Living Learning Space: Recognizing Public Pedagogy in a Small Town AIDS Service Organization

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Abstract

In the early days of HIV/AIDS in North America, those most directly affected by the crisis created a social movement to respond to the virus when no one else would. The legacy of activists’ efforts can be seen in the more than seventy-five AIDS service organizations (ASOs) that provide prevention, support, and education to communities across Ontario today. While these organizations were once an important site of advocacy and resistance for people living with HIV/AIDS (PHAs), ASOs are now often viewed as professionalized, bureaucratic and impersonal spaces. Linking theoretical understandings of public pedagogy and the pedagogical potential of space with HIV/AIDS scholarship, I offer a conception of ASOs as more than simply impersonal service providers, but vibrant spaces of community learning. Drawing on interviews with people who work, volunteer, and use services at a small ASO in Kingston, Ontario called HIV/AIDS Regional Services (HARS), I identify three pedagogical assets within the agency’s space that tend to go unrecognized as such. The agency’s drop-in space, artworks created by PHAs that decorate the walls of the office, and HARS’ storefront design are not usually counted as elements of the kind of formal “HIV/AIDS education” that ASOs provide. However, by exploring the learning experiences that are incited by these assets, I argue that we may broaden our understandings of what counts as HIV/AIDS education and of the value of ASOs in their communities. These unacknowledged assets not only enhance peoples’ understanding of issues related to HIV/AIDS, they also work to develop a sense of community and belonging for visitors to the space. In conclusion, I reiterate that while today’s ASOs are surely different than the organizations that activists created in the 1980s, the learning experiences that arise in agencies like HARS demonstrate that community-building and mutual support can remain as integral aspects of ASOs.
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Preface: Finding HARS

Tim had never heard of HARS (HIV/AIDS Regional Services) before he was diagnosed with HIV. He told me,

I learned about the organization through a sense of panic. I didn’t know that this place existed and my doctor told me I was in a great deal of trouble… He told me I should try and get whatever help I could find. I then cried. I walked up Princess St. and I saw HARS.

I can only imagine what was on Tim’s mind during his walk from the hospital where he had been diagnosed to the small AIDS service organization (ASO) on the other side of town. As he left the hospital, Tim would have walked away from Kingston’s trendy restaurants and cafes, away from its picturesque university campus, away from the attractive view of Lake Ontario. He would have passed run down homes, a pawn shop, and a discount variety store before arriving at HARS. A volunteer receptionist would have greeted Tim when he walked through the door. Once inside the bright office space, Tim would have walked down a hallway past staff offices on either side and he would have come upon the drop-in space for the first time. There he would have met people he knew from around Kingston, people he didn’t know from as far away as Sharbot Lake, people with HIV, people without HIV, people who use drugs, people without homes. The drop-in space would have been crowded, with friends chatting over coffee. It is likely that there would have been more than a few dogs. Tim had an intake session on his first day at HARS, he was introduced to staff and given a tour of the office. A staff member pointed
out the needle exchange area, the cupboard where he could help himself to donated clothes, and
the small kitchen area where he could help himself to baked goods, coffee, and tea. Over the
years, the range of services available at HARS has had a big impact on Tim’s life, but it is not
just the services that have kept him coming back to the drop-in – almost every week for fourteen
years.

![Figure 1. The reception area at HARS](image)

During my first month of working at HARS I noticed that people who use the drop-in
tend to connect with the space in a very personal way. This was perhaps most obvious on one
morning when I arrived at the agency to discover that someone had broken in to the building
overnight. As people arrived at the drop-in to get their morning coffee or to catch up with
friends, they were devastated to learn what had happened. People who use HARS’ services
consoled the agency’s staff members: “How could someone do this to you?” “Who would do such a thing?” Whoever had broken through the door (to grab petty cash in the office) had not simply broken into a building that provides services to people living with HIV/AIDS in Kingston, he had broken into a place where people come to feel safe, to connect with others, and to be part of a community. He had broken into a place where people feel at home. For several days the break-in was a popular topic of discussion in the drop-in, but eventually the pace returned to normal and visitors reclaimed the space as their own. They came in to have a coffee and a doughnut when the office opened in the morning, they chatted with friends, and they shared their stories with other visitors and HARS’ staff members. They visited the drop-in to try on donated clothing, to pick up food for their pets, and to ask questions about doctors’ appointments or medications. The drop-in space in the center of the agency’s work was soon bustling once again.
Chapter One: Introduction

When HIV/AIDS broke out in North America during the 1980s, there were no social services ready to meet the needs of people most directly affected by the disease. Stigma, misunderstanding, and discrimination contributed to governments, medical professionals, and drug manufacturers being unwilling or unable to respond to the increasing number of people being diagnosed as HIV positive. In the absence of support from the public institutions that should have mobilized a response to HIV/AIDS, activists and organizers created a broad network of services dedicated to providing support, education, and advocacy for those who needed it (Gillett, 2011, 58). Many of the organizations that were created in the early days of the virus are still operating across Canada in one form or another. James Gillett (2011) argues that the endurance of HIV/AIDS activists and the organizations that they created is what sets HIV/AIDS apart from other health scares or epidemics. Rather than returning to a subordinate role once HIV/AIDS issues were more widely embraced within the public sphere, people with HIV/AIDS have stayed active and have expanded the movement they created in the 1980s (Gillett, 58).

The legacy of activists’ efforts can be seen in the more than seventy-five AIDS service organizations (ASOs) across Ontario. These ASOs receive funding from the federal and provincial governments to provide prevention, support, and educational services to people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS (Guenter et.al, 2005, 29). Government funding has enhanced the role that community groups are able to play in response to HIV/AIDS. At the same time, researchers who have completed ethnographic studies in Ontario’s ASOs reveal that the administrative demands that accompany government funds have changed the nature of community agencies (Cain 1993, 1997, 2002; Gillett 2011). Many local ASOs now operate in a more professionalized manner than did the organizations that activists created in the 1980s. For
instance, while AIDS organizations were seen as sites of resistance during the 1980s, today’s ASOs seem more concerned about monitoring their public image and establishing formal policies and procedures than fighting the state or pressuring drug companies. People working in ASOs today are also required to devote substantial amounts of their time to administrative tasks that are unrelated to providing services to people living with HIV/AIDS. As early as 1993, the vocabulary of many ASOs began to shift and now more closely resembles the language used by other professional agencies. People who once worked at ASOs as “coordinators” are now known as “executive directors” and “people living with HIV” are now often referred to as “clients” (Cain, 1993, 675). Such changes to the daily operation of ASOs have altered how many people living with HIV relate to local organizations.

For some people living with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) ASOs are no longer the community hub they once were. A report prepared by the Ontario HIV/AIDS Treatment Network (OHTN) suggests that over the last decade AIDS organizations have increasingly become seen by PHAs as professionalized, bureaucratic, and inflexible spaces. The bureaucratization of ASOs has meant that some PHAs no longer feel at home or welcome in local agencies (Ontario HIV/AIDS Treatment Network, 2011, 8). As described in the OHTN’s report, “some of us who are PHAs in organizations…feel we assert an identity that doesn’t quite jive with those working in the organizations anymore. So we go back into the closet” (Ontario HIV/AIDS Treatment Network, 32). Sentiments such as this are alarming because they suggest that the organizations that activists fought so hard to develop in the 1980s are no longer influential community spaces for people living with HIV/AIDS. In this thesis I aim to address concerns about such feelings of alienation by highlighting ways that ASOs can continue to be meaningful community spaces that are created by those most directly impacted by HIV/AIDS.
While working as a community educator at a small ASO called HARS (HIV/AIDS Regional Services) in Kingston, Ontario, I observed how community building and community education projects are linked. Most often my work involved venturing out into the community to teach about issues associated with HIV/AIDS such as stigma, discrimination, and healthy relationships. I provided HIV-related education to high school and college students, employees in different workplaces, and groups of nurses and medical students. Despite my position as an “education coordinator” at HARS, eventually I began to notice that there were many moments of informal education that I had not coordinated occurring within the agency. As I was working to develop programs and plans for teaching “out there”, a lot of teaching and learning seemed to be arising naturally from everyday experiences “in here” at HARS. I was witness to moments of informal education that would arise organically as staff, service users, and volunteers shared stories, perspectives, and skills in a space dedicated to addressing the experiences of people living with HIV/AIDS.

“HIV/AIDS education” most often refers to the material that ASOs formally present to people in their communities. For instance, the HARS website states that for more than 20 years the organization has provided community education in the form of presentations, workshops, interactive discussions, and displays. This thesis project is an effort to broaden understandings of how ASOs foster teaching and learning. The aim of my project is to make evident the kinds of informal teaching and learning within HARS that often go unacknowledged by people involved in AIDS organizing. By highlighting moments of informal education among the people who use services, volunteer, and work at HARS, I want to demonstrate the vibrancy of the agency as a community space where educational moments arise organically and, often, in unexpected ways. I will argue that the educational experiences that I discuss throughout this thesis affirm that ASOs
can maintain their original spirit of mutual support and grassroots community-building despite the growing pressures associated with funding, accountability, and bureaucratic processes.

Communities that are cultivated within ASOs are vital because they can work to increase peoples’ confidence and comfort with their HIV status. This in turn, makes it possible for people to become more active proponents for HIV/AIDS issues in the broader community. I focus on pedagogy throughout this work because I believe that the process of teaching and learning is too often overlooked as a method for building communities.

I believe that drawing attention to unacknowledged pedagogical assets is a valuable exercise in three ways. First, by focusing on ways that the ASO becomes a lively place of learning I hope to direct attention to the broad range of work that ASOs do and to expand the ways we recognize their contributions. Second, I hope that this discussion of the different assets that help to mobilize informal education at HARS might prove useful to other community organizations. Finally, I hope the thesis will expand the ways that the community at HARS sees education and that it will offer insight into how the ASO can build upon previously unrecognized strengths.

My use of the term “unacknowledged pedagogical assets” may cause readers to wonder what is concealing these assets. The irony in searching for the “hidden” pedagogy at HARS is that it is often to be found in the most visible aspects of the ASO’s work. The practical and obvious utility of the services that HARS is best known for (the drop-in or the needle exchange for instance) can make it hard to see the capacity of these services to also facilitate moments of teaching and learning. The pedagogical function of these services might be understood as a
serendipitous extra. For instance, the “explicit” function of HARS’ needle exchange program\(^1\) is to provide access to harm reduction materials for people who inject drugs. Among the not always recognized pedagogical effects of the needle exchange are the relationships that form while people access the materials, or the lessons learned by service users as they develop schedules for dropping off and picking up their supplies. The pedagogical potential of such services often goes unrecognized, and thus their value to service users and the community at large can be underestimated.

It can be difficult for staff and volunteers at HARS to recognize the informal learning that can be an important effect of HARS’ services. This learning is “something else” that takes place in addition to the purposeful function of, for instance, the needle exchange or drop-in space. Staff have a much easier time recognizing the teaching and learning that result from the agency’s formal HIV/AIDS education program because it is purposeful and calculated. Educators at HARS, and at other ASOs in Ontario, must ensure that their programming meets the parameters set out by the AIDS Bureau Funding Program of the Ministry of Health. ASOs must document the number of people who attend educational presentations, the volume of resource material that is distributed at such presentations, and the specific “at-risk” populations that their programs reach (for instance: gay men, at-risk youth, people involved in sex work, and people who inject drugs). The AIDS Bureau at the Ministry of Health uses these statistics to assess whether the ASO is meeting the objectives and requirements of its funding. The bureaucratic process that defines education at ASOs does not provide space for agencies to document or reflect on the organic moments of learning that arise everyday in their offices. This in turn, makes it difficult for staff members to recognize this type of learning as it is taking place or to prioritize it.

\(^1\) HARS offers a needle exchange program which it describes as a “confidential, non-judgmental service that provides syringes, needle tips, bio hazard bins, and alcohol swabs.” They encourage people to drop-off used works as well.
In an effort to expand the definition of HIV/AIDS education beyond the formal practices of an ASO, I ask: How does informal education operate at HARS? In what ways does it contribute to a sense of community and belonging? How are staff, service users, and volunteers involved in the process? ASOs have certainly undergone big changes over the last decades, however, when we fail to recognize the variety of ways that they can continue to be important sites of community for those most directly impacted by HIV/AIDS, we risk greatly underestimating their value. In the following chapters I discuss three previously unacknowledged educational assets at HARS and what I see as their main effect on the building of a supportive community for people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS in Kingston. In the second chapter, I introduce the theoretical perspectives that frame my study of community learning at the agency. My project aims to link the work of scholars who value the transformative possibilities of public pedagogy with those who study the pedagogical potential of space. By introducing these ideas from the field of education to HIV/AIDS scholarship, I hope to spark conversations about the multiple ways that learning happens in community AIDS organizations and what that learning might do. In chapter three, I discuss how I went about my research. I talk about the challenges and opportunities that arose as I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with people at the agency. In chapter four I present three of the key pedagogical assets at HARS that became evident during interviews with people at the agency. The community drop-in space, artworks created by PHAs, and HARS’ front window display are all informal teaching assets made possible by the design and use of the space. In the fifth chapter I discuss the implications of these assets for how we understand the community education work of the ASO. I suggest that these hidden educational assets make HARS more than simply a professionalized service provider;
they are part of what makes it an important community space for people in Kingston living with HIV/AIDS.

While issues related to pedagogy, community education, and small-town HIV/AIDS organizing are the issues that drive my thesis, I also hope that my project displays the value of research that aims to be affirmative rather than critical. Engaging in the art of critique is, of course, an important activity for scholars. It is vital that researchers ask critical questions, challenge commonly held ideas, and present counter-arguments that move discourse forward. Nevertheless, throughout my Master’s Degree, I have at times been exhausted by the amount of scholarship that finds holes, highlights problems, and disparages various activist efforts, while seemingly being less interested in searching for or documenting moments of success or resilience. I believe the level of critique that I have encountered in academic journals and seminar classrooms may do more to paralyze action and promote despair than inspire action and encourage hope. Perhaps particularly in regards to challenging issues such as HIV/AIDS it is crucial that we actively seek out opportunities to pause and reflect on the seemingly small victories that actually can make big differences.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

I begin this thesis by introducing the theoretical works that inform my project. “Pedagogy” is a broad term. In this chapter I clarify how I use the concept in my analysis and I contextualize the term in the field of AIDS education. Community education has been central to the work of AIDS activists and AIDS service providers since the outbreak of the virus in the 1980s. Over the last three decades HIV/AIDS education has come to address a widening range of topics and an increasingly diverse audience. In this chapter I devote particular attention to the challenges that this broader focus creates for organizations working in smaller communities. I begin this section by discussing how the study of pedagogy has evolved to encapsulate learning experiences beyond traditional and formal educational institutions. Next I introduce “the pedagogy of space” as an area of study where researchers explore how we learn from our environments and seek to understand the influence that space has in producing relationships among people. I then center community AIDS organizations as sites of learning and discuss the role of community education in local responses to the virus.

Expanding Notions of Pedagogy

Researchers who evoke the concept of “pedagogy” in their analyses are often criticized by scholars from the field of education for using the term haphazardly or without specific meaning attached to it (Sandlin, O’Malley & Burdick, 2011, 338). Pedagogy is a difficult term to define because it is used in a wide variety of contexts. In a chapter in *Understanding pedagogy and its impact on learning*, Chris Watkins and Peter Mortimore chart how the study of pedagogy has evolved. Watkins and Mortimore write that, most simply, pedagogy refers to “the science of teaching” but use of the term has developed in scope and complexity over the years (Mortimore,
1999, 2). The authors recognize four main phases in the study of pedagogy: (I) a focus on different types of teachers, (II) a focus on the contexts of teaching, (III) a focus on teaching and learning, and (IV) “current views” which consider how knowledge is co-constructed and attend to the process of learning itself (Mortimore, 8).

Scholars have built upon the basic idea of pedagogy as the process of teaching and learning and have applied the concept to social justice issues. The study of “critical pedagogy”, for instance, encourages learners to raise questions about inequality and entrenched belief systems in society. Leaders in the field of critical pedagogy such as Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and Peter McLaren, believe that the teaching and learning that occurs in schools is always political in nature as opposed to being a neutral activity. The task of critical pedagogy is to recognize how curricula, resources, and approaches to teaching within schools provide students with a perspective on the world that marginalizes certain voices. The hope is that learners will apply critical thinking about their educational experiences to wider social contexts and challenge unequal and undemocratic structures in society (Morgan, 2000, 274-275).

