

# **Community Leadership for Grassroots Democracy**

Papers and Abstracts

## **EDUCATION AND SOCIAL ACTION CONFERENCE**

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## One Size Won't Fit All

**Cunningham-Smith, V. and Konza, N., Barnardos South Coast  
Guggisberg, N. and Harris, N., Albion Park Neighbourhood Association  
Parsons, T. and Walton, J., Shellharbour City Council**

The Illawarra Child & Family Community Project is a partnership between Barnardos South Coast, Shellharbour City Council and Albion Park Neighbourhood Association (APNA), and is funded under the Stronger Families initiative of the Commonwealth Government. We provide child and family community development services through three distinctly different organisations on three different housing estates. The project was also funded to research practice and develop a model for Child and Family Community Development.

Today's presentation will first of all give a birds eye view of the 3 housing estates, followed by the key issues experienced, and then move into how these practice issues have led to the development of a practice model for child and family community development.

The three communities are located around 2 hours south of Sydney. Barnardos works in the Warrawong area which is the 12th most socially disadvantaged community in NSW, Shellharbour City Council works in a newly developed private housing estate, and APNA works on two low-density public housing estates in a semi rural suburb of Shellharbour LGA.

The partnership is base around research, while the practice is delivered autonomously. In the research we have been looking at:

- is there a model of community development that fits all three communities?
- is there common practice that can be applied to any community or do they all need different approaches?
- can we propose a model of best practice?
- what other lessons can be learnt?

I'd like to now briefly introduce you to the 3 communities. In Albion Park where APNA works, Sophia St is one of 2 low density public housing estates. It is made up of 42 houses located closely together and on the edge of town. The second estate is Russell St, located in the middle of town but again housing located closely together.

Bundaleer housing estate is a Radburn designed high-density public housing estate containing 188 houses. It branches out across five streets and around 500-600 people live there.

The third community is Flinders. Flinders is a Landcom sub-division of 888 private housing lots including 83 social housing lots integrated throughout. Flinders is the newest suburb of the city of Shellharbour just south of Wollongong. Population at last census (2001) was 2616, but this is rapidly rising as this is a centre of growth and development. Household income is equally split between middle and low-income earners.

Having given you a brief feel for the types of communities we've been working with, I now want to summarise the issues that have emerged.

In the public housing estates, the issues revolve around:

- lack of trust
- difficult engagement
- poor levels and experience of participation
- chaotic environments – family, interpersonal & community
- poor levels of safety
- high levels of stigmatisation
- high child protection concerns

In the private housing estate, the issues can be summarised around:

- new community
- initial fragmentation
- poor to developing social networks
- higher capacity to use community resources
- experience in participation is usually more positive
- safe community
- high levels of household debt
- dual income households

### **I'll now hand you over to Vivienne**

#### *The Research*

I'd now like to concentrate on what messages our research has provided for child and family community development.

Just to recap, the aim of the research has been to investigate best practice guidelines in Child and Family Community Development taking into account:

- Housing density,
- Socio economic status,
- Private and public housing,
- Cluster housing versus urban sprawl,
- New and established communities
- The affects of differing organisational structures on practice.

The research was undertaken through focus groups, data collection, and quarterly research group meetings which comprised of the three workers plus their managers. We met to interpret the data, as well as pose further questions in an action research model. From this we have developed the strengths and pressures model of child and family community development which I'll now move to.

I'd like to recognise the role of an excellent piece of work undertaken by Barnardos UK. We discovered this work after 12 months of the project. It's Strengths and Pressures analysis within the Children in Need Program in the UK mirrored our own, and we utilised these constructs to describe or own practice. Our work builds upon and expands the analysis by Jack and Gill<sup>1</sup>.

