role as a MEO differently. “I’m a MEO. And what that means is that I’m responsible for providing instruction at our PCCs for the communities around those computer centers” (MMP MEO 2, personal communication, November 12, 2011). She had worked in an allied organization and was one of the individuals who was hired as an employee without previous direct experience with MMP. Her description of her work as it changed over time reveals a frustration in juggling the two forms of accountability that were written into the job description. She explains:

I go out, as it stands, once a week, to Logan, and teach computer basics and basic digital storytelling to the community—for people who sign up. . . . Right now I’m teaching a class of seniors—older adults. On the day-to-day, I prepare for that as well as. . . . Earlier on, I thought a lot about building a curriculum as well as what it means to organize in these communities. Right now, I’m not sure what my role is in relation to that, because there are other people bottom-lining what that looks like. . . . And there are these city meetings that MMP has to show up at that’s part of our funding source. . . . So they have these different working groups because
it’s a partnership of organizations around the city. This partnership comes together on a weekly basis to talk about shared, best practices around the education and computer technology. I attend the bi-weekly meetings on the education side. . . . I hate those meetings. . . . there’s all this policy, procedure, protocol stuff that gets in the way of us as community orgs—who get what it means to work in these diverse communities—being clear about what is important to share with each other. (MMP MEO 2, personal communication, November 12, 2011)

The MEO role was meant to embody the powerful combination of practices that originally established MMP’s success on our terms. However, the day-to-day work was compromised [for all staff] by the necessary attention to managing new, required activities associated with BTOP.

**Standpoints Further Outside of BTOP’s Nexus**

Two staff, who were funded in other ways and designated by MMP as matches to the BTOP funds, continued to be primarily responsible for distinct work outside of BTOP funding. MMP Video Coordinator had been a volunteer media maker with MMP since 2008. Prior to BTOP, she was hired for a full-time position responsible for training and producing video for earned income as well as MMP’s regular video program, MMP-TV. She explains:

> My job crosses a few different areas of work, one is doing education and curriculum development around our media education, using media as an organizing tool and weaving political education into that. And then I also coordinate volunteers to produce our TV show. Again that space is about ongoing political education. I also work on building our sustainability around earned income. (MMP Video Coordinator, personal communication, February 10, 2012)
Taking on contracts with various organizations allowed her position to be funded outside of the BTOP grants, facilitating greater continuity between practices that developed prior to BTOP and after. “With MMP-TV, we don’t figure out how to do that work in relation to BTOP” (MMP Video Coordinator, personal communication, February 10, 2012).

MMP Network Organizer, one of MMP’s first volunteer organizers, described her official Strategic Director position as ensuring “the development of this network and movement, meaning building our institution and leadership structure, building relationships and facilitating the political consciousness of people within MMP” (Staff Meeting January 28, 2011). In the first staff meeting of 2011, she referred to the vision diagram for how this might look in stages of development. MMP Co-Founder Informant 2 and MMP Network Organizer, in their official roles as Political Education and Leadership Development Director and Strategic Director, were to coordinate closely with the Executive Committee and Leadership Council and align others in the organization towards the strategic direction set by these bodies. In this role, MMP Network Organizer stated in the first staff meeting that: “I can’t really have a work plan, because a work plan is really our network plan” (Staff Meeting January 28, 2011). Her key considerations during BTOP were MMP’s institutional expansion and “assessing all the relationships we have and the specific campaign work taking place. . . . In this next 6 months, there is a looming attack on public services and workers and education” (Staff Meeting January 28, 2011). MMP Video Coordinator and MMP Network Organizer’s positions provided a different way of seeing and understanding the organization’s broader goals and work as well as the changes during BTOP.

In sum, the positionality that I analyzed in this study was primarily rooted in how the individuals who were subjects in this research were institutionally authorized [or not] to act. The informants in my study were crucial in imparting the expertise involved in carrying out their
everyday work, which was accountable to MMP and to BTOP. A growing bifurcation was
evident in all interviews with MMP staff at this time revealing diverging modes of practices that
shaped how job descriptions were defined, staff were oriented, and actual work was understood.
While a growing division of labor was inevitable as the organization grew and entered new
stages of development, I argue that BTOP accelerated internal fragmentation, disorganizing the
previous collectivity among MMP’s committed leaders.

Geographic Fragmentation

Managing six sites across the geography of the city, each with different constituencies,
needs in technology, and limited staff time dedicated to them, contributed to the fragmentation
described above. The Site Organizers, already operating separately from the rest of the
organizations, were also spread out across the city in different organizational contexts in
marginalized communities. They were only hired for 15 hours per week but were required by the
City to be trained in an overview of the grant, PCC-specific data collection and reporting,
processes for registering users and monitoring the computer centers, as well as participate in
their own internet skills development. In this way, PCC part-time staff were expected to go
through professional development to further their own proficiency in the digital age, as they were
helping to implement programs during the BTOP grant period. MMP’s Site Organizers
eventually began to teach the Basic Computer Skills curriculum in their respective PCCs.

Across MMP’s six PCCs, some of the populations that came together through the
partnering organizations included undocumented workers, high school students fighting for their
public schools, taxi drivers organizing for better work conditions, unionized service sector
employees, and unemployed and homeless people. The different conditions in the lives of these
populations impacted the consistency of learners’ attendance and their particular interests in
using new computer and internet skills. I spent time observing classes in four of the most active PCCs, which I describe here to illustrate the distinct communities that were served by the computer centers.

**Logan Community Development Corporation**

The Logan neighborhood is in the upper part of North Philadelphia. The organization that housed the computer center no longer exists for lack of resources. The computer center and the free classes that MMP Site Organizer 2 taught were their last accomplishments that kept the doors open in a row house located across from a large open space where houses once were located. The houses were demolished in the mid-1980s when the City condemned nearly 1000 homes because of engineering deficiencies, leaving the grid of streets and abandoned redevelopment plans. The Logan PCC oversaw this bleak, abandoned landscape. MMP Site Organizer 2 has been involved in MMP since attending Our City, Our Voices trainings in 2006. As a janitor in Center City buildings in Philadelphia, he had been active leader in the Service Employees International Union (SEIU 32BJ) and attended MMP meetings regularly. MMP Site Organizer 2 began along with the cohort of six site organizers hired to staff the public computer centers and eventually each of them began to teach the digital literacy curriculum that the MEOs designed. Once the classes began, he would take public transportation and frequently arrive early, stay late, and come on additional days to accommodate the erratic schedules of people with chaotic lives.

**Casa Monarca**

Casa Monarca, now also closed, functioned primarily as a cultural center for Philadelphia’s Latino population in South Philadelphia. South Philly is a densely populated neighborhood, and Casa Monarca’s salmon colored stucco building stands apart from the brick
row homes. At first, MMP Site Organizer 1 was nervous about taking on this work. He doesn’t have a teaching or organizing background and he is teaching in a second language on a topic he’s not an expert in. But he discovered that he enjoyed working with adults and his Spanish is now quite good. MMP Site Organizer 1 told me a story about Lady Elizabeth, an elderly woman who has been coming in for several years now to practice her typing. She now has an iPad that her family got for her and internet at home. Willie has gone to her house at times to help her with connection issues. He recalls that some forty or so people who came to the center with no experience left buying computers and getting internet at home, through a discounted program from BTOP that allowed people to pay in cash, a feature important to this population. Job readiness is not first on the minds of the majority of the people coming to this center. Most people, many of whom do not have legal status, work in restaurants, construction, childcare, and cleaning. Most of them get jobs through word of mouth. The public computer center was Casa’s first free program offered to adults. Previously, their programs were all geared towards young people and families, and preserving the cultural practices of Mexico. With BTOP funds, elders and single men started coming to Casa for the first time. “Many people now come in not so much to use computers. Because they made friends and they want to know what’s going on in the community. People will come in and have long discussions about immigrant rights and I watch this unfold” (MMP Site Organizer 1, personal communication, April 18, 2013).