This thesis is linked to the study of critical pedagogy as I focus on the relationship between the ways that people at HARS learn and the ways they confront marginalization in the broader community. My analysis of the teaching and learning that occurs everyday at HARS relies on the concept of “public pedagogy”. By “public pedagogy” I am referring to a subgenre of critical pedagogy that focuses on “spaces, sites and languages of education and learning that exist outside of the walls and institutions of schools” (Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2009, 1; Sandlin et.al, 2011, 339). I see value in research that concentrates on public pedagogy because it can have a democratizing effect on the study of education. When researchers are attentive to sites where public pedagogy is at work, their analyses capture the experiences of people in an array of
positions and locations, and not just the experiences of those who work or study in institutions of formal education.

While the study of critical pedagogy remains primarily focused on the formal classroom, Jennifer Sandlin, Michael O’Malley, and Jake Burdick (2011) identify five categories of public pedagogy research where analysis is centered on the ways that learning happens beyond traditional educational settings. The authors recognize public pedagogy as the study of pedagogy as it relates to: (I) citizenship within and beyond schools, (II) popular culture and everyday life, (III) informal intuitions and public spaces, (IV), dominant cultural discourses, and (V) public intellectualism and social activism (Sandlin et.al, 2011, 339). My project focuses on the third category that Sandlin, O’Malley, and Burdick identify: informal institutions and public spaces. Work that addresses this category of public pedagogy “explores informal sites of learning and their role in developing learners’ relationships to their world and lives” (Sandlin et.al, 2011, 348). Enhancing peoples’ awareness of the ways they are connected to places and people in their community is certainly an integral aspect of public pedagogy, however, this definition from Sandlin, O’Malley, and Burdick remains rather vague. Based on their definition it is difficult to conceive of what is not a site or act of public pedagogy. It is also challenging to distinguish between what is “pedagogy” and what is merely an “experience”. If public pedagogy only relates to developing a relationship with our world, would simple acts such as going for a walk or visiting a local restaurant be considered acts of public pedagogy?

Amidst this ambiguity Michael O’Malley and Donyell Roseboro provide insight into more specific functions of public pedagogy. The authors emphasize that public pedagogy is “a theoretical construct that specifically informs both counter-hegemonic inquiry and collective agency oriented toward a democratic ethic of social justice”. Similarly, Jeanne F. Brady (2006)
writes, “public pedagogy is a critical public engagement that challenges existing social practices and hegemonic forms of discrimination” (Brady, 2006, 58). Public pedagogy not only denotes the teaching and learning that takes place in local communities, but teaching and learning that aims to create more socially just communities. This sort of teaching and learning includes the work of educators who work in formal institutions as well as “activist individuals and community groups that are providing a democratic vision to challenge inequality in both public and private intuitions and everyday practices” (Brady, 58). My search for ways that public pedagogy functions at HARS involves being attentive to how teaching and learning are part of the agency’s daily confrontation with injustice and marginalization in Kingston.

Because of the great influence that public pedagogy can have on social justice projects, scholars are calling upon those in social movements to expand our analysis of what counts as pedagogy, to locate hidden or obstructed pedagogy, and to see grassroots communities as developers of curricula (Sandlin et. al; Schubert, 2009; Giroux, 2009).

Of course there are many modes of education operating within HARS. The education room at the agency is filled with pamphlets and brochures on virtually every topic related to HIV/AIDS and the education staff offer presentations to various community groups on a range of issues. However by studying pedagogy at HARS with the expressed purpose of searching for unacknowledged and informal modes of teaching and

Figure 2. Pamphlets regarding a range of issues related to HIV/AIDS are part of the formal education program at HARS
learning I attempt to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the ways pedagogy works at the community level. Without a dedicated and focused search for ways that community organizations educate beyond the presentations, workshops, discussions, and displays that they formally announce in their mission statements, un-planned and informal educational tools and their effects will remain invisible. When these tools are invisible, we are unable to protect or promote the contributions that they make to community organizations. This is a concern because it is often in these unexpected moments of informal teaching and learning that we can see how agencies like HARS become important community spaces and resources for personal transformation for people living in oppressive circumstances as opposed to merely impersonal service providers.

**Pedagogy of Space**

I have decided to focus on the connection between pedagogy and space for agencies like HARS because space is a readily available resource that is often over looked as a potential asset. Space was once widely viewed as nothing more than an empty receptacle or an area where social life simply unfolds. In the 1970s, the study of geography underwent a “spatial turn” that changed how scholars understand space to influence our daily lives. A critical pedagogy of space is in itself an acknowledgement that “space matters” (Morgan, 276). Space is now understood as a location produced by human activity, or as Derek Gregory and John Ury explain, “a medium through which social relationships are produced and reproduced” (cited in Morgan, 276). Space is socially produced and interpreted. Thus, HARS’ space is more than merely a physical location that people visit, it is an opportunity for people to produce and re-shape an environment that they desire. When I speak of “space” throughout this thesis, I am referring not only to a physical
location made of bricks and mortar but an environment that is shaped by the people who inhabit it.

The study of public pedagogy, as explained in the previous section, establishes that pedagogy is at work in various locations throughout peoples’ everyday lives. Researchers studying the pedagogical potential of space focus on how these various locations can develop learners’ relationships to their communities. In order to recognize the ways that spaces act pedagogically, researchers have expanded upon traditional understandings of what learning looks like. While most people are familiar with the experience of learning in traditional classrooms, Elizabeth Ellsworth (2005) argues that within informal sites, learning takes on a subtle and embodied form that differs from the cognitive rigor commonly associated with education (Sandlin et.al, 2011, 348). As I will explain in further detail below, spaces with pedagogical potential engage people in a learning process. This means that unlike in a formal classroom, people can learn from informal sites of pedagogy even when they do not expect to or attempt to do so.

Elizabeth Ellsworth’s book *Places of Learning: Media, Architecture, Pedagogy* is a foundational text in the study of how material spaces act pedagogically. Particularly influential for the purposes of my project is her conception of “anomalous places of learning” by which she means spaces of education that are to a certain extent unusual, bizarre, or exceptional (Wildemeersch, 2012, 80). Ellsworth explains that anomalous places of learning “incorporate into their primary medium the force that creates the experience of the learning self” (Ellsworth, 2005, 37). For Ellsworth, there is something inherent in pedagogical spaces that spark a transition within the individual who is engaging with the physical space. For instance, Ellsworth recognizes the pedagogical capacity for the design of the civil rights memorial in Montgomery,
Alabama to promote reflection from visitors. Maya Lin designed the memorial as a sculpture that is also a walkable pathway. When visitors gather at the site, they navigate a black granite timetable that chronicles the times, places, and events that cost the lives of “ordinary people in the struggle for justice and equality” (Ellsworth, 40). Montgomery’s civil rights memorial is one of many anomalous places of learning in which Ellsworth identifies a pedagogical force. A limitation in her analysis of space and pedagogy is that she remains focused solely on what she describes as, “those elements that seem designed specifically to ‘assemble with’ their visitors’, users’, and viewers’ *learning selves*” (Ellsworth, 6, italics in the original). Ellsworth does not address the possibility of anomalous places of learning that operate unintentionally. I believe there are locations, such as HARS, that create similar learning experiences despite not having an intentionally pedagogical design. By focusing on HARS as a space with an *unintentional* pedagogical force my analysis may offer insight into a different type of informal learning space that can provoke transformations within people.

The personal transformations that Ellsworth sees occurring when people engage with anomalous places of learning are particularly significant in the context of social justice projects because these transformations can consist of individuals becoming more aware of their communities and consequently becoming more closely connected to each other. Scholars such as Sarah Buhler (2009) have studied how physical spaces can spark moments of pedagogy that enhance one’s understanding of one’s place in community. In Buhler’s article, “Journeys to 20th Street: The Inner City as Critical Pedagogical Space for Legal Education” she reflects on her experiences as a professor of law who facilitates students’ collaboration with legal-aid organizations in inner-city Saskatoon. Buhler understands the inner-city to be, “a dynamic pedagogical space that has the potential to teach students about the possibilities and limits of
legal practice in the face of injustice and oppression” (Buhler, 2009, 383). She recognizes the pedagogical moment to occur as students move across entrenched boundaries between spaces. Students move from the privileged space of law school to collaborate with social justice projects already taking place in the inner-city where community members are the protagonists in their own struggles. As students transit across the boundary between privileged space and marginalized space, Buhler sees them critically reflecting on their experiences and reconsidering the function of lawyering (Buhler, 404). These considerations also lead students to discuss larger systemic forces that shape the experiences of people in inner-city space (Buhler, 412). HARS represents a different kind of space and people who engage with the agency do so in a much different context than the law students that Buhler describes. Despite these differences, I seek out similar pedagogical moments as the ones that Buhler highlights. I am interested in what people learn about community when they cross the boundary between the busy sidewalk and the doors to a space that is marked as “the AIDS building”. As people enter HARS and become active in the work the agency does, what sort of transformations do they experience? What new questions might they ask? Do their ideas of HIV/AIDS or conceptions of living with the virus change?

Scholars studying space-based pedagogy have argued that learning of this sort is a valuable means by which to create and sustain community. Paulo Freire for instance believes that critical pedagogy begins by recognizing that human beings, and learning, exist in a cultural context. He writes in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “People as beings ‘in a situation,’ find themselves rooted in temporal-spatial conditions which mark them and which they also mark. They will tend to reflect on their own ‘situationality’ to the extent that they are challenged by it to act upon it” (Freire, 2000, 90; Gruenewald, 2008, 310). While Freire does not explore the spatial aspects of “situationality” in great detail, David Gruenwald argues that Freire’s notion of
“‘being in a situation’ has a spatial, geographical, contextual dimension. Reflecting on one’s situation often corresponds to changing one’s relationship to a place” (Gruenwald, 310). A critical pedagogy of space fosters awareness of one’s place in community by encouraging people to reflect and consider how their “situation” is tied to other people and place(s). This awareness can increase peoples’ compassion and encourage the creation of supportive communities. The “challenge” to act upon the situationality of community that Freire refers to may be more of an “opportunity” at HARS. The agency’s space becomes a site where people can recognize various ways they exist in relation to one another and provides people with the freedom to shape this location in a multitude of ways. By fostering a sense of community at HARS, people who visit the space are cultivating a new site of mutual support and belonging. Once people develop a supportive community within the ASO, they may feel more comfortable with their HIV status beyond the agency’s walls as well. This can lead to peoples’ active involvement in the wider AIDS movement and more voices pushing for social change related to injustices that remain attached to living with HIV/AIDS.

**Community Education and HIV/AIDS Organizing**

Spaces created by and for people living with HIV/AIDS have traditionally been important sites of community education. In his book *Power and Community*, Denis Altman (1994) writes that, “people with AIDS have tended to see themselves as having a role to play in the larger AIDS struggle, particularly as educators.” Having gained expertise that cannot be learned otherwise, HIV-positive activists have often identified themselves as critical resources (Altman, 1994, 62). Since the outbreak of the epidemic, PHAs have enlightened the wider community and have challenged attitudes shaped by homophobia, stigma, and discrimination. People most directly affected by the virus have mobilized their educational messages through a variety of innovative
mediums. As Steven Epstein notes, “it is the gay community that invented and disseminated the idea of ‘safe sex’, trained hundreds of volunteers to staff information hotlines, set up local AIDS libraries…and held forums on varieties of treatment” (Altman, 5). These early community education initiatives created by HIV/AIDS activists are examples of the kinds of work people had to do when no one else would mobilize a response to the virus. Altman contends that although doctors, researchers, and government officials are today widely seen as taking the lead as players in the response to HIV/AIDS, the impact of the epidemic would be considerably more devastating without the daily work of hundreds of thousands of people across the world involved in community efforts (Altman, 6-7). These community responses often continue outside of the spotlight and without widespread recognition. When researchers highlight the efforts of people working at the local level we can offer a platform for sharing more personal accounts of the virus and perhaps contribute to a more complete description of how people and communities experience HIV/AIDS. Such descriptions can incorporate diverse voices and perspectives from the grassroots level that tend to be silenced by accounts of the virus that come from more mainstream contexts, such as doctors, researchers, and government officials.

As is the case across the globe, people working at the community level have largely shaped the response to HIV/AIDS in Canada. When the AIDS epidemic emerged in gay communities across the country in the early 1980s no one knew what was causing young healthy men to die suddenly and inexplicably. While governments remained inactive and medical science tried to catch up to the disease, community organizations formed to offer support, counseling, and hospice care for the dying (McCaskell, 2012). As more became known about the epidemic (the Human Immunodeficiency Virus was identified in 1986), community
organizations staged prevention campaigns urging safer sex while continuing to provide support and counseling.

Over the last decades ASOs across Canada have made important adaptations that have transformed how they educate their communities. When HIV/AIDS was thought to be a virus infecting gay men almost exclusively, Canadian ASOs focused mainly on reaching gay men across the country. More recently, a research team headed by Dale Guenter (2005) found that ASOs in Canada now address populations that are more diverse in terms of age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, income level, and education. Present-day ASOs are challenged to develop programming focused on preventing HIV infection among at-risk youth, women, people who use injection drugs, health service providers, First Nations groups, people who are incarcerated, and people involved in sex-trade work (Guenter et.al, 2005, 30).

As ASOs have expanded to reach a broader population, they have also had to confront a wider array of issues (Crook et.al, 2005, 39). Educational messages no longer focus solely on the transmission of HIV/AIDS but speak to managing risk, maintaining healthy lifestyles, and practicing healthy sexuality regardless of HIV status. There have also been calls for ASO workers to challenge homophobia, to help individuals build social supports and to increase their community integration. Empowerment and community development are central themes in these new models for ASOs (Guenter, 35; Cain, 1997, 337). By exploring the informal teaching and learning happening at places like HARS, I believe we can expand the ways we recognize ASOs to be fostering empowerment and community development beyond their formal programming. While the scope of agencies’ formal education programs has expanded to meet the needs of the broader population that accesses ASOs, in this thesis I suggest that this diversity has also influenced the informal education that occurs in local organizations. As I will explain further in
the next chapter, people in ASOs now have an opportunity to learn from individuals with a great variety of experiences, perspectives, and identities. Community organizations can become richer and more vibrant spaces of learning when people with diverse backgrounds come together in the space.

**Researching ASOs’ Influence on Communities**

There is a wide range of literature dedicated to studying how local ASOs across Canada influence their communities. Researchers often measure the impact of an organization by analyzing the programs that it offers to the community. For instance, Dale Guenter and his co-authors (2005) study the prevention programs of ASOs across Ontario. The research team collected statistical data during interviews with community educators and developed themes that describe the prevention work ASOs do. The paper published by Guenter and his colleagues provides an overview of prevention work in Ontario, the challenges that educators face, and the ways that educators measure the effectiveness of their programs. A similar study by Joan Crook and her co-researchers (2005) measures the impact of a specific Canadian ASO. Crook and her team use statistical analysis of a standard questionnaire to assess if the ASO’s programs are reaching its most vulnerable populations. Research projects such as the two I have briefly outlined here enable people working at local organizations and researchers to see the effectiveness of the services that ASOs offer. My concern, however, is that such a narrow focus on service delivery and programming structure fails to fully capture the deeper meaning that an ASO’s space can have for someone living with or affected by HIV/AIDS.

ASOs operate as community centers and in some cases, are seen as a “second home” of sorts for people who use services. Research projects that are able to address these less tangible contributions of community organizations provide a more complete picture of the ways that
ASOs can make a difference. For instance, ethnographic researchers such as Roy Cain (1993, 1997, 2002) focus more on the nature and environment of local ASOs than the programs they deliver. Cain develops an understanding of daily life in ASOs not only by conducting qualitative in-depth interviews with people in agencies, but also by volunteering in the spaces he studies. This approach enables Cain to identify the differences that ASOs make which cannot be measured statistically, such as the importance of ASOs providing a community space where people feel safe. For example, Cain’s study (1997) on the changing nature of Canadian ASOs identifies three important defining features of contemporary ASOs: an ethos of confidentiality, clear accountability, and perhaps most importantly, a strong desire for their services to be different from the other bureaucratic intuitions that their service users deal with (Cain, 1997, 339). While Cain does not focus on the pedagogy of community organizations’ spatial environment, he does identify the value the physical space has in providing a safe and supportive location for people in the community. As one ASO worker interviewed by Cain explains, “We are, I believe, the one place in the world that a PWA should be able to come and experience something different than what they get in other systems…where they deal with…workers who just don’t have time for them. I feel that when they walk in here they should be met with something real human, real fundamental” (Cain, 339). Here Cain identifies “something else” happening that is otherwise missed when researchers only pay attention to the formal programs an ASO offers and when they fail to recognize the significance that the agency’s space itself has for marginalized individuals.