#### *The Model*

We have conceptualized the differences in our practice and communities into three groups:

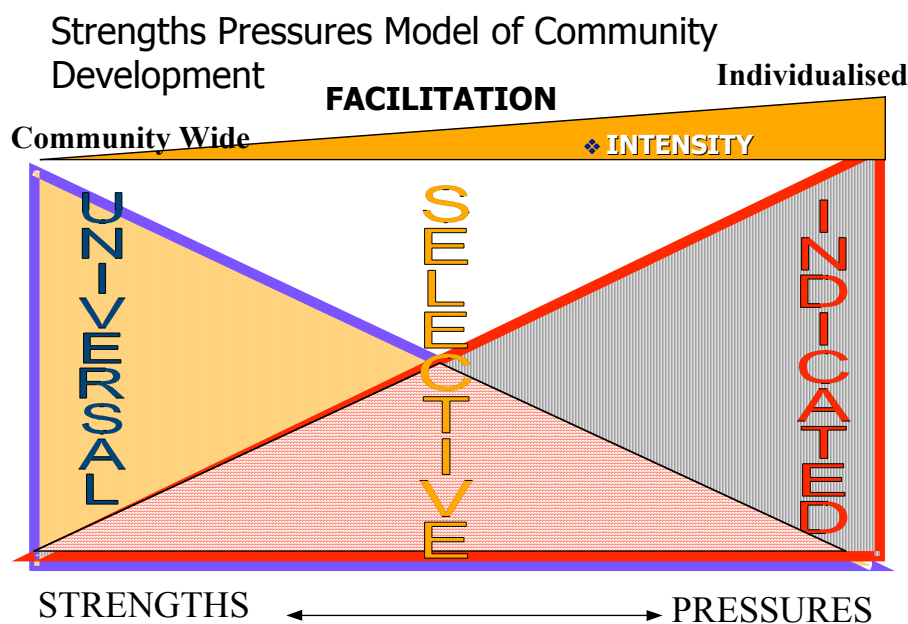
Universal: having high strengths and low pressures

Selective: having balancing strengths and pressures

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<sup>1</sup> Jack G & Gill O. The Missing Side Of The Triangle. Assessing the Importance of family and environmental factors in the lives of children. Barnardos UK

Indicated: having high pressures and low strengths.



When we initially came to this model we saw Flinders, Bundaleer and Albion Park fitting into either /or one of these groups on balance. For instance Flinders was the Universal community with the vast majority of its community having high strengths and low pressures, but with a minority having low strengths and high pressures. The public housing estates were in fact Indicated with the opposite occurring. The majority of the community on public housing estates were high pressure low strengths with a smaller number being at the top of the left triangle with high strengths. We also saw that in each estate, there were sub groups who would be categorized as Selective.

What we found in practice was that for the public housing estates, facilitation by the community development workers was intensive and much more individualized, especially in the beginning. Whereas, given the high strengths of Flinders, the facilitation of that worker was less intensive but equally important to engage the community; its focus was more community wide.

As the research progressed over time, it became clear there were more subtle differences we needed to include. Our communities were not that straightforward. In each of the communities we began to identify 4 sub groupings, as represented diagrammatically in this slide.

## Strengths Pressures Model

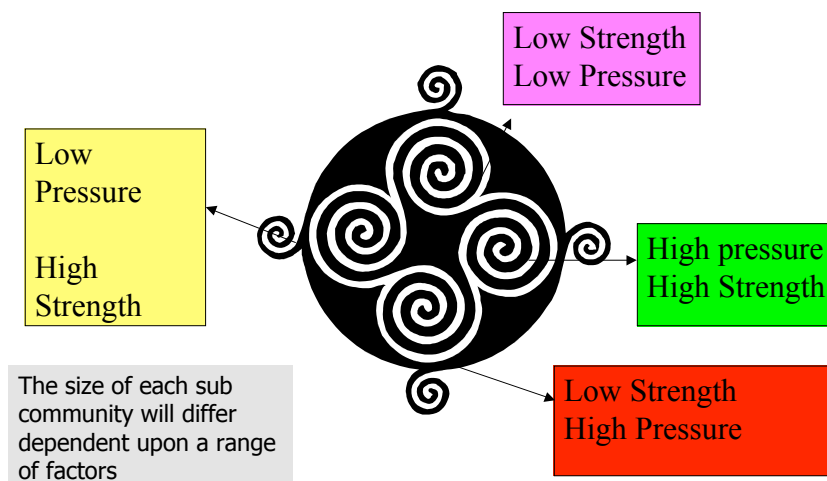
In any community there will be 4 types of community or sub community

