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# Defending democratic youth work

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In Defence of Youth Work
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*Thirty years ago Youth Work aspired to a special relationship with young people. It wanted to meet young women and men on their terms. It claimed to be 'on their side'. Three decades later Youth Work is close to abandoning this distinctive commitment. Today it accepts the State's terms. It sides with the State's agenda. Perhaps we exaggerate, but a profound change has taken place.*

Back in March 2009 the venerable corridors of the Ushaw College in Durham were witness to this sweeping, polemical assertion on the state of English youth work. It marked the opening salvo of an Open Letter, 'In Defence of Youth Work', which aimed to dent a consensus that there was no alternative but to do New Labour's bidding. Whilst those of us involved in the animated discussions, which had kindled the Letter's passion, felt the time was right. Neo-liberalism was imploding before our very eyes. We were anxious. Behind the scenes we had been written off by notable 'shakers and movers' in Youth Work's small world as irrelevant 'dinosaurs', clinging apparently on to the past for fear of the present. In the event our anxiety was misplaced. Our effort to reflect critically on the health of Youth Work matched the diagnosis of the overwhelming majority at our first small gathering. We felt alive rather than extinct. Since then our collective confidence in seeking to influence present events has increased, of which more later.

**Analysis and anecdote**

The background to the appearance of this call to arms illustrates a mix of both historical and political analysis intertwined with the anecdotal reflections of workers on the ground. Whilst it might now be a common-place observation, the liberal or social-democratic form of Youth Work initiated by the Albermarle Report in 1959 has been under increasing pressure since the ascendancy of neo-liberalism in the late 1970's. Back in the early 1980's the Thatcherite effort via the Manpower Services Commission to shift the focus of state Youth Work from an open-ended social education to a prescriptive social and life skills training was repelled. In the early 90's the Tory government's half-hearted ideological attempt to impose a national curriculum on the diverse and eclectic elements of the Youth Service ground to a halt. In their frustration the Conservative administration decided upon the time-honoured tactic of 'whomsoever calls the Piper plays the tune'. Siphoning money via such schemes as the Single Regeneration Budget established in 1994 towards a Youth Service reeling from devastating cuts, the plan was plain and simple. Youth Work would be brought under manners by binding the release of funding to the setting of agreed targets e.g. a quantifiable decrease in youth crime or even a reduction in the consumption of alcohol by young people! As it was the monitoring of this approach was initially sloppy, but the writing was on the wall. And, if those youth workers gyrating with glee at the accession of New Labour in 1997 thought the graffiti would be jet washed from the wall in the name of a fresh start, their naïve hopes were to be dashed. The fixation on the Market as the elixir of existence meant that New Labour, the neo-liberal party par excellence, determined to push ahead with a target and outcomes-led, instrumental approach to work with young people. Policy documents such as

'Transforming Youth Work' (DES 2002) and 'Youth Matters' (HMG 2005) were no more than "prospectuses for the delivery of mostly agreed priorities and outcomes" (Jeffs & Smith 2008: 281). Thus across this last decade youth workers and youth managers have been cajoled and coaxed into embracing the very antithesis of the person-centred youth work process: predictable and prescribed outcomes. New Labour has shown itself to be obsessed with the micro-management of problematic, often demonised youth. In a rhetorical flourish the Open Letter accuses New Labour of possessing no vision of a world beyond the present. It continues:

"*yearning for a generation stamped with the State's seal of approval the government has transformed Youth Work into an agency of behavioural modification. It wishes to confine to the scrapbook of history the idea that Youth Work is volatile and voluntary, creative and collective – an association and conversation without guarantees."*

This overview of the intent and impact of neo-liberal social policy has been transfused into life through the actual observations of workers struggling in the muddy mess of practice. Across meeting after meeting their repressed and alienated voices are beginning to be heard. Amongst their fears are:

- That their values and principles are under such attack that they are losing a belief in what they are doing.
- That universal services are disappearing in the face of the targeted agenda e.g. in the name of 'preventing violent terrorism' or dealing with anti-social behaviour at weekends.
- That they are being directed towards an individualised case work approach, 'working on young people rather than with them'.
- That the emphasis on accredited outcomes is undermining their commitment to association on young people's terms and to the building of relationships.
- That they are being incorporated increasingly into the surveillance and policing of young people, symbolised by the pressure on detached workers to join forces with the police in 'managing the streets'.
- That the management imperative to procure 'hard' evidence is generating a culture of deceit, wherein workers falsify numbers and outcomes for fear of reprisal.
- That training and education is failing often to produce questioning and critical practitioners, paralleled by a suppression of critical dialogue within the workplace itself.
- That the role of volunteers and part-time workers is being cheapened and overlooked.
- That crucially the voluntary basis of their engagement with young people is in peril.
- And that young people themselves are being demeaned, having their rights taken away.

[based largely on a report produced by the North-East Steering Group, November 2009 and on conversations during 2009 in Wigan, Sheffield and London.]

These cries of concern echo the findings of Jean Spence's 'An Everyday Journey' (2007) which concentrated on part-time workers and young people, and 'Squaring the Circle', a self-styled modest inquiry initiated by the De Montfort University, led by Bernard Davies and Brian Merton (2009), which interviewed both workers

and management. To take but two quotations from these searching investigations:

*"Is this research going to tell the big bosses to stop them (the workers) doing loads of paperwork. Because it's crap. Because it's all changed from the young people to computers and paperwork. And it sucks! It's like you come and you expect things to be happening, like it used to, and they're just talking about paperwork."* (Young Woman in Focus Group: Spence, 2007:2).

*"The style of management is based on control at all costs. It's as if they fear, that if they don't control, a disaster will happen . . . . Even if we are not the one who has made a mistake it affects us all: we can't put a letter out without running it past a manager. It squeezes the juice out of you: you wish for and desire to be trusted and to be more equal."* (DMU, 2009 :42).

To return for a moment to social policy, Jeffs and Smith place these anxieties and frustrations in a political context, within which we need to question:

- The shift from locally negotiated plans to centrally defined targets and indicators.
- The growing emphasis on the potentially deviant or dysfunctional young person as the centre of Youth Work's attention.
- The changing role of the youth worker from being a social educator to becoming a social entrepreneur, selling both themselves and young people in the market place.
- The delicate issue of to what extent professionalisation, hand in hand with bureaucratisation, has assisted the suffocating grip of rules and regulations upon the work and played its part in the exclusion of the volunteer, once the lifeblood of the old Youth Service.

(drawn from Jeffs and Smith 2008).

**A matter of timing**

Nevertheless having sketched this scenario we are troubled by a conspicuous lacuna. Both the trenchant critique of neo-liberalism and the rumbling dissent of workers have been available and known about for the past decade. For example, in 2005 Bernard Davies produced an eloquent and carefully considered argument in support of classic 'democratic' youth work, 'A Manifesto for Our Times'. Whilst it ruffled a few feathers, it was not taken up by organisations, such as the then Association of Principal Youth & Community Officers, for whom it offered a lifeline in clarifying the tension between the government's demands and the cherished traditions of the work. During this period too the Critically Chatting Collective, a small group of argumentative workers, of which I am the coordinator, organised meetings around such themes as 'Youth Matters' and 'Democratic Management: A Contradiction in Terms?', together with setting up a web site to stimulate debate. Interest in our dissidence was expressed, but we were not overrun in the rush. The overwhelming feeling seemed to be that there was no option but to make the best - dependent on your rationalisation - of either a good or bad job.

Then, dramatically in late 2008, the neo-liberal project imploded. As Paul Mason concluded, " .. a deregulated banking system brought the entire economy of the world to the brink of collapse. It was the product of giant hubris and the untrammeled power of a financial elite." (Mason 2008: 173). Alluding both to Marx and J.S.Mill, the Open Letter grabbed the chance, exclaiming:

*But History is an unruly character. In the space of only a few months everything has been turned upside down. Capitalism is revealed yet again as a system of crisis: 'all that is solid melts into air'. Society is shocked into waking from 'the deep slumber of decided opinion'. The arrogant confidence of those embracing the so-called 'new managerialism', which has so afflicted Youth Work, is severely dented. Against this tumultuous background alternatives across the board are being sought. We believe this is a moment to be seized.*

**Emancipatory and democratic youth work**

In grasping the opening we seek to reaffirm our belief in a distinctive form of 'emancipatory and democratic' Youth Work, whose cornerstones are:

- *The sanctity of the voluntary principle; the freedom for young people to enter into and withdraw from Youth Work as they so wish.*
- *A commitment to conversations with young people which start from their concerns and within which both youth worker and young person are educated and out of which opportunities for new learning and experience can be created.*
- *The importance of association, of fostering supportive relationships, of encouraging the development of autonomous groups and 'the sharing of a common life'.*
- *A commitment to valuing and attending to the here-and-now of young people's experience rather than just focusing on 'transitions'.*
- *An insistence upon a democratic practice, within which every effort is made to ensure that young people play the fullest part in making decisions about anything affecting them.*
- *The continuing necessity of recognising that young people are not a homogeneous group and that issues of class, gender, race, sexuality and disability remain central.*
- *The essential significance of the youth worker themselves, whose outlook, integrity and autonomy is at the heart of fashioning a serious yet humorous, improvisatory yet rehearsed educational practice with young people.*

Asserting this definition identifies a key contradiction in the Letter. Its desire to defend Youth Work is revealed as being partisan. Inevitably Youth Work is a contested site of practice, within which authoritarian and conformist models of interaction with young people have always been highly influential. The classic essay title: 'Is Youth Work an agency of social control or social change? Discuss.' retains all its relevance. This said, many supporting the Open Letter and what is now transformed into a Campaign wish to propose that any work with young people at odds with our definition is quite simply not Youth Work!

Leaving aside for the moment this tension about what constitutes Youth Work, a contradiction that cannot be wished away, we are very conscious that it is easy to spout rhetoric on paper. But we hope in borrowing a term from the new managerial lexicon that a window of opportunity has been opened by the economic and political crisis. Our concrete proposal is simple, namely ". . . *that we must come together to clarify what is going on in all its manifestations: to understand better how we can support each other in challenging the dire legacy of these neo-liberal years."*

**Agitate and organise**

The response to this challenge has been encouraging. Certainly in the past year we have continued to pass the litmus test of whether we are prepared to agitate and organise. Over 30 local and regional meetings have been held with attendances as high as a hundred in Newcastle and Huddersfield. Steering groups have been set up in the North-East, West Midlands and South-East of England as a first step in developing a representative structure for the Campaign. The first National Campaign conference is to be held in mid-February at the Manchester Metropolitan University. We estimate that around 500 people, made up of a diverse mix of students, workers from the state and voluntary sectors, academics and even the occasional senior manager has been to date involved in the Campaign. There are understandable mutterings that it is time to be less defensive and more offensive in our collective activity. A change of name reflecting this shift is likely at the National Conference.