**Philadelphia Unemployment Project**

The Philadelphia Unemployment Project, a service and advocacy organization, was the last location that was designated for a computer center and with only a little more than a year left with the grant, they needed to get a site up and running fairly quickly. This site was chosen for pragmatic reasons. It already had a computer center and regular participants. PUP’s
demographics had more people struggling with drug addiction and mental health issues and notably more instability than the other sites. The existing programs there consisted of traditional literacy, life skills “how to keep the electricity on, spelling, recipes, how to apply for welfare online, how to dress for an interview, relationships” (MMP Site Organizer 3, personal communication, March 30, 2012). MMP Site Organizer 3 sometimes offered a basic computers curriculum that could be adjusted in minor ways to address basic literacy and job searching. In addition to this class, she would spend three hours a week with individuals or small groups to help them with typing or providing feedback on their resumes. MMP Site Organizer 3 has lived in Philadelphia all her life. She worked as a teacher in the urban school system until she left a few years ago to take care of her aging mother. She found out about the Site Organizer position with MMP while working as the station manager of a community low power FM radio station in the neighborhood.

**Taxi Workers Alliance of Pennsylvania**

MMP Site Organizer 4 immigrated from Bangladesh in 1999 where he worked as a social worker. When he came to the US, he was able to find work in a gas station and then a pizza shop in Newark. Since 2001, he has been driving a cab in Philadelphia. I met MMP Site Organizer 4 in 2006, when MMP was just beginning to take shape and he was a lead organizer in the Taxi Workers Alliance of Pennsylvania (TWA-PA). MMP Site Organizer 3 and other leaders in the Philadelphia-based taxi drivers organizing committee fought for and won a national charter from the AFL-CIO in 2011 to unionize drivers throughout the United States. Driving a cab is statistically one of the most dangerous jobs in society—not only from driving but also discrimination and violent crime. In the past, TWA-PA has organized vigils and marches for cab drivers who were killed on the job. When he was hired by MMP to coordinate the PCC housed
within their former offices, there was a challenge with accommodating the erratic schedules of taxi drivers. The task of organizing taxi-workers is not an easy one. Of the available service economy jobs for immigrants, many choose the occupation because of the flexibility, freedom. They are not typically predisposed to collective organization and activity. Some of the success of this site was in outreaching to the wives of taxi-drivers and addressing their need to learn English. Each of the PCCs had to develop unique approaches to make their educational offerings relevant to these communities.

**Bifurcation of Professionalized and Movement Spheres of Work**

MMP frontline staff struggled to understand their work in the larger social and political landscape in the U.S., including the relationship between media/technology and creating social change. This section continues to illustrate how the bifurcation that was expressed in people’s self-descriptions of their work was also manifest in everyday experiences. Work that was accountable to two different underlying motivations created tension regarding the imperatives of MMP’s education. MMP educators faced a philosophical and practical dilemma in the PCCs: Is the purpose of education to join the workforce or is it to make social change? In speaking to this point, MMP Network Organizer, whose work was the most authorized for MMP’s original social change work, articulates this divide in terms of BTOP trainings and network organizing. Network organizing was her responsibility, sometimes along with the two other staff named here.

In the early stages... a divide materialized around work that encompassed the BTOP trainings, and then network organizing work, which was me, MMP Co-Founder Informant 2, to a certain extent, although she was doing a lot of administrative stuff with BTOP and half of MMP Video Coordinator’s time was
Staff whose work was more removed from daily BTOP duties could better articulate the growing divide within the organization. For example, MMP Video Coordinator was also responsible for continuing the original mission through media production programs and could articulate a growing division, despite also working regularly with digital technologies. “I felt like there became a separation between BTOP and some of the other practices that we had been doing before that” (MMP Video Coordinator, personal communication, November 18, 2011). Internal disorganization and continuous reorganization accompanied the new pressures as paid staff and budget tripled. Here, I first describe the new divisions, especially focusing on ways that the frontline educators were made to be accountable to two standards. This period in MMP’s development was frantic, exciting at times, but extremely difficult. The section concludes with reflections from MMP’s two BTOP Managers regarding how completely MMP was reorganized under the federal grants.

New Divisions and Shifting Relationships to BTOP

Various internal schisms and new hierarchies within MMP began or were exacerbated during this time. These were not necessarily fraught divisions but there became clear distinctions between old and new staff, PCC and SBA staff, paid and unpaid staff. The older staff, now called “veteran staff,” had committed to the organization based on a common sense in the work. With this pre-institutional memory, some were expressing concern about how this program was integrating with the rest of the organization: “There’s a way where MMP—and I include myself in this—hasn’t really adjusted to having this BTOP project. It’s still kind of out there and is just really different” (MMP BTOP Manager 2, personal communication, October 21, 2011). Some
staff experienced repeated shifts in their relationship to BTOP and their approach to designing education—which sometimes counted as contributing to the BTOP programs and sometimes stood outside.

we started doing more classes as part of earned income work—teaching computers and teaching digital storytelling. And then three new staff members were hired, they’re called Media Educator Organizers. And they became the trio that was creating the curriculum and doing those trainings. . . . At different points I went on the books as a MEO, so sometimes my work with MMP has been seen as being as one of the MEOS, and at other times it hasn’t, and in practice I wasn’t really meeting with them. And now that’s starting to shift again. (MMP Video Coordinator, personal communication, November 18, 2011)

Part of the rationale for dividing vet staff and new staff was to lessen frustrations and simply “trying to just get things done” (MMP MEO 1, personal communication, March 30, 2013). MMP MEO 1’s experience of the vet staff meetings was to go over everything that MMP was doing, not just BTOP, that also required coordination. We needed to be able to coordinate about the politics of our work in relationship to other organizations in the city and nationally. . . . One of the main reasons for having that space was actually to just be able to do that and with a group of people who were on the same page about what we are trying to do and why, and not have to simultaneously be orienting new people into the work.

(MMP MEO 1, personal communication, March 30, 2013)

MEOs were thrust into shifting decision making practices that were baffling and frustrating: “Everyone has to be in on what’s going on to some degree. If we are all part of this team, we’re
all going to meet around this thing. . . we’ll all share what we think this thing should be and, at the same time, no one person can anchor it because of our capacity” (MMP MEO 2, personal communication, November 12, 2011). These interviews revealed a growing organizational shift from developing political understanding collectively to the need to hold new ‘employees’ accountable for their work.

The uncertainty and shifting organizational plans, structure, and decision making had a particular impact on the Media Educator Organizers, who were tasked with the frontline activity of developing and teaching the curriculum with the diverse populations in the various computer centers. These staff were held to different sets of criteria. MMP MEO 2’s interview clarified that both divergent goals were abstracted from the actual situation, where learners were coming for particular skills. MMP MEO 2 was struggling with the immediate challenge that she faced in a classroom: to find “synergy between MMP’s goals and what’s happening at the centers to be seamless without losing what the people came there for (a computer skill)” (MMP MEO 2, personal communication, November 12, 2011). Several veteran staff I interviewed told a story of how MMP MEO 2 and another educator were criticized for their teaching in a digital storytelling class where students did not produce work that was ideologically aligned with the views of the organization. Being held accountable to different purposes caused confusion among the new staff and did not account for the marketing of the computer centers, which attracted learners with particular expectations to learn computer skills versus “social change.”.

Everything Became Tied to BTOP

In a conversation I had preparing for a BTOP reflection session with the BTOP Managers of the SBA and PCC staff, we discussed the necessity of reflecting on BTOP within a holistic view of MMP’s work. MMP BTOP Manager 1 lamented that the actual experience of BTOP did
not correspond with the original vision of expanding organizing, media production, and leadership development for movement building.