High Pressure Low Strength	High Strength High Pressure
Low pressure Low Strength	High Strength Low pressure

How could we conceptualize the interplay of these groupings which the practice was demonstrating? The communities became a set of 4 linked spirals to represent each of the sub communities or sub groups. If you can imagine the spirals swelling and shrinking and moving you would find that the public housing estates have much bigger spirals of low strength high pressure sub communities than those Selective communities with balanced strengths and pressures. Flinders has a much bigger spiral bulge in the high strength low pressure spiral.

THE INTERPLAY OF COMMUNITIES:

THE DIFFERING PRACTICE STRATEGIES?



This enabled us to demonstrate the interplay between the sub communities on the estates and also explain the differential practice of the workers who at any one time could be working with all 4 groups, but in different levels of intensity. For example, door knocking as a means of engagement looks and is more intensive and repetitive in a community characterized by a large low strength high pressure spiral. In a high strength community it is a much timelier and less repetitive and intensive strategy, because the strengths to engage and participate already exist and they don't need to be built.

Going back to our original model. Universal communities have proportionately more people with high strengths and low pressures. They have a smaller number "in the middle" and an even smaller group who would be classified as an Indicated. Where communities are predominantly Selective in nature, they have balancing strengths and pressures and the strengths can be further strengthened through empowerment, and the community shifts to become more Universal. Or through disempowerment, pressures can outweigh strengths and push the community to further vulnerability.

Indicated communities have predominantly larger proportions which can be described as high pressure and low strength, requiring not casework, but more intensive community development work with individual children and families to form meaningful engagements and linkages into the community.

At any one time these non-homogeneous communities require the workers to employ different strategies ranging from intensive individualised strategies through to community wide facilitation. It is the proportion of this work that differs from Universal to Indicated work, and this is the critical factor when looking at resourcing initiatives in these different communities.

The work of community development is always to keep the community moving toward a strengthened position i.e. Universal. The role in Flinders is to address the low strength parts of its community whilst maintaining the high strengths that already exist. Removing all forms of facilitation from a community such as this would be to risk that community's movement backwards toward a Selective or Indicated community over time.

The role in the public housing estates is to move the community to the left toward higher strengths. We have seen some of this movement in the 3 years we have worked on the estates, with some moving toward being predominantly Selective. This changes the nature of the work being undertaken and requires proportionately less intensive individualized work.

Ultimately the work's outcome should be this: a predominately Universal community able to harness its own strengths to participate and engage in their community. In our work we have also identified five stages of community development which I will hand back to Nick to outline.

#### *Staged Conceptual Practice Model*

We've conceptualized community development into broadly speaking, five steps towards this goal of being able to predominantly employ a Universal model of service delivery. The first step we've called "Beginning: where you arrive in the community and commence getting to know the community and promoting your services" or "Getting to Know & Be Known". The community at this stage is checking you out, deciding whether to "buy in" to what you are offering.

The second beginning stage is where communities have decided to give it a go and start to become engaged.

The third stage we call "Small Shifts", where participation is commencing in community activities. People are starting to recognise some strengths and use them to overcome pressures; there is movement happening.

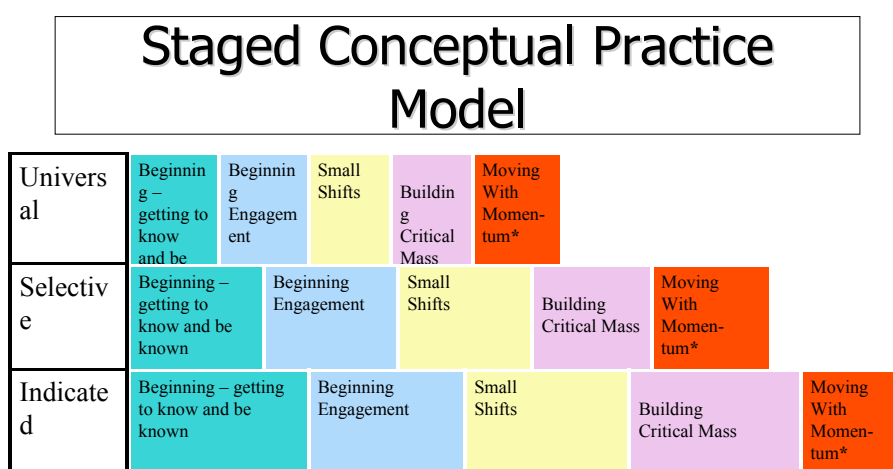
Stage 4 we call "Building Critical Mass". A culture of community participation starts to take hold, and people can organise without intensive facilitation. There is a greater propensity to build on strengths & to self generate and follow through with ideas. Community wide activities