**Catalysing a critical dialogue**

In the closing lines of the letter the plea for support is tempered by the observation that ". . . *in doing so, you are not agreeing to toe some party line. There is so much to think through together."* In harmony with this sentiment a lively and healthy debate is indeed emerging. Amongst the questions being raised are:

Is there a unique Youth Work value base? Intriguingly the Open Letter itself never mentions values, preferring to talk about cornerstones of practice, implying that the emphasis ought to be on process and methodology (Davies 2005:3) and in the English context on Youth Work as a distinctive site of practice. Talk of values though remains central to many people's thinking. In addition there seems to be a contemporary fixation on ethics, on professional ethics. Three titles focused on 'Youth Work Ethics' will have appeared in a single year (Roberts 2009, Sercombe 2010, Banks 2010). Does this emphasis on the individual practitioner's moral dilemmas reflect the post-modernist abandonment of the possibility of a collective political praxis?

If there is an argument for the existence of a discrete Youth Work profession, what is its particular function? Whilst Walter Lorenz reflecting on the European state of affairs speaks of a general crisis of confidence in the professions and welcomes the opening of a serious debate about professionalism's place in the humanist project of "realising the human in a social context", within large swathes of English Youth Work it is taken for granted that professionalisation is inherently good. To entertain doubts about moves to an exclusive degree profession or the imposition of a license to practice are perceived, contrary to Lorenz's desire for a historically rooted and critical debate, as "expressions of backwardness" (Lorenz 2009:21). To touch on this question raises the role of the youth work trade unions, primarily the Community & Youth Workers Union [CYWU], recently merged with UNITE, and its rival, UNISON. It poses, given the spread of youth workers across differing settings, employed on different rates of pay and conditions, the significance of the JNC agreement - defended most vigorously by the CYWU - in safeguarding the character of a Youth Work 'on young people's side'. All of which is shadowed by defending democratic Youth Work just as the consequences of the State's rescue of the banks begin to impact on public services of every variety. The Campaign in partnership with the trade unions has no option but to take up the class struggle alongside all other State workers.

Should the Campaign embrace Community Work? Aren't the principles

of engagement the same? Indeed by failing to embrace Youth and Community is the Campaign forgetting that some of the most progressive Youth Work practice has been informed by the ethos of Community Development? In Scotland it is the Community Education tradition which resists the forced intrusion of 'market' values into both youth and community work; which challenges the emptiness of governmental pronouncements on citizenship, marking the crucial distinction between 'provided' and 'demanded' spaces when speaking of young people and democracy [Shaw and McCulloch 2009].

How far has Youth Work itself compromised its avowed informal educational commitment by going along with claims that the presence or otherwise of youth provision can be measured in terms of a rise or fall in youth crime, anti-social behaviour, teenage pregnancy or drug abuse? Indeed some of the pronouncements of its spokespersons suggest that meeting such welfare targets constitute the purpose of Youth Work. Hasn't this understandable yet flawed response to pressures on its very existence given credence to the notion that within Integrated Youth Support Services youth workers are no more than providers of positive or diversionary activities?

Over the last 40 years Youth Work's training agencies have held to a curriculum founded on an eclectic broth of person-centred humanistic and social psychology mixed in with a radical sociological emphasis on inequality in society. Whatever its omissions and weaknesses it has aspired to inform a practice which starts from young people's perceptions of their predicament. Given this proud history and the fact that contemporary academic contributions such as Batsleer (2008) and Sapin (2008) maintain this commitment, how do we address the insidious intrusion into practice of an alternative soup of an integrationist European social pedagogy, a classical American insistence on the primacy of adolescent psychology, dressed up as Positive Youth Development, supplemented without any critical deliberation by such dubious pseudo-scientific fabrications as Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)? Certainly the purchase of external consultants to provide in-service training has allowed the often unquestioned import of instrumental explanations of young people's needs and behaviours, which are seductive in their simplicity, being both functional for practitioners searching for easy answers and functional for the State wanting its boxes to be ticked.

In a recent article Bernard Davies [2009] ponders, "can youth workers, but perhaps particularly senior managers now imagine a world without targets?" In advancing this concern he touches on a deep-rooted dilemma. To what extent has thirty years of neo-liberal individualism permeated all our souls? It has been sobering to discuss with the latest generation of workers their sense of isolation. As we struggle within the Campaign to renew a commitment to a collective practice in the service of young people, we cannot underestimate across this period the body blow delivered to the social movements, from which many of us drew inspiration and strength. Of course the collective pulse never stops altogether, kept alive, for example, through patches of militant trade union activity, through the resurrection of a feminist youth work practice (FeministWeb 2008), and indeed through the response to the Campaign itself.

In thinking about renewing ourselves in the 21st century we must engage with the possibilities provided by the Internet. Our use of a website, of Facebook, if a touch amateurish, has brought welcome

rewards in terms of both propaganda and organisation. However do the social networking sites sustain authentic, critical and collective activity? To what degree do they offer the individualised succour of an empty 'active' passivity?

In the face of the obsession with the quantifiable, how might we begin to collect our own evidence about the complex reality of the Youth Work process? In responding to this query a number of workers have offered stories of their unpredictable journeys with young people. At this moment there is significant interest in organising a research project, which pursues this exercise in Oral History by interviewing practitioners about their experiences, past and present.

Finally, if not exhaustively, we are haunted as ever by the problem of how we might forge a direct and accountable relationship with young people themselves? Such a bond between workers and young people on a political basis is rare, except sometimes on an immediate level in the teeth of cuts to local provision.

The Campaign argues that in fighting back youth workers are not alone. Indeed other parts of the Welfare State suffered the institutionalisation of the logic of the market long before it began to dominate Youth Work – adult educators, teachers and social workers, to name but a few. Thus, for example, we are forging a relationship with the Social Work Action Network [SWAN], having a place on its national steering group and are involved closely with the National Coalition for Independent Action, which is striving to reassert in the face of the State's strategy of incorporation the necessary autonomy of the voluntary sector.

Plainly the Campaign remains rooted largely in the English experience. This focus is not born of chauvinism. It reflects no more than our present composition. We are conscious that the devolution of some legislative powers to Wales, Scotland and belatedly Northern Ireland means that at a policy level there are differences of structure and emphasis. As it is a number of activists from Wales and Scotland are attending our national conference, which will open up a dialogue about what is actually going on in practice. Certainly our understanding will be enriched and a wider solidarity nourished by this encounter. The hope is that our effort to organise will encourage similar initiatives across the British Isles. If it is not too grandiose an ambition we wish as well to reach out to youth workers in mainland Europe. How far does our analysis chime with their experiences in such a myriad of settings? We are aware that valuable links are being made at an academic level through the History of Youth Work in Europe group. What we are unsure of, is whether on the ground European workers, operating in contrasting national situations, are motivated by their circumstances to organise autonomously in defence of an emancipatory and democratic Youth Work?

To speak of the European dimension is to summon up the spectre of social pedagogy, which is mistrusted, half-understood and little debated in British Youth Work. We touched earlier on the appearance of a conformist social pedagogy in state-sponsored work, which emphasises 'formation rather than education', imposed rules rather than open dialogue.[Jeffs and Smith 2009]. However the British notion of social education is blighted by the same contradiction. Its aim is more often to socialise rather than politicise. In this sense Lorenz's classic definition of the social pedagogical [or social education] dilemma retains its sharp edge:

*Is social pedagogy essentially the embodiment of dominant societal interests which regard all educational*

*projects, schools, kindergarten or adult education, as a way of taking its values to all sections of the population and of exercising more effective social control; or is social pedagogy the critical conscience of pedagogy, the thorn in the flesh of official agenda, an emancipatory programme for self-directed learning processes inside and outside the education system geared towards the transformation of society?* (Lorenz 1994: 93)

The challenge is to support one another in becoming a collective of critical thorns imagining and creating an emancipatory and transformative educational practice. We welcome your criticism and support.

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# The democracy challenge: young people and voter registration

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In May 2009 at the height of the MP's expenses row, the Prime Minister (Brown 2009) talked about the need for *'major constitutional reform'* which included *'the case for votes at 16'*. In March 2009 one of his cabinet colleagues, Ed Miliband, (Scottish Labour 2009) went even further stating;

> *'We need to do more to hear the voice of young people in society. That is why we need to transform young people's role in our democracy and in my view, introduce votes at 16'*

In Scotland the rhetoric of British Parliamentarians has been put into practice by the Scottish Parliament. The passing of the Health Boards (Membership and Elections) Bill and the introduction of a new model scheme for Community Councils in April 2009 will mean that 16 and 17 year olds will be able to stand for and vote in elections to these bodies.

Whilst this extension of the opportunities young people have to engage with the electoral process should be welcomed, it does present a fundamental challenge. However I would suggest that this challenge also presents an exciting opportunity for community educators.

The challenge concerns the wider context of young people's apparent disengagement from the political process. Specifically, a key prerequisite for young people's active involvement in this electoral process is their inclusion on the electoral register, yet young people as a group, are amongst the least likely to be on the electoral register or engage with formal political processes.

However this context also presents community educators with increased opportunities and motivation to work with young people so they can fully understand and engage with this extension of the electoral process. Therefore learning for and about democracy should be an increased priority for community educators who work with young people, particularly with 16 and 17 year olds.

In this article I want to comment on some aspects of young people's political engagement and in doing so I want to do four things. I'll start by giving an example of how the low registration rate amongst young people can be addressed by using a youth voter registration initiative as a case study. I'll go on to emphasise that in this context of young people's disengagement from the formal political process, educational work aimed at fully developing young people's political literacy must be a core part of any voter registration initiative. I also want to make a case for community educators playing a lead role in this educational work.

I'll conclude by suggesting that despite the flaws in our system of democracy, opting out by young people is not a realistic alternative. The only real potential for their voices to be heard and to influence change is for them to learn about democracy and be encouraged to actively engage in the formal political process. Therefore rather than tinkering at the edges of the franchise, I'll argue the voting age should be reduced to 16 for all elections.