Researchers such as Tiffany Veinot and Roma Harris (2011) share my interest in understanding how the informal education happening within ASOs can contribute to a sense of community. Their work focuses on ways people living in rural and urban areas exchange
information about HIV/AIDS. Veinot and Harris’ study is useful for its recognition that the teaching and learning that takes place within ASOs is more than merely an exchange of information; it also works to build support networks. Veinot argues that these networks are a vital component of battling the virus because they help to mitigate the stigma that PHAs face and can provide access to care and further support (Veinot, 2010, 875). Veinot explains, “receipt of information can be experienced as emotionally supportive because it can signal caring…I therefore treat the receipt of information and emotional support as related and overlapping experiences” (Veinot, 876, 877). ASOs are fundamental in this process because they create opportunities for PHAs to develop new connections, particularly with other PHAs (Veinot, 893). A space for PHAs to create support networks with each other is especially important in smaller communities like Kingston where people living with HIV/AIDS are more dispersed than in larger cities.

Experiences of HIV/AIDS in Smaller Communities

Much of the research on HIV/AIDS activism remains focused on organizations in large North American urban centers. In order for activists to mount holistic responses to HIV/AIDS their experiences must be informed beyond the urban centers where analysis is usually located. In this project I have chosen to look specifically at an ASO in a small town. I hope to capture the ways that HARS influences the community that uses its services, but I also want to understand how the ASO impacts people in Kingston who do not have a personal connection to HIV/AIDS. Acknowledging the influence that ASOs can have on the broader geographical communities in which they are situated expands peoples’ understanding of the contributions these agencies can make.
ASOs in smaller communities face a number of challenges that organizations do not have to confront to the same extent in larger settings. Agencies in small towns often operate in a context where issues related to homosexuality, gender identity, sex work, and drug use are still considered taboo subjects. In addition, issues related to confidentiality and disclosing one’s HIV status are increasingly complicated in smaller settings. More research on the work that ASOs do far from urban centers would help to develop a clearer understanding of ways that people navigate these challenges. As Sarah Lovell and Mark Rosenberg (2009) state, “the history of Western AIDS activism is set in large socially progressive cities where multiple forms of citizenship have come to be accepted by the general population. There is a lack of historical grounding for understanding social participation and activism amongst people living with HIV/AIDS in smaller cities” (Lovell and Rosenberg, 2009, 113). Peoples’ involvement in HIV/AIDS activism in smaller communities may look different than it does in large cities, however, this does not mean that AIDS organizing does not happen in small towns.

Other challenges faced by smaller organizations are related to the increasing demand placed on agencies with limited resources. For instance Roy Cain explains that ASOs are being asked to provide education to both a wider audience and to more specific groups. Men who have sex with men and gay men are, not surprisingly, a focus of much HIV/AIDS education. As Cain says, “groups in larger cities have specialized programmes for the gay community, but in smaller settings, however, this degree of specialization is not seen as practical. Smaller settings have few, if any, formal gay establishments, groups, or publications” (Cain, 1997, 337). Although Cain’s observation was made more than a decade ago, it still reflects the reality at HARS. As the only AIDS organization in Kingston, HARS must take on the education work that a number of different organizations would share in a larger region. In addition to providing education to
people in Kingston, HARS has a mandate to provide services and education to rural communities outside of Kingston. Detailed research by Tiffany Veinot and Roma Harris demonstrates that rural Canadians are less likely than urban-dwelling Canadians to be knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS or to talk about it (Veinot and Harris, 2011; Veinot, 2010). Engaging with these communities is an important part of HARS’ education program. Increased knowledge and understanding of HIV/AIDS in rural settings has significant ripple effects. The research team’s findings confirm that the more knowledge people have regarding the virus, the less likely they are to hold discriminatory beliefs and to distance themselves from PHAs (Veinot and Harris, 310).

My hope is that by highlighting the work of an ASO in a smaller community this project can encourage researchers to expand upon the usual list of places we look to find AIDS mobilization. Michael Brown (1997) cautions that “a narrow and precise lens on urban AIDS politics can trick our geographical imaginations into assuming that we need to look only at these three cities [New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles] to understand local AIDS politics in North America. We may forget that there has been a local politics of AIDS everywhere” (Brown, 1997, 32, italics in the original). As the center of Kingston’s local politics of AIDS, HARS is a site that displays the tremendous influence of HIV/AIDS mobilization that happens away from the big city.

Conclusion

My intention in this chapter has been to demonstrate the need to think about public pedagogy and HIV/AIDS community education in new ways. I would like the findings of this thesis to encourage researchers who study public pedagogy to examine not only sites that have an intentionally pedagogical design, but also unintentional sites of pedagogy that engage people in a
learning process organically, unexpectedly, and accidentally. This broader focus will help us to expand the number of locations where we can recognize critical thinking, teaching, and learning to occur. In this chapter I also encourage a broader view of HIV/AIDS community education. I promote research projects that recognize the impacts that ASOs have on their communities beyond the measurable effects of their formal programming. This wider lens on ASOs can help researchers to recognize the variety of ways that these organizations influence their communities. My hope is that by looking at the public pedagogy that arises at HARS, I can acknowledge contributions from the organization that have previously been unrecognized. As I mentioned previously one of my aims is to show that mutual support and community building can still thrive in ASOs despite the fact that they operate in an age of professionalization. By acknowledging the sense of community that derives from people learning together in places like HARS, we can expand the ways that we recognize ASOs reaching people affected by HIV/AIDS. In the next chapter, I describe how I studied informal education at HARS and the steps I took to ensure that my project is aligned with the interests of the ASO.
Chapter Three: Research Approach and Method

My aim throughout the research process was to ground my work in the community at HARS as much as possible. This meant spending significant amounts of time at the agency each week over a period of eight months and interacting with people at the organization in a number of different ways. As my thesis focuses on the relationship between learning and fostering a sense of community, it is important that my project evokes methodologies that are concerned with co-constructing knowledge and incorporating an array of voices into its production. I sought out research strategies that would enable me to engage in as many conversations as I could with the experts at HARS: people who use services, work as staff members, and volunteer their time at the ASO. I begin this chapter by discussing the qualitative interviews I conducted and I explain how they inform my analysis. I then reflect upon the strategies that I evoked in order to align this research with the needs and desires of people at HARS. This process mainly involved positioning myself as an “activist researcher”. Finally, I describe my use of an “assets based approach” and talk about why such a research focus is particularly useful when studying an organization like HARS.

Qualitative Interviews

To complete the research for this thesis I conducted twenty-two semi-structured interviews with service users and service providers at HARS over a four month period. My aim was to explore instances of unacknowledged teaching and learning within the ASO and to better understand how they might contribute to a sense of belonging and community for those who engage with the space. I focused on the relationship between pedagogy and peoples’ sense of community at HARS because I believe it complicates the common critique of ASOs as impersonal, professionalized, and rigid service providers. Despite the changes that ASOs have undergone
since the 1980s, I want to showcase that people still value organizations like HARS as spaces where they can feel a sense of belonging. I designed a common guide (see appendix I) to structure the interviews; the guide led to interviews that were flexible enough to address particular issues of concern to each respondent (see Cain 2002, 97). As I set out to interview people who regularly engage with HARS I intended to interview each of the agency’s eight staff members and then at least as many people who use services at HARS. It was difficult to anticipate how many service users I would be able to interview and how I would arrange interviews with those who tend not to visit the drop-in or meet with their support worker on a regular schedule. I selected potential interview participants by speaking to people in the drop-in while I was volunteering at the agency. After sharing the letter of information (see appendix II) and explaining my project, the potential interviewee and I would often arrange an interview for later that same day. In the end, I interviewed all eight staff members, ten people who use services, and four people who volunteer at HARS. It was challenging to develop a racially diverse group of respondents. Kingston is a predominately white city where only 10% of the population is visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Population). Likewise the vast majority of the people who work, volunteer, and use services at HARS are white. Only two of the twenty-two people (9.1%) I interviewed where non-white Kingston residents.

Many participants were eager to speak at great length about their experiences at HARS and, for the most part, they demonstrated great expertise regarding various ways that teaching and learning take place within the agency. I typically began interviews by asking people how long they had been involved with HARS, how they first became familiar with the organization, and how they situate themselves in relation to the agency’s work. In general, I have not used the real names of respondents in this text. However, the real names of the Executive Director, John
MacTavish, and the chair of the Board of Directors, Joseph Babcock, do appear (with permission) throughout this thesis because their names are publically available on HARS’ website and because they regularly speak about their experiences living with HIV/AIDS and working with HARS in the community. Interviews lasted anywhere from thirty minutes to two hours. I recorded the interviews and transcribed the digital recordings. Each participant was offered the opportunity to review his or her transcript so that he or she might offer clarity, provide further insight, or remove sections of the interview. My objective in being open to interviewees revising their transcripts was to foster rich responses while promoting a co-construction of knowledge throughout the research process.

Scholars such as James Clifford, Donna Haraway, and Michelle Fine recognize that research is necessarily partial and thus must include multiple voices, the researcher’s being just one among many (cited in Johnson et al, 2006, 239). By including many voices, experiences, and perspectives in this text I seek to interrupt my authority as a researcher and to enable the reader to “listen” to the people with whom I spoke. As Richard Johnson and his co-authors write, “authors can appear as the one who knows the others and shows them off to the reader. Authors can imagine that they know what it is like for the other…however, this is to disempower the person who is being understood” (Johnson et al, 238). Rather than speaking on behalf of people at HARS, my goal is to let the interviewees appear, as much as possible, on their own terms and in their own words (Johnson et.al, 239). I make an effort to avoid interpreting passages from interview respondents and to include excerpts from interviews in long segments throughout the text. I believe the insights of the people with whom I spoke stand up quite well on their own and offer a rich and nuanced perspective of the ways teaching and learning happen within HARS.
Working the Hyphen

In addition to interviews, I also engaged in what Joao H. Costa Vargas calls “observant participation”. Costa Vargas writes that “while participant observation traditionally puts the emphasis on the observation, observant participation refers to active participation in the organized group, such that observation becomes an appendage of the main activity” (Costa Vargas, 2008, 175). Thus throughout the research process I participated in the work of HARS as a volunteer receptionist. One day per week over a ten-month period, I welcomed visitors to the agency and answered phones. This level of involvement allowed me to be part of the office’s day-to-day activity and to engage in ongoing dialogue with people who use HARS and with people who work at HARS. Observant participation enhanced my ability to conduct my research. While the content of the interviews was the main focus of my analysis of HARS, observant participation helped me to become more familiar with the organization, to meet potential interviewees and, in a small way, to address my role as an “outsider” by contributing to the daily life of the organization. By being an active part of the daily work at HARS I also sought to ensure that I was not doing research that solely involved arriving at the agency, conducting interviews, and then leaving. When researchers “parachute” into a site they study, and then vanish once they have collected the data they need, they create scenarios where people who are the subjects of research are likely to feel used or taken advantage of.

Throughout my research process, Michelle Fine’s (1994) call for researchers to “work the hyphen” between themselves and their informants was foremost in my mind. By “working the hyphen” Fine encourages us to “probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations” (Fine, 1994, 72).
Fine’s writing provides an important reminder that we as researchers must continually consider the ways that power, privilege, and notions of “expertise”, influence the relationship between researcher and the researched. The hope is that this level of reflection on the part of researchers will help us to avoid the tendency to reproduce our informants as “others”- nameless, faceless, objects of study. While developing this thesis I tried to resist Othering by constructing the project collaboratively with people at HARS and self consciously examining my relation “with/for/ despite those I am researching” (Fine, 74). This process involved searching for methodology that would assist in developing a thesis project that is rooted in the interests and needs of the community I study.

In an attempt to resist Othering and to facilitate the process of moving across the hyphen, I position myself as an activist researcher. Charles Hale (2006) refers to activist research as “a method through which we affirm a political alignment with an organized group of people in struggle and allow dialogue with them to shape each phase of the process, from conception of the research, to data collection, to verification and dissemination of the results” (Hale, 2006, 97). At the outset of this project I spoke informally with members of the Board of Directors, the agency’s Executive Director, and various staff members to get a sense of what sort of research would be a valuable contribution to the organization’s operation. People at HARS expressed interest in and a need to better understand the unrecognized assets they have at their disposal. Community education at HARS became the focus of my work in part because of my previous role as a community educator at the ASO, but also because of my continued interest in the contributions that education-based initiatives can make to community-building projects. I will continue to engage in dialogue with people at HARS to determine the future directions this work might take and decide the most worthwhile forms of dissemination.
Charles Hale cautions that the defining challenge for activist research projects such as this thesis is to produce research that is useful not only to the communities with which the project is aligned, but the academic realm as well. He writes that activist researchers must adhere to “two distinct sets of objectives and forms of accountability” (Hale, 105). Research projects are evaluated quite differently in academic and activist communities. Within scholarly circles research must generate new knowledge, be theoretically innovative, and advance scholarly discourse. Outside of academia, however, research is valued by the extent to which it will make real contributions to political struggles underway (Hale, 105). Hale cautions that there are inherent tensions and contradictions between research that is useful to academics and activists. Research findings that support political action often do not speak to current scholarly debates. Projects that make important theoretical contributions for academics are rarely useful to the work activists are doing “on the ground.” Throughout this thesis I attempt to remain aware of the ways this project can contribute to the work HARS does while also aiming to offer valuable insight for scholars studying community education, HIV/AIDS mobilization, and community building efforts.

An Assets Based Approach

The early discussions I had with people at HARS informed my line of inquiry and my use of an “assets based approach” to analyze the effects of informal education at the agency. Assets based approaches endeavor to locate assets that already exist within communities but that have gone unrecognized or underappreciated. These tangible assets can be people, skills, materials, space, and other naturally available resources (Landau, 2007, 355). Assets based approaches are used in a variety of contexts. Community workers often use them as an intervention into communities that “have experienced a rapid, untimely, and unpredictable transition or loss” (Landau, 352).
Scholars studying the resilient nature of various communities also commonly utilize assets based approaches. Researchers value this approach for its capacity to highlight moments of optimism during challenging situations. For instance, Sarah Mohaupt (2008) writes:

In the social sciences, research concentrated for a long time on negative outcomes and processes, mostly employing the so-called deficit model. The work of resilience, however, directs the attention of researchers to positive outcomes for individuals and investigates the factors for succeeding in overcoming adversities (Mohaupt, 2008, 63).

Mohaupt argues that research that draws on an assets based perspective is more likely to result in cooperation with targeted groups because of the positive connotation that becomes attached to such projects (Mohaupt, 63). My hope is that staff and volunteers at HARS can make use of the research findings within this thesis and perhaps use them to better understand the variety of teaching and learning tools they have at their disposal. This project might also be a valuable model to assist other community organizations in identifying the unrecognized ways that teaching and learning are made possible in their spaces.

Locating assets that already exist within a community agency is particularly valuable for smaller organizations such as HARS. The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network points out that obtaining long-term funding for projects is challenging for small ASOs because “the application and reporting requirements for small amounts of funding are so burdensome that they become barriers to obtaining funds” (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2005). This element of the bureaucratic funding process that ASOs are committed to can be demoralizing for an organization. While its is of course advantageous for HARS to receive funding that enhances the
formal and informal education it provides, an assets based analysis of a small organization can help to promote community strength and agency by showing community members the contributions that are already occurring organically within organizations and without the need for extra funding or programming (Cadell et.al, 2001, 21). This also helps them be free to determine their own objectives and priorities.