are happening without significant facilitation, and community issues are being dealt with by the community without major conflict.

The final stage we call “Moving with Momentum”, where worker facilitation is minimal but still necessary. Communities are acting on issues for themselves, albeit with some guidance. High strengths are celebrated and utilised throughout the community. As communities move through the stages their levels of empowerment increase, resulting in an empowered community which moves with momentum.

### What are the implications for this research?

For us it has wide implications for policy and funding of child and family community development in communities of differing vulnerabilities. Our research has shown that in Universal communities, movement through the stages is much faster given the high level of strengths that exist within the community which can be harnessed more rapidly. For Indicated communities, progression through these stages is far slower. Each stage taking much longer as high pressures need to be overcome before significant strengths can be built.



\* Requires On-going Facilitation



For Selective communities they are in the middle with stages taking longer. Strengths that exist are able to be built on by the worker, to promote empowerment and participation in community. As we all know though, it is not a linear process - especially with Indicated communities. Previous steps will often be revisited in the process of empowerment; that is two steps forward and one step back.

Policy and funding bodies need to recognise that time limited funding in universal communities will produce greater outcomes than in vulnerable or indicated communities. ‘One Size Fits All’ strategies will always disadvantage the most disempowered communities, who will struggle to reach the empowerment outcomes of the already strengthened community.

Recurrent funding allows communities to move through stages according to their relative strengths and pressures. Flinders for instance has outstanding outcomes for its universal community, but knows it will struggle given time limited funding to harness the smaller proportions of their community with high pressures and low strengths. The public housing estates know they have made some headway into the stages of work with some ‘Small Shifts’ happening and even some building critical mass in some areas, however, these gains will be lost through time limited funding. Consolidation of strengths is not possible in 3 years for the entire community.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the implications of our research are that communities are about proportions of strengths and pressures. We must recognise and work with these differing proportions of strengths and pressures whether our communities are predominantly Universal, Selective or Indicated in nature. Disadvantaged or vulnerable communities have far higher proportions of its community experiencing high pressures with low strengths, and require reliable work which builds strengths and overcomes pressures over time. They are different to Universal or mainstream communities where these strengths already exist in greater proportion and can be readily harnessed through experienced community wide community development facilitation. Whether Universal or Indicated, the work is fluid requiring workers to move the differing sub communities through stages over time.

We know the practice varies depending upon the strengths or pressures in the communities. We also know that facilitation is required whether you are in a predominantly Universal or Indicated community. However facilitation is different in both these communities. Policy and funding bodies need to recognize that 'One Size of Community Development Doesn't Fit All'. We need to recognize that for vulnerable communities, a greater and more reliable commitment is required to allow movement towards a high strength community. We also know that if we ignore the Universal communities, we risk the strengths of these communities dissipating over time. Each community requires more refined policy and funding strategies to ensure that they either build or maintain strengths.

Policy makers need to look at what type of communities are being targeted by their funding packages and set realistic outcomes. Do not set equivalent outcomes for Universal and Indicated communities. The vulnerable communities can't compete when coming from a high pressures starting point. They will always achieve less in time limited funding. Don't set them up to fail.

Our work finishes this year with the estates unfortunately as we received time limited funding. If you would like more information please feel free to contact us.

Thank you for listening.