[W]e can’t evaluate BTOP outside of the rest of the organization. . . . was BTOP this overarching thing of MMP or a program of MMP? I thought of BTOP as a set of work we would be expanding and we would be expanding other areas of work. . . . Everything became tied to it. Instead of expanding things, it constrained things. (MMP BTOP Manager 1, personal communication, November 27, 2012)

At first, BTOP might have appeared to be very open, undefined and undictated. The contracts stated simply: staff computer centers and provide trainings. The curriculum was not specified. Various staff that I interviewed over time contributed different insights into the changing practices and internal reorganization that shaped what happened. MMP BTOP Manager 2 reflected on the realities within her own work to which she was accountable, and that coordinated her time and attention.

BTOP is actually very structured. I think it’s far more structured. . . than we anticipated (I’m not sure if structured is the right word, but that’s the language that comes to mind). . . . There are a lot of federal requirements—you have to report, you have to have numbers, you have to pull off classes, you gotta have matching funds. There’s a lot of administrative crap. And then the way we’ve figured out how to advertise so far is bringing in people with certain expectations. (MMP BTOP Manager 2, personal communication, April 20, 2013)

Previously people who came into MMP were both learners and leaders, with both as an ongoing expectation. “People who had been involved prior to being hired were committed to doing the work and the people were brought on through a hiring process. We struggled with how
to build more commitment from them to the organization and work, in general” (MMP MEO 1, persona communication, March 30, 2013). MMP MEO 1 also noted the marked shift in approach to bringing people into the organization. This was done very thoughtfully, over a period of time, in order to build trust and unity of purpose. New division of labor and hierarchies came into being within the paid staff. MMP BTOP Manager 1 recalls creating an organization chart that made visible the imbalance of where the organization’s resources were placed during these years, but also that staff were becoming fragmented in new ways under the reorganization.

I tried to create a staffing chart to break down how different programs are related to each other. Not just BTOP, but how all of MMP’s work is related to each other. What was tough: It showed that the computer centers and media education trainings had lots of staff. Network building had no staff. Media educators—their work continually became more and more and were held to taking on these other areas of work. This made management and supervision tough. On the flip side, I tried to develop the Media Educators as a core group—insulated or excluded, isolated them. . . . I didn’t figure out how to support them as both trainers [for BTOP] and program people [for MMP]. (MMP BTOP Manager 1, personal communication, November 27, 2012)

This bifurcation was expressed repeatedly. For example, MMP BTOP Manager 2, reflected in an interview about how her own consciousness and actions were constrained by the imbalance in the organization:

there’s so much resource tied into BTOP. We’ve got people doing SBA trainings. We have the site orgs who have to pull off things for their sites. We have me—it’s not that I’m overwhelmed with work. But I’m the least productive with work that
I’ve been in years because I can’t focus on BTOP and I can’t focus on MMP. They are two very different things right now. And to try to switch my head—I try to work from home once a week just to pull off the most basic BTOP administrative stuff. . . . I have to get my head into the BTOP space and then I need to pull it out. But then, more broadly for the organization, we’re all—the organization is a little schizophrenic at this point. (BTOP Manager 2, personal communication, April 20, 2013)

Most of the staff during BTOP years moved on. Several who were new to MMP could not feel settled in what their work was. The necessity of navigating accountability to funding sources set in as a permanent feature of the organization, requiring staff to frequently change their areas of focus and modes of working in relation to subsequent grants. This poses an ongoing problem of how to provide experiences for committed MMP staff or volunteers that allow the organization to grow integrated practices that are continuously separated by the constraints of funding requirements.

Towards the end of implementation, MMP BTOP Manager 2 continued to describe BTOP as a “peculiar, difficult piece in and of itself” (BTOP Manager 2, personal communication, April 20, 2013) within MMP. In her job of overseeing the six public computer centers, she described the difficulties stemming from the parameters and process involved in accomplishing the BTOP grants:

I have felt really confused and restricted by the site organizers only being funded for 12 hours at these sites—the partner organizations where they’re at. I mean they are not movement organizations for the most part. And having six of them means that the ones that are—we don’t really have attention for them. . . . We
believe that the right to access to technology is a human right. . . . But, it also creates this crazy community where our most successful site—it’s the right neighborhood setting, the classes work, it’s our successful model. But what we’re seeing is what this success equals. We teach people skills, we get people computers, we get them internet access in their homes, and they no longer come to the community centers—so we just have to start over. It’s doing what we’re supposed to, in terms of BTOP. It’s not actually building a broader community that we get to keep educating or growing with. (BTOP Manager 2, personal communication, April 20, 2013)

Because of the nature of the content and challenges with attendance, it often became easier to organize the basic computer classes around individuals’ needs versus the collective needs of the various communities in which the PCCs were located. These experiences in the PCCs stood in stark contrast with MMP’s organizing work taking place at the same time.

As there was a growing awareness in the organization about a “lack of coherence” internally, there was also a growing awareness that the PCCs were not accomplishing MMP’s ideological vision. MMP BTOP Manager 2 reflected on the work MMP Network Organizer was doing outside of BTOP to build relationships with the Firefighters’ union to bring attention to the impact of municipal austerity measures on keeping fire stations open.

[MMP Network Organizer] does an amazing job of weaving political education into conversations with them. She’ll bring something up about the economy and the firefighters are just down with it and they just start to riff off it. (BTOP Manager 2, personal communication, April 20, 2013)
But MMP was not able to put consistent attention and resource to continuing this organizing-focused part of the work, and it became harder to develop other leaders within the organization with an appreciation and ability to move this forward, in the face of other pulls and pressures.

I feel like the thing MMP is up against is that their activity has become so diffuse because it’s so big and it’s become something where we look to other people like a service provision organization, and that, in turn, is very hard for the staff to fight against, even within themselves. (MMP BTOP Manager 2, personal communication, October 21, 2011)

BTOP accelerated the consolidation of MMP into a non-profit form, capable of handling complex administrative responsibilities and accomplishing the federal grants. The particular bifurcation in experience during this time, between establishing a viable organization while continuing movement building strategies also introduced a contradiction to the original mission. As BTOP recipients, they became “Providers” of broadband technology in poor communities, on behalf of the state. This service to the city was predicated on poor people bearing responsibility to develop their human capital. Still, MMP accomplished organizing work in the city, at times in resistance to the city. A different accountability mechanism through a nonformal leadership structure provided a counterweight to the grants. Though unraveling, MMP’s commitment to building a network served to direct people towards movement building work. Two curricula were produced during these years. I explore these as components of social organization within two forms of accountability.
Conclusion: Ongoing Struggle for Clarity

Internally, MMP leaders struggled to gain clarity, articulate what was happening, and intervene in order to move forward their vision. Interviews showed people trying to articulate something that they could sense that was shifting and disrupting their original work. MMP BTOP Manager 2 described BTOP as being “more structured than we thought” (2013). Several spoke more specifically about two competing relations. The MMP Network Organizer marked the “divide between BTOP and the network” (2015). At the heart of this period were MMP’s frontline staff, divided among their work responsibilities and desiring to advance MMP’s mission while being pulled into the complex of BTOP. Several informants marked the difficulties that arose in preparing new staff to create a distinct approach that would take advantage of the incoming resources while advancing MMP’s agenda. MMP MEO 1 described the requirement to participate in the Freedom Rings Partnership as “a huge balancing act that requires a lot of sophistication. Meeting all these requirements and navigating this world of technology access, nonprofits, federal funding, and all that while also maintaining the integrity of the organization. . . . That was something that expecting newer folks to really get was really tough” (MMP MEO 1, personal communication, March 30, 2013). MMP’s original work and mission is continually interrupted by the drive to seek resources, out of administrative necessity.