**Young people and electoral registration**

The scale and detail of young people's lack of engagement in the electoral and formal political process is well known through research. For example analysis of the 2005 UK parliamentary elections by MORI found (Electoral commission, P7 2005) that:

> *'Estimates show that young people were half as likely to vote as older age groups and estimated turnout among young people was lower than in 2001: according to MORI, it was 37% in 2005 compared to 39% four years ago'.*

These findings lead some to suggest that there is a potential crisis for democracy in the UK, for example as Russell et al (2002) state:

> *'A central worry for those concerned with the state of democracy in Britain is that young voters might be suffering from what Eliasoph (1988) has termed "the shrinking circle of concern": that widespread indifference to and ignorance of politics is causing an evaporation of the concepts of citizenship and participation'*

In relation to voter registration this low level of engagement was confirmed by an investigation conducted by West Lothian Council officers which found that only 49% of attainers (young people turning 18 in any one year) actually registered to vote in West Lothian. The investigation showed that this was one of the lowest rates in Scotland and this low rate of registration therefore provided the stimulus for action and as a result the Democracy Challenge was created with the principle aim of raising the registration rate for attainers.

The Democracy Challenge is a one hour presentation given to S5 & S6 students in all eleven high schools in West Lothian. The sessions consisted of four elements: (i)how politics affects your life, (ii) the process of registration, (iii) the promotion of further opportunities for engagement in civic activity, (iv) an opportunity, for those eligible, to register at the session. These sessions involved three community educators from West Lothian Council and staff from the Electoral Registration Office (ERO).

The results of this initiative demonstrate clear evidence that the proportion of attainers registering has increased as a direct result of the Democracy Challenge. The ERO publish the number of attainers on the register in December every year, the figure for 2007 was 1082, the figure for 2008 was 1256. From our partnership with the ERO we are able to confirm that the Democracy Challenge was responsible for 182 of these 1256 registrations.

Furthermore as a result of follow up work with schools to include those young people who missed the Democracy Challenge session, a further 71 young people registered after the 1st of December and these figures were not included in the ERO return for December 08. Therefore the total number of young people added to the electoral register as a result of this initiative is 253, some 20% of the total.

Before moving on to consider the educational work needed to support this promotion of registration, I want to make two points about the Democracy Challenge. Firstly this is an easily replicated and cost effective initiative. Also in securing a partnership with the ERO we have found willing collaborators with relevant expertise and appropriate

responsibilities. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, whilst this initiative has been successful, on reflection we have discovered the limits of the work as it stands and uncovered the true scale of the problem.

Despite getting 253 young people on the register who would not have been otherwise, it only scratches the surface of the problem. The total number of attainers left unregistered for 2008 was 986. The problem we face with the Democracy Challenge therefore is that it is primarily focused on attainers who are in high schools, yet the majority of attainers are not in school. Therefore focussing on schools alone can at best only reach approximately 25% of those attainers who are least to register.

Our response to this is to work towards finding and engaging with the missing 986. As a result we are now approaching employers, further education colleges and agencies that have contact with these young people and trying to find ways to offer them a similar opportunity to that offered to those in school. Examples of this work so far include sessions with the West Lothian Council's apprentices and information stalls, targeted at marginalised groups, to raise awareness and promote registration in the lead up to the European Parliamentary elections in 2009. The result from this work was a further 111 under 25 year olds entered on the register for the first time.

## Learning for democracy

Whilst getting young people registered is a key pre-condition to democratic engagement, it is not enough in itself. Young people also have to develop their political literacy in order to see the need for engagement in the first place and then do so in an informed way. As John Stuart Mill (Ch 8) powerfully argued in the debates concerning the extensions to the franchise in the 19th century; *'universal teaching must precede universal enfranchisement'.*

This educational approach is confirmed in some of the current literature on young people's political engagement. As Russell et al (ibid p, 47) states:

> *'If the youngest generations are not participating in politics because they lack sufficient social capital, education ought to be a necessary precondition for reinvigorating democracy. We would argue, however, that active citizenship comprises more than simply voting at elections: the whole range of participatory democracy needs to be covered by any citizenship programme'.*

This need for educational opportunities as a pre requisite to and means of sustaining young people's political engagement seems clear to me from my own work with young people. I would argue that in general they lack knowledge and awareness of what I would term the five P's: Parties, Politicians, Parliaments and Political Processes. For example the following quotations come from young people who had taken part in a Democracy Challenge session and were eligible to vote in the European elections (on 4.6.09);

> *'Modern studies has enhanced my understanding, however young people who have not studied this will probably have little or no knowledge of the voting system, how they work or the government and so no interest in voting. This needs to be put across to young people in a way that is accessible to all so that they all understand'.*

> *'Need more educational courses in place within schools to help young people understand politics and how parliament works'.*

> *'For younger people that are inexperienced at voting give them some sort of pack explaining parties' intentions of what they plan to do because if you Google it you're not really sure on what you are looking for and what is correct information'.*

So to maximise and make meaningful the opportunities presented by this limited extension of the franchise it needs to be accompanied by the promotion of electoral registration. However this should not just focus on the administrative detail of how to do it. It also has to involve educational intervention which engages young people in a critical dialogue which helps them understand why participation in the political process is important. Furthermore to make this educational intervention sustainable it needs to be both followed up and prefigured by longer and more in-depth educational opportunities which help young people to learn about democracy and the political processes and encourages their active involvement in it.

I would argue that the curriculum for this learning for and about democracy should certainly contain knowledge about political institutions, politicians and electoral processes. However, I strongly believe that it should also introduce young people to the history of and ongoing struggle for democracy and the social and political rights we take for granted today. In addition this learning should help young people identify issues in their own lives and how they are affected by politics and what they can do to address these issues and influence changes.

I know from experience that engaging young people in these educational opportunities is difficult as many young people find politics boring and can't see how it affects them. Yet the policy context does provide both the opportunities and the motivation to develop this work as youth empowerment, participation and citizenship are high up the public policy agenda.

Therefore when it comes to developing this work with young people, particularly in and with schools, then I would argue that as a result of the nature of our training and the associated core competencies community educators are best placed to play a leading role in this work and can make a unique and decisive contribution. For example one of the five core values of Community Learning & Development is (see Standards Council 2009);

> *'Empowerment - increasing the ability of individuals and groups to influence issues that affect them and their communities through individual and or collective action'.*

Furthermore community educators are trained to help participants; *'analyse and understand power dynamics and decision-making processes'* , *'participate in decision-making structures and processes'* and *'campaign for change'* (see Standards Council 2009).

## Conclusion

In conclusion I want to turn to what I see as a crucial issue concerning young

people's political engagement. Whilst research evidence does show that young people are disengaged from the political process, they are not apathetic or disengaged absolutely; just from the formal expressions of politics. It seems that they do care about politics and democracy. As Henn and Wienstein (2006: P 528, 529) comment:

> *'The results indicate that young people's apparent reluctance to vote in elections does not signal a lack of interest in 'politics', nor does it indicate political apathy; the evidence presented here suggests that young people are concerned about political matters, and that they have a broad agenda of issue concerns. Furthermore, young people are generally predisposed to the democratic process. They have a strong civic orientation and a firm belief in the principles of voting and elections. However, there is an apparent inconsistency here in that this broad commitment to the democratic process is not translated into actual democratic participation.'*

The causes of this discontinuity between young people's apparent support for democratic values but lack of participation in formal process are complex and varied and I don't have the space to explore these fully in this article however I want to highlight what I think are two important features. One is to do with young people's lack of political literacy, whilst the other relates to how the formal political process operates and the behaviour and language of politicians and parties. As community educators we can't do anything about the latter, but I would suggest we have the competence and the moral duty to do something about the former. We have to find ways in which we can connect or reconnect young people with the formal political process.

Whether we or young people like it of not, and despite its flaws, we live in a representative democracy. As Winston Churchill commented in a speech to Parliament in1947:

> *'No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time'.*

Our current political system is the only one operating and as such I would argue that we need to help young people understand it and actively engage with it and ultimately in doing so it is the only real way their voices can be heard and they can seek to influence the decisions which affect their lives.

Young people are living through difficult times, not least as a result of the recession and the impact on youth employment. They are being affected by the decisions made by politicians in the UK and Scotland. Some examples identified by young people that I have been working with recently include: the increase in the legal age to buy cigarettes and the attempted increase in the legal age to buy alcohol at the Scottish Parliament; economic exploitation in the labour market and the operation of the system for allocating council housing.

In all these areas and more young people are being affected by the decisions politicians make, but they lack the political power to influence them. I would argue therefore that if the Government are serious about the outcomes of citizenship education and see young people as '*citizens of today*,

*rather than citizens in waiting*" (Learning and teaching Scotland 2002 P2), then a major contribution to achieving this would be to follow the direction of policy through to its logical conclusion as I see it and give young people full political power by reducing the voting age to 16 for all elections.

Having the vote and using it is an important right of being an active citizen. However it's not just about expressing a preference periodically at elections. With the use of the vote comes a range of activities which can help develop and sustain political literacy. As Lockyer (2003: P 133) argues:

> *'It provides the focus for a range of political activities – deliberating, debating, persuading, organizing, lobbying, canvassing, and perhaps declaring partisan allegiance. It therefore supplies the rationale for developing the knowledge, skills and attributes which constitute political literacy. It is the culmination of civic and political engagement.'*

Enfranchising 16 year olds may also mean that elected politicians and other decision makers would be more likely to listen to and take seriously the views of young people if they were voters now and not voters in waiting. Furthermore enfranchising young people and the experience of being taken seriously, along with developing their political literacy, may also lead to an increased motivation for young people to engage in civic and political activity. By doing so they might begin to change and improve the political processes which they currently shun.

Michael Sandel (2009; P11) has argued that the values and virtues of democratic citizenship were:

> *'…rather like muscles that develop and grow stronger with exercise. A politics of moral and civic renewal depends, it seems to me, on a more strenuous exercise of these civic virtues'*

Community educators should seize the opportunity the policy context and the recent extension of the franchise offer to play a leading role, in both formal and informal settings, to help young people build up and exercise their 'democratic muscles' so they can learn about and take part in democracy and the political process and take full advantage of the opportunities crated by acquiring these voting rights.

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# Can Social Enterprises Lead the Way for Regeneration and Poverty Reduction?