## Social Capital Measurement Indicators

Rick Flowers

Centre for Popular Education, University of Technology, Sydney

The following indicators are work in progress. They have been trailed with a major community building strategy in Victoria and an enterprise development project in Western Sydney. I propose that data can be collected against these indicators with focus group discussions.

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

*Community engagement is measured by the degree to which people and groups are investing time and energy in project initiatives*

LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Passive engagement; stakeholders are involved in a tokenistic or superficial manner. Their interest is low and demonstrated by brief attention spans and attendance.	Episodic engagement; stakeholders appear either indifferent or are only occasionally active in project activities but do participate.	Deep engagement; stakeholders are energetic, enthusiastic, active and volunteering to do more.

### ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS WHO EXPERIENCE SOCIAL EXCLUSION

*It's easy to do community capacity building work with successful business people, experienced local government officials; people who do already feel they are in charge of their community's future. It's much harder working with people who feel relatively powerless to influence change*

LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Socially excluded groups do not participate in project activities. Project activity is perceived to be largely of interest to one or two dominant groups.	A small number of socially excluded groups participate in project activities. Some inclusion of others' cultures by reference to their existence and perhaps some activities based on their interests.	A large number of socially excluded groups participate in project activities. Diverse community groups, including those who have experienced social exclusion, experience a strong sense of their community, identity and pride. Diverse cultures are explicitly valued in the content and process of the project activities.

### BONDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

*A 'strong' community is measured not only by its material wealth, but by the ability and willingness of its members to pitch in together, and support bottom-up initiatives.*

LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Project organising groups struggle to recruit volunteers willing to get involved in planning and management of	Willingness to help out with planning and management of projects is sporadic. For short	There is never a shortage of volunteers able to plan and manage project

activities. People show little care or concern for others outside their immediate families. They are more interested in receiving than initiating projects (ie. welfare mentality).	periods of time, group memberships are high and people applaud festival initiatives.	activities. Many people are committed and determined to initiate local solutions to local problems.
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### COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY AND PRIDE

*Community and culture may be defined by class, sexuality, gender, disability, occupation, ethnicity, religion and place.*

<i>LOW</i>	<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>HIGH</b>
Because of the project people feel subjugated and alienated. They feel shame and embarrassment about their place, histories and culture.	Despite the project people are not sure about which places and cultures to identify with. They have ambiguous feelings about their place, history and culture. They profess not to be interested in history or culture.	Because of the project people feel stronger and securer about their place, identity and culture. They are prouder of their histories and of their suburb.

### BRIDGING SOCIAL CAPITAL

*It is one thing to have vibrant community groups and people willing to pitch in. It is another to have exchange and interaction between the various groups. It is possible to have high bonding social capital in various parts of a community. But groups from those different parts may mistrust each other.*

<i>LOW</i>	<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>HIGH</b>
Despite the project, the community is deeply fragmented and factionalised. A sense of community is defined less by 'place' and more by ethnicity, language, religion, age, sexuality or interest. Conflict is common between various groups and factions within groups.	Because of the project, there is more tolerance and respect for and between the diverse groups in the community. But there is still a widespread feeling of 'us' and 'them' between many groups. There is widespread perception that there is a 'mainstream' community and that there are 'peripheral' communities.	While there are communities defined by interest, culture, religion, work etc. they are united in a shared pride in the festival. There is significant trust, and high levels of exchange, sharing and co-operation between various groups. Not only is there tolerance and respect for different groups, there is also considerable empathy.

### TECHNICAL AND FUNCTIONAL CHANGE AND LEARNING

*This refers to the learning of technical and functional festival skills and knowledge.*

<i>LOW</i>	<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>HIGH</b>
Stakeholders who participated in the project activities miss out on opportunities to gain specific, functional skills.	Stakeholders who participated in the project activities gain some useful technical knowledge and skills.	Stakeholders who participated in the project activities gain skills and knowledge that enable them to successfully get commissioned festival work.