The acts of securing and implementing the funding entered the organization into the textually mediated processes of large scale organization that orchestrated practices of reading, writing, and acting. Reorganization within MMP involved people creating and adopting texts through which their work became accountable to the state agenda for broadband adoption, namely to require individuals to acquire skills deemed appropriate for the digital age. Trends in technology policy and funding regimes at the federal and municipal levels in terms of technology
infrastructure are part of a shrinking public sector. A prime example, Philadelphia’s original, failed vision of providing free internet access through their municipal wireless initiative had yielded to the public private model of the Freedom Rings Partnership, with the City subcontracting to private entities, including MMP. This was difficult for MMP staff to see, beyond the confines of everyday experience, despite the irony of fighting for the public sector during this same period. However, the ongoing commitment to the original work of organizing and entering independent media texts that center people’s everyday experiences into political contest remains a powerful formula that continues to intervene and shift power relations in the city.
PART III
CHAPTER SEVEN
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This research used an institutional ethnographic approach to analyze and detail the social relations of broadband access and adoption through the public programs implemented by the Media Mobilizing Project (MMP), operating for the first time under federal regulations that orchestrated the practice of Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) programs trans-locally. This study proceeded as an institutional ethnography, a research approach in which theory and practice of investigating the world are taken together as a coherent method.

The aim of institutional ethnography is to extend our ordinary knowledge as practitioners in our everyday lives into the workings of social relations, which this approach makes visible. A Marxist ontological and epistemological approach is embedded in institutional ethnography, signifying a commitment to the real world versus theory or concepts. Pursuing research in this way commits the researcher to an explicit ontological position that rejects abstract and speculative ways of knowing, thus “transferring agency away from concepts…back to the embodied knower” (DeVault, 2008, p. 5). Adult educators who proceed from a Marxist ontology understand adult education to be “the site, vital dimension and long-standing context for critical practices, organization and proliferation of counterhegemony, to be specified in and of the “concrete,” in Marx’s terms” (Carpenter & Mojab, 2011, p. vii). The strength of using institutional ethnographic methods is to be able to locate and describe how concepts (that were discovered in texts and talk) concretely coordinate people’s activities. How things worked and came to happen as they did were discovered in research. The orienting questions at the beginning of this study directed my attention to people’s activities, what they did and experienced.
Examining the activities associated with securing and implementing BTOP, continuing their original work, and establishing their educational programs during these years led me to the discoveries of broader social relations that I distill in this chapter. As I investigated the period when the federal government announced the available funds and a lengthy process ensued in getting organized to apply for the BTOP grant streams in 2010, I also looked at documentation of the rest of MMP’s work. At this point, the majority of the organization was involved in local organizing and producing media in relationship with a broad range of social justice organizations that MMP leadership were actively facilitating into collective conversation. Over the next several years, the core finding that I discovered and observed was the growing bifurcation of activity and consciousness within MMP. In the first part of this concluding chapter, I summarize the findings of the study in three ways, and provide discussion that addresses the larger significance, as they relate to adult education and to the extended social relations that coordinated MMP’s frontline educators’ and other leaders’ consciousnesses and activities. Next, I discuss the implications and contributions to the field of adult education. Third, I reflect on the limitations of the study and provide suggestions for further research. Finally, I share my final thoughts after completing the research.

**Summary of Findings and Discussion**

The findings of this research need to be understood in light of a bifurcation which developed between work surrounding BTOP implementation and MMP’s combined social change practices, which disorganized and reorganized their program of work. Here, I describe the manifestations of these bifurcated activities: textual production, forms of accountability, and curricula. The first discussion, which I link to the distinct practices of textual production, addresses the social relations of the digital economy that promotes the growing, hegemonic
understanding that poverty is normative and solutions revolve around individuals taking responsibility to continually (re)skill and (up)skill (Jackson, 2011). In this study, this understanding was promoted through the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) under the Stimulus Act (2009) and embodied in the textually-based social organization that produced MMP’s Basic Computer Skills curriculum. The second discussion addresses this funding in the context of a public sector that has been reorganized under the imposition of managerial models that originated in the private sector. Government (federal and municipal) were seen to be the managers within the accountability circuit found in this research, and was at the root of the disorganization and reorganization of MMP’s activities. Finally, the last two sections return to the two curricula that MMP produced, and then discusses these as a current expression of what some adult educators refer to as “really useful knowledge” vs. “merely useful knowledge” (Crowther, 2012), that embodied the divide between radical education within the working class Chartist movement and the technical education that was encouraged by factory owners in the 19th century. Different from the ways that society operated in Marx’s times with a single owner and myriad workers, today’s workforce development trends operate through institutional complexes via a conceptual apparatus of hope in the digital economy.

**Distinct Practices of Textual Production**

In this research, examining specific practices with language in the actual production of new texts was critical as an entry point into the rapidly shifting social organization within MMP. Chapters Four and Five begin with a closer look at how the federal grant making process and MMP’s radical media production proceeded from different bases in official texts and discourses, on the one hand, and in experience, on the other. In the investigation of how the BTOP grants were written, the trans-local movement of terms and discussions of terms was evident, as people
activated them in order to make arguments and create possibilities for their work and other future institutional actions. Tracing the origins and movement of these terms revealed the hierarchical movement of standardized terms and concepts that were part of the specialized language relating to broadband technology and the digital economy. In order to accomplish work, MMP leaders had to align to these terms and concepts that circulated in ruling or “boss texts.” I discuss this alignment as happening within text-based interindividual territory, in which consciousness arises within activities of reading and activating texts.

In contrast, the production of MMP’s radical media was built around the incorporation of recorded stories of lived experience, accompanied by analysis developed through collective political education, for purposes of entering into political contest with hegemonic ideas and framing of pressing issues. The recording of such stories was possible through the formation of trusting, lateral relationships that facilitated a context in which people were willing to share personal experiences. The resulting media-texts preserved the authenticity of those individual and collective voices and identities unlike the impersonal, standardized and specialized language that characterizes institutional texts. When read (or viewed or heard), stories of actual direct experience prompt readers to scan their own experiences as they align to the people, who are the subjects of the media. Further, editing techniques that place stories from different locations, communities, and sites of struggle in relation to each other, in montage forms, serve to underscore commonality of experience. These media-texts were also produced with intentions of accomplishing work, in this case, the formation of a broadened subjectivity that compels people to act collectively for social change. The politicized practice of interviewing in media production are opportunities where experience-based interindividual territories are established and recorded by the MMP media producer and then circulated as interventions in ruling relations.
Social Relations of the Digital Economy

The economic crisis launched technology and human capital into a new rhetorical position in public life. An ensemble of ideas based in a technological utopianism surrounding “hope in the digital economy”, was promoted as having “extraordinary potential…for transforming lives by bringing the world closer, spurring job creating innovations and growing the economy” (http://www.ntia.doc.gov/legacy/broadbandgrants/090310/transcript_090310.pdf) by the Obama administration. The Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP), under the Department of Commerce, was the particular program within the Stimulus Act designed to orchestrate stated transformation. The social relations that MMP and all recipients of these funds entered into drew them into these workings, through the textually-mediated processes associated with the grant. This conceptual framework and actual workings of the digital economy take assumptions about human capital as a given, (that individuals are capital assets on behalf of the state, as discussed in the literature review for this study). Scholar on neoliberal rationality, Wendy Brown (2015), suggests that “[w]hen we are figured as human capital in all that we do and in every venue, equality ceases to be our presumed natural relation to one another…inequality becomes normal, even normative” (p. 38). The logic that operates, then, is that individuals must take responsibility for personal investment in (re)skilling and (up)skilling to stay marketable.

Visions of human existence founded on political equality and freedom, and promoted within social purpose and critical theory traditions of adult education recede as language that rewrites humans in market terms circulates more broadly. Particular ways of thinking about the economy and poverty, and what should be done about it, emerge within educators and learners as education based in the reconstitution of human beings in terms of capital investment is enacted.
“Human capital is distinctly not concerned with acquiring the knowledge and experience needed for intelligent democratic citizenship” (Brown, 2015, p. 177). The potential of media production strategies infused with radical education that proceeds on a different basis, through the restoration of direct individual and collective experiences is to intervene in these very social relations by creating new forms of struggle.