Conclusion
In this chapter I reflected on how I came to be an activist researcher at HARS. Throughout the research process my intent has been to ensure that my project is aligned with the interests and needs of people working on staff and using services at the organization. Utilizing an assets based approach helped me develop a dialogue with people at HARS and, hopefully, provides them with information they can use to enhance the ways education is evoked as a community-building tool within the space. Through the interviews I conducted, three main unacknowledged pedagogical assets became evident. In the next chapter, I discuss each of these assets and highlight how they create opportunities for teaching and learning among people at HARS. Through these learning experiences of people at the ASO, we can recognize ways that the organization is much more than a professionalized and impersonal service provider, but a vibrant community space. As people come together and learn about issues related to HIV/AIDS at HARS, they also develop a site of belonging and mutual support for each other.
Chapter Four: Acknowledging Unacknowledged Pedagogy

In order to identify the many ways that teaching and learning happen everyday at HARS, I draw on the collective wisdom of people who use services and provide services at the organization. At the outset of this project I was particularly interested in linking the pedagogy at HARS to the concept of resilience. When I speak of resilience, I am referring to what Dyer, McGuinness, O’Conner, and DeSantis (2004), call “the process where an individual is confronted with adversity and yet is able to move forward” (Dyer et.al, 2004, 57). In my experiences with HARS (originally as a staff member, then as a volunteer, now as a researcher) I have been struck by the tremendous resilience displayed by people across the organization. Many people confront HIV/AIDS while also dealing with matters related to addiction, mental health issues, homelessness, and poverty. The experiences of people at HARS are in line with a disturbing trend in which HIV/AIDS is likely to be associated with poverty and marginalization. In 2006 the Positive Spaces Healthy Places study interviewed 600 PHAs across Ontario and found that 75% were living at or below the poverty line (Positive Spaces Healthy Places, 2006).

Despite the range of issues that they face, clients at HARS are able to come together with staff to make the agency a vibrant second home for people who make-up the HARS community and to make it an integral part of their own everyday confrontations with HIV/AIDS. As I began to study pedagogical moments at HARS, I suspected that the resiliency I was seeing could be traced back to something that clients and staff were learning from their interactions with the agency. But when I asked participants about resiliency, it became clear that it is not a term with which they identify.

It became obvious early in the research process that I was wrong to assume that people at HARS would trace a sense of resiliency back to lessons they had learned in the office. When
people affiliated with the organization were asked to reflect on what it is about HARS that might contribute to their resilience, they were eager to deflect the term away from themselves and to cast it upon other people within the agency. This held true even for Dave, a service user who faces momentous daily struggles related to poverty and addiction:

I have friends that come here [HARS], that every morning when they get up, they don’t know what the day’s going to be like. By nighttime they could be dead. I myself have come here when I was in opioid withdrawal. I was having a bit of a hard time with the aches and the pains and the paranoia and all that shit. And then I think about these people [with HIV] and it’s not their fault that…like when I come here and I’m in an opioid withdrawal, that is my own doing. These people get up every morning and most of them got it by accident, like it sure wasn’t planned. They got to get up every morning and think like that. Some of them have families like children… you got to be pretty resilient to live like that… But I’ve learned a lot from watching other people.

Most often, service users would avoid self-identifying as resilient and would focus instead on what they believed was the resilient nature of the staff members at HARS. Brett uses services at HARS as a person living with HIV/AIDS and he seemed to marvel at the workload managed by staff members: “Some of them take on more than what’s necessary. Some of the people in here, they just take on so much. It just blows me away how they keep it together and help everybody.”

Of course, at the same time, staff also refused to identify themselves as resilient and emphasized the resilient nature of the agency’s service users. For instance, Jennifer, a support worker said,
…they’re [service users] teaching me…how they can continue to plug through…I don’t think that we’ve created a space where people are more resilient. They’ve come to the table with that. They’re surviving regardless of our space. Basically I don’t think our space is what enhances people’s resiliency…I don’t think as adults you can teach resilience, it’s a set of skills people have.

By talking to those who use services and work at HARS, I realized that people do not identify with the concept of resiliency in the way that I suspected they might. However, I would argue that the resilience that I recognized at HARS is made possible by a sense of community that is enhanced by teaching and learning that happens in the space. I will return to discuss the effects that pedagogy has on the community within the ASO later in this work, in the meantime, this section is dedicated to what people at HARS actually said about pedagogy in the office space. The stories that people generously shared with me about the teaching and learning they had experienced at HARS made evident three key pedagogical assets at the agency that tend to go unrecognized: (i) the open drop-in space, (ii) the artwork produced by PHAs that is displayed throughout the space, and (iii) the ASO’s storefront design. In the discussion that follows I suggest some of the ways that these assets facilitate informal teaching and learning for people in the Kingston area who are affected by HIV in a variety of ways. The learning experiences brought about by these assets display how everyday practices at HARS challenge the bureaucratization of AIDS service organizations. The examples that I present below make clear that HARS continues to be an important community space despite the fact that it operates at a time when many ASOs are widely seen as professionalized and impersonal organizations.
It is important to note that the pedagogical assets people spoke about during interviews are experienced differently by people with various levels of knowledge and experience related to HIV/AIDS. Influential works such as Cindy Patton’s *Inventing AIDS* (1990) offer a critique of AIDS education programs that are directed toward either a general public that is ignorant of how HIV is transmitted (these programs were concerned with assuring members of the general public that HIV could not in fact be spread by touching doorknobs) or toward communities that are believed to exhibit so-called risk factors. Patton believes that “the division of educational strategy, and the illusionary epidemiology on which it is based, constitutes the terrain in which legal and social discrimination occur” (Patton, 1990, 100). Her concern is that while the goal of education is to reduce discrimination and promote compassion, this division of educational messages enables greater discrimination and “more deeply inscribes the system of discrimination against people associated with HIV” (Patton, 100). Messages aimed towards at-risk communities such as “you can get AIDS” (from risky practices that took place in these communities), and messages aimed at the public such as “you can’t get AIDS” (from a doorknob, or on a crowded bus), changed the question for the individual from “how do I avoid the virus?” to “which one of these ‘you’s am ‘I’?” (Patton, 101). Interviews with people at HARS showcase how each of the three assets listed above creates informal pedagogical moments for people who have diverse experiences with HIV.

Throughout the remainder of this chapter I detail the types of learning experiences that arise from the pedagogical assets that people spoke about during interviews: the community drop-in space, artworks produced by PHAs, and the ASO’s storefront design. I begin the discussion of each teaching tool with a general overview of how it works in the agency’s space. I then focus on the unique lessons people have learned from each unacknowledged asset.
The Community Drop-in Space

As revealed in the interviews, one of HARS’ most prominent services, the drop-in area, has a pedagogical potential that tends to go unrecognized. HARS has always had a space that provides a comfortable area for service users to visit during the day and to utilize as they wish. Originally the drop-in space was tucked away in the back of the office in a closed off, private room. Ten years ago, staff members moved the drop-in to a large central area to make it part of the functioning day-to-day office space. The people who worked at HARS were seeking to cultivate a home-like environment for the area and so they raised funds to purchase new furniture, a bookshelf, a microwave, a telephone, and a small set of kitchen cupboards. A large cupboard that is used to store clothing donations is now a central piece in the space as well. The drop-in’s setting amidst staff offices and the agency’s hustle and bustle makes it literally and figuratively a central feature of the organization’s operation. Ronda, a longtime volunteer, emphasizes that the drop-in is “not something separate or something not to be talked about or not to be looked at, it’s just right out there.” The drop-in’s central location means that people in the space are able to engage in ongoing dialogues with staff workers and other visitors.
to the office. As I came to discover, one can learn a great deal about the many ways that people use HARS by being attentive to the stories that come through the drop-in space.

One of the reasons that staff members moved the drop-in space to a central area was to expand access to the space and to provide everyone in the community with the opportunity to utilize it, regardless of their HIV status. Today, people with a variety of identities and experiences visit the drop-in. Joseph serves as the Chair of the Board of Directors at HARS and explains that the organization’s setting in a small town enhances the diversity of people in the space. Joseph thinks of HARS small town setting “as a benefit, that we don’t have large, fully formed communities of the various people at risk [of HIV]. So people have to mix with each other. We’re not an agency only for this because another agency only for that exists.” ASOs in larger cities might specialize in addressing a certain population (having a mandate to serve gay men or injection drug users for instance or a certain ethnic or racialized community) but at HARS diverse groups of injection drug users, gay men, transgendered women and men, and people who are homeless (to name a few) all access a common drop-in area and rely on the same support staff. People at the organization take great pride in the accessibility of their drop-in and identify its radically open nature as a feature that distinguishes HARS from other ASOs. For instance, a service user whom I spoke to named Ben had recently moved to Kingston from Toronto. He compared the design of the drop-in at HARS to ASO drop-in spaces he had visited in the big city. Ben explains that,

Because they have so many people coming through [in Toronto] they try and keep it very hyper-organized, very regimented, sign-in sign-out, …you even have to go through reception or registration to get to the drop in area. If they have a common drop-in area, a
lot of the ones that I’ve come across, they’ve got set activities, set times. But again, you’re signing in, or you’re pre-registered. You feel like you’re being kept tabs on all the time. And that isn’t the case here, just the open concept where someone can come in the front door, make themselves a cup of coffee, sit on the couches.

The drop-in contributes to a pressure-free environment at HARS that is part of the general effort to meet service users wherever they may be with their HIV status or other issues. John, the Executive Director, likes to tell service users, “This is your place, you can be with your HIV and be as open as you want with it.” People use the space for everything from chatting with friends, to phoning to inquire about apartment rentals, even napping on the couches when they are exhausted from having slept on the street. The space tends to be shaped by those who happen to be making use of it on a particular day.

The ever-expanding diversity of experiences and identities among people in the drop-in space contributes to a comfortable setting that people seem to be less hesitant to enter than they once were. In the early years of HARS, many people were concerned about visiting the agency and being seen entering what was widely known as “the AIDS building.” Such apprehension is no longer an issue as Sue, a support worker, confirms that today, “People who aren’t HIV positive use the space [more] than anybody else”. Ironically, the presence of more people in the drop-in who are not HIV-positive has increased anonymity for service users who are positive. As Claire, a support staff worker explains, “We have so many people coming in for lots of different reasons. People don’t have to worry people are going to think they’re positive…now it’s more of a community space.” Visitors to the drop-in space share a wide range of experiences and perspectives. Ben from Toronto notes that within HARS’ drop-in, “you’re encountering people
from all walks of life, all backgrounds, and I think it’s a good natural opportunity for growth as individuals.” Visitors share their stories with each other in the drop-in and introduce each other to new perspectives and ideas. As people learn from one another and establish personal relationships, they can form a supportive community in the drop-in space.

**Lessons Learned in the Drop-in Space**

People who visit the drop-in told me that spending time in the space has allowed them to become more aware of a range of social issues that affect others in the community. As expected, people who have spent time in the drop-in have become more knowledgeable about the experience of living with HIV. For instance, Ken is one of the many people who visits the drop-in space regularly but is not HIV positive. He began visiting the ASO a number of years ago to use the needle exchange program. Since then Ken has stopped injecting drugs, but he is still often at HARS as an energetic volunteer. The lessons he learned from engaging with other people in the drop-in space fostered his transition from service user to volunteer service provider. He recounts that

> Since I’ve been involved with HARS, I’ve learned to be a lot more comfortable around people with HIV…I respect a lot more for sure. Just from being in the environment and meeting people…years and years ago I was kind of prejudiced about gay people and wasn’t really prejudiced about people with AIDS but I was scared of them. But they’ve helped me to see there’s nothing to be afraid of.

A transformation such as the one that Ken describes is possible, in part, because of the PHAs who take on the role of educators in the drop-in. Brett, for instance, is HIV positive and lives in
HARS’ rural catchment area, and he visits the drop-in space regularly. He believes that the growing diversity of people who use the space works to reduce the level of stigma that is attached to HIV/AIDS:

I like what they’re doing. They’re opening up the doors…I think if they do that, more people will stop in and read up and they’ll see, there’s not so much to be afraid of or worried about…I think it will help get the word out and people won’t be so judgmental about people living with HIV. They might have a little bit more sympathy.

There are people who come to HARS, who have never met anyone with HIV and are wary of PHAs. When Ronda volunteers at HARS, she sees PHAs in the space who are open about their HIV-status offering insight to others who are unfamiliar with the experience of living with the virus. She observes that many PHAs

…are more than willing to share their story or share their experience or talk about their health or anything like that…probably a lot of people if they haven’t been coming here, I’m talking about people who aren’t PHAs, they wouldn’t…have been exposed to this type of information.

Educational work at HARS is normally defined as the formal presentations, workshops, discussions, and displays that the organization provides the community. The drop-in is rarely thought of as a teaching tool, however, the experiences of people who visit the space display a knowledge and understanding that they have gained from their interactions there.
Living Learning Space

People who visit the drop-in space also told me that they have learned about the myriad social issues that bring others through the door beyond HIV. For instance, Tim is a longtime PHA who is well known to most people at HARS. He told me that his first encounter with someone with severe mental health issues took place at HARS’ drop-in: “I saw a man tying himself one day, in here on the sofa, with strings and ropes and I tried to help him and he had compulsive disorder going on. [My worker] taught me that episodes…nothing can be done about except through their own health care.” In the drop-in people like Tim can be exposed to issues that are new to them. He says that becoming more familiar with issues like mental health, he has grown more comfortable connecting with people he would not otherwise have engaged with.

Similarly, Dave began using the drop-in recently and he maintains that even though “some of the people here have some pretty heavy issues and even though they’re a little schizophrenic or whatever, I still get along with them, they still talk to me. I feel just really comfortable when I come here.” Dave says that the drop-in is one of the few places in Kingston where he feels comfortable with such a wide range of people.

In addition to social issues such as HIV and mental health, people who visit the drop-in also described how they became more aware of the ways that poverty effects people in the community. For instance, Tony is HIV positive and recalls that his first interactions with HARS “…pushed me and challenged me because I’m meeting all these various people that I probably never would have had any contact with if I was just a gay guy working in the restaurant world in Toronto…[I am] much more aware of other social determinants of health and poverty and things like that.” Tony is now committed to addressing issues related to poverty beyond the agency’s walls as well: “Now it’s like I see so many different things that need to be fixed big time and that’s probably due to my experience here. HARS allows for conversations to happen.” The
conversations that happen in the drop-in area are part of what makes HARS so much more than simply a professionalized or impersonal service provider. The agency is a community space where people become more aware of each other’s reality and more deeply engaged in their community. People who visit the drop-in relate to the space in different ways. While some will stop by the drop-in once and never return, many visit regularly. Those who spend time in the drop-in on a consistent basis are most likely to take part in organic learning experiences such as the ones described above. People such as Ken, Brett, Dave, Tim, and Tony visit the drop-in primarily to socialize, and in the process, they come to better understand their community in ways they never expected. This sort of learning is the “something else” that happens in the drop-in that often goes unacknowledged by people in ASOs.

Of course, the examples that I have provided here paint a relatively rosy picture of easy personal transformations that can be attributed to the open drop-in at the ASO. However, HARS is a small agency and naturally the array of personalities and the vastly different experiences that come together in the drop-in have been known to clash at times. Sue, a support worker at HARS reminds us that “it doesn’t always go smoothly, but it moves along.” The types of transformations I have just discussed often come with growing pains, as Sue explains: Probably the worst instances we’ve had here are homophobic ones where comments are made, and those comments are addressed. If people choose to come back, and they usually do, they stop saying those things.” It can be difficult to tell if such modifications in someone’s language reflect a deep seated change in their personal beliefs or merely a shift in their behaviour while they’re in the drop-in space. Either way, the drop-in space remains a pedagogical tool that has the potential to provide important learning opportunities about what Sue refers to as “a different way of being in the world.”
Artworks Created by People Living with HIV/AIDS

The walls at HARS are lined with a collection of artwork produced by PHAs. It is difficult to find a space on the walls that is not covered by a painting, collage, or photograph created by someone living with HIV/AIDS in the Kingston area. The majority of these people would not identify as artists per se, but they have engaged in artistic practice to depict their experiences of living with HIV/AIDS. The pieces of art on the walls are often what people first notice when they visit the office. When I spoke with people who are in the HARS office regularly, they often referred to certain pieces of art to help explain particularly influential moments they have had during their time at HARS. For instance, Jennifer, a support worker at HARS, named the artwork on the walls as one of the main reasons she felt connected to the organization when she arrived for her initial job interview. She remembers that,

“I was really hoping I would get the job because you just walk in and you feel accepted. It’s just a general sense of the environment…. There seems to be a little bit of everything on the walls so you can pull something off and say ‘oh that’s kind of like me’… I feel like you can also say, well, that’s like everybody, that includes me, my kids, my partner whatever. It’s just really warm and welcoming.