### INTERPRETIVE CHANGE AND LEARNING

*This refers to gaining knowledge and understanding of other people's views and analyses. This sort of knowledge is often acquired in meetings and workshops and by reading.*

<i>LOW</i>	<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>HIGH</b>
Despite the project stakeholders learn nothing new about other people and gain no new appreciation and empathy for other residents.	Because of the project stakeholders gain insights into the experiences of other people and groups. They gain some new knowledge about issues, challenges and community action initiatives.	Because of the project stakeholders win deeper and new insights and knowledge of issues, challenges and community action initiatives. They gain more understanding of the perspectives of other people and groups. They learn more tolerance and compassion.

### TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE AND LEARNING

*This refers to that change when people who previously had low self-efficacy believe in the value of their own knowledge and ability to change their circumstances. It also refers to that transformative change when powerful people are questioned about their domineering and excluding behaviours.*

Despite the project people seem to be resigned to the way things are, even in the face of things that make them unhappy. They do not question the status quo. They do not question others who show disrespect to them. They do not question inequalities, social exclusion and apathy. They believe they do not have the necessary qualities, skills and knowledge to be 'enterprising.'	Because of the project people begin to name things that make them unhappy. In particular, they begin to name challenges and issues in their community. They question what they perceive as injustice. They imagine the possibilities of being enterprising and of change for the better in themselves and their communities.	Because of the project people assert that their knowledge is as valuable as 'expert' knowledge. They question taken-for-granted assumptions about many social issues. Powerful people seek to include previously excluded people in analyses and actions. People see themselves as 'enterprising' and sufficiently powerful to make change.
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### COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

*This refers to people's willingness and capacity to exercise leadership and develop projects; ie. to research and offer their own analyses of challenges and issues and then to plan and pursue actions.*

<i>LOW</i>	<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>HIGH</b>
There is a tendency to depend on others, especially figures of authority, to not act on challenges and issues.	Individuals and groups are interested in supporting various festival initiatives and activities. They actively seek opportunities to make their voice heard and convey their ideas.	Individuals and groups actively support each other in their efforts to improve quality of life in a community. Recognised 'leaders' actively seek to nurture 'emerging' leaders. Significant amounts of time are invested in planning and pursuing festival and action initiatives.

## **Volunteer committees and CAPACITY-BUILDING: Developing COMMUNITY-BASED LEADERSHIP among refugees in Armenia**

**Armen Gakavian**  
**RealChange**

### **Introduction**

What does it take to exercise community leadership? What capacities need to be developed by members of marginalised groups to participate in decisions that affect them, and how is this capacity developed?

This paper discusses the development of community-based leadership among refugees under the care of Mission Armenia, Armenia's largest NGO. It reviews and critically evaluates the activities of Mission Armenia's Volunteer Committees. It then discusses the obstacles and limitations facing the development of fully participatory leadership. It is argued that, by strengthening the emphasis on social integration, education, politicisation and economic self-reliance, refugees can not only participate in the agenda setting, planning and implementation of projects, but also develop the capacity to initiate, 'self-mobilise' and engage with the broader socio-economic and political system.

### **Armenia's refugee problem and Mission Armenia**

Armenia was one of the 15 republics of the Soviet Union, which, along with the other republics, gained independence in 1991. The so-called period of 'transition' that followed has been characterised by poverty, corruption, war, famine and unemployment, culminating in the mass emigration of over 1 million Armenians in search of a better life.

However, the difficulties began even before independence was declared. In 1987-88, violent mobs perpetrated pogroms against Armenians in Azerbaijan. In those years, and during the Armeno-Azeri war of 1991-1995, hundreds of thousands of Armenians fled Azerbaijan and Karabagh, leaving everything behind and arriving in Armenia empty handed.

In Armenia, these refugees were settled into abandoned resorts, hotels, schools, kindergartens, hostels, dormitories and railway wagons. In the early years, some refugees were able to find work and leave their temporary housing. For the rest, their temporary stay in these dwellings turned into a permanent one. The living conditions in these dwellings are generally poor, lacking minimum infrastructure. Many facilities are crowded, and located in isolated and hard-to-reach places.