**Distinct Forms of Accountability**

The bifurcation within MMP can be attributed to distinct, underlying forms of accountability that disorganized their original practices and creating conditions of divergent practices and experiences among frontline staff. Again, both Chapters Four and Five discussed these different forms of accountability as they were directly connected to and made visible by exploring the practices of textual production. In the first example, following the trail of institutional texts and standardized/specialized discourse invoked in people’s talk revealed an accountability circuit that shaped and constrained the possibilities of implementing BTOP funds. MMP had to fit to and/or fight to expand established priorities, guidelines, categories, and metrics in order to secure the funds made available by the federal Stimulus Act. As they proceeded to implement the actual work and produce deliverables that were organized to fit these same predetermined frameworks, they finally had to produce reports that stood in for their actual work, also written to match these metrics and categories. In this way, aspects of their actual work were made to “count” or “not count.” Stories from their actual work were made visible or invisible, in order to demonstrate success, often not for them or on their own terms.

Another form of accountability, described in Chapter Five, was built as an extension of their relational methods employed in radical media production. A lateral form of relational accountability was established as MMP was founded, and during the BTOP period was
disorganized for varying reasons, some that may be attributed to new pressures and conditions as a result of the funding. Although MMP’s Leadership Council was not able to maintain its coherence and provide an alternative form of accountability as they were charged to do, the dedicated work of the one staff person and orientation of all staff to the principles and purpose of building a network form of organization, contributed to significant organizing work across a range of public and service sector issues and communities in Philadelphia. In addition to making it through this tumultuous period, themselves, relationships built through MMP’s radical media production and organizing practices helped to launch new platforms for continued and focused work in and across specific communities.

**Reorganization of the Public Sector**

This discussion focuses on the finding of the accountability circuit which disorganized and reorganized MMP’s frontline work under new managerial terms instituted in the BTOP contracts and process. In recent years, institutional ethnography has been paying increasing attention to this phenomenon of new public management under a reorganized public sector that employs practices that are used in private enterprise (Griffith & Smith, 2014). Under BTOP, the Freedom Rings Partnership was constituted as a public/private partnership, under management of the City of Philadelphia Division of Technology and Urban Affairs Coalition, who subcontracted several private non-profit organizations who were designated as Managing Partners. The contracts named MMP as “Provider” (of access to technology), on behalf of the city at the same time that they were actively protesting the city for implementing austerity measures. Managing Partners tasked with promoting Sustainable Broadband Adoption were particularly subjected to “top down” management practices and pressures to promote internet subscriptions and a citywide curriculum of teaching basic computer skills based on international standards. Even as they
resisted such hierarchical management, MMP designed a Basic Computer Skills curriculum that inadvertently “provided” access to technology that encouraged individuals in poor communities to develop themselves as autonomous entrepreneurs (Baptiste, 2001; Olssen, 2006) through the acquisition of skills in digital technologies. This direct contradiction to MMP’s founding practices of employing digital technologies with poor communities in order to advance anti-capitalist organizing was a disruption to the cultivation of radical consciousness within MMP, as their frontline work was reorganized according to institutional accountability circuits.

Distinct Curricula as Components of Social Organization

The final finding that I discuss, here, is the production of two distinct curricula. Ultimately, the curriculum produced for BTOP, which can be understood as objectified consciousness in institutional ethnography, embodied and corresponded to competing forms of social organization, facilitating different possible actions for the educators and learners. Learning and teaching about technology was reorganized within two forms of practice that aligned within two forms of accountability. I have already referred to the Basic Computer Skills above as an expression of human capital and neoliberal rationality in which “all domains are markets, and we are everywhere presumed to be market actors” (Brown, 2015, p. 36). Within the accountability circuit of the BTOP programs, learners in Basic Computer Skills classes represented the larger ideological frames of human capital and hope in the digital economy. MMP educators had difficulty reconciling the contradictions between this and the rest of MMP’s work. Further, the modular form of this curriculum that was focused on teaching discrete technical skills was not amenable to the introduction and integration of radical ideas that could make sense and resonate with different communities.
The Movement Media Institute (Institute) curriculum was developed as a return to an earlier form of movement praxis that MMP leaders reintroduced at this time to redirect their work. This was also part of addressing an emerging problem of staff being fragmented by the institutionally authorized division of labor. A process of studying together was part of attempting to rebuild internal coherence and contributed to the design of the Institute curriculum. A program of political education and media literacy was the center of this curriculum that incorporated screenings of mainstream media and media produced independently by individuals and organizations rooted in social justice. These media-based texts from different sites of struggle were often used to draw connections between Philadelphia current events and places beyond, as a way to make people conscious of shared experiences. They also juxtaposed movement made media with news stories that held contradictory analysis in order to teach people to recognize media conventions in support of different interests and politicize conversation. The digital technology skills training that was incorporated into the Movement Media Institutes centered on learning the media production process that facilitates the direct expression of survival experiences through recording stories of people’s lives.

**Really Useful Knowledge in the Digital Age**

Adult educators invoke the phrase “really useful knowledge” to mark the distinction between radical education that helps people to develop analyses and strategies to act versus education oriented towards techno-rational skills that keep people marketable (Brown, 2010; Crowther, 2012; Lucio-Villegas, 2015). The phrase was used by workers in the Chartist movement of the 19th century as they developed their own forms of radical education and media (Flett, 2009). I came to see the Movement Media Institutes and Basic Computer Skills curricula as a current expression of “really useful knowledge” vs. “merely useful” knowledge (Crowther,
2012) in the digital age. When we founded MMP, we knowingly positioned it within a history of social movements where technology (particularly media technologies) played a role in circulating ideas and cohering mass identity. We were curious about the potential of digital media technology to cross sectors, borders, and other divides. Early theorization in this work was based in study that the co-founders underwent about globalization, social democracy, neoliberalism, and social movements. Alongside study, we also participated in organizing work surrounding various topics and communities. MMP has built and continues to build many leaders who take action in the world, using digital technologies to circulate stories as critical interventions. Within this mission, there is an inherent concern with the cultivation of radical consciousness and action through really useful knowledge, as well as what disrupts and interrupts this process. I return to this topic later, within a discussion of the implications and contribution to radical adult education.

**Implications and Contribution to Adult Education Field**

I believe that this research offers three areas of theoretical contribution to the field of adult education. One is within the scholarship on the influence of neoliberalism and human capital within the field, especially as discourse regarding technology strengthens and becomes more ubiquitous. Second, I return to reflect on critical program planning literature in adult education, post-research, in order to again make the case for a different approach to research. This leads to my last argument that institutional ethnography is a practice for developing really useful knowledge and that reviving Marxist-feminist frameworks for adult education is imperative, not only for the field, but for society as a whole. Finally, I conclude this section with a few suggestions for radical adult educators in practice, including broad areas for further research that can aid the field as well as practical work.
Technology, Human Capital, and Adult Education

Scholars have examined information and communications technologies (ICTs) as a new hope for developing human capital. I explored this as part of my literature review for this research. In contrast to the existing critical viewpoints within adult education (Baptiste, 2001; Brine, 2011; Mojab, 2009; Jackson 2011; Kopecky, 2012), which show how teaching and learning, program planning, credentialing, etc. support and reproduce neoliberal practices, many of these studies perpetuated a skills deficit argument and leave unexplored broad uses of technology in society. This research contributes to critical adult education perspectives and/or complicates the notions of hope in technology for developing human capital in three ways. First, the outcome of MMP’s most successful Basic Computer Skills classes, from the standpoint of the BTOP Manager of the Public Computer Centers and the Site Organizer of this site, was that people purchased devices and internet for their homes. This observation corroborates critical scholars’ warnings of the individualizing effects of human capital oriented education. Further, MMP’s most successful site was in a community center that served Philadelphia’s undocumented, Latin American population, who are not interested in developing standard digital literacy skills for a job market they cannot access. This challenges the idea that this is the universal best approach to teaching technology in the first place. Second, the research shows the practical workings of an everyday situation, where adult educators, even when radical in orientation, inadvertently enact neoliberalism’s stealth agenda (Brown, 2015) and practices in designing learning and teaching through mundane activities. For those who wish to resist these pulls and promote social justice through education, it is important to be able to see how easily these intentions can be subverted, as well as how critical interventions can be made to redirect initiatives back to original intentions. The accounts in this research show both. Finally, the
Movement Media Institutes also point to a different model of ideas and practices in learning technologies for purposes of social action that could be expanded on as a contribution to adult education. While other, more likely, academic fields in media, communications, anthropology, etc., have been exploring the intersections of technology and social movements, adult education could benefit particularly from a deeper dive than what I have done in this study into the radical pedagogy that is fused with combined practices of media production and organizing.

