

**Book Review**

**Community Education, Learning and Development  
(Third edition)**

Lyn Tett with a chapter by Ian Fyfe  
Dunedin Academic Press, 2010

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Readers of *Concept* will I'm sure be familiar with the earlier editions of this work by Lyn Tett. Perhaps like me you can take pleasure then in the fact of a third edition, an affirmation that the topic is in demand, that the book is selling well and is being read by a wide audience. In these acutely austere times an intellectual work that amplifies traditions of democratic renewal through community education is to be thoroughly welcomed.

Across seven chapters in this short but rich imprint Tett shines a light into the recesses of community education, identifying with contesting principles for practice and evolving traditions in policy. The stated aim is to provide an analysis of the conceptual, policy and political ideas underpinning community education and the variety of practices in which community educators engage. The amendments made in this third edition include reworked chapters, including a wholly new chapter on young people and community engagement, and sufficient new material to give the book fresh appeal. The new chapter on youth work is an important and timely addition.

The first chapter takes the reader through a history of the traditions that shape and underpin community education practice. This is an important chapter in revisiting history to uncover contrasting yet oppositional philanthropic and radical strands that remain as ideological and contested foundations for contemporary practice. The extrapolation of conceptions of "community" and the notion of "contrived communities" assists in setting up an analysis of how community education operates at the meso level "between the individual and the state, the local and the global, the personal and the wider society".

This material sets up the appraisal of the problems and possibilities of the largely top-down policy agenda – the ebb and flow of the fortunes of community education, the pull of successive governmental initiatives constrained by neo liberal conventions and the tensions and dilemmas facing practitioners who, perhaps as a result of these influences, did not feel empowered to practice. Despite an espoused central role being ascribed to community learning and development in policy the chapter also exposed the concomitant detachment from community education's distinctive epistemology and methodology.

Lifelong learning as a European tradition forms the basis for analysis in the third chapter and sets the evolution of community education in the context of a

European/global policy drive. The consequent utility afforded to learning only as it is applied to the economy is correctly critiqued. Perhaps there is an omission in this chapter in that these same policy movements have seen the growth of the FE sector in community learning an analysis of which may have been of interest. The extrapolation of a set of fallacies in lifelong learning is astutely used: as a means of highlighting inappropriate commodification in learning; highlighting weakness in causal links between learning and economic success; identifying that failings are not simply the fault of the individual; and identifying the profound unfairness of access in education. The paradoxes once uncovered by Tett go to the heart of policy incongruity and practice inconsistencies.

It is this concern for social justice in analysing policies that takes Tett to a consideration of social practices, situated learning, learning from experience and collaborative learning in her fourth Chapter - entitled Learning, Knowledge, and Development. Dominant discourses of deficit and remediation are taken to task in a section that draws out lessons from family literacy work and work on health inequalities – cases studies that provide an exemplification of working **in** the community, **with** the community and **for** the community. There is more than a hint of popular participation in what she terms these more active forms of politics – a necessity for democratic renewal according to Tett.

Ian Fyfe, a colleague of Lyn Tett at the University of Edinburgh, provides the fifth chapter entitled Young people and Community Engagement. It takes a similarly rigorous approach to analysis – plotting policy developments and drawing on accounts of citizenship to locate the discourse of youth participation as community engagement. One question I had was about a discourse of youth work that is perceived to be predominately male and white – I wondered about the locus of young women or minority groups - are they being omitted from practice and therefore from these discourses of citizenship? I was also reminded on reading this chapter of the ongoing arguments we have had with community development traditionalists who themselves had not experienced youth work as community development and who had allowed its omission from their discourse. That youth work is predictably configured in policy to meet conflicting conceptions of risk (passive) or trouble (active) is effectively critiqued and contrasted with an approach to young people as active citizens. Typologies provide a tool for analysis and highlight the insidious pressure in policy and resourcing to move away from epistemological and methodological traditions that are core to youth work.

Chapters six and seven confirm that a healthy democracy requires a robust civil society. At the nexus of contested notions of citizenship, society and diversity lie core concerns about the constitution of community, about intersectionality, about collective efficacy and about activism. Educating desire is essentially an enterprise in going against the grain of the taken for granted in a neo-liberal common sense. Tett rightly poses questions about whose experience counts and sets this in the context of considerations of reflexivity and new ways of constructing knowledge. It is this that paves the way in the final chapter for considering the possibilities for democracy and equality. The intellectual traditions and scholarship of Ian Martin provide a core for analysis informing conclusions both for the chapter and for the book overall. Ideas

about courage, hope desire, and risk are balanced against cooption and incorporation in the interest of domination and exploitation.

Overall this is not a book that proselytises. Rather it is a carefully researched and balanced account of the antecedents, developments, pressures, contestations and constraints on particular forms of community education practice in Scotland. The analysis is systematic and clearly principled, showing how spaces can be created to challenge narrow policy conceptions of what constitutes learning and development. My reading is that Lyn Tett is rightly proprietorial in holding firm to a vision of democracy and equality that arises at the intersections of risk and the education of desire. A case is made for models of community engagement and learning configured around principles of social purpose democratic education. This is a book therefore that should be essential reading to politicians and policy makers, to practitioners and students and to the various agents of education research and development.

The book leads the reader to an appreciation of the yeast of education and to finding a way “to make a particular kind of politics pedagogical” (Ian Martin again). The text offers an analysis therefore of purposeful intervention in the interests of social and political change. It ends with four redolent words that could provide no greater testament to its value in mapping a route to a “*more democratically just society*”.