Almost half of those refugees who first came to Armenia have since emigrated to other countries in search of work. Those who have emigrated have mainly been men, leaving behind the elderly, disabled, women and children. Since the prospects for the repatriation of these refugees are bleak, the government of Armenia has adopted a policy for their integration.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been a key player in assisting the process of integration of, and providing socio-economic assistance to, the refugees. One of the UNHCR's largest partner organisations is Mission Armenia, an indigenous non-government organisation (NGO) founded in 1993. Mission Armenia is Armenia's largest NGO, and provides assistance for over 10,000 refugees living in 300 temporary communal dwellings in 7 regions of Armenia (Mission Armenia, 2003). Included in the range of services provided by Mission Armenia are first aid centres, health education, small group sessions, advocacy workshops, food packages, repairs of ceilings, plumbing and other facilities, interest-free loans for small businesses and winter heating.

### **Building Capacity: Self-help and Volunteer Committees**

The work of Mission Armenia has a twin focus: relief and development. The aim of Mission Armenia's development or 'self-help' programs is to build capacity to develop community-based leadership and ensure refugee participation in activities that affect their own interests.

#### *Definitions and concepts*

One definition of capacity building describes it as "the process of equipping individuals with the understanding, skills and access to information, knowledge and training that enables them to perform effectively." (Urban Capacity Building Network, 2002) In other words, the purpose of capacity building is to empower individuals or groups by providing them with the knowledge, skills and resources needed to improve their situation.

Community-based leadership is leadership that is participatory, in other words, that is proactively involved in every stage of the relief and development activities undertaken for their benefit, from agenda setting to planning through to implementation. Kumar (2002, pp.24-25), in his Typology of Participation, identifies seven different types of participation: passive participation; participation in information giving; participation by consultation; participation for material incentives; functional participation; interactive participation; and self-mobilisation.

Each of Kumar's participation types can be used to describe different aspects of Mission Armenia's work, though few activities fall under the category of 'self-mobilisation'. Self-mobilisation' is when "[p]eople participate by taking initiatives independent of external institutions to change systems. ..." They may appeal to external groups for resources, but in so doing they still "retain control over how the resources are used." (Kumar 2002, p. 25)

#### *Description of the activities of Volunteer Committees*

One of the highlights of Mission Armenia's activities in the area of community-based leadership has been the creation of Volunteer Committees. An average of 12-15 percent of the refugee population in each communal dwelling is involved, in one way or another, in the activities of the Volunteer Committees (Mission Armenia, 2003). The Committees are self-selected – in other words, membership is open to any refugee who wishes to join, and members of the Committee are not appointed or elected. Sub-committees are formed as required for the execution of specific tasks.

When a Mission Armenia team visits a refugee dwelling for the first time, it asks the refugees to select a Committee that will act as a 'contact point' between them and Mission Armenia. This Committee forms the nucleus of the future Volunteer Committee. Some of the first tasks undertaken by this Committee are: assisting Mission Armenia with the registration of refugees; submitting information to Mission Armenia on the most impoverished households; coordinating the distribution of help packages and medical aid; assisting in the search for a suitable nurse and/or doctor for the first aid centre; and creating a team that will undertake renovations on the building. Mission Armenia provides the raw materials – medical equipment, medicines and building materials – but it is up to the refugees themselves to find the human resources to implement these projects.

According to Kumar's typology of participation, this first stage of the work of the Volunteer Committees can be described as 'participation in information giving' and 'participation by consultation'. Over time, however, the role of the Volunteer Committees has been expanded. Presently, some of the tasks undertaken by the Committees are:

1. Assistance in the establishment of vocational training centres, where refugees learn computer skills, and trades such as carpentry, hairdressing and sewing
2. Submission of references about refugees for income-generating projects, and the distribution and management of micro-loans for small businesses.
3. Overseeing of activities such as Food for Work programs.
4. Organising of social and cultural events and integration activities such as outings, festivals,

parties, gardening and so forth.

5. Coordination of advocacy-related activities and the formation of sub-committees to deal with specific advocacy and administrative issues.

6. Participation in the organisation and operation of summer camps for refugee children.

7. Supporting Mission Armenia in the general supervision of activities performed at the refugee facilities.

The above activities fall under the category of 'functional participation', that is participation "by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives", and interactive participation, that is "participation in joint analysis, development of action plans and strengthening of local institutions. Participation is seen as a right, and not just as a means to achieve project goals." (Kumar 2002, p. 25.)