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This short paper is a summary of a presentation made by the two authors at a conference organised by the Scottish Trades Union Congress in September 2008 around the themes of *Regeneration and Poverty Reduction.* The paper focuses on issues facing Scotland as a whole, but Glasgow in particular, and was written in response to the publication of *Taking Forward the Government Economic Strategy* and *City Strategy Action Plan* by Glasgow City Council in 2008. The authors are particularly concerned that there is little mention of the issues of poverty reduction and regeneration within these documents. Furthermore, within this limited agenda social enterprises are seen as a way forward to tackle these issues but we argue that there are particular concerns regarding their use in pursuing these objectives. The paper is therefore organised on the following lines: firstly the issue and extent of poverty within Glasgow are explored with an analysis of how the City Council, as outlined in the two documents, seeks to tackle these problems. This critical examination is undertaken within an outline of previous policy initiatives. We then proceed to examine potential alternatives to the implicit strategies within the two documents, with an emphasis on social capital and social enterprises. However, whilst social enterprises are becoming one of the preferred vehicles for delivering regeneration objectives we argue there needs to be a full understanding of these organisations and potential problems surrounding their deployment.

The last three decades have seen rising income inequality in the UK with increased poverty amidst escalating prosperity for the few. The driving forces behind this move away from a welfare regime which promoted inclusion and equity can be traced to the lack of well-paid employment opportunities to replace those lost from traditional manufacturing industries, so that the old industrial regions, towns and cities have suffered most. Changing demands in the labour market have shifted jobs to the service sector, where posts are more likely to be temporary and low paid, and located in city cores and out-of-town malls. The continuing high levels of restructuring throughout the period since 1977 have favoured the creation of significant numbers of highly paid jobs in these centres, supported by massive expansions in minimum wage jobs. Geographically, this has produced areas of prosperity and areas of social isolation, which recreate the causes of poverty through generations and markets.

Despite the long-established recognition of these forces for change, their modes of operation and implications, the strategic approach to addressing increasing inequality and poverty has been based on fairly limited policy exercises. In particular, disadvantage has been tackled through measures based upon a supposed 'trickle down effect': expenditure by those who have benefited from economic change through consumption spending will create low paid employment in the private service sectors. Many of these jobs in the core cities of consumption, including Glasgow, are not sustainable, downturns in well paid jobs and the incomes of the rich are quickly transmitted to redundancies in retailing, hospitality and tourism. Having built a new Glasgow founded on this new economy, with its new image forged in festivals, cultural and arts events, the original contradictions of 'who is Glasgow for' continue.

[1] The authors would like to acknowledge the input of Kean Birch, University of Glasgow, to earlier drafts of this paper

The question of whether all benefit from these is coming clearer as the current recession deepens. Considering these previous initiatives, as with the proposals in the *City Strategy Action Plan*, we can see the 'Good Intentions' but there is multi-deprivation in households and neighbourhoods where poverty is endemic. Far too many neighbourhoods are populated by those on the margins or beyond employment and so neglected by a strategy where the emphasis for escape from poverty is on entering the paid labour market. As the market and system creates and recreates worklessness for a significant section of society, there is a continuing flow of new poor into these communities while any fortunate to secure and keep a job are up and off. Many of the new jobs are short-term and non-sustainable, as is now all too apparent. Without a commitment to wholesale investment in social housing and public services, piecemeal housing developments encourage a parallel outward mobility for the few.

Traditionally, at national level other policies would complement other strategic interventions. But since 1977, fiscal transfers have been forsaken in favour of tax cuts for the rich and employment incentives. So, the post-war Keynesianism of tax and spend used to compensate for inequality, and the use of nationalised industries to promote balanced growth across the country, have been ditched by successive Westminster governments. Local authorities and quangos, NDPBs (non-departmental public bodies) and executive agencies have controlled budgets and opportunities to address poverty and inequality while under the devolution settlement only local taxation and the 3% (Tartan Tax) rule can be utilised. Without the fiscal instruments for income and wealth redistribution at local and Scottish levels, cities and regions have pursued supply-side policies (training, advice and guidance) and property-based development plans as the ways to compete in the market for mobile consumer spending. These unilateral measures become the local way of providing potential jobs and income for the poor.

As above, these strategies recreate inequality and instability as they are based on unsustainable expenditure by higher income groups and tourists. Before looking at the role of social enterprises in such an environment, it is insightful to consider an alternative definition of 'the city' than the dominant 'cathedrals for consumption'. Fundamentally, a city is a place for people to live, work, enjoy, and look after - a community, or inter-related system of neighbourhoods. And, together these represent an embryonic local economic system, where people can produce, consume, save and invest in their local community. To maximise the potential of these local systems, there is a need to create and nurture local multipliers, limiting leakages of spending from the local economic system. This requires a holistic approach to social and economic development – very different from the piecemeal, property-led, consumerist expansion and recession of recent times.

It has been argued that the role of social capital is key to this alternative vision and strategy. Despite their multi-deprivation and poverty, deprived communities are still communities, offering the potential to create another way forward. People have an attachment to place that goes beyond consumption and location. Economic activity undoubtedly takes place in these communities: in terms of social, caring, housing, and other services. To an even greater extent than up to now, there is the opportunity for more of this to be undertaken, managed and controlled locally because of the conditions presented by the current recession, public sector constraints and restrictions of investment. As always, there are powerful arguments for developing existing resources, and in particular recognising people as a resource and not as a problem. In theoretical terms, there is the possibility of building on existing social capital whilst bridging to new networks. Social enterprises could be a vehicle for this capacity building process.

Social enterprises have become more important in the last decade; however, to understand why this has become the case we need to examine the potential theoretical underpinnings for the promotion of 'third sector organisations'. This promotion needs to be observed against the back-drop of the liberalisation of markets which coincided with the 'rolling back of the state' which has been a policy objective in the United Kingdom for the last three decades. This has resulted in an extension of the commodification of an ever-greater array of goods and services, with social enterprises seen to have a part to play in this process. Additionally, social enterprises have been encouraged to play a greater role in regeneration projects alongside the social inclusion agenda. The argument here is that, at the local level with a 'triple bottom line' and a democratic and accountable governance structure, social enterprises can be involved in creating much needed 'social capital' in neighbourhoods where it was deemed that regeneration was a priority. In the words of the then Department of Trade and Industry.. "Empowering individuals and communities, encouraging the development of work habits and increasing employment diversity" (DTI 2002).

A further rationale is the correcting of market failures. For example, "Social enterprises create new goods and services and develop opportunities for markets where mainstream business cannot or will not go" (DTI 2002). Private businesses rely on the profit motive to provide the incentive to produce goods and services, where this is absent mainstream businesses will not produce. Traditionally this has been the rationale for state provision of certain goods and services. The political and economic philosophy of 'liberalisation', with the re-emergence of third sector organisations, led to a 'third way'. In other words, a more market orientated approach to resolve 'market failures' means …. "Paradoxically, then, we are looking at the system of regulated capitalism to solve a problem that it has generated" (Blackburn and Ram 2006).

## Issues to think about

One of the ways that has been attempted to promote third sector organisations in the delivery of goods and services in a more competitive market system is through a bidding process for the 'right' to deliver goods and services. That is, it is a contestable market approach, bidding **for** the market rather than the promotion of competition **in** the market. Whilst this approach can provide the incentive required for individual organisations to bid for contracts there is the danger that it can lead to 'uncompetitive markets'. The winner of the contract can achieve a 'cost' advantage over potential competitors. This cost advantage arises through the ability of the winner being able to achieve economies of scale, which are denied to the organisations which have been unsuccessful. This can lead to oligopoly and/or monopoly providers of certain goods and services.

It could also be argued that promoting the model of the 'social enterprise' with a 'social entrepreneur' as the 'leader' of the organisation can create a conflict with other social aims and objectives. The entrepreneur is 'the gatekeeper' and in this role it is s/he who sets the agenda, decides the priorities, controls the resources, etc. that could be in conflict with, for example, a democratic and accountable governance structure. One of the motivations of 'the entrepreneur' is to "be one's own boss" (Hisrich 1986, Caird 1991). Furthermore this approach to promoting social enterprises can lead to:

- the breaking down of existing social capital
- the provision of opportunity for some meaning opportunities withheld from others
- sustainability concerns, with a danger this may become only considered in financial terms to the

neglect of other aims of the organisation

- competition on costs alone, resulting in inadequate resources being secured
- size becoming important so that local social enterprises are squeezed out.

Taking each of these in turn. There becomes increasing pressure on social enterprises to bid for contracts in areas where they do not have the necessary experience or expertise. For example, a mental health charity could bid for a contract to provide shelter for the homeless. Previously, the mental health charity, and the homelessness charity, had a good working relationship. This relationship will be put under strain if the mental health charity won the contract, which could lead to a breakdown in the previous good working relationship - a breakdown in social capital.

With limited resources, which exist at any moment in time within any economy, the winning of a contract by one organisation, means that another organisation loses resources; the unintended consequence could be the promotion of inequality particularly if there is a spatial element to the delivery of the services. With an increasing emphasis being placed on market based activities it could be that other items of 'the bottom line' may be ignored so that the main priority becomes financial survival. If contracts are won on cost grounds alone this could lead to inadequate resources being secured which may lead to the social enterprise having to reduce its existing costs, such as wages and salaries, to survive. It was highlighted earlier that once a contract has been won the winner secures a cost advantage over its rivals, which can lead to a growth in the size of the winning organisation. This growth in size can lead to the securing of additional assets such as staff to write tender documents, resources which smaller social enterprises do not possess; therefore it becomes more difficult for small social enterprises to compete with larger ones.

In this brief paper we have noted the inadequacies of previous attempts to reduce poverty and inequality and argued that current attempts by Glasgow City Council in the future plans for the city won't overcome previous shortcomings. Third sector organisations, such as social enterprises, may be a way forward for the regeneration of some neighbourhoods but the potential problems of utilising social enterprises need to be taken on board if the latest panacea for deprived communities is not to become the latest to fail to deliver.

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# Trust In The Community?

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*Ian Cooke has been a community development practitioner for the last 27 years, and a large part of that time has been spent supporting community activists and community organisations within a succession of local authority and government led regeneration initiatives. As Manager of the Pilton Partnership within North Edinburgh he played a key role in re-constituting the organisation as a development trust, and in 2009 took up post of Director with the Development Trusts Association Scotland.*

Over the last 25 years, an increasing number of communities throughout the UK have established development trusts as a framework for community-led regeneration or as a means to address key community issues. On the face of it this seems to have been a largely organic development, and much of this activity has taken place with limited support from "professional community development". But what exactly are development trusts, what historical, economic and political influences have shaped the development trust movement and what potential do they have to offer within a community development context?

Development trusts come in a number of shapes and legal forms, but essentially they can be distinguished from other types of community organisations in that they possess a number of key characteristics. Firstly, they are community led and community owned; and this is enshrined within their constitutional arrangements. In the main (exclusively in Scotland) development trusts represent defined geographical communities, and are seeking to either regenerate these communities or address a number of key community issues. They are, therefore, multi-issue in nature, rather than single-issue community organisations. In seeking to address these issues, development trusts will work in partnership with public sector, private sector and other third sector organisations – from informal working relationships to joint ventures. Finally, development trusts are committed to reducing their dependency on grant income through the development of an "independent" income stream(s) from trading and social enterprise activities.