Artworks at HARS create moments of pedagogy in both formal and informal ways. For instance, the Hands-On Art Project is an initiative that was formally facilitated by the ASO. It incites learning experiences that staff, volunteers, and people who use services can all recognize. The community project resulted in hand imprints made by people living with HIV. On the back
of each imprint is the name or nickname of the person, the number of years since his or her diagnosis, and a short piece of information about them: “client at HARS, happy and healthy mother of two”, “if you need a hand just ask for mine”, “rural and positive”, “he lives!”. These short phrases remind onlookers that PHAs are defined by more than their HIV status.

HARS’ Education Coordinators developed the *Hands-On Art Project* as a learning tool to be used during formal presentations about HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination in the community. The series is now on permanent display at the office. Sue facilitates workshops where these handprints are created by PHAs and she explains how the finished pieces help to connect people who are unfamiliar with HIV to experiences of the virus: “The purpose of the project was for people to put their hand in the handprint and have a sense of the people we’re talking about with HIV as real people. To make it more real. This is a human being and it’s a very poignant experience to actually put your hand in a handprint.” Staff workers recognize the handprints as a learning tool that humanizes people living with HIV/AIDS. It is difficult, however, for staff and others at HARS to recognize the range of learning experiences that arise from personal artworks that have been created by people living with HIV/AIDS and that are now on display in the office. Even when the production of artwork is not facilitated by staff workers or the agency, pieces of artwork can still shed tremendous light on peoples’ experiences living with HIV/AIDS.
Figure 5. Today the *Hands-On Art Project* is displayed on the walls at HARS

Creative projects crafted by people living with HIV represent the ways that the virus comes to bear on peoples’ lives. For instance John, the Executive Director, has a painting made by Scott hanging in his office. Scott was a client at HARS; he passed away in May of 2002. He was well known for his intricate charcoal drawings of the human form. While he battled HIV, Scott contracted Cytomegalovirus (CMV), a viral infection affecting the eyes that was once common among people living with HIV/AIDS. As Scott lost his sight he decided to adapt his artistic practice to suit his vision-loss rather than give up painting entirely. The pieces he created after contracting CMV deployed a new abstract style and exemplify the resilience of many of the people who are regulars at HARS. For instance his painting, “Self Portrait”, is an abstract work...
that looks much different than the intricate pieces Scott once created. His self-portrait displays one person’s perseverance while living with the virus. “That’s what our folks do”, John says, “they find ways in the worst of times.” Like the *Hands-On Art Project*, Scott’s painting humanizes people living with HIV/AIDS, it reminds the viewer that PHAs are not solely defined by the virus they are living with. “Self Portrait” is an example of the way art – including art not made or hung for ‘educational’ purposes – can have pedagogical effects in the HARS office. In this section, I seek out similar instances where artwork provides the opportunity for moments of pedagogy for people who work, volunteer, and use services at HARS.

**Lessons Learned Through Artworks Created by People Living with HIV/AIDS**

As I volunteered as a receptionist at HARS, I was struck by how quickly visitors to the office would notice artworks on the walls. People were eager to hear stories about those who had created the pieces and they often shared personal stories that were similar to those reflected in pieces that they engaged with. Visitors often asked how they might contribute work of their own to the agency’s walls. While the staff at HARS is fully aware that artworks are teaching tools in the space, I want to draw attention to ways that artworks can be dynamic teaching tools that incite a variety of learning experiences amidst a diverse group of people – the creators and the viewers, and people work, volunteer, and use services at HARS.
Regular visitors to HARS told me that artworks throughout the space have helped them develop a more nuanced understanding of what it is like to live with HIV/AIDS. Oftentimes these lessons are “something extra” in addition to the formally stated aim of artistic projects. For instance, the Tell Project is a growing collage of 8”x10” canvases, produced by people in the Kingston community, that depict their experience of HIV/AIDS. The lessons viewers learn from the project go beyond its formally stated intent of “remembering those who have died, honouring those who are living with the disease, and recognizing the contributions of other members of our community who are connected to this struggle.” Pieces completed for the Tell Project regularly challenge common ideas of what it means to be a PHA. HIV positive people involved in this project have created images that cast them as more than static victims, more than someone needing help or pity. The often-uplifting nature of these pieces has provided important and unexpected lessons for people who have not experienced what it is like to be HIV positive, including Sue, the facilitator of the workshops in which the artwork is made. She says,

I started doing the artwork to give people the opportunity to talk about how dreadful it is to be stigmatized by HIV…But I found regardless of what project we were doing…people created strong, positive images. There would be depictions of the misery of it all. But more often than not strength came through…What people are learning…or what people are showing is who they are as positive, forward-moving human beings, through their artwork, not wallowing in misery or how difficult their lives are.

The artworks throughout HARS provide an opportunity to connect with peoples’ experiences of living with HIV in a very personal way. These learning experiences are not a one-way street
from the artist to the viewer. People who have created art told me that the creative process helped them to learn about new modes of self expression. HARS’ walls are a space for PHAs to represent themselves using their own voices and imagery. This space is tremendously important because it allows for a range of depictions of life as a PHA, but also, because it provides members of a community that is often marginalized and silenced elsewhere in Kingston with a space to express their thoughts and feelings. Karen works in social services in Kingston and volunteers at HARS. She believes that “art is a huge thing that people get from HARS…The staff is so creative in making art such a beautiful thing, getting people engaged who would never do art.” The art workshops that staff members offer provide PHAs with a new tool that they can use to work through challenges they might be facing. For instance, a work that I have always found to have a strong impact on people when they visit the office is Tim’s contribution to the Tell Project.

Figure 8. Tim’s contribution to The Tell Project
The poem that Tim has laid across the image of a door talks about the night that a neighbor in his apartment building became aware that Tim is HIV positive. Tim awoke in the middle of the night to the sounds of someone washing his door with soap and water. The neighbor wanted to protect others near by and to alert them to the fact that someone, “disgusting” lived there. The poem reads:

Once upon a Midnight Dreary
As I pondered, weak and weary
Came a rapping, gently tapping
At my chamber door.
It was approximately 3:30 am,
I awoke to discover that
Someone was doing something to my door.
Upon opening, I discovered my
Neighbour with a rag and a bucket of suds.
“I decided to wash your door” she said.
“But what is wrong with my door?” I replied.
“It’s disgusting!” she cried,
“Simply disgusting”.
…To this day,” whenever I enter my
apartment I feel a little less cleaner
Than the rest of my neighbours…
So…thank-you sweet neighbor for
Sharing with me the fact that people with HIV/AIDS are disgusting.
Simply disgusting. And…This must be wrong- simply wrong.

Tim’s says that the work he put into the poem was an important part of him overcoming this ignorant and hurtful act:

I told [my worker] about it, and she said ‘you know, you should write about that.’ I said ‘are you kidding? Do you know how mad I am about that?’ And she said, ‘that’s why you should write about it”…When I first did it I was ashamed to do it because no one else had their door get washed [laughs]. You’ll notice [my name] isn’t really clear at the
bottom [of the piece]. I didn’t really want it to be. I wanted it to be kind of anonymous.

Now I’m proud of it.

Tim’s poem is a point of pride for both him and for others in the organization today and it is often pointed out to those who visit the office. While people who read the poem will come to more fully understand the presence of stigma and discrimination in the community, the transformative impact that the artistic process had on Tim himself is perhaps less obvious. Though the event that inspired his poem brought feelings of shame, the writing of the poem itself helped bring Tim to a different understanding. He said that he has been told, “What courage it takes to stand and say that happened to [me]… It makes me feel okay. I visit public places and I show people I’m not ashamed to have it [HIV].” We often only pay attention to the influence that creative works have on the audience they were intended for. However, experiences like Tim’s remind us that artworks can engage the artist in a learning process too. I was able to recognize what Tim learned while he created his poem because I had the opportunity to talk to him and the support worker who encouraged Tim to turn his difficult experience into art. However, most people who see the piece do not have access to the story behind the work. For that reason, the lessons that Tim learned while creating his poem tend to remain unacknowledged and beyond most people’s view.

We can recognize the influence that artworks have on those who create them by looking at Tony’s work as well. Tony is a committed artist whose pieces often speak to his experience of living with HIV. He says he has found the occasions when his work has been displayed in the community to have been quite transformative. For instance, a number of years ago Tony’s painting entitled “The Last Supper” was displayed at a downtown café in Kingston. The message
of the work was centered on the complexities of a PHA’s daily pill management, for instance, having to ensure that some medications are always taken with a meal. In reflecting on the sort of influence this work had, Tony illustrates how artwork that PHAs produce can simultaneously transform different groups of people.

So something that for me was a self-portrait, and my trying to deal with having to take pills everyday to save my life, allowed a much broader conversation to occur about pill management and pill burden and things like that. And, interestingly enough, because [the café] actually has a lot of our drop-in clients go there too…they would share with me that they would bring friends in to see my pieces because I was the guy at HARS and…I was like their brother they were proud of.

In this instance Tony’s art helped others to learn about what it is like to live with HIV, while also, unexpectedly, helping him learn about the community of support that exists around him. As this section illustrates, artworks at HARS can incite learning experiences for people who are connected to HIV/AIDS issues in a variety of ways. These sort of pedagogical moments are not often counted among other more formal modes of “HIV education” at HARS. However, these instances when a learning process is provoked by artwork are crucial because they are occasions where people are able to relate to each other’s experiences and learn about their community. Although the staff at HARS is fully aware that art is an educational tool, it is surprising that an artwork such as the ones created by Tim or Tony can incite such a range of learning experiences for a diverse collection of people. As I will discuss in chapter five, artworks produced by people living with HIV are important tools for public pedagogy because they not only teach people
about their community, but also, physically shape a space that people living with HIV require. People can be empowered when they shape the spaces that they inhabit.

**The Storefront Display**

![Figure 9. A section of HARS storefront window display. Photo by Jim Verburg (jimverburg.com), the artist who created the posters.](image)

A third key asset at HARS, with pedagogical potential that often goes unremarked, is the organization’s storefront. The face of the building is a striking feature of the agency. Large street-to-ceiling windows line the building and create a bright and open feel within the space. In addition to the bright red ribbons painted on the glass, the windows frame banner-sized posters that depict experiences of living with HIV. These large posters show: shirtless men being intimate with one another, an assortment of HIV medications, some syringes. One poster juxtaposes a women holding a baby with a small collection of pill bottles. Another juxtaposes a naked man in a shower with one of the bubble-packs that pills come in; information about the side effects of HIV treatment overlay the man’s back.
In the early days of HARS, the agency was located in a small, non-descript house across from the central branch of the Kingston Frontenac Public Library on Johnson Street. By the fall of 1994, HARS had outgrown the small house and had moved to its current location on Princess Street’s west end. Moving away from the center of Kingston situated the agency in an area of the town where more service users reside, significantly increased the size of the space, and led to questions about how to best utilize the new storefront location. Prior to the move, there had been no sign on the agency to announce that it was HIV/AIDS Regional Services. This was not uncommon at the time since most ASOs tried to ensure anonymity for their service users. As HARS staff prepared to move to the new space, they were wary of what the consequences of a sign might be. However, after discussions among staff, the board of directors, and service users, a collective decision was made to publicly identify the new office. As John describes it, “We put our name up out there, put a big red ribbon painted on the window so you know it’s the AIDS building, It’s pretty easy to see.” Another staff member, Claire, adds, “We’re right on the main street…We’re not trying to hide somewhere to be invisible. It says a lot.”

The heightened visibility that the provocative images and large open windows bring to the organization means that images of HIV/AIDS have become part of the landscape on Princess Street, Kingston’s main street. HIV/AIDS is difficult to ignore for the people who pass HARS’ offices everyday. Staff workers hope that the organization’s obvious presence in the community means that HIV/AIDS issues will be on the minds of people in town. As Jennifer explains, “The art along our front windows…it really encourages people to just kind of stop and think ‘what is this place all about?’…The windows are what makes people curious.” The curiosity sparked by the windows has been known to incite conversations regarding HIV/AIDS in community spaces beyond the ASO. For instance, Claire, a staff worker at HARS, told me about a time that a
conversation about HIV/AIDS arose while she was visiting the hairdresser. HIV/AIDS became the topic of conversation after someone else mentioned driving by the windows at HARS. The discussion turned into an occasion for informal pedagogy as Claire took up the chance to inform others in the salon about HIV and about the nature of the work that HARS does. Without the bold storefront, this dialogue may have never begun. The design of the physical building is not often considered among the “HIV education” work HARS does, however, the storefront windows do incite learning experiences that enable people to better understand HIV/AIDS and the community at HARS.

**Lessons Learned Through the Storefront Display**

People who are connected to HARS explained how that the storefront teaches about HIV/AIDS in a personalized way. For instance, images of seemingly routine elements of a PHA’s life (medication, showering, romantic relationships) serve to interrupt and complicate the long lists of statistics people often encounter when learning about HIV. The Executive Director, John, explains that the organization attempts to broaden people’s perspective beyond the numbers: “It’s what people want to know, how many people [are infected with HIV]?...Stats are needed, but lots of time you forget the person. That behind every number is a human being, that it’s actually people.” Rather than confront the community with statistics or the epidemiology of the virus, HARS offers representations of the humanness of HIV/AIDS.
This human-centered and holistic perspective echoes throughout HARS’ work. The agency does more than manage the “HIV issues” that people face. HARS services attend to PHAs’ whole lives as they assist with housing, nutrition, navigating other social services, and even the wellbeing of people’s pets. The ASO’s shift to responding to an entire range of PHAs’ life experiences is a crucial development since the early days of HARS, as John describes:

The type of work we’re doing has changed big time. Back then it was death and death only so you were always dealing with individuals dying so that’s all we did you know? Funeral after funeral after funeral, giving people care the last couple of months of their life. Where now, it’s more helping people live.

The imagery HARS has chosen for its storefront window points to the current state of HIV as a manageable illness for those who receive/have access to and can afford treatment. Staff and volunteers told me that they are hopeful that the images they present to the general public will
enable people unfamiliar with HIV/AIDS to relate to the daily reality of PHAs. Ronda, a PHA volunteer, believes that each poster offers a lot of insight into the challenges PHAs face:

I’m thinking of the ones with the pills, all the pills. It lets people know that, hey, some people have to take a lot of pills in a day. Maybe think of the cost of that and how they’re covered and things like that… I think when you’re walking past windows like that everyday, you’re bound to think about it, like …why do they have those vials and pills and stuff like that?

It is of course quite difficult to ascertain how the people who pass HARS respond to the images they see. However, staff and volunteers told me that they hope the images not only spark conversations about HIV, but more specifically, open opportunities for informal discussions that are relevant to the broad range of issues that HARS confronts.

In addition to learning about HIV in a manner that emphasizes the life of the person living with the virus, people also told me that the windows taught them about the nature of HARS as an organization. For instance, one employee, Kim, believes that the storefront is a vital part of what differentiates HARS from other social services,

HARS, it amazes me that it’s been able to remain so grassroots after such a long time, that’s such a rare thing. Everything always goes corporate, starts to become professionalized and formalized and that sucks because it ends up not really addressing the needs of people who are using the services, I think. The posters in the window are really indicative of that ability to remain rooted in the community.
The posters contribute to a community space where service users like Earl feel free to be themselves. Upon his first visits to the agency Earl found the posters welcoming and he explained how he particularly appreciated the accessibility of the storefront design as opposed to having to visit “some secluded office.” He recognizes a communal tone at HARS that he feels is distinct from other social services he utilizes,

When I go to the clinic…I sit quietly and read my book, I don’t feel like talking, I would say that here…I feel permitted to…it’s almost a spiritual quality about the place…about the space itself. All of that says to me I’m permitted to be myself and feel the way I feel without judgment.

The agency’s posters broadcast the humanness of service users. This focus on acceptance and commitment to being a non-judgmental space is at the root of any instance of education or personal growth at HARS. As Sue of the support staff emphasizes,

the overall theme at HARS…is that they [people who use services] come in and be seen as fully human as the staff who work here or the volunteers who work here. In terms of seeing people on the street, most of our clients are seen as subhuman…We treat people as human beings here and that’s what they can learn. What that actually feels like…Otherwise nothing else matters, nothing else can matter. The basis of the work I do is to see them as people.
The seemingly simple goal of emphasizing the humanness of people who walk through their doors may appear as too modest an endeavor for an organization like HARS. However Earl speaks to why the organization’s holistic focus is greatly needed and appreciated:

I can’t stress enough how I truly feel that the biggest experience that I have had from being told I’m infected [with HIV] is isolation. I isolate myself, I feel cut off from society. I feel like a leper…at HARS your physical wellbeing is probably limited to giving you a cup of coffee. But they’re interested in your sense of humanity, they’re interested in you as a person, as a whole person…it’s quite different [from clinics] and unique, and needed.