### *Critical analysis*

The innovative and empowering approach used by Mission Armenia in building capacity is unique and comprehensive. However, most of these activities, though highly participatory, fall short of self-mobilisation. The refugees are mobilised to carry out particular activities and projects, and are even involved in the planning of the projects; however the nature of their participation is limited, in three ways.

Firstly, and most significantly, strategic decisions about issues related to the refugees are made by the NGO and not by the beneficiaries. Certainly Mission Armenia engages in extensive consultation with its beneficiaries and, on the basis of information gathered, develops a grant application, which it presents to the UNHCR and other donors on behalf of those beneficiaries. However the framework within which the project is developed, and the final version of the grant proposal, is at the discretion of the NGO and the donor organisations. Therefore, while there is certainly a strong level of 'participation by consultation', the refugees themselves are not part of the negotiation process that takes place between Mission Armenia and the donor organisation(s).

Secondly, what is taking place is a process of 'knowledge transfer', which does not always translate into 'knowledge ownership'. Certainly, Mission Armenia's stated emphasis on 'community mobilisation' points to a highly participatory approach – communities are mobilised via their Volunteer Committees and empowered to address issues that concern them. Their consciousness of their own condition is raised and they move from apathy to action. However, mobilisation is still facilitated 'by' the outsider (whether it be the social worker, psychologist or lawyer), and so the initiative largely remains outside the refugees themselves.

Third and finally, while the Volunteer Committees meet, discuss problems, enumerate demands and propose solutions, they are not usually in a position to *implement* these solutions. They are not able to directly lobby, negotiate with and present their claims to international, national and local groups such as governments, and are therefore not directly involved in bringing about policy changes. These sorts of activities are undertaken on their behalf by Mission Armenia, who sets the agenda in consultation with, but ultimately in the absence of, the refugees and their representatives.

This means that, despite a decade of efforts towards mobilising the refugees, they continue to remain in dependency on Mission Armenia and its staff to define and meet their basic needs, defend their interests and negotiate with the powers-to-be. In this regard, the introductory paragraph of the January-September 2003 report of the work of Mission Armenia among its refugee beneficiaries is telling (Mission Armenia, 2003, p. 1):

"Within this period of the Sub-project implementation no changes/improvements have been observed in the general situation in the country and refugees with no permanent shelter are still considered as one of the four most disadvantaged groups among the vulnerable population in Armenia. Therefore, the provision of different services/assistance to this group under this Sub-project is stipulated by the sustainability of their poor status, their extremely limited opportunities to help themselves and their great need for external intervention."

### **Building Capacity: Obstacles and Opportunities**

The “limited opportunities” for self-help alluded to above, and how they can be addressed, are discussed in this section. First, however, we turn to a discussion of the obstacles to creating self-mobilisation among Mission Armenia’s Volunteer Committees.

#### *Obstacles to Self-mobilisation*

There are both external and internal factors that limit the capacity of the Volunteer Committees to engage in self-mobilisation. The first external factor is the continuing lack of integration. Ten years on, most refugees remain confined to communal dwellings, with limited contact with mainstream society, and limited opportunities for the development of cross-cultural, professional and other skills.

Secondly, the poverty rate among Armenia’s refugees is 50 percent higher than among the general population (Mission Armenia, 2003). This means that the majority of refugees simply do not have the financial or material resources to meet their own daily needs, let alone engage with the political system. Micro-loans for small businesses go a long way in creating self-sufficiency, however they do not often provide the refugees with the means for sustainable, long-term, strategic integration into Armenia’s economic system.

Thirdly, refugees lack access to education. Children are often unable to attend school on a regular basis because their dwellings are located in isolated places with limited public transport access to local schools. Other children do not have money for transport, stationery, books and clothes. Consequently, many refugee children end up lacking basic literacy skills and knowledge in essential subjects. Mission Armenia provides extra-curricular tutoring and books, materials and other resources; however, this does not address