**Post-Research Reflections on Critical Program Planning Frameworks**

In my literature review for this research, one section of this chapter was dedicated to the contribution of institutional ethnography to research in adult education. Here, I particularly discussed the approach in relation to a category in the field that focuses on program planning. This discussion is relevant in that practitioners who design adult education programs may operate at a managerial level, as opposed to frontline adult educators, and have the ability to identify places where intervention can create different future possibilities (for instance, in grant writing stages). Without repeating my review of critical program planning frameworks here, I begin this discussion with restating that embarking on institutional ethnography is a different commitment to the practice of research, one in which the imposition of an additional theoretical framework is not ontologically compatible. A materialist theoretical frame, at the root of its design, commits the researcher to the real world and the embodied knower.

A way to illustrate this more clearly, using the adult education framework of Cervero and Wilson (1994, 1996, 2006) that centers on the activity of “negotiation of power and interest,” is by using Dorothy Smith’s (1990) elucidation of hierarchy and ideological circles as part of her growing argument for positing institutional ethnography as an alternative sociology. In fact, this is the precursor to articulating how hierarchical accountability circuits operate within
institutional complexes. The point is to reveal “methods of creating accounts of the world that treat it selectively in terms of a predetermined conceptual framework” (p. 93). I explicitly sought to avoid such methods in this project. The circularity of the ideological process that institutional ethnography sets out to critique can be summarized thus: 1) I, the researcher, set out to find out how MMP negotiates power and interest within the BTOP process, 2) therefore, I find such examples in the field according to predetermined schema (interests defined as predispositions, motivations; stakeholders; individual and contextual factors, etc.), 3) I produce and analyze data that “becomes the reality intended by the schema; the schema interprets the data” (p. 93), 3) I write up findings based on interpretation of the data that was collected to fit to the predetermined schema (which may also resist aspects of the schema), 4) findings are used to comment on the original conceptual framework and the research is a contribution to the field, within the category of program planning. This is an approach to research that represents a commitment to theory.

Aside from proceeding from a different intellectual commitment that employs theory and concepts differently, I also offered two main critiques of “negotiating power and interest” as a theoretical framework. First, this approach places and constrains research and analysis primarily within the realm of planners’ rational activity and understanding of the decision-making context. One presumes that individuals and communities engage in an activity of negotiation when they are aware of what is negotiable. Second, if it is found and highlighted that a negotiation did not happen where it might have, this method does not provide a means to explicate the social organization that produced this occurrence. I have considered what the findings may have been if I had proceeded with my research with MMP in this way. MMP leaders, indeed, negotiated power and interest, masterfully at times. The activity of two MMP leaders in particular is the root of Philadelphia’s success in accessing $18 million for public computer centers and digital
literacy. They proceeded to advocate for the city’s most marginal populations, the inclusion of
digital media production as an acknowledged form of broadband adoption, and resisted top down
managerial attempts to hold organizations responsible for standardized metrics (internet
subscriptions) and curriculum. Even despite critique of the Basic Computer Skills classes, MMP
provided access to technology for a time to Bangladeshi taxi drivers, homeless and unemployed
people, undocumented immigrant and service economy workers, and an African American
neighborhood of North Philadelphia, part of which was condemned, demolished, and left
abandoned since the 1990s. I am proud to tell the story in this way; these are as much truths as
the accounts that I chose to explore in this research.

What is striking is how the above version entirely misses the problematic located in
MMP staff’s experiences that I began to identify in 2011, precisely in what people could not
articulate. It was this concern and also a response to Wilson and Nesbit’s (2005) call for better
explication of the mechanisms of power in adult education that I turned to institutional
ethnography for launching at this point into investigation, into social relations of which none of
us were then conscious. As this research made clear the boundaries of consciousness, I also
began to realize certain limitations of critical reflection. During this research period, I observed
and facilitated reflection sessions that could not help facilitate the necessary breakthrough into
what was beyond local experience and consciousness. I believe that institutional ethnography can
be learned and developed in nonformal settings where radical education occurs outside of the
university, as a method of developing “really useful knowledge” that both offers a different
approach to study and self-reflection that is not about people, but for people, by giving insight
into how individuals have been institutionally authorized to act or not act, as well as to make the
reaches of power visible and actionable for organizing purposes.
Institutional Ethnography as a Practice for Developing “Really Useful Knowledge”

I have made several arguments for the usefulness of institutional ethnography within academic and grassroots contexts. A strong community exists among people who use institutional ethnography because it offers a coherent approach to a world that is real and knowable. All institutional ethnographies can find connection to each other as they explicate extended social relations. Therefore, I generally suggest that more U.S. scholars in adult education, in particular, cultivate a practice of using this method, in addition to earlier arguments regarding what this approach affords. Reviving Marxist-feminist frameworks for adult education research (Carpenter & Mojab, 2011) is both an imperative in today’s societal climate, and may also facilitate more interest in institutional ethnography, as this would allow this research to fit the standard form better.

In this section, I want to return briefly to the historical root of the phrase “really useful knowledge,” from which this research takes inspiration. Historian Keith Flett (2006) makes an argument in his research of the working class Chartist Movement’s radical education that it was during a time widely understood as the movement’s decline when self-led radical education and production of “really useful knowledge” actually continued to rise and flourish. Partly this was evidenced in the “battle of ideas” examined in the language of the movement’s radical newspapers. It is during this historical moment that Trump has become the 45th U.S. president that I turn to such a story for hope. Stakes are high for advancing combined practices of radical education, media production, and organizing that can engage and win in a battle of ideas that is taking place both glaringly and stealthily in society. I mentioned above that the model of Movement Media Institutes, as facilitated by the Media Mobilizing Project, offered a view into educational practices that fuse these elements that have recurred throughout a long history of
social movements. In this first attempt at using institutional ethnography for research, I was directed to attend to language and textual production that was occurring within MMP. I found that approaching media production as a coordinator of consciousness from a materialist perspective was a powerful vehicle for investigating different organizing initiatives. I believe there is an opportunity for further research from an adult education perspective into how consciousness is formed within experiences of producing media in politically contentious contexts, especially in situations where the produced media is intended to coordinate further action.