By focusing on the whole person, HARS fills a need that is not addressed in bureaucratic institutions such as clinics or other social agencies that people living with HIV/AIDS encounter. People explained that they visit the office not only to access the organization’s services, but also, to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. The fact that service users come to HARS to get something “quite different” than clinics is particularly interesting in light of the common critique of ASOs as professionalized, impersonal, and bureaucratic spaces. Elements of HARS, such as the storefront, work to root the organization in the community and incite moments of pedagogy that teach people about the supportive environment that is cultivated in the space.

Most people that I interviewed supported the storefront design and staff members confirmed that they have very rarely received negative feedback from the community. One service user I spoke to, however, said that the imagery on the storefront made him uncomfortable. He explained that
Specifically, the giant syringe with the medication I find very disturbing. I believe others might find that disturbing. The public doesn’t always like to be reminded. I mean hospitals are full of us and we’re all sick. We should be able to walk down the street without being confronted with it. You can have whatever you want, but that’s my take on it.

While the opinions expressed about the storefront do not always support the current design, I would argue that when these debates occur they shed light on various experiences of living with HIV/AIDS and manifest the pedagogical potential of the agency’s storefront. Divergent responses, such as the ones highlighted here, exemplify a challenge that arises when trying to measure the pedagogical potential of the windows. There is a wide range of possible reactions from the many people that pass the office everyday. Accurately measuring the influence that the storefront has on people passing by is more complex than examining how the drop-in space or artworks contained in the office incite moments of pedagogy. Perhaps the best way to address this challenge is to remain mindful that the responses I have documented from interviews represent only a sample of the ways that people in Kingston are influenced by the storefront.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced three of the key pedagogical assets that became evident during my interviews with people at HARS. The drop-in space, artwork produced by PHAs, and the storefront design all incite moments of pedagogy for people who relate to HIV in diverse ways. Recognizing that these aspects of the agency can be teaching tools changes how we might conceive of “HIV education” to work in ASOs. The three assets outlined in this chapter demonstrate that learning in ASOs is derived not only from the work of formal education
departments, but also from everyday occurrences that arise organically in the office. As I illustrate in the next chapter, people develop a sense of community and a sense of belonging as they engage with these pedagogical assets. By acknowledging the ways that pedagogy brings people together in the ASO, I hope to illustrate that HARS is much more than an impersonal service provider, but an influential community space.
Chapter Five: Community Learning, Community Building at HARS

The educational assets that interviewees identified during our discussions each incite unique learning experiences at HARS. An important commonality among the three potentially-pedagogical assets is that they function organically and independently of focused programming from staff or specific funding to ensure their operation. By expanding our vision of what education can look like beyond the formal practices of community organizations, we can acknowledge and therefore protect contributions that ASOs make to their communities that often go unnoticed. Throughout this chapter I focus on ways that these previously unrecognized pedagogical assets not only incite learning experiences about issues related to HIV/AIDS, but also, foster a space for community building and mutual support.

As with chapter four I have structured this chapter around the three assets. I begin the chapter by recognizing the drop-in space as a site where visitors share information with one another so as to increase peoples’ knowledge and to develop a supportive community within the ASO. I evoke Doreen Massey’s concept of “accidental neighbours” to illustrate the pedagogical significance of diverse people coming together the drop-in space. Second, I argue that the artworks created by PHAs cultivate important moments of public pedagogy as they become a medium for people to share their experiences, as well as a way for PHAs to shape the ASO’s space. Henri Lefebvre’s conception of peoples’ “right to the city” demonstrates the importance of people being able to structure the spaces that they inhabit. Finally, I argue that the storefront design at HARS has the potential to break down barriers between people inside of HARS and people outside in the broader Kingston community. I rely on Elizabeth Ellsworth’s idea of a “pedagogical pivot place” to help show how the storefront can incite learning experiences that
help to make HARS more than an impersonal service provider, but an influential community space.

This chapter addresses the rich learning experiences that people have at HARS that prompt us to think differently about the role that ASOs play in local communities. Looking beyond the formal education programming of the ASO enables us to recognize how relationships are formed within the space, the ways that learning influences people on a personal level, and how the community at HARS continues to grow. When we acknowledge the variety of ways that community education and community building are linked at HARS, we can imagine ways that these seemingly simple instances of pedagogy can actually be the seeds of social change.

**Dropping-in on Unexpected Neighbours**

The drop-in space is most often praised around HARS for its everyday utility – a space where people who use services are welcome to rest, re-group, collect clothing, find food, and take shelter. The learning experiences that occur in the drop-in, which I presented in chapter four, indicate that the space is also an important site of what I have been calling, after Jeanne Brady, public pedagogy, even though these pedagogical moments often go unrecognized as such. In this section, I explore the relationship between the pedagogy that takes place in the drop-in and the different types of communities that form in the space. I begin by discussing the significance of the drop-in as a location for PHAs -- who may be facing similar issues -- to relate to one another and share information. I suggest, however, that the drop-in may reach its fullest potential as a pedagogical space when visitors relate to one another across a range of social, economic and health-related differences. I conclude my analysis of the drop-in by exploring how service users ensure that the space continues to be a safe and open environment that truly fosters the formation of a supportive community.
The drop-in is an important pedagogical site because it provides a location in which people living with HIV can learn about the virus from one another. Jeremy, for instance, is a person living with HIV/AIDS in Kingston who shares information and experiences with other PHAs in the drop-in. He explains that other people “have been living in Kingston longer than I have, but I’ve had different experiences with having HIV than they have…We talk about strategies in a personal way, our health or things like that”. Given the heavy stigma that remains attached to HIV, it is still important for people living with the virus to have a space where they can share information with each other. While some people who are directly or indirectly affected by HIV may still be hesitant to be open about seeking information related to the virus, public community drop-in spaces create a setting where knowledge can be accessed incidentally from other PHAs (Veinot, 2010, 875-877). PHAs, particularly those who live in rural areas, often face challenges related to feelings of alienation and isolation (Peters 2011). For instance, Earl lives in a rural area outside of Kingston:

I live in a small village where I’m the only one infected by HIV. I don’t know anyone else, within many many many many many miles, who’s infected. I’m totally totally alone. I depend on HARS. I came here today, an hour and a half to drive here. Specifically to come to HARS. I will do that at least once a week. It’s that important to me that I will make that effort…[Rural areas are] not the place to disclose your status. The sense of isolation for these people [living in rural areas]…is more than you might imagine. People like us depend on a drop-in center, a physical place.
Jeremy and Earl’s experiences illustrate that a space in which to connect with other PHAs can help people confront some of the challenges that are associated with living with HIV in a smaller community. Jeremy and Earl confirm the findings of Crook and colleagues who found that the learning that arises in ASO drop-in spaces contributes to PHAs feeling less isolated, being more informed about their HIV status, and having an improved quality of life as a result (Crook et al., 2005, 47). Both drop-in visitors told me that their experiences in the space have helped them to become more secure with their HIV status, and more comfortable pushing for social change as part of the wider AIDS movement. Jeremy was in the process of training as volunteer at HARS when we spoke. Earl fundraises on behalf of the organization and is not afraid to approach friends who are not HIV positive for donations. He explains, “HARS has given me the courage to put myself out there. To hell if people wonder ‘why is he promoting this HIV thing so much?’”

As PHAs open dialogues and share their experiences in the drop-in, they not only enhance each other’s knowledge of HIV/AIDS, they also work to form what is generally an inclusive and supportive community. When I spoke with people who are living with HIV they often emphasized that the drop-in is an important “safe space” in their lives. A service user named Brett told me that the drop-in is a space

for people to come in and feel comfortable.[People] can come in and talk to other people in their situation…There’s always someone who can help them out…If anyone has any problems [the drop-in] is one of the places they should be able to come and feel absolutely safe. Sometimes in [one’s] life things get rough, this place is a good place to help sort that out.
While the interactions that take place in the drop-in help to cultivate a sense of community among PHAs, I think the greatest pedagogical contribution of the drop-in may be the ways that it helps facilitate the formation of community across vastly different experiences. I argue here that given the current context within which ASOs operate, drop-in spaces can reach their potential as sites of public pedagogy when they are truly open spaces that are accessible to the entire community, regardless of people’s HIV status. Today’s ASOs attempt to maintain a delicate balance between recognizing various overlapping systems of oppression while also trying to create a sense of unity and cohesion in HIV/AIDS work (Cain, 2002, 109). Education departments, for instance, must tailor unique messages to specific populations such as gay men, people who inject drugs, and people who are new to Canada while continuing to relate peoples’ diverse experiences to a common virus. As more social and cultural groups articulate their needs and interests regarding the epidemic, it becomes more challenging for ASOs to meet the expectations of these various communities (Meekosha, 1993, 189; Cain, 2002,109). As Helen Meekosha writes, the important task for those involved in the community movement, “may not be constructing unity, but achieving solidarity from the vantage point of our differences” (Meekosha, 189, 1993, Cain, 2002, 109). One way that visitors express solidarity across differences in the drop-in is by enforcing guidelines that ensure it remains a safe space for everyone in the community. John explains that staff workers have to do very little to keep the drop-in running smoothly, “On the whole, we don’t have to do a lot of policing of the spot where that has been an issue in some [other ASOs]. The individuals who use it respect it, and if you used it and don’t respect it, they deal with you…and they actually do it better than we can…People are very clear and concise with folks”. People in the drop-in unite around the
common goal of keeping the space safe and welcoming for those who visit. John says that visitors to the space will often ask anyone who is being discriminatory or using hateful language to leave.

One of the first and most important lessons I learned at HARS is that for most of the HIV-positive service users at the agency, HIV is not their primary concern. Instead, they confront the virus in addition to a host of other issues that might include being in and out of prison, mental and physical health problems, injection drug use, hunger, and homelessness. This level of multiple marginalization is not necessarily the case for everyone in Kingston who is HIV positive, but it is the reality for the majority of people who use HARS.

There is security in being able to expect that others in the drop-in space will be comfortable with whatever identity or experience a visitor might bring. This is why the drop-in is so often referred to as a “safe space.” However, there is also pedagogical value in the level of randomness attached to the people who come together in the space. Doreen Massey (2005) argues that we too often overlook the significance of space as “the sphere in which different trajectories coexist, as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity”(Massey, 2005, 9). She makes the case for what she refers to as “an alternative approach to space” in her book, *For*
Massey’s approach is based on her belief that space is the product of peoples’ interrelations and interactions and so space must also be “predicated on the existence of plurality”. As she writes, “Without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space” (Massey, 9).

Multiplicity is definitely a feature of the drop-in at HARS. People arrive at the drop-in from a multitude of locations. This makes it difficult for visitors to predict exactly whom it is that they will be interacting with when they arrive at the drop-in space. Massey recognizes the “accidental” nature of such relationships to be a fundamental aspect of what makes space so important. In *For Space*, she explains,

The specifically spatial within time-space is produced by that - sometimes happenstance, sometimes not - arrangement-in-relation-to-each-other that is the result of there being a multiplicity of trajectories. In spatial configurations, otherwise unconnected narratives may be brought into contact, or previously connected ones may be wrenched apart. There is always an element of 'chaos.' This is the chance of space; the accidental neighbour is one figure for it (111).

Here, Massey encourages us once again to recognize the ways that space brings people into relation with one another. The accidental neighbours who meet at HARS come from vastly different places and carry dissimilar points of view. Massey’s conception of space as “an ever-shifting constellation of trajectories” poses the question of what happens when people are thrown together in such a way (151). Accidental neighbours at HARS teach and learn from one another, they become familiar with issues they may not have considered previously, they relate to people
they used to be afraid of, and most importantly they work together to form a new community for support. It is worth noting here that what we could call the “accidental neighborhood” of the drop-in is quite a small space. People almost have to relate to each other as they share the space because there is no room to avoid people. Sue, a support staff worker, told me that “many times when you’ll come in and there will be different service users providing support services, essentially, to other clients or to people off the street and being supportive or sharing what little they have with other people. It’s a wonderful thing”. Moments such as the ones that Sue describes suggest that the drop-in space is much more than simply an impersonal and bureaucratic ASO service.

The drop-in at HARS functions to develop a sense of collectivity across identities that in other locales tend to divide people – class, race, gender, sexuality, and especially HIV status. As the Executive Director, John explains:

A lot of our clients are very marginalized. But we have clients who are not, who have privilege, who have stuff. And they come in to sit down and have a coffee and they’re chit chatting with somebody else who’s living on the street or who has addiction history or mental health…you just see that happening, you see the connection happen.

The everyday efforts of service users are integral to the drop-in remaining a safe home base for people in the community. Simple practices, such as drop-in visitors upholding a strict standard of confidentiality, are the acts that maintain an environment where people are free to be themselves. Service users to whom I spoke repeatedly pointed to confidentiality as an important lesson they have learned from being at HARS. So much so, that when I asked questions that I
assumed were rather ordinary such as, “How do you see the drop-in space being used most often?” service users reminded me that they would be speaking only to their personal experiences and that they could not share any information about how others might interact with the space. Here we can recognize people learning about mutual respect and forming a supportive community across differences – individuals making an effort to extend the support they have received to others.

While it is important to note the significant role that service users play in creating a supportive community space, staff and volunteers at HARS are critical to ensuring that the open drop-in space is able to thrive. They make sure that the drop-in is a focal point of the organization’s structure, not merely a way to make use of leftover space in the agency. Organizations such as HARS that serve a smaller population generally have the resources and space available to accommodate the number of visitors that access their open drop-in spaces. It may be more difficult for agencies in larger urban areas to offer an open drop-in area that is available to the entire community. We can recall Ben’s experiences in Toronto that I introduced earlier in this thesis. He compared the open nature of the drop-in at HARS to the regimented and “hyper-organized” nature of the space in Toronto that made him feel as though staff were keeping tabs on the service users. Agencies in bigger cities serve larger populations and often must limit access to drop-in spaces in order to ensure that staff and volunteers can meet the needs of visitors. Although it may be challenging for larger organizations to offer an open drop-in like HARS does, there may be substantial benefits to having open drop-in spaces in ASOs located in big cities. If people have the opportunity to connect with each other and to learn with each other, they may create more intimate communities, even in larger settings.
It is a challenge for the staff at HARS to connect with conversations taking place in the drop-in while simultaneously maintaining the “hands-off” approach that enables the drop-in community to develop organically on its own. The ability of staff to work with the environment service users create for themselves can be enhanced by encouraging service users to contribute to the agency in a wide variety of ways. These contributions can range from service users sitting on the Board of Directors, to decorating the office space in a way that they desire. In the next section of this work, I explore the significance of contributions that service users make to the ASO in the form of artwork and other physical changes to the environment.

**Mobilizing a “Right to the ASO”**

While the public pedagogy that takes place in the drop-in is facilitated by the work that service users, staff workers, and volunteers do to create an inclusive sense of community across difference within the agency, service users, in particular, also help to create community by shaping the ASO in more tangible ways. As I discussed in chapter four, artistic projects structure the appearance of the ASO and from them people learn about various experiences of living with HIV. People who use services at HARS alter the physical space in a variety of ways, for example, by mopping floors or decorating the office. In this section I talk about how the range of contributions that people make to HARS’ space incites personal learning experiences and enhance a supportive community at the ASO.