Importantly, this enterprising approach includes the acquisition and ownership of assets to host services and activities and / or deliver an income stream for the development trust. In this way the community ownership of assets can provide a foundation from which to launch community led social enterprises and deliver sustainable transformation. The community ownership of assets has the potential to increase the sustainability, independence and status (community groups with assets are players rather than tokenistic or peripheral partners) of the organisation and therefore tends to be the characteristic most associated with development trusts.

The Development Trusts Association, which is the UK-wide body for development trusts, currently boasts a membership of 466 (this includes the 143 members of DTA Scotland) which gives some indication of the scale of the national movement. Within England, development trusts are more prevalent in urban, rather than rural, communities although this position is reversed north of the border where for a variety of reasons Scottish development trusts are more common in island and rural communities. This figure of 466 significantly underestimates the extent of development

trust activity, with at least as many organisations again in existence outwith the membership of the DTA; community organisations who in some cases may not recognise or call themselves development trusts but exhibit all the key characteristics which define development trusts.

What is particularly striking within the development trust movement is the range and variety of communities and organisations; the range of issues being addressed and the activities and services being undertaken to address these issues. In terms of size or scale, development trusts range from those covering small rural settlements of between 40 and 50 people to the large, well established development trusts such as Coin Street Community Builders in central London. Formed over 20 years ago as a community response to the lack of affordable rented housing for local people in the centre of London, Coin Street now has extensive commercial and property interests on the South Bank (including the Oxo Tower and Gabriels Wharf) which have enabled the development trust to establish 4 housing co-operatives and other state of the art community facilities for local people (see www.coinstreet.org ). The scale and diversity of the development trust sector, the ability of development trusts to harness community energy and the creative ways in which they have addressed a wide range of issues has led to an increased level of interest in development trusts from both communities and politicians alike.

The 2009 annual membership survey of the Development Trusts Association calculates that the combined turnover of member development trusts across the UK is £275 million (of which £136 million is earned income) and that the asset base of members is currently worth around £565 million. Viewed in this light, community development seems a much less marginal activity than many community work commentators would have us believe. In addition to land and buildings in community ownership, the assets of development trusts in Scotland include woodlands, harbours, housing, renewable energies (wind turbines, hydro schemes and bio-mass initiatives), castles, swimming pools and other sports facilities, shops, post-offices, hotels, former MOD bases – the list is endless! In addition, development trusts often operate around the area of market failure and many have acquired, and successfully run, a range of commercial businesses, in many cases maintaining vital local services and safeguarding local employment.

The growth of development trusts within Scotland has taken place within (and arguably as a response to) a difficult and challenging context for many communities. For many urban communities, and particularly the poorest urban communities, the last 25 years have been characterised by a succession of regeneration partnerships and initiatives by governments of different political complexions. While the experience of these partnerships, including their limited impact, have been well documented in the pages of Concept and elsewhere, the top down nature of these arrangements have frequently required communities to engage on the terms of the paymaster, with issues and problems (and the required solutions) invariably being defined in advance by politicians and civil servants. Out-with housing funding, the major financial investment has usually taken the form of grant funding, the consequence of which has been vital local services being delivered by fragile community-managed voluntary organisations who are almost 100% grant dependent. The longer term sustainability of this community infrastructure will be tested to the limit in Scotland as the ring fencing of Fairer

Scotland Funding is removed over the coming year or two.

It is interesting to note that over the same period, the issue of rural communities has been virtually ignored within contemporary community work literature in Scotland, yet the experience of many island and remote rural communities has been not that dissimilar to the poorer urban communities – effectively abandoned by the market (apart from the second home / holiday home market which has contributed further to the de-stabilisation of fragile rural communities) and systematically failed by central and local government. Arguably, the major exception to this public sector failure is the approach of Highland and Islands Enterprise (HIE), who have for some years encouraged and supported community based social enterprise as a key element within their economic development strategy. However unlike their urban counterparts, and with the exception of HIE programmes, there has been no major comparable government "regeneration interventions" within island and remote rural communities.

Given these different, yet in some ways related, contexts which many communities have experienced over the last 25 years, it is perhaps unsurprising that a new approach – the development trust approach – has emerged: a framework which enables communities to define and prioritise issues for themselves, engage in genuine partnership working on their terms, release the creativity of local people, reclaim "enterprise" from being the sole preserve of the private sector and increase the community ownership of land, buildings and other productive assets. Because of the different elements within the approach it is difficult to place development trusts neatly within any one part of the political spectrum – indeed the fact that development trusts talk of enterprise and assets in the same breath as co-operation and mutuality perhaps presents a challenge to the nature of the political spectrum itself. In a similar vein, development trusts, as community organisations using an enterprise approach, straddle both the community sector and the social enterprise sector.

Despite this, the development trust movement seems fairly comfortable with itself, where it has come from and where it is going. In terms of the community ownership of assets it can point to a rich historical tradition emanating from the struggles of various groups of people from as far back as the 17$^{th}$ century (the Levellers, the Ranters and the Diggers perhaps being the most well known). Over the centuries, the community ownership of land and assets has ran "like a golden thread through our social history" (Wyler,S 2009), remaining a consistent issue within progressive political thought, and subsequent struggles and movements. The concept of community-based social enterprise can arguably be traced back even further - to the medieval guilds which existed in the twelfth century. Since then, the concept of social enterprise has informed the development of successive progressive movements (including the Chartists, the Rochester Pioneers, Robert Owen's villages of co-operation, the trade union communities of the 1840s, and the early Co-operative movement), often being interwoven with ideas of community ownership.

While the impetus for many of these social movements was the eradication of poverty and exploitation and a desire for transformative social change, development trusts within the current context make no such claims, preferring to draw on their rich historical legacy to provide practical and creative solutions to both traditional community issues and new, emerging issues (such as climate change) with an approach which is both "can-do" and often opportunistic in

nature. As has been described above, the development trust approach is not rocket science and indeed part of the attraction for communities, may lie in both the simplicity and the flexibility of the framework on offer.

The current economic crisis has arguably posed more fundamental questions about the nature of the society we live in than any other event in recent years, summarised in the following quotation from the Independent newspaper - "The present situation has shown us that the purely profit-motivated business model hasn't worked. It never worked for the poor and excluded, but now it can't even survive on its own terms. It has over-borrowed, over-promised and finally the bubble has burst". If ever there was an opportunity to re-focus on the concepts of co-operation, mutuality and social enterprise and the re-emerging economic ideas of thinkers such as E.F. Schumacher, then this is it! However, in the absence of this being picked up by any major political party, then the onus would seem to fall on civil society, and seen within this context the development trust approach may offer an apposite way to engage local communities.

Writing in Newstart magazine (November, 2009), Tony Hawkhead, the Chief Executive of Groundwork UK, argues that "a broken society won't be mended from Westminster or the town hall. Society has to mend itself. This means those people with the most challenges being given the best tools and support to increase their self-reliance …. a community that is motivated and feels involved in decision making can affect real change". Faced therefore with the consequences of further potential economic crises, an increasingly ageing population, and the twin threats of climate change and peak oil, it is fairly safe to conclude that communities will increasingly require to be stronger, cohesive, creative, more autonomous and more resilient.

While the development trust approach seems to have much to offer within the above context, it should be stressed that it is not a panacea for all of society's ills. It does however, arguably, offer a new framework for community development, which draws on the strengths of good, progressive community development practice, whilst at the same time addressing some of its historic weaknesses. Importantly, the development trust approach also addresses many of the problems within traditional, and much of current, community engagement activity (top down, tokenistic, marginal, with imposed partnerships, and agendas). Having said that, the development trust approach is not totally without its challenges - for instance there is a fragility within some of what has been achieved to date, and, like much other community activity, it runs the risk in some instances of community activist burn-out. In addition there can, at times, be a tension between the development trust being both democratic and enterprising. However there is no doubt that increasing numbers of local people are drawing inspiration and motivation from both the development trust approach and each other, and using this to achieve all kinds of success in their communities – often in very adverse circumstances. As more and more communities vote with their feet, professional community development would do well to, at the very least, ascertain why.

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DTA Scotland has recently produced a new learning resource which is available free to community organisations interested in exploring the development trust approach. "Inspiring Change" charts the birth and early years of Comrie Development Trust in Perthshire through a DVD, illustrated wall chart depicting the 'time line' of the trust's journey, and booklet which gives essential ingredients for success as well as relevant information, contacts and tools.

For information, DTA Scotland: 0131 220 2456 or info@dtascot.org.uk

# Can Islam Learn from the Legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.?

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*In October – November 2008, Concept, in collaboration with Queen Margaret University and Moray House School of Education, and with funding from the Centre for Sociology, Anthropology and Politics, organised a series of 'critical 'race' dialogue' workshops. There were two origins of these workshops. The first emerged through a Concept seminar in 2007 to discuss dilemmas faced by community education workers and university teachers relating to Islam and liberalism.*

*In Denmark several cartoons had recently been published depicting the prophet Mohammad in ways which a number of vocal Muslim organisations had vociferously condemned. The conflict had led in several countries to riots and deaths, and in the experience of several community education workers, growing Islamophobia and entrenchment of Muslim communities. In the more protected context of the university, an email debate had raged into the limits or otherwise of freedom of speech, the protection of religious minorities and the right to offend and be offended. The outcome of the Concept seminar was an expressed need for further informed debate about these issues and the possible changing nature of racism in our society.*

*A second source of inspiration for the critical 'race' dialogues was a Queen Margaret University undergraduate programme in Social Justice. Several courses had already been developed as collaborations between the university and campaigning organisations: Friends of the Earth Scotland and Scottish Women's Aid. When developing a course in racial justice, there was some difficulty in identifying a willing collaborator from amongst the many anti-racist organisations in Scotland. During discussions with anti-racist activists it became clear that many organisations had declined in their capacity for campaigning as they had been drawn into delivering services to minority ethnic communities. In addition, several people reported an escalation in new and particularly vicious forms of racism which required responses for which they felt unprepared.*

*The critical 'race' dialogue workshops therefore aimed to resource anti-racism campaigners, community education workers and socially engaged academics, and focused on the themes of Images of 'Race'; Islamophobia; Migration and Globalisation and Whiteness and Scottishness. Following the workshops, several themes emerged which participants thought would be useful to explore in more detail.*

*2008 was also the 40th anniversary of the death of Martin Luther King, and one debate emerged about whether his methods could be appropriately adopted by those tackling Islamophobia. Nahid Aslam, a Scottish Muslim active in a range of anti-racist, anti-Islamophobic and other social justice campaigns reflects on some of her research which was inspired by these discussions, and suggests that there is a wealth of resources for non-violent resistance within Islam, albeit not well known to Muslims* .[Editor]

After participating in the critical 'race' dialogues, I agreed to write about Martin Luther King – that great Christian-American Civil Rights Activist of the 1960s – and say if Muslims can adopt his teachings to some degree and so may be help quash the rising tide of Islamophobia in the world today, particularly in the West. Not an easy task particularly since the Christian World view and the Islamic world view can often to be seen as radically different. Radically different? Do

they not both preach peace and compassion? Of course they do, but there is a radical difference. That is the concept of 'Holy War' or 'Jihad'.

