

Abstract

Community radio in the United States is an under-studied and under-theorized medium. The role of this important medium in serving underrepresented populations, however, does not go unnoticed across many communities. In this study, the researchers consider the Freireian potential of community radio as a tool for education, participatory communication and democracy as they examine the case of WMMT-FM in the heart of Appalachia. On-the-air since 1985, WMMT is one of a handful of radio stations in the United States that still broadcasts live community-created programming. Its stated mission is to give mountain people a voice. To that end, the station has trained several hundred volunteers in radio production in its 23-year history, expanded its technological capabilities to overcome substantial barriers created by the rugged mountainous terrain, and worked to preserve and disseminate the rich traditions, stories, and heritage of the region. Qualitative and quantitative data were gathered by researchers from 273 radio listeners in Pike and Letcher Counties in Kentucky and Wise County in Virginia in order to determine the specific issues, concerns, and information that would improve the quality of their participants' lives. A second goal of the study was to more closely define the radio audience of WMMT-FM to better understand the extent to which WMMT was reaching its constituencies and fulfilling its public service mission.