Henri Lefebvre has argued that people can be empowered and be more likely to realize their full potential when they have the opportunity to generate the conditions that they live in (Friedman and Van Ingen, 2011, 89). Lefebvre is best known for developing the concept of the “right to the city”. By “right to the city” Lefebvre meant that everyone should have right to conceive, create, and implement urban space as they desire. Lefebvre considered this to be a
fundamental right because it enables people to produce spaces that meet their needs as opposed to relying on the decisions of the state (Friedman and Van Ingen, 97). Here I borrow and bend Lefebvre’s concept of the “right to the city” to help me make sense of how service users conceive, create, and implement the community they desire at HARS and claim the “right to the ASO”. Even the smallest changes that service users make to HARS’ physical space are significant. Lefebvre reminds us that, “the ability to structure space is a source of considerable power, whether it is wielded by dominant or subaltern groups” (Brenner, 1997; Friedman and Van Ingen, 89). I realize that in discussing the ways that people who use services at HARS shape the ASO I am talking about a different kind of relationship than Lefebvre wrote about as he imagined the “right to the city” as a strategy for reforming urban citizenship. Despite the difference between the “right to the city” and the “right to ASO” I find the concept is useful because it helps me to acknowledge the variety of ways that people at HARS create a community for themselves and to recognize the potential for empowerment and social change that lies in the simple actions that tend to be overlooked.

Some of the people I interviewed said that, for them, HARS feels like family. As Brett describes it, “HARS is like a family except it’s not always the same people at the same time.” While the concept of “family” is most often applied to the people who comprise it, Brett’s notion of family is linked more to place. His perspective speaks to the vital role the organization has as a “home base” for some service users. They produce the space at HARS to suit their need for “family”, or for community, in various ways. For instance, John, the Executive Director, recalls one service user in particular, named Darrel, who took on the role of decorating the agency for the Christmas season:
This fellow loved Christmas, so every doorknob, every window had garland. It was not pretty, but every year we looked forward to it... After he passed away, that first Christmas [often] it was like, ‘oh, we’re not going to have it’. That was his imprint on us was the Christmas decorating, and it [the decorating] was...it was awful. That was his and we just let that happen.

By decorating the office, Darrel claimed his “right to the ASO” and created the space that he desired and required. HARS is a site where, to a great extent, service users can see their thoughts and actions reflected within the space. Much like members of a “family” who share a home, service users shape the space by using a range of talents and skills.

Service users at HARS often require a location in which they can “give back” or contribute to a community. Ken for instance shaped the space by mopping floors when he first started visiting the agency, “I just started doing it. I just started helping because they do so many good things for us.” Since these initial contributions, Ken’s involvement with the organization has increased. He developed and continues to operate a program that facilitates the donation of pet food to HARS and other community organizations. Tim’s experience has been similar. Earlier I mentioned the poem Tim wrote after he found a neighbor washing his door. When I interviewed him, he told me that when he first began visiting HARS he “was the meanest little guy you’d ever want to meet. Scary, awful, brutal, like don’t talk to me...I’d start a fight with you if you looked at me.” As Tim came to recognize the supportive community that HARS provided, he acquired a desire to give back to the agency in some way:
I then noticed when I came here, that people who catch HIV or have hepatitis are so scared. They’re always...their eyes are filled with tears. They’re always quiet and they’re scary to talk to because they’re humming with panic. So I’d hang around and I’d have coffee and I’d say “Hi, how are you? I’m Tim”. I’ve been doing that for fourteen years in here. I wanted to work here but I’ve only got a grade 10 education. With the staff turnover, I said, since I’m not going anywhere I said ‘maybe I can help this girl, maybe I can help this guy’. When that got boring, I would write. That’s where my writing comes from, and that’s why I write for HARS, and that’s why I still come back.

Ken and Tim both claim a “right to the ASO” and create a space in which they can contribute to the community. It is important to recognize the ways that individuals are transformed as they transform their environment. In Ken’s case the transformations he made to the space accompanied his personal transformation from being a service user to a volunteer service provider. Similarly, Tim’s story illustrates the development of his skill as a writer. His work is now featured throughout the space and sometimes appears in the HARS newsletter. Tim also gained confidence and comfort with his HIV status while engaging in his artistic process. As I mentioned in chapter two, Ellsworth believes that pedagogical spaces incorporate a “force that creates the experience of the learning self” (37). For Ellsworth, there is something inherent in pedagogical spaces that spark a transition within the individual who is engaging with the physical space. Here I argue that when HARS becomes open to people claiming a “right to the ASO” it creates the experience of the learning self in much the same way. As people transform the agency they acquire new skills, new perspectives, and new awareness of their community. Similarly, David Harvey (2008) argues for an understanding of Lefebvre’s “right to the city” that
“is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city” (Harvey, 2008, 23; Van Ingen, 2011, 97). As people claim a “right to the ASO” they have the freedom to choose how they will contribute to the space and the types of learning experiences they will have in the process. If we fail to recognize the potential for the physical environment of community organizations to facilitate such moments of learning we miss out on important ways that service users both teach within and learn from the ASO.

As people change HARS, and consequently themselves, they often take on a leadership role with the organization. For instance, people who use services might make the transition to being volunteer peer educators. Service users at HARS have made the change from requesting that the organization present a workshop (for an art project for instance), to facilitating such workshops themselves. Such instances that increase a person’s sense of agency are important moments in the work that the organization does. The Executive Director, John is excited by moments when “We say…put a poster up, we’ll get your supplies and on that day it’s yours. You have to do that, if you don’t work with the folks that are using the service…what are you doing?”

The people I interviewed told me they value the opportunity to be leaders in the space. For instance, a number of service users told me that they see a service user named Ben as a leader in the space. Ben has a long history as an AIDS activist and often supports other service users with issues they are facing related to HIV. Ben told me, “I get a lot out of it [being involved with HARS], I really do. Knowing that you can make a difference for people to realize that it’s [HIV/AIDS] not a death sentence.”

While the “right to the city” as Lefebvre conceptualizes it can be read as a radical vision of urban politics that allows citizens to reclaim power and challenge social hierarchy (Purcell, 2002, 100), the “right to the ASO” must be entered into as much more of a collaborative effort
between volunteers, employees, and service users within the organization. While there is no strict hierarchy at HARS, the agency strives to create an environment where everyone (staff, volunteers, service users) are as equal as possible while maintaining appropriate boundaries.

Organizations that are looking to embrace an approach that would promote the “right to the ASO” must be conscious of power imbalances that exist within their relationships with service users. Otherwise, the organizations could be exploiting the contributions that service users make. When considering the many influences that service users can have on the physical environment of community organizations, staff and volunteers must also be mindful of the type of contributions they are allowing for. It is important that PHAs have the opportunity to take on leadership roles in the ASO, however, organizations should also embrace a wide range of contributions that PHAs might want to make. People living with HIV in the early days of the epidemic insisted that personal experiences shape the AIDS movement and adopted the slogan: “nothing about us without us.” The importance of people living with the virus being able to make meaningful contributions to the AIDS movement was first formalized at the second annual AIDS Forum in Denver in 1983. The work of activists eventually developed into the GIPA principle: The Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV/AIDS. The GIPA principle was formalized at the 1994 Paris AIDS Summit and in 2001 189 United Nations member countries endorsed the principle as part of the Declaration of Commitment to HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, 2007). GIPA emphasizes that it is vital for community AIDS organizations to involve PHAs in their work (Living and Serving 2011, 13). More recently, MIPA (the Meaningful Involvement of People Living with HIV/AIDS) has entered the discourse to combat token inclusion of PHAs in ASOs and to ensure that a significant percentage of agencies’ leadership or representation positions are occupied by PHAs. MIPA guidelines are an integral part of any genuine effort to create more
socially just communities for PHAs. It is also important that efforts to position PHAs in leadership roles do not overshadow efforts to embrace a wide range of contributions from PHAs. Some ASOs are known to be hesitant about letting service users mop floors or paint walls, but for some service users these everyday contributions (such as Ken’s floor mopping or Darrel’s Christmas decorating) that reshape the space fulfills their desire to contribute to a sense of community and belonging. Even contributions that are easy to overlook open the possibility of service users transforming themselves as they transform the space. Every location within the ASO that service users are able to re-shape carries within it the potential to become a pedagogical asset.

Each of the hidden pedagogical aspects of the organization that I have touched upon this far work to cultivate community within the ASO. In both a figurative and literal sense, service users shape a site of community by fostering an inclusive space and shaping the location to fit their needs. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss how the design of the agency’s building creates learning opportunities that work to make HARS part of the broader Kingston community. **HARS’ Inside-Out**

The drop-in space and instances where visitors claim a “right to the ASO” both work to enhance a sense of community within the space. As people learn through these two assets, they develop a better understanding of each other’s experiences and develop a location where people with diverse backgrounds can feel a sense of belonging within HARS’ space. In this section, I explore the pedagogical potential of the storefront design at the ASO. I examine ways that the design may operate as what Elizabeth Ellsworth (2005) calls a “pedagogical pivot place”, and also how it may work to make the ASO part of the broader community in Kingston.
As I outlined in chapter two, Ellsworth refers to spaces of learning, such as HARS, that are to some extent bizarre or unusual as “anomalous places of learning”. In her book, *Places of Pedagogy: Media, Architecture, Pedagogy*, Ellsworth focuses on moments when these spaces create learning experiences and put people in relation with other people and ideas. She recognizes that anomalous places incite learning experiences that occur “at and as a pivot place” (37). For example, when speaking of the pedagogical potential of architecture, she argues that, “architecture becomes pedagogical, pedagogy becomes architectural when together they create a fluid, moving, pivot place that puts inside and outside, self and other, personal and social into relation…[pedagogy] becomes the force that sets interior self-experience in motion to encounter the outside ‘not me’” (38). Learning experiences of this kind Ellsworth is talking about are especially significant in the context of social justice projects because they may break down barriers between people and help to cultivate compassion and understanding. For instance, Ellsworth identifies the U.S Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C as a space with a “powerful pedagogical pivot place”. She explains that “the pedagogical hinge of the memorial museum is a configuration of time and space that invites in its visitors the sensation of “inside” and “outside” the Holocaust” (51). The sensation is accomplished in this particular museum by creating a space of radical relationality by putting visitors’ selves in relation to history not by collapsing the difference between now and then through realistic representations of the Holocaust ‘as it was’ but by insisting on displaying the space of difference between here and there, now and then, insider and outsider of the Holocaust (52).
Of course HARS is a different type of space than that of the U.S Holocaust Museum. Nevertheless, I aim to understand the pedagogical function of HARS in much the same way that Ellsworth understands the memorial. I want to acknowledge the ways that the storefront can put “inside” (the expectations that people have) and “outside” (the world that people encounter) into relation and the implications this has for how HARS might cultivate a sense of community beyond its walls. In the remainder of this section, I first illustrate how the storefront draws passersby into relation with issues around HIV/AIDS. Second, I demonstrate how the storefront puts “self” and “other” into relation. Before concluding I turn to discuss some of the challenges that arise while trying to measure the pedagogical potential of the storefront display.

The storefront design that I described in chapter four can be understood as the pedagogical pivot point that brings people who are unfamiliar with the ASO or with HIV into relation with the issues that HARS faces. The storefront design confronts people with the reality that HIV/AIDS exists in Kingston and that an empowered community is working to address it. By announcing the presence of the virus and the ASO community space in such a way, the storefront works to root HIV/AIDS issues on Princess Street. These issues become part of the town’s fabric along with the banks, restaurants, and dollar stores neighbouring HARS.

The storefront can bring “inside” (the expectations that people have as they walk by HARS) and “outside” (the presence of HARS on Princess Street) into relation by challenging the presuppositions or expectations that people in the Kingston community might have about HIV/AIDS. The bold design may challenge beliefs that HIV/AIDS is solely an issue for big cities and not for smaller towns like Kingston. The striking images and sprawling bright red ribbons on the glass may also complicate expectations that the stigma attached to the virus renders responses whispered and private, not bravely thrust onto the town’s central street. Sue, a support worker on
staff, believes that the windows proclaim to the town “We are not ashamed of HIV, we are not ashamed of who we are, of being drug users, of being HIV positive, gay, sex workers. This organization has no shame around that. This is who we are, we’re in the community, find a way to deal with it”.

The storefront’s capacity to work as a pedagogical pivot place is exercised when people who are unfamiliar with the work that HARS does must find a way to deal with the organization’s presence in the community. Before a person can relate to “the other,” to the “not me” that Ellsworth refers to, he or she must first acknowledge that “the other” exists. The windows have the potential to set into motion the process of people coming into relation. As Jennifer, a support worker, explains, the windows “…bring the eye this way. You also see people who are walking by and having their own discussions…Hopefully that encourages dialogue around ‘what’s HARS?’ ‘What does that mean?’…They might not like what we do, but now they know that we do it.” While instances such as the ones that Jennifer describes might seem minor, they can be significant moments of pedagogy nevertheless. Cindy Patton acknowledges this spatial significance of ASOs. She writes, ASOs’ “very stability has put an address on AIDS, making it possible to publicize the epidemic here and now, not mysteriously always someplace else” (Brown, xvi). The windows provide the opportunity for moments of public pedagogy, however, the storefront becomes an even greater powerful pedagogical pivot point when it does more than broadcast HARS’ presence, and puts the self (living without HIV) and the other (HIV positive) into relation with one another.
The storefront design creates opportunities for both the general community and HIV positive service users to encounter what Ellsworth calls the “not me” (60). Ellsworth argues that in order to learn, “we must be able to access something external to our own projections and identifications; otherwise, our entire reality would consist of our own dreams and individual delusions” (Ellsworth, 30). The large open space created by the windows makes this sort of access to something beyond our own ideas possible. Despite the fact that HARS confronts issues that are often heavily stigmatized in small towns, the large front windows permit people on the sidewalk or driving down the street to see right into the agency’s space. Sue believes that the storefront design is vital given the small town setting that HARS operates in. She emphasizes that “HIV is so stigmatized, we can’t behave like we’re ashamed of it in the community because
that only contributes to [the stigma]”. Unlike other ASOs, HARS is not located in an office building and hidden away down a corridor, it is not in an unmarked space, it requires no buzzer to enter. The open concept of the building means that there remains little mystery as to what HIV/AIDS work looks like in Kingston. The person living with HIV (“the other” or “not me”) is not a mysterious or unknowable figure because HIV/AIDS work is not hidden out of sight. HARS’ open concept and location on a busy street provides people who are unfamiliar with HIV an opportunity to access something beyond their own ideas and expectations about the virus.

The sightlines provided by the ASO’s open concept also enable people in the agency to feel connected to the community. John, the Executive Director, told me, “We really want to get rid of the stigma so we use the windows for that.” John is optimistic that the windows work to help service users to become more comfortable and open with their status. He hopes that the storefront windows will render HARS’ presence more ordinary and make it easier for a PHA to say, “Yes, I’m living with HIV, but I don’t need to be ashamed about it.” HARS’ storefront design means that PHAs access HIV/AIDS services right at street level and can always easily view the town they live in while doing so. By making the organization’s environment an open aspect of the cityscape, HARS invites people to relate to the neighbourhood outside in a way that activates the instability of the binary between self and other (Ellsworth, 37). Ellsworth explains that pivot points of this kind are significant because they set inner realities in relation to outer realities (50). This may enable people to develop relationships with one another and better understand each other’s experiences.
Staff workers at HARS do recognize that some service users may not be comfortable walking off busy Princess Street and into a building that is clearly marked as offering HIV/AIDS related services. For all service users, the option of accessing the building from the backdoor and out of view is available. As Jen, a support worker explains, “We help people where they’re at…if they’re at a space where they don’t feel comfortable coming in the front door, fine, just let me know and we’ll make arrangements and meet you at the back door. Hopefully over time they’ll be more comfortable”. Staff tell me that fewer and fewer service users seem to require the backdoor option. They also told me stories of service users transitioning from using the backdoor to eventually using the front door. Staff recognized such moments as profoundly transformative, both for the service user making the change and for others in the space who witness people gaining increased comfort and confidence with the agency and their identities.
The bold storefront design at HARS has garnered a variety of responses from the local community. People who are unfamiliar with the agency’s work are still able to identify HARS as “the place with the pictures of naked men out front” or “the place with the butt in the window.” Some people at HARS value these images for their capacity to combat a de-politicized identity and ensuring that HARS does not become overly rigid or impersonal, as I mentioned at the outset of this thesis (see Cain 2002). But, while the posters effectively spark conversations, they do risk alienating some members of the larger community who are uncomfortable with the image HARS projects. One staff member recalls a conversation she had with a Kingston police officer. The officer told the staff member,

I know you said that anyone can go in, but I’ve been by that place, I’ll tell you: I wouldn’t go in because I don’t want people to think that I’m gay or HIV positive. Even though you said there are all these good things at HARS, and I believe you. But, I still wouldn’t want people to think that.

It is difficult for HARS to strike a balance between portraying an image that simultaneously accepts everyone and offends no one. Debates over imagery and posters within ASOs are common because they are important symbols of organizational identity (Cain, 2002, 99). Posters such as the ones displayed in the big front window at HARS make important statements about the organization, the HIV/AIDS virus, and the kind of services people can expect when they enter the doors.

The pedagogical potential of the storefront design is more difficult to quantify than the drop-in space or artwork by PHAs. Staff workers at HARS hope that the open concept will help
people to become more aware of issues related to HIV/AIDS and to become more comfortable crossing boundaries. However, it is a challenging to know the influence the design has on people who pass the building everyday. Are their minds changed? Do they consider HIV/AIDS issues in new ways? Do they notice the building at all? What the experience at HARS does tell us is that such open and obvious signifiers of HIV/AIDS community work sparks conversations in places where they may not have otherwise occurred. But, community organizations can only do so much in terms of influencing the dialogues sparked by their presence and their work. Agencies like HARS can only reach so far into the community to ensure their images build bridges between inside and outside, and do not scare away people unfamiliar with the issues ASOs confront. Some people, such as the police officer introduced above, will unfortunately be turned off by the images and distance themselves from the ASO.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the ways that three potentially pedagogical assets at HARS work to cultivate a sense of community within the agency. The drop-in is a space for people living with HIV to gather and learn about the virus from each other, however, it also is a space where visitors from vastly different backgrounds develop relationships. As these “accidental neighbours” build a supportive community in the drop-in, they turn the space into a “home base” for people confronting multiple forms of marginalization. Artworks produced by PHAs are also assets that cultivate a sense of community at HARS. These creative pieces not only shed light on various experiences people have living with HIV/AIDS, they are also a medium through which people can transform the agency’s space, and consequently, change themselves in the process. Finally, I have argued that the storefront design can be understood as HARS’ pedagogical pivot point. It helps to bring people “inside” and “outside” of the ASO into relation with one another.
The learning experiences brought about by each of these pedagogical assets challenge the idea that ASOs in the age of bureaucratization have to be impersonal and unemotional spaces. By acknowledging the ways that a sense of togetherness and community arise from people teaching and learning at HARS, I hope to extend the ways that we recognize ASOs contributing to local communities. ASOs may not be the antagonistic organizations that activists created in the 1980s, however, they are still important centers of community that can have a profound influence on the lives of people affected and affected by HIV/AIDS.
Conclusion

I began this work by asking three interrelated questions: How does informal education operate at HARS? In what ways does it contribute to a sense of community and belonging? How are staff, service users, and volunteers involved in these efforts? The search for answers to these questions revealed three pedagogical assets within the ASO that often go unacknowledged. Each of these assets provides moments of learning that not only develop peoples’ understanding of issues related to HIV/AIDS, but also enhance visitors’ sense of community and belonging. The well-established critique that ASOs have changed into more bureaucratic, professionalized, and impersonal spaces may be valid. However, the informal teaching and learning transpiring within HARS suggests that ASOs can maintain their original spirit of mutual support and grassroots community-building despite the growing pressures associated with funding, accountability, and bureaucratic processes. The ways that informal education within HARS contributes to people gaining a fuller understanding of each other’s experiences and becoming more closely connected to their community imply that ASOs can continue to be more than simply service providers, but important community spaces for people living with HIV/AIDS. Of particular importance is the prominent role that PHAs continue to play in creating and maintaining communities for themselves. The community that grows within HARS can cultivate another generation of HIV/AIDS activists who can push for social and political changes that confront the injustices that remain attached to living with HIV/AIDS. As the voices from HARS demonstrate, PHAs regardless of their title (employee, director, service provider, service user, volunteer) play a leading role as educators in and creators of community space. Many of the people who walk in HARS’ annual AIDS Walk, read speeches at the annual AIDS Vigil, volunteer at community dances that HARS plans, and speak to community groups about life as a
PHA, initially arrived at HARS merely to access the agency’s services. Today they are community organizers. It is essential that these voices remain at the forefront of the AIDS movement.

The pedagogical assets that people identified during the interviews each represent “something else” happening at HARS that often goes unacknowledged. When we fail to recognize these hidden moments of teaching and learning, we risk greatlyunderestimating the value of community organizations like HARS. For instance, while the drop-in at HARS has an obvious practical utility, visitors’ experiences highlight how the space becomes a living classroom for those who spend time there. People who visit the drop-in become more aware of what it is like to live with HIV, and are also able to better understand the ways that issues like mental health and poverty effect people in the community. A growing sense of compassion accompanies a better understanding of each other’s experiences. The beauty of this teaching tool lies in its simplicity. Aside from a list of guidelines pinned to the wall and staff sharing supervision duties, the drop-in space requires little extra attention. The people in the drop-in mobilize informal teaching and learning on their own as they engage with their “accidental neighbours.”

Denis Altman visited many community-based organizations as part of his research on grassroots responses to HIV/AIDS. The most characteristic image of ASOs in his mind,

…is of movement: AIDS community organizations seem to be constantly outgrowing their space, to be shifting premises as the load on them and the resources available increase…packing crates and not yet connected telephones seem as good a symbol as any
of the energy and the stress which characterizes the communal response to the AIDS epidemic (Altman, 6).

This sort of relentless movement is what sets HIV/AIDS apart from so many other public health initiatives. As I mentioned in the introduction, the organizations that were originally created to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the 1980s have not only maintained a presence in the public sphere for more than three decades, they continue to increase the size and scope of their work. HARS has recently more than doubled its space by taking over the adjacent building and the agency’s work continues amidst drywall dust and the constant drone of power tools. Much of the new space will be dedicated to expanding the drop-in area. This may even further diversify the population that utilizes the space and create new opportunities for developing a sense of community in the drop-in. While the organization will begin to offer a wider range of programmed events in the new space, a truly “open” drop-in will remain as the focus.

Artworks that are crafted by PHAs and displayed throughout the agency’s space are dynamic teaching tools. On one level they are windows into various experiences that people have living with HIV/AIDS. On another level artistic practice becomes a vehicle for PHAs to learn new skills and tools for confronting challenging aspects of their lives. While the drop-in enhances a sense of community within the agency, the artworks produced and displayed there form a community space in more tangible ways. Service users offer their skills and talents to physically alter the space by crafting artworks, mopping floors, painting walls, and decorating the space to name a few. As service users shape the space to suit their needs they change not only the agency, but also themselves. When staff, service users, and volunteers come together to facilitate service users claiming a “right to the ASO” in a way that is respectful and conscious of
power relationships at play, it can have tremendous benefits to the organization as a whole and to individual service users.

Finally, the agency’s storefront boldly announces HARS’ presence in the community. The images in the windows catch people’s attention and cause them to reconsider their preconceptions of HIV in Kingston. The hope is that the design leads people in the community to reflect upon the issues HARS confronts and the experience of living with HIV/AIDS. This may foster greater compassion and work to close the binary between “me” and “not me.”

Opportunities to relate to “not me” more closely are reinforced by the large windows that allow people in the community to see the work that HARS does, and for people in the space to not feel hidden away or separate from the community. The challenge in studying the impact of the storefront, of course, is ascertaining exactly how people walking by react to the space. Throughout my research people passionately voiced both support for and displeasure with the front window display at the agency. Even instances when the organization receives negative feedback can serve as teaching moments and opportunities to connect with people they may not have the chance to otherwise. The expansion of HARS’ space on Princess Street means that there will be more windows available for staff workers and volunteers to fill with imagery that broadcasts the organization’s culture to those who pass by.

An important aim of this thesis has been to lend voice to the unique challenges of social and political organizing in a smaller community such as Kingston, especially in relation to stigmatized issues such as HIV/AIDS and harm reduction. Currently the experience of HIV/AIDS activism in smaller towns is largely omitted from accounts of the HIV/AIDS movement. This may be because we expect the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS to silence responses to the virus outside of large urban centers or because we forget that rural populations
confront the virus as well. An uplifting element of this research has been noticing the ways that people at HARS not only mobilize a lively response to the virus in a smaller community, but have done so in a way that transcends divisions that tend to develop between people who are living with HIV/AIDS and those who are not. People at HARS have turned the challenge of working in a smaller setting into an opportunity to open themselves to the entire community and to build connections and allies across Kingston. While the “small-townness” of HARS does present obstacles, in the forms of limited resources and a small staff size to name two, the allies they have developed have become resources for confronting such challenges.

Finally, this work has sought to complicate common understandings of how and where education happens in our communities and to contribute to the ever-expanding list of “spaces, sites, and languages of education” that I introduced in the second chapter of this thesis. It is important that we acknowledge sites where critical thinking is taking place so as to reinforce the idea that transformative teaching and learning often happens beyond the academy. By acknowledging the multitude of ways that pedagogy works at HARS this project speaks to the goal of public pedagogy scholars who strive to understand the role that pedagogy plays in peoples’ everyday lives and the places they interact with (Sandlin et.al, 2011, 348). The learning experiences that I have presented in this thesis illustrate that HARS is more than a service provider, but a space where people build a sense of community and mutual support while they teach and learn from each other.

The ways that people cultivate relationships through teaching and learning in ASOs is never the focus for funding bodies that define what “HIV/AIDS education” looks like. In fact, elements of places like HARS that cannot be quantified, such as the ways that people create a sense of community, are of no interest to funding bodies whatsoever. From my time working in
and volunteering with an ASO I understand how much time workers are expected to spend documenting and completing paperwork in order to quantify the significance of their agencies. While these bureaucratic responsibilities are likely here to stay, I hope that the learning experiences that I’ve included in this thesis encourage people associated with local AIDS organizations to embrace the messiness wherever possible. It’s impossible to quantify how supportive a community is or how many ways people feel connected to a community space, but that does not mean that such contributions from local agencies are unimportant. People working in community agencies should celebrate moments when their drop-in spaces are noisy and lively, their walls are cluttered with artworks, and people are talking about the imagery they use in the community. Even though the effect that these aspects have on people can never fully be quantified, we can be assured that “something else” is happening beyond the usual service oriented mandate of ASOs.

As I mentioned earlier in this thesis, in an effort to “work the hyphen” between the people that I “researched” and myself, I identified as an activist researcher while I worked on this project. I do not think I ever felt like I was “working the hyphen” more than on one afternoon late in the qualitative interview stage of my research. After weeks of trying to arrange an interview with a particular community organizer in Kingston, I was finally sitting across the table from him in a back room at HARS and setting up my tape recorder. A few short minutes into our discussion John, the executive director, came into the room looking rather exasperated. HARS’ network server had crashed, computer files has been lost, staff members could not conduct intake sessions, the drop-in space was over crowded, and a long line had formed at the needle exchange. All hands on deck. The interview was over before it began and I was helping to answer phones, to hand out harm reduction kits, and to direct visitors to where they needed to be.
I share this story because it demonstrates nicely that although activist research can be unpredictable, time consuming, and stressful at times, it can also offer an intimate look into the daily life of people that we as researchers have aligned our work with. My hope is that by being part of HARS while I was conducting my research, I have been able to provide insights that will help people at the organization to do the important work they do. Having completed and submitted the formal thesis project, the next stage of the process is to meet with people at HARS and discuss how to best mobilize this research for the organization and determine what elements of the project they deem to be most valuable. Ideally the project that I have started with HARS as an activist researcher will never really “end”, my hope is that it can continue to shift and grow to meet the organization’s needs.

A challenge that I grappled with throughout the research and writing process was how end of life issues can or should be represented in my depiction of HARS. My intent in employing an assets based approach was not to gloss over or ignore the difficult reality that people associated with the agency passed away while I was conducting this research. Instead, my hope is that an assets based approach encourages readers to reflect on more than community education programming, or small-town organizing. In a broader sense I have intended to display the value of research projects that affirm and highlight moments of achievement instead of searching for and critiquing faults. Of course research based in critique can and often does make vital contributions to social justice projects. By focusing on assets throughout my thesis however, I want to encourage and make more space for research that is aimed at finding and understanding the effects of important community projects, provides cases of small but meaningful victories, and utilizes an academic platform to communicate these experiences as responses to complex social justice issues.
By highlighting achievements we can offer vital moments of hope and encouragement amidst constant challenges and obstacles that grassroots workers confront. At HARS for instance, staff face high demands with limited resources, are witness to trauma on a daily basis, and constantly face the threat and reality of losing people they have come to know intimately. Service users battle the virus while simultaneously confronting additional health issues, poverty, stigma, and discrimination. I believe there is great value in research projects that encourage us to pause and reflect on where and when triumphs occur, and that consider how to reproduce them. The community at HARS is triumphant when barriers are broken down within its space and people learn from each other, when people shape the space to suit their needs, and as the agency boldly thrusts its image onto Princess Street. Each of these suggests in their own way the possibility that people in the communities impacted by HIV/AIDS can not only survive, but thrive.
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Appendix One- Interview Guide

Questions for service providers:

- Do you consider aspects of HARS to be educational?
- What do the people who make use of the space at HARS learn?
- What do you see happening most often when people visit the agency’s space?
- Are there instances you have witnessed or been a part of in the drop-in space that you remember as being particularly impactful or influential for service users and/or staff?
- What sort of comments would you say you receive most often in relation to the building’s design?
- Do you believe HARS would be a different kind of organization without either the drop-in space or the current design of the front windows? Do these elements make HARS different from other organizations? How?
- Can you please tell me about any facets of the space at HARS that you have had a hand in designing or setting up?

Questions for service users:

- What brings you to HARS?
- How do you spend most of your time when you’re here?
- What was your impression the first time you came to HARS? Have your thoughts on these changed today? How?
- What have your experiences in the drop-in space been like?
- Is there one time or event in the drop-in space that has had a particular impact on you?
- What parts of HARS have had the biggest impact on you?
- What are your interactions with other people in the drop-in space like?

Questions to be asked to both groups:

- What do people who engage with HARS learn?
- How do we know when teaching and learning are happening at HARS?
Appendix Two—Letter of Information

This research is being conducted by Colin Hastings under the supervision of Dr. Mary Louise Adams, in the Department of Cultural Studies at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario.

**What is this study about?** I am doing a research project that looks at the ways people learn and teach at HARS. As part of this project I am interviewing people who spend time at HARS to learn about how they use the space. The interview will be about an hour long and be recorded with an audio recorder. I’ll be asking questions about your experiences at HARS in places like the drop-in space and your thoughts about the design of the building. The goal of the research project is to find examples of teaching and learning at HARS that we might not have noticed before.

There are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with this study.

**Is my participation voluntary?** Yes. If any of the questions during the interview make you feel uncomfortable or are too sensitive you do not have to answer them. You are free to stop the interview or leave the project at any time.

**What will happen to my responses?** I will keep anything you say in the interview confidential. Only my thesis supervisor and myself will be able to see what is said during the interview. In transcripts of the interview and the research paper, I will call you only by your pseudonym (that you can choose) so that other people will not identify you. The recordings and transcripts of the interview will be kept on a password-protected computer. I will show you the transcript of the interview after it is complete so that you can make sure I recorded you correctly. If there is anything you would like me to take out of the transcript, I will do so. After the project is complete all of the information you give will be deleted. I will be happy to give you a copy of the research findings when they are complete!

**Will I be compensated for my participation?** No, there is no monetary compensation offered as part of this study.

**What if I have concerns?** Any questions about study participation may be directed to Colin Hastings at 11ch19@queensu.ca or Dr. Mary Louise Adams mla1@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or 613-533-6081.

Again, thank you. Your interest in participating in this research study is greatly appreciated.

*This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines, and Queen's policies.*
Appendix Three – General Research Ethics Board Letter of Approval

October 12, 2012

Mr. Colin Hastings
Master’s Student
Department of Cultural Studies
Queen's University
Kingston, ON  K7L 3N6

GREB Ref #: GCUL-021-12; Romeo # 6007435
Title: "GCUL-021-12 The pedagogy of space and new spaces of pedagogy: A case study of HIV/AIDS Regional Services and organic education"

Dear Mr. Hastings:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GCUL-021-12 The pedagogy of space and new spaces of pedagogy: A case study of HIV/AIDS Regional Services and organic education" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB, of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Adverse Event Report). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To make an amendment, access the application at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Amendment to Approved Study Form. These changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services or irvingg@queensu.ca for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Stevenson, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair
General Research Ethics Board

cc: Dr. Mary Louise Adams, Faculty Supervisor
    Dr. Magda Lewis, Chair, Unit REB Danielle Gugler, Dept. Admin.