Whereas Jesus seems to be advocating pacifism when one reads passages such as that found in the Gospel of Matthew: "But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." (Matthew 5:39).

The Qu'ran teaches 'Jihad' or fighting the enemy: "Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loves not aggressors". (Chapter2:190).

Muslims will say of their Christian brothers that Christianity is not a realistic religion for the world that we have today. The West, although claiming to be Christian, has so often gone against the very teachings of Christ in its dealings with the world. For example: the phenomenon of Imperialism. The Church and Christians have 'allowed' or even encouraged their 'leaders' (industrialists and government) to invade Eastern lands for natural resources, thus benefiting the whole nation, including the Church.

Thus, it is acceptable in their eyes, say Muslims, to fight against corrupt 'Christians'.

The term 'Islamophobia' made its way into the English language around the 1980s. It is defined as 'dread or hatred of Islam' and by extension, to the fear and dislike of all Muslims. It also refers to the practice of discriminating against Muslims by excluding them from the economic, social, and public life of a nation. In this sense it is similar to the discrimination meted out to the African-American Communities of the USA which led to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and the activist work of people like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King.

Malcolm X, as a converted Muslim, was heavily influenced by the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam. Elijah believed that White America actively strove to keep Blacks from realizing their potential in the political, social, and economic arenas and that they would be unwilling to share these arenas with them. Hence he believed the only way forward was for the 'National of Islam' to create its own separate State for Blacks, independent of White society.

The Baptist Minister, King, on the other hand was influenced by the reconciliatory teachings of Christ such as 'turning the other cheek', and hoped that one day Blacks would be able to share the social and economic opportunities that Whites had. In his famous speech "I Have a Dream", King stated that he dreamed of a day when the sons of former slaves and sons of former slave-owners would be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood and that a day would come when Black people would be judged not by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.

King was heavily influences by the teachings of Mohandas K Gandhi aka Mahatma Gandhi, the Civil Rights activist from India who helped lead Indians towards independence from Britain in the 1940s. Gandhi took his inspiration from sacred texts such as the Bhagavad-Gita but also the Bible. In particular, he was heavily inspired by the 'Sermon on the Mount' teachings.

In a reported conversation between him and Britain's viceroy of India, Lord Irwin asked Gandhi what he thought would solve the problems between Great Britain and India at that time. Gandhi picked up a Bible and opened it to the fifth chapter of Matthew and said: "When your country and mine shall get together on the teachings laid down by Christ in this Sermon on the Mount, we shall have solved the problems not only of our countries but those of the whole world."2 It seems quite clear that although Lord Irwin – a Christian – was not following, or indeed did not have knowledge of his own prophet's teachings. If he did, he would

2 http://www.2006torino.org/sermon

certainly not have been carrying out the bidding of the British Empire by oppressing the Indians and allowing their natural resources to be taken away from them.

King and Malcolm X can be seen as the two differencing faces of Muslims resident in the West at this current time. Martin Luther King was a strong advocate for integration while Malcolm X believed in separation. In the West today there are Muslims who want to convert Europe to Islam yet there are also those who appreciate diversity and respect all faiths and traditions.

The question of a Muslim Gandhi has been posed on many occasions. King as a Christian was influenced by Gandhi, a Hindu. Why have seemingly no Muslim activists fighting imperial oppression been influenced by Gandhi's teachings of '*Ahimsa'* or non-violent résistance? There are after all plenty of examples of violent forms of resistance to oppressive State control in the West!

On the face of it, it seems that many Muslims born and brought up in the West know more about Gandhi than any freedom fighter in their own countries of origin. While writing for this article I conducted a short questionnaire which was put out to the membership of the Muslim Women's Association of Edinburgh. I asked them if they had heard of the Indian - Mohandas K Gandhi and the Sudanese – Mahmoud Mohammad Taha – and if so what did they know about these two men. Most of those who replied, and who had their secondary schooling in this country, stated that they had heard of Gandhi but not of Taha. This is not surprising since at school in Britain, pupils are taught about Gandhi in subjects such as Religious Studies and History, while Taha or any other Muslim Activist for Justice is hardly ever mentioned.

The Western Established Order, it seems to me, has an aversion to portraying Islam as a religion of peace and justice. It would much rather show Muslims acting barbarically – oppressing women, training child soldiers, blowing up State infrastructure, etc – than showing them working to create a better, fairer system for all.

Yet, if one looks outside of the West and into the Muslim World there are examples of individuals who have advocated peaceful resistance to oppressive regimes. One such person is Mahmoud Muhammad Taha (b. 1909), founder of the Sudanese Republicist Party.

Taha was active against the struggle for Sudanese independence from the British. Afterwards he continued his struggle for justice against the Sudanese ruling elites, particularly when they tried to impose Shariah law on his country. Sudan has a large Christian and 'pagan' population living within its borders and he believed that applying Sharia Law would invite the distrust and animosity of these Sudanese citizens. This he felt was contrary to real Islam as he understood it.

Taha made a distinction between the early teachings of the prophet Mohammad in Mecca and the later teachings after he had been expelled to Medina and established a city state. Mohammad's instructions in the context of resistance were nonviolent and quite different from those in the context of governance and control. He was put to death on Friday 18th January 1985 by the Islamic judiciary who accused him of holding unorthodox views of Islam and so feared that he could cause widespread dissention.

He could have escaped execution by fleeing Sudan, yet Taha faced death with remarkable courage and serenity believing that submission to the will of God was the essence of Islam and that one should endeavour to achieve such submission in every aspect of ones private and public life. He often told his disciples to see the hand of the original actor, God, behind that of the apparent actor or immediate cause of the event or incident. For many Sudanese, and perhaps one day to the world at large, when Taha's life and work are fully appreciated, the events of that fateful

Friday will be the most eloquent testimony of his extraordinary moral stature3.

Another example of non-violent alternatives of Islamic political resistance is that of Addul Ghaffar Khan a mid-twentieth-century Pashtun of the Northwest Frontier Region of what is now Pakistan. The very area where civil war has taken hold and the Taliban seem to be in control.

Khan has been called the "Frontier Gandhi". He rejected the 'Islamic' concept of 'eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth' blood feud that is so often commonplace in Pastun-Islamic communities, and the belligerent Pashtun tribal code. Instead he accepted a non-violent interpretation of Islam. Khan was heavily influenced by Mohandas K. Gandhi, and came to interpret the heart of Islam, including the concepts of jihad, as essentially about peace, service, and non-violence. Khan travelled widely in the frontier region that later became Pakistan, and his most significant achievement was to raise a non-violent army of Khudai Khidmatgars or "Servants of God" from his own Pashtun people4. It is unfortunate that Pakistan's education system does not give him much time, yet his legacy does remain within pockets of Pushtun communities living in the West, if not in Pakistan.

The history of Islam and the West has been one of conflict and plunder. Many Muslim homelands have felt the hand of Western oppression and continue to do so. Western-educated Muslim Youth are taught this history in their community centres and mosques, from the internet and each other. Feelings of anger and frustration naturally build up. Yet if King, Taha and Khan were alive today they would beseech Muslim Youth, as they did their communities, not to be consumed with feelings of bitterness and hatred, but rather to conduct themselves with dignity and discipline in their struggle for Justice.

The Sermon on the Mount reaches to the heart of all those that are striving for justice whether they be Christian, Muslim, Hindu or of no religion at all. In particular the following two verses: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". (Matthew 5:1).

Which is why Whites joined Blacks, religious people joined non religious people during the St Andrew's Day Anti-Racism March and Rally which takes place each November in Glasgow. A March which calls for a Scotland which is free from the fear of discrimination, prejudice and racism for everyone.

In his 'Beyond Vietnam' speech Martin Luther King reminded his audience of the power of Love. He said, "Love ….is the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality. This Hindu-Moslem-Christian-Jewish-Buddhist belief about ultimate reality is beautifully summed up in the first epistle of John in the Bible: Let us love one another; for love is God and everyone that loves is born of God and knows God. He that does not love, does not know God; for God is love. If we love one another God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us". 5

Hence my answer to the title question is that Islam has learnt from Martin Luther King Jr. However we need to keep reminding ourselves and others of his teachings as we go about our business in a world that so often encourages our selfish desires to flow out rather than our auspicious ones. Otherwise his legacy can be so easily forgotten.

3 The Republican Thought.

www.alfikra.org/index_e.php

4 Abdul Ghaffar Khan: An Islamic Gandhi by James L. Rowell

5 Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence, by Rev. Martin Luther King . 4 April1967

http://www.ssc.msu.edu/~sw/mlk/brkslnc.htm

# The multicultural circle as a dialogical site of (re)costructing social identities in Edinburgh[6]

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**Introduction**:

The current context of rapidly changing ethno-cultural compositions of European societies represents a challenge for people in both public and private spheres. Global migratory flows that are transforming cities generate 'superdiverse' (Vertovec, 2006) communities with people from widely different cultural backgrounds and experiences. This has produced tensions in various societal aspects with regards to coexistence and cultural diversity and communication among different communities, tensions which have been politicised within the wider integrationist agenda of 'minorities'. In such a climate multicultural learning in communities seems to provide a democratic framework and a valuable starting point for the development of intercultural dialogue and intercultural competence aimed at social and cultural change. As a result, the proposal to create a Multicultural Learning Circle in the community learning centre in Edinburgh with strong traditions of dialogical learning was welcomed as both a necessity and a response to the increasing cultural diversity and mobility.