Further Suggestions for Radical Adult Education Practice and Research

While this research was based on a specific case and context, the situation where successful radical educators and organizers want to take steps to expand the reach and strength of their work may lead them to consider external resources. Further, I mention in Chapter Three that while this particular inquiry is not generalizable, it displays features of social organization and relations that can be found operating similarly across sites. Therefore, the practical suggestions that I offer here are related to being attentive to uses of language and forms of accountability in local settings, as these are the features that draw our work into relations beyond which we may be conscious. Of course, the ubiquitous and real challenge for those committed to this work is dedicating the time for engaging in regular, collective study. Perhaps this should be the primary suggestion, as it is key to conducting necessary investigation beyond local experience as well as providing a venue for strengthening relationships. The two main insights regarding language include 1) investigating the trail of texts and terms that emerge in work accountable to an external source—what are the origins of and nexus of institutions in which language and concepts are found and flowing, and 2) how can stories of lived experience,
recorded or otherwise, be mined in order to build lateral relationships and to challenge language from “boss texts” that circulate in the mainstream. Finally, two related insights regarding forms of accountability include 1) identifying institutional circuits and especially the places where intervention can be made in order to make changes to frameworks that guide what work is possible and for whom, and 2) taking care to create lateral accountability mechanisms that build strength and solidarity across organizations that can set and maintain direction, and can intervene as needed in hierarchical institutional processes.

This last set of suggestions build from the particularities of this research, in which MMP is an incorporated non-profit organization. In this and related contexts, I believe that a strategy of anticipating a bifurcation between professional/institutional and organizing/movement work, and maintaining consciousness of these as separate forms of work, can ultimately facilitate stronger analysis that can guide courses of action. However, a more optimal scenario is to avoid conditions of bifurcation. To this end, it would be instructive to become familiar with the insights from activists and scholars who are exposing the difficulties and challenges with forming and working with non-profit institutions at the expense of building truer movement forms of organization. Though I did not go this route myself, research in adult education should put similar, critical attention on the constraints and possibilities of education within non-profit contexts. Generally, more studies into societal mechanisms that constrain possibilities for radical consciousness are necessary; non-profit institutional complexes are part of this. My research proceeded from the standpoint of leaders within MMP, versus the learners, partly because of my own interest in the development of radical consciousness in educators. For a suggestion into how this exploration can be furthered within adult education, I borrow from Carpenter and Mojab (2011) in their call for more studies that can interrogate the constitution of consciousness. To this
end, they elaborate on a Marxist-feminist framework that can be used to inform such an exploration in adult education.

**Limitations of this Study**

This study, like any study has limitations and strengths. The limitations are potentially instructive for others embarking on institutional ethnography. The metaphor of “mapping” social relations is often used to describe the aims of institutional ethnography. This metaphor is appropriate in that findings are empirical and verifiable, so a research project in institutional ethnography makes visible a particular area on a map of extended social relations. Further research in a similar topic area does not negate existing findings, but has the potential to make the map more detailed or highlight a different area of the map. My existing relationships with many MMP staff and leaders allowed me to conduct and record several interviews over time as well as have numerous informal conversations in order to clarify events that had occurred or share my thoughts as my analysis developed. These occasions, as well as a wealth of internal documents from meetings over several years gave me a rich sense of trans-local movement of language from different contexts over time.

There are a few ways that I or other researchers may extend the knowledge produced in this research. More interviews with officials at the City of Philadelphia’s Division of Technology and at the federal level, within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), could have developed a richer picture of how MMP’s local activities were connected and coordinated by those managerial and regulatory mechanisms. The two interviews I conducted with Open Technology Institute former staff were helpful towards this end. Further, the hierarchical accountability circuit could be elaborated more with an investigation of the corporate for-profit entities in this story. The impact of telecommunications companies in
shaping the outcome of the City of Philadelphia’s proposal for the Infrastructure stream of BTOP funding should be told. An entirely different approach to this exploration could have been to conduct interviews with the adult learners in MMP’s classes. This data would have made visible other intersecting ruling regimes in the various communities in Philadelphia where MMP managed public computer centers. However, my interest in the challenges for radical adult educators influenced my decision to privilege the standpoint of MMP leaders.

Finally, in order to create a broader conversation about the trans-local coordination of BTOP experiences and the social relations of the digital economy, I could have conducted a multi-sited study with two or more organizations who received BTOP funds nationally, or who were members, locally, of the Freedom Rings Partnership. However, this would have interfered with the in-depth view that was enabled by focusing on MMP’s experiences during this period and the insights I gained about cultivating radical consciousness. This was perhaps the greatest strength of this study. Taking a more comprehensive approach to the organization’s work rather than restricting myself to only narrowly understood BTOP-related work, I was able to bring the distinct, bifurcated mechanisms operating within MMP, into view.

Final Thoughts (That are Never Final)

In 2016, it is ten years after I co-founded the Media Mobilizing Project (MMP), and twenty years after I graduated with my undergraduate degree from the University of Pennsylvania. It occurred to me not very long ago how strikingly similar this research project has been to my undergraduate thesis, in which I compared students’ shifting understandings of their class privilege as they interacted with poor communities through either university-led service projects or poor-led organizing in the United States to build a movement to end poverty. For a long time, I have been interested in how radical consciousness is formed and interrupted, and
how sense of self changes as we interact with the world. This is a Marxist conception of learning, although this was still a few years before I discovered Marx. Many years later, I accidentally arrived at adult education’s door. And soon after, I discovered Dorothy Smith’s work, which has allowed me to continue earlier interests and explorations.

When I began this research into MMP’s experiences during their “BTOP period,” I did not set out to write a critique of non-profit industrial complex (INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, 2009) and of pursuing funding, though I am sympathetic to these views. This analysis has been done and written about passionately and eloquently. But I have had to reflect on my part in deciding to incorporate MMP as a 501(c)3, putting the organization on a particular path that creates conditions for bifurcated experience and consciousness. On the one hand, the work of sustaining the organization interrupts, disrupts, and at times, displaces the original purpose. On the other, this institutional designation has facilitated some degree of continuity, legitimacy, good work. On a personal level, it makes my life more interesting and I continue to build from it, as it builds new platforms for activity in the city. MMP’s existence facilitates certain possibilities (relationships, collaborations, interventions) and is not a straightforward path to political clarity and revolutionary praxis.

I have shared my reflection, above, that many leaders have grown through their involvement with MMP. This is broadly understood and reflected in a recently revised mission statement: The Media Mobilizing Project builds leaders – leaders who use their stories to make our organizing stronger; and who build the movement for human rights and to end poverty. I (and many others) observe that new organizing platforms and new leaders emerge, together, from the original combined practices of political education, media production, and organizing. This research allowed me to understand this potential, in new language, as well as it helped me
to articulate what we are up against (social relations), as we take action. Everyone lives compromised under late capitalism and neoliberal logic. This does not make an argument for retreat from engagement within complex institutions, as this simply abandons the most vulnerable. At the end of this research, I am not willing to say that MMP should not have incorporated or should not have sought federal funds. The organization was founded on fierce audacity in a compromised landscape. The learning from this is invaluable.

Finally, there is sometimes a critique that circulates that critical theory is long on critique and short on practical solutions. To this, I say that Marx has never been more crucial and practical. I made a commitment that this research should produce really useful knowledge and I use insights, which continue to emerge, daily. Laying bare these years of MMP’s work, when I was not here, was not easy. My hope is that this will be received as a sincere attempt at seeing honestly and accurately during a difficult period that was crucial in the organization’s evolution. It is meant to be a celebration of individual and collective courage and commitment. To conclude, I am stealing my great co-founder friend’s favorite reflection for my own—that building MMP was our realest experience of *The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.*
References


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pz4Pt4mDNgY

Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

York Times. Retrieved from

York: Doubleday.


of adult learning. In D. N. Aspin, J. D. Chapman, K. Evans, & R. Bagnall, (Eds.), Second
international handbook of lifelong learning (pp. 887-897). New York: Springer.


Forum Helps Build Common Narrative Among Working People. (2011, October 17). Media


[Media Mobilizing Project]. (2010b). “If I don’t have a license, I can’t work”. [Web log comment]. Retrieved from https://mediamobilizing.org/if-i-dont-have-a-license-i-cant-work/


Selvaraj, S. (2013). De-Centering the ivory tower: A university of the poor. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education.*


Watkins, B., & Tisdell, E. (2006). Negotiating the labyrinth from margin to center: Adult degree program administrators as program planners within higher education institutions. *Adult Education Quarterly, 56*(2), 134-159.

