

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.

Reference

Smith, M 1994 *Local Education: Community, conversation, praxis* Buckingham; Open University Press

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 the 1990s. 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.*