

Review

Talk Scotland Education Campaign

Introduction

The concept of a *Talk Scotland* campaign was originally put forward by WEA Scotland in a paper which outlined the aims and actions of an impartial public education campaign which would be accessible to all of Scotland's people, in the run up to the Scottish Independence Referendum. The plan was to set up a consortium of partners who would undertake a range of educational work: produce materials and resources; host online discussion and learning; run a media campaign; and fundraise to support all of these activities.

In the end these proposals did not materialise in the way they had been envisaged across Scotland, but in Edinburgh, through the wider Community Learning & Development (CLD) sector much of the ambition of the original *Talk Scotland* idea was realised.

An initial meeting was called by the Edinburgh WEA tutor organiser in June 2013 which brought together about 25 people who were already involved, or interested, in undertaking educational work around the Referendum – including CLD workers, libraries, voluntary organisations, community schools and tutors offering courses. There was discussion about the range of activities which might be organised under the Talk Scotland theme, both targeted and open to all, and whether members of the group might come together to jointly organise some large scale events. In the end, as most people were busy with Referendum- related activities in their own work contexts, it was agreed that the most useful role for the group would be twofold:

- a) information sharing about activities and how best to publicise these
- b) putting together the wide range of resources that people had researched, developed and written, and the courses and activities that had been run, and having these all available in one place for people to share

The group continued to meet every 6 – 8 weeks for almost a year and was a valuable forum for sharing information about events and activities; for people talking in detail about courses they had run; bringing information about resources that people had either put together themselves or had found useful elsewhere eg in libraries, online.

Talk Scotland then became an umbrella term for a wide range of CLD sector activities, adult education classes, workshops, public events, work with young people and adult learners that were organised to inform and engage people in the run up to the Referendum. These included the following:

Active Citizenship Group Seminars

The Edinburgh Active Citizenship Group is a partnership of workers in the City of Edinburgh Council, the Voluntary Sector and Edinburgh University which organises regular, large-scale, free public seminars around issues of interest or concern, creating a public space for education and debate with academics, policy makers and media personnel. The group organised four seminars around the Referendum and people's visions for a future Scotland, which attracted between 70 and 100 people. Two other events were organised jointly with other organisations – one an intergenerational debate with a local youth project and the other with Edinburgh University after the Referendum looking at 'what next?'

Classes and Groups for Adults

The first course to be run, which was called *Talk Scotland* was offered from scratch and tutored for the WEA by Colin Campbell. This course was about encouraging people to have a vision about the sort of Scotland they would like to see and also about issues around democracy, the history of Scottish Politics and understanding the workings of the Scottish Parliament. All the materials used were written up as a resource pack for other tutors to use.

At the same time, Alex Wood, an adult education tutor, was running the first of his Roads to Referendum courses in two of the community high schools in the city. This course also looked at the historical background to Scottish politics and culture: broad concepts such as nationalism, national independence; internationalism and

globalisation and their impact on Scottish politics; the implications of both an independent and a devolved Scotland. This was picked up by the *Scotsman* newspaper when Tax Payer Scotland argued that tax payers ‘money should not subsidise political education classes’.

Both these courses were offered as part of the Council’s city wide Adult Education Programme, which people pay a fee to attend, and were extremely popular – with students in one class continuing to meet to discuss the issues after the 8 week course had finished.

Referendum Events for Literacies Learners

Two half day events were organised in the city centre for literacies and ESOL learners. Learners did preparatory work in their groups, then came together for a morning to learn about the context of the Referendum: constitutional history; devolved and reserved powers; how to vote; and to discuss what kind of Scotland they would like to see. Key issues were prioritised and the second event included speakers from Yes and No campaigns to address the students’ issues from each perspective.

Work with Young People

Political and critical literacies work with young people.

Will Golding, a youth and adult tutor, was employed for 9 months to work with young people from 16 to 25 - using a critical literacy approach to develop resources. This included exploring democracy and active citizenship in relation to issues of importance to the young people, and the Referendum. One of the activities was “A’ dinnae dae politics” which offered a range of different sessions for young people to choose from.

Will also ran 27 Referendum events or workshops in youth clubs, or youth forums, and worked with young people to organise hustings and two short action research projects with different groups focusing on the Referendum. He also delivered upskilling sessions for youth workers and CLD workers, delivered workshops to practitioners at the Scottish Peer Education Network conference and the South East &

Central CLD workforce development consortium 'Inspiring Practice' conference, and developed an extensive range of resources.

Callum MacLeod, based at Broughton High School organised a wide range of events for school pupils, including mock elections, film screenings of *Better Together* and *Yes Scotland* videos, information stalls, a poster competition, debate, question time, a visit to the Scottish Parliament and a drama project as well as collaborating with school staff to integrate Referendum education into the curriculum.

He has also started up a participation newsletter for children and young people in North Edinburgh called *The Charger*.

Gavin Crosby, the Youth Work Strategy Implementation officer:

- was involved with the Edinburgh Youth Work consortium in training youth workers across the city in democracy education.
- helped develop a lesson plan 'Democracy on the Move' about decision making, registering to vote and the impact of political decisions in daily life – which can be used by workers with a small amount of training.
- encouraged youth workers to get young people to register to vote, and created a 'branded' registration form which could be used to record the impact of the push to get people registered.
- supported the Scottish Youth Parliament who were also rolling out the resources developed in Edinburgh on registration and reasons to vote - 'Aye! Naw! Mibbe!.

A range of other Referendum and political education initiatives also took place in local communities. These included:

- *People and Power* classes on Scottish political history for people in north Edinburgh;
- *People and Power* events at North Edinburgh Arts – including films, plays and discussion about the Referendum issues.

- The Adult Learning Project held a co-investigation to engage local people in political dialogue in the build up to the Referendum.
- *Write Around Our Referendum* – a 6 week course exploring writing around the theme and discussion in South West Edinburgh.
- Ladies Referendum Coffee Morning in Leith.
- 4 week Road to Referendum course at South Side Community Centre.

A particularly interesting piece of work was undertaken with homeless and vulnerable men through CRISIS Skylight. The men worked with a tutor to discuss the Referendum from the starting point of issues of concern to them eg benefits, sanctions bedroom tax. They decided to tackle these through humour and comedy, writing their own material, and planned to present comic sketches to homeless people to encourage them to take part in the political process and develop confidence. The group won the Outstanding Achievement Award at the 2014 Edinburgh Adult Learners' Week Achievement Awards. City Libraries came on board by theming book groups around the Referendum, holding a debate and producing a resource list of relevant materials.

Resources

Many of the above activities resulted in the development of some excellent resources and the *Talk Scotland* Group collated all of these, as well as other relevant articles, literature, teaching packs and links to useful online resources. They were all downloaded and are available for anyone to access and use at www.upskilling.org.uk/home/talk-scotland-materials-resources

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