Who we are. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.mediamobilizing.org/who-we-are/updates


### Table 1. Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXTS – INVESTIGATION OF TRANS-LOCAL FLOW OF LANGUAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOCAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL= 499 texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Meeting Minutes</em> (141): staff, extra-corporate leadership <em>Vision and Strategy Texts and Minutes</em> (145): BTOP, Organizing <em>Curriculum Designs and Materials</em> (23): staff orientation, advanced study, Basic Computer Skills, Movement Media Institutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philadelphia Digital Inclusion Documents (2008-10)</strong>: (10) BTOP working group, Presentation to Mayor’s Office, Digital Justice Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open Technology Institute Reports</strong> – Philadelphia (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SBA and PCC Documents (2011-12)</strong> (151)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Orienting Presentations</em> (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hiring Process Documentation</em> (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bi-Weekly Meeting Minutes</em> (124): Joint FRP Meetings, SBA Partners, PCC Partners, SBA Training Working Group, FRP Evaluation Working Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freedom Rings Partnership website</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MMP’s Independent Media</strong> (10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2. Observations and Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>OTI Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PCC Observations</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observations</strong></td>
<td><strong>MMP Interviews</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL = 24 hours Active MMP public computer centers</td>
<td>TOTAL = 119 hours MMP’s Intensive Movement Media Institutes (4 x 3 days each= 20 hours)</td>
<td>TOTAL= 23 Semi-structured interviews with 12 MMP paid staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Selection criteria = most active centers</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center 1 - Logan CDC 4 Observations x 3 hours Basic Computer Skills &amp; open-use</td>
<td>8 hours MMP’s Advanced Study 2012</td>
<td>MMP Site Organizer Interview (observed class instructors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center 2 - Taxi Workers Alliance PA/MMP 2 Observations x 2 hours Basic Computer Skills</td>
<td>6 hours Attended meetings of Freedom Rings Partnerships 2011-2012</td>
<td>MMP Site Organizer Interview (observed class instructors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center 3 – CASA Monarca 2 Observations x 2 hours Basic Computer Skills</td>
<td>5 hours Facilitated Focus Group with MMP - reflection of the BTOP process for key leaders</td>
<td>MMP Site Organizer Interview (observed class instructors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center 4 – Philadelphia Unemployment Project 2 Observations x 2 hours Basic Computer Skills</td>
<td>20 hours MMP BTOP planning and evaluation meetings</td>
<td>MMP Site Organizer Interview (observed class instructors)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Some of the general questions that typically guide institutional ethnographers were useful in my own initial approach to data collection:

- What are the people in this setting doing?
- How do they know what to do?
- What coordinates their work?
- What texts do they consult?
- Where did that text originate and from whose hands did it travel?
  (Campbell, 2010, p. 7)

**Guide for Interviewing MMP BTOP Manager 1 (Fall 2011)**

1. How did the organization come to apply for BTOP funding?
2. What are the details of the program you proposed in your grant application? Can I see a copy of your grant application?
3. Who teaches in and staffs the public computer centers?
4. What kind of work do the *educators/staff* do? How does the organization decide what work the staff will do?
4. How does the organization approach the federal regulations? How do you organize work projects within the regulations?
5. How are *educators/staff* supervised? What forms/protocols do you use for supervision?
6. What is the process for individuals to attend MMP classes at the public computer centers? What are these classes?
7. What kinds of training sessions do *educators/staff* participate in?
8. What kinds of reflections sessions?
10. How do you approach the curriculum you provide for training sessions? What are the curriculum, goals, outcomes, and pedagogies?
11. How do *educators/staff* respond to the curriculum?
12. What other kinds of activities do they participate in throughout the year? Which ones are compulsory, etc? Who organizes these activities?
13. How do you approach the curriculum you provide in the public computer centers? What are the curriculum, goals, outcomes, and pedagogies?
14. How do the participants in the classes respond to the curriculum?
15. What other kinds of activities do they participate in throughout the year? Which ones are compulsory, etc? Who organizes these activities?

**Guide for Interviewing MMP Network Organizer (Winter 2015)**

1. When did you first hear about BTOP? What work were you doing at the time for MMP? What was your position? Were you paid? What did you think/feel? What was the tone of the organization?
2. At this time were you shown any documents? Like the actual grant proposal? Was there a summary of the project that was circulating? Who created that?
3. The pyramid: were you part of creating it? (October 2010) What do you remember of the conversation? What were the considerations?
Organizational reorganization to meet the demands of the grant
4. There was a lot of restructuring internally (2011-2013). What was driving these decisions? How did BTOP interact with where the organization was at, at the time?
5. Did you participate in hiring/creating orientation for new staff/creating curriculum for the centers?
6. Hires that were made/hires that weren’t made? (WPEB, etc.)
7. Did you play a role in supervising new people? What was your relationship to new hires?
8. The MEOs were hired to bridge BTOP and MMPs original mission. What was their work?
9. How did the organization approach the federal regulations? How were work projects organized within the regulations? Where did you fall in this?

Your work- (Recession, Occupy, Working People’s Communications Forum, Firefighters, Fight For Drivers Licenses, Wisconsin-Public Sector Unionism)
10. What was the work that you were doing primarily? How did your work relate to MMP’s original mission?
11. How did you approach the work you did? What were the goals, outcomes, pedagogies?
12. Who did you work with primarily- what did you actually do? What training/political education did you participate in or lead? What reflections sessions took place?
13. How did rest of staff (new and old) respond to this work/education?
14. Did your work change post BTOP?
15. Did you ever go out to the PCCs? What were your memories? Reactions? Interaction with PCC site coordinators?
16. What was your role with the Media Institutes- they were your idea? Where did the idea come from?
17. How did you approach the curriculum for the Media Institutes? What were the curriculum, goals, outcomes, and pedagogies?
18. What was the process for recruiting individuals to attend Media Institutes? How did you recruit people? And who specifically?
19. How did the participants in the classes respond to the curriculum?
20. What were resulting action(s) from taking part in the Institutes? Do you know what resulting action was of any participants in classes at any of the PCCs?
SHIVAANI A. SELVARAJ  
1615 East Passyunk Avenue #2  
Philadelphia, PA 19148  
Phone: 267-979-9726  
Email: sas82@psu.edu

EDUCATION

Pennsylvania State University-Harrisburg, Middletown, PA, December 2016  
Doctor of Education, Adult Education

Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, PA, December 2009  
Master of Science, Instructional Technology

University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, May 1997  
Bachelor of Arts, Urban Studies

HIGHER EDUCATION

Director of Urban Engagement (2/2016-present)  
Penn State Center for Engaged Scholarship, Philadelphia, PA.

- Provide leadership, management, planning, and implementation of a broad portfolio of educational initiatives
- Coordinate faculty/urban community project activities and related research and dissemination project activities through reports, publications and presentations
- Facilitate collaborative projects and partnerships that engage communities and students in reciprocal learning
- Build and maintain strategic networks of internal and external relationships, lead high performance teams that assess and address complex urban social problems
- Monitor results and evaluate effectiveness in meeting performance measures and financial metrics

Instructional Designer (1/2010-1/2016)  
Penn State University-Harrisburg, Faculty Center for Teaching and Instructional Technology.

- Applied pedagogical principles of instructional systems theory and of existing and emerging educational technologies to learning design in face-to-face and online contexts
- Led large projects by managing cross unit committees and teams to develop new programs and courses, from initiation to completion, including scope, objectives development, timeline, personnel, budget, quality assurance, documentation, evaluation, publication
- Piloted new learning technologies in the categories of multi-media production, social media, project management, data visualization, mobile devices
- Provided consultation to faculty and staff in the design and implementation of instructional solutions for active and collaborative, computer-mediated, and online (distributed) learning