We start with two key points. Firstly, in this article the collective voice 'we' refers not only to the writers of this text, but also to the participants in the Multicultural Study Circle (henceforth the Circle) [7]. This is not an aesthetic strategy, but rather a material fact backed up by the observation that the Circle itself is a collective accomplishment. Secondly, the driving force behind the writing of this text is ideological; hence it is a value-oriented contribution. This is justified on the ground that any engagement in any discourse (acts of writing or talking) about cultures, identities, religions, etc., necessarily entails description of viewpoints, beliefs, values, etc. These are not innocent or neutral but rather deeply ideological and political because they incorporate various forms of social relations (e.g., Muslims, Christians, socialists, etc.). They also embed contending ideologies (world views) which mutually shape the ways in which the social order is (and should be) structured. Ian Martin (personal communication 2009) is right to point out that 'we need to learn to live together' hinting at the fact that when people interact they mobilise a specific set of ideological assumptions about the world. Yet, we should hasten to add the caveat that endorsing a particular ideological position is not an excuse not to argue your case rationally or to provide supporting evidence (see Fairclough 1989).

[6] Acknowledgements: On behalf of the members of the Circle, we would like to acknowledge the assistance of the ALP project, we are particularly grateful to Stan Reeves for providing the possibilities for setting up the Circle. We are also thankful to Mae Shaw for the encouragement to share our experience with others through the mediational platform 'Concept'. Our thanks are also extended to Ian Martin and John Player for their support and solidarity. We are grateful to Eurig Scandrett for his valuable comments and suggestions which have certainly improved the transparency and dialogicality of the paper.

[7] Current membership includes: Mohammed Yahia, Wei Qing, Haruka Yazaki, Benji Grant, Rise Kagona, Sylvia Trotter, Nahid Aslam, Anna-Maria Maguire, Kishor Dangol, Fastima Cherkaowi

The article is divided into three sections. In the next Section we provide some historical background about the Circle and the ways in which it is collectively managed. In the final Section, we draw on the discussion to make a set of statements that will constitute our ethical commitment to the principles of dialogic education in the Circle.

**The Multicultural Study Circle as a Site for Interrogating Social Realities**

The Circle, which is part of the Adult Learning Project (ALP), has emerged as a response to a rapidly changing social and cultural landscape in Scotland not just in terms of the enlarged presence of diverse ethnicities, but also with respect to a variety of multicultural experiences and practices. Out of the context of multiculturalism, the Circle has been created as the necessity to improve our understanding about cultural diversity through sharing cultural knowledge and celebrating differences with the aim to facilitate the social integration of ethnic minorities, and to challenge the cultural stereotyping of the 'Other' as problematically different. Therefore, the task of the Circle is not just to exchange cultural experiences and to learn about each other's cultures, but to promote tolerance and social justice and to be part of a struggle for a better society. In this respect, the Circle offers a common space that allows learners to examine and critically scrutinise 'the facts presented by the real concrete context' (Freire, 1994: 257) and their daily experiences, using their cultural differences as a basis for critical exploration and learning in the context of shared dialogue. From a pedagogical perspective, the Circle is organised around Freire's principles of critical education as a site where learners can be empowered through problem-posing and mutually created dialogue, which encourages participants to collaborate actively with fellow learners and to act as the 'knowing subjects' (Freire, 1994: 259).

Paulo Freire was a radical educational activist whose work in the area of critical pedagogy is committed to the project of transforming the world. His metaphor of 'banking education' which refers to the view of knowledge as a static set of facts 'deposited' by teachers in students is both insightful and transformative. Freire has endorsed an approach that begins with raising the general awareness of the oppressed by enabling them to uncover the causes of their oppression (see Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 2008). However, to avoid the essentialising trap against which Freire has issued his metaphorical warning, we tend through our reflections and actions in the Circle to engage in a critical textual dialogue with Freire. Hence, we provide a grounded perspective through which the work of Freire can be empirically interrogated. For example, each one of the participants has her/his own (auto) biographical narrative which defines 'who' she/he 'is'. Some of the situated personal narratives were historically constructed through various 'non-Western' literacy practices., Against this historical background, the participants not only reject but resist the universalising claim embedded in the autonomous view of literacy that only the western-type of literacy is the valid way of reading the world.

The participants have drawn on their vast cultural resources and experiences that inspired the first dialogical discussions and brainstorming sessions. This led to a collaborative creation of a learning programme which includes the following themes:

- Personal and national identity.
- Social and economic factors in your country (e.g., how do social and economic factors diminish or raise the possibilities of social success?).

- Tales, proverbs, stories and crafts as the main constituents of culture.
- Personal and national heroes.
- The most important historical events in your country.
- The impact of current economic and political relations on the cultural make-up of your country.

These themes were critically explored using the methods of codification (representation) and decodification (analysis) conducted at three levels: descriptive, affective and interpretive with the aim to arrive at 'the critical level of knowing' (Freire, 1994: 257). We have started with the learners' lived experiences of the situation in different cultural contexts and diverse cultural knowledges. During the process of codification a variety of 'knowing subjects' was used, which took the form of a picture, a photograph, a video, a slide show, traditional crafts and musical instruments representing codes originated from different cultural settings. As a result of the decoding process, some learners re-evaluated their understanding of themselves as well as their feelings towards the countries which define them. These issues were revealed and shared in dialogical discussions amongst participants reflecting on the learning process by, for example, commenting:

1. 'I think more deeply about my own country in order to explain it to others' .
2. 'I find it exciting to talk about my own country'.
3. 'The class is an opportunity to externalise the longing or sad feelings about being away from my home place'.
4. 'My feelings about my country are more complex and contradictory. The class is an opportunity to become more objective about your love'.

As the participants' reflexive statements show, the Circle has acted as a dialogical platform in and through which they can 'externalise' the taken-for-grantedness about their socio-cultural identities (e.g., their countries, home place, the love, etc.). For example, one of the participants (statement 4) pointed to the 'complex' and 'contradictory' feelings about her/his country. It is this complex set of 'contradictions' which assigns a dynamic to our social identities and cultures. We should note here that some of these statements were made against the background of a discussion on 'national geographies'. Here, for example, through a critical process of decodification of 'geographical maps', the participants interrogated the (colonial) genealogy of the notion of 'nation-state' and 'national identities' as bounded and fixed units.

The discussions consisted of a series of actions (e.g., talking and writing) and reflections (e.g., critiquing what is said/written) which have exposed the hidden historical character of the social constructs such as the 'West' and the 'East'. These social constructions are not 'innocent' since they incorporate ideologies which in turn shape our power relations producing in the process structures of domination and subordination.

Penrose and Howard (2008) are right to argue that in the current context of multiculturalism Scottish people are under most pressure to review their cultural and social attributes, and this can be a very profound demand as it involves changing their national identity. From this perspective, the Circle contributes fresh and novel ways of understanding and responding to such complex interplays through dialogic learning and critical analysis of how these transformations are experienced and lived through the modalities of daily existence.

For participants of the Circle, the notion of 'culture', for instance, provides them with a pedagogical powerful tool for reflecting about themselves, their relationship to others and their position in society as social and cultural subjects. It also offers a common public space in and through which to analyse the changing context of Scotland as a place for many cultures and where the critical exploration of common issues such as identity and political relationships create a sense of solidarity and cohesion amongst group participants. The latter is the grounds for both the democratic atmosphere in the group and the promotion of the possibilities of shared dialogue as 'the seal of the act of knowing' (Freire, 1994: 259). These interrelationships are evidenced in learners' feedback:

5. 'I enjoy learning from others like in a family'.
6. 'The class allows us to have dignity and showed us how we are linked in common human concerns'.
7. 'The class is an equal sharing of our time together and encourages new people'.
8. 'Our tutor gives us a voice and the sessions are managed in democratic and respectful way'.
9. 'Can we find a way to share what we have discovered and enjoyed with other people, so our work can make a difference?'.

Two key words are mentioned in the above statements that might summarise the rationale for setting up the Circle. The word 'voice and 'difference' (statements 8 and 9 respectively). The term 'voice' here can be interpreted as a reference to social identities of these participants (politics of voice). And it is through 'difference' that these voices and identities are given value and meaning. These reflexive statements clearly identify the democratic possibilities of multicultural learning in a collaborative way as well as the future potential of the Circle that would allow change through common action. For example, the idea of the Cultural Festival, which is initially originated by participants of the Circle in a form of a structured programme, is not merely designed as an entertainment event, but more importantly as a social and cultural action in which participants take an active part. The aim is to promote non-judgemental attitude towards ethnic minorities, to develop harmonic relations between different cultural groups in society and to cultivate a sense of social inclusion and justice.

The second phase of the Circle has culminated in a new learning programme generated by 'co-educators' through an active dialogue in which the themes were identified and negotiated. This democratic process of constructing knowledge by learners and co-ordinator has allowed each participant to articulate views and to say her/his own word. Such

fundamental elements of democracy initially exercised by the participants of the learning group in the public space at a micro-level are expressions of Freire's ideas and practices adopted by ALP. The Circle has become an organic part of ALP enabling people to engage with and analyse critically their lived reality and their 'real' cultural contexts. This critical discourse allows affirming of the worth of different types of culture and cultural groups, claiming that each culture has its own importance and validity. We use the term 'culture' to refer to the 'complex of values, customs, beliefs and practices which constitute the way of life of a specific group' (Eagleton 2000: 34). The Circle harnesses cultural studies as a comprehensive framework for constructing views of the world and identities, for analysing society and politics with the purposes of individual empowerment and social and democratic transformation.

**By way of conclusion**:

In this paper we have reviewed the activities of the Circle as a site of critical education and solidarity in Edinburgh. We have demonstrated how the Circle is a response to the much-needed grounding in 'here and now' of the abstract notions of 'cultures', identities', etc. We have shown the ways in which the Circle has become a site in and through which the participants perform various historical narratives and negotiate social relationships (e.g., the construct of 'national heroes'). One thing which we have learned is that 'world views' (ideologies) are not fixed universals. They are contestable (as they have always been) ways of doing 'being/becoming' in life. In the Circle, participants have engaged in the dialogic acts of 'being/becoming' Russian, Zimbabwean', Scottish, English, Japanese, Chinese, Moldovan, Spanish and Sudanese. Through the analysis of these doings of 'being', we have problematised the mainstream fixed notion of 'multiculturalism'. In the light of the above discussion, we end this endeavour by the following statements which make up our ethical commitment in the Circle to the principles of dialogical education, and we invite you (the dialogical reader of this article) to get engaged in this ongoing learning process:

1. We, the participants to the Circle, declare that all forms of knowledge and meta-knowledge (ways of talking about knowledge), which we construct in and through the very process of debating our acts of 'being/becoming' specific types of socially-recognised persons, constitute the underlying moral foundation of our resistance to all forms of unreflective and antidialogical banking education which might lead, consciously or unconsciously, to damaging and disadvantaging the 'Other'.
2. We reserve and exercise the democratic right to 'name the world in our own word' through the dialogical making of our own social theories about the world which we inhabit.
3. We believe that all forms of knowledge are socially and historically constructed. We undertake to (critically) endorse the principles of dialogic learning as a way of transforming our own social realities.
4. We demand that all our 'world views' be validated by whoever comes in contact with them as situationally legitimate ways of doing 'social-being' in life.
5. Inspired by Freire's (1993: 65) pedagogical principle that 'problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming – as unfinished, uncompleted beings

in and with a likewise unfinished reality', we undertake to adopt a problem-posing attitude that rejects outright any homogenising position which objectify our 'identities', 'cultures', languages', etc., as statically fixed given, rather than as inherently dynamic and contextualised processes.

6. Drawing on Freire's (1993: 52) stance that 'education is suffering from narration sickness', we commit ourselves in the Circle to the resistance through praxis (reflection and action) to any overarching and universalising 'scientific' narratives that are insensitive to our historically situated cultural identities.
7. We assert our commitment in the Circle to the continuing development of a democratic educational programme which not only respects but is itself constituted out of the contextualised 'world views' of the participants. Our moral guiding principle in this respect is this: 'One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action programme which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a programme constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding. The starting point for organising the programme content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people' (Freire 1993: 76).

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**Book Review**

# Informal Learning in Youth Work

By Janet Batsleer
Sage Publications, London, 2008 172pp
ISBN 978-1-4129-4619-3(pbk)

Reviewed by Ken McCulloch,
Department of Higher and Community Education, Edinburgh University

This is a welcome addition to the growing literature on the purposes and processes of youth work. It approaches a somewhat similar territory to that covered in Mark Smith's *Local Education* (Smith 1994) but with a sharper focus on youth work rather than the more general themes of what some still prefer to call community education discussed in the earlier work. Janet Batsleer is well known for her feminist commitment to work with girls and young women, and in this book a strong commitment to equality and diversity in her treatment of gender, class and ethnic inequalities is commendably evident. It is clearly aimed at an audience of students and practitioners in youth work and should be accessible to readers at a range of different stages and levels.

The book consists of sixteen chapters, mostly around ten pages each, organized under four larger headings. This scheme gives what might otherwise be a fairly disparate collection of ideas and discussions a coherent framework and effectively stitches together what could otherwise look like a collection of separate essays rather than a unified text. It took me some time to come to grips with the book as a whole but once I began to understand the structure the contributions of the various parts started to make more sense. Its biggest flaw is probably its ambitious scope. So many themes and issues are touched on that many are necessarily dealt with rather briefly and without perhaps providing sufficient signposts to other resources. The very brief sections on self-destructive behaviour and suicide were an example of that, enough to signal the significance of the issue but not sufficient really to resource effective professional decision-making around such issues.

The first section considers some of the broader 'public issues' that provide a background for much of what youth workers need to consider in their practice. The chapters on *Identity and Rights*, and on *Social Exclusion and Inclusion* provide useful explorations of the context, both of policy and ideas, against which youth workers in the UK and more generally need to consider the purpose and nature of their work. The third chapter in this section, on *Reflective Practice in the Context of Diversity*, seemed less satisfactory, delivering much less than the title promised.

The two middle sections, headed Getting to Know Young People and Getting Deeper are really the core of the book, exploring a wide range of issues and problems that youth workers need to understand. Theoretical resources are deployed with a light touch so that readers will recognize that there are extensive research literatures on, for example, youth transitions or subcultures but without becoming entangled in thickets of dense references or complex arguments of the kind that can easily turn off many readers. For a more academic audience this might be seen as a weakness and indeed there were places where I found the text under-referenced and over reliant on the author's articulate and authoritative voice. In some ways I liked the final section best. The title 'Unfinished Conversations' nicely conveys the idea that answers or solutions to problems are provisional and emergent, and that some issues, such as personal despair and unhappiness at the

individual level, and political engagement and participation at the structural level, are likely to remain problematic.

Janet Batsleer has a distinctive voice and a lot of interesting things to say about youth work. She has brought a lifetime's experience as a practitioner and as a teacher to this project and while I sometimes found myself disagreeing with some aspects of her approach, I found far more to like and agree with in this book than the converse. It is both to be commended for its breadth of focus as well as criticised for lack of depth on some places but overall this is a really useful and important new resource for students, practitioners and teachers of youth work.

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## CD Review

# A'Adam's Bairns

By Fred Freedman, National Library of Scotland and Scotdec

Reviewed by Eileen Penman

Celebrating and understanding Scottish history in song is the purpose of this CD which is a joy to listen to. Released a couple of years ago, it was produced as part of a partnership project developed by the National Library of Scotland, Scotdec and Dr Fred Freeman and had the honour of an official launch in Edinburgh's Queens Hall. For some of the songs Dr Freeman was able to draw on a considerable number of song collections in The National Library of Scotland's extensive archives. Most of the remainder is drawn from the splendid songs of the contemporary Scottish folk movement. There is nothing romantic or schmalzy about the songs, chosen for their historical and current focus on our sectarianism, racism and prejudices against Jews, Travellers and the Irish.

The superb opening track, 'Hawks and Eagles', though written twenty five years ago by Ian Walker, is still outstanding today both in word and melody. Inspired by the massacre at Uitenhaage in apartheid South Africa in 1985 when people on a funeral procession were shot, many in the back, it is not sung so much nowadays, but I remember teaching it while a tutor with the Adult Learning Project in the1990s. There are 18 tracks altogether, including 'A Man's a Man', 'The Freedom Come All Ye', 'Why Dae They Say I'm Only a Jew?', 'Indian Death Song' and 'I Am The Common Man'.

For more information about the project, please contact the Education & Outreach officer at the National Library of Scotland (www.nls.uk) or the Coordinator, Scotdec (www.scotdec.org.uk)

## Speaking tour review

# Sathyu Sarangi International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal

Reviewed by Kathy Jenkins
Scottish Hazards Campaign

In July 2009, Satinath Sarangi (Sathyu) was awarded an honorary doctorate by Queen Margaret University for his work for social justice. Whilst in the UK, he spent a week travelling, speaking, teaching, discussing, working to reach as many people as possible in those seven short days. Looking back, I realise that

when I learned that Sathyu, a core activist with the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal and founder of the Sambhavna clinic was coming to Scotland, I expected the experience, commitment and intelligence he brought. What I had not anticipated was his humour, his poetry, the strength of his optimism and the intensity of his love of people and of life.

When gas leaked from the Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal on 3 December 1984, thousands died and a life long struggle began for survivors and their families and community. Sathyu, then a young man, abandoned his PhD to support and work with those survivors and has continued to do so ever since. Through his visit last year, he gave all of those who met and heard him a personal insight into what happened in Bhopal that night; its historical and current impact on Bhopal's people; and the ongoing campaign for justice, for clean water, for health care, for environmental and community restitution and restoration.

Sathyu painted a vivid picture of the appalling legacy of Union Carbide (now Dow Chemical) negligence: the company's under resourcing and failure to prioritise health and safety; the deliberate and documented decisions to operate with different standards in India than the USA; the refusal, following the disaster, to provide vital toxicological information that would have saved lives and reduced suffering; the failure to clear the factory site leading to the continued contamination of water…and of the resulting birth defects, cancers, TB, mental health problems.

Sathyu then told us the history of the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal, of the Bhopal Group for Information and Action, of the formation of a women's trade union, the successful mobilisations to keep Dow from re-entering India and of the emerging involvement of young people. He gave us some idea of the vast amount of work undertaken by the community with help from professionals to fill the gaps left by the failure of Union Carbide and the Indian Government to investigate, record and address past, ongoing and new health issues. This included the development and use of verbal autopsy to try to reconstruct medical and epidemiological evidence of the links between exposures, ill health and death; the development of health monitoring units using local working class volunteers; the establishment of the Sambhavna clinic, incorporating mainstream medical care, a range of complementary therapies, yoga and the growth and use of a range of plant medicines.

Sathyu shared with us the determination of people in Bhopal to maintain their own ethics and integrity - to recognise, understand and reject the values of multinational industrial and financial institutions which has so coloured their lives. An example of this is their determination not to patent new plant medicines and to encourage local communities throughout the world also to refuse, in order to break the circle of 'poison and profit' inherent in the current global practices of the pharmaceutical industry.

**Events**

In the short time Sathyu was here, he addressed six major events and gave numerous media interviews.I attended three of these at which he presented and facilitated discussion with participants:

-A half day seminar on Corporate Accountability and Environmental Justice hosted by Queen Margaret University. Sathyu was a keynote speaker, joining Duncan McLaren, the Chief Executive of Friends of the Earth Scotland, Andrew Watterson, the head of the Stirling University Occupational and

Environmental Health Research Group, and representatives from the Scottish Trade Union Congress, the Scottish Hazards Campaign and Families Against Corporate Killers.

-A Public Meeting in Edinburgh where Sathyu spoke on 'Bhopal 25 Years On: Corporate Crime and People's Resistance'

-The Annual UK Hazards Conference, Manchester. This conference brings together over 500 occupational health and safety activists, the majority of whom are elected trade union health and safety representatives. Sathyu address the opening Plenary session and facilitated a number of workshops/meetings including one on Action on Corporate Accountability in the UK and Internationally.

Through these three events alone, Sathyu brought his knowledge, experience and passion to well over 700 people.

(Other major events were in Middlesbrough, Teesside, the UK's poorest and most polluted region; the Frontline club, London for foreign correspondents; and at the launch of the film *The Yes Men Fix the World*)

His time here also strengthened ties between health, safety and environmental campaigns in the UK and India. It stimulated UK actions to mark the 25th anniversary of the Bhopal gas leak, fundraising for the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal and the Bhopal Medical Appeal, and invitations to other Bhopal campaigners to participate in the 2009 Scottish Hazards Conference and the forthcoming European Works Hazards Conference being held in September 2010.

In extreme, adverse conditions, the Bhopal movement has brought together community action with trade union struggles; problems of poverty with environmental issues; welfare services with pressure on the state to provide; health care with a campaign against the causes of ill health. There are lessons here for activists and community workers in the UK and Sathyu's work has been an inspiration to many who heard him.

*Excerpts of interviews with Bhopal survivors and campaigners, including Sathyu, can be found in* ***Bhopal Survivors Speak: Emergent Voices from a People's Movement****, published in 2009 by Word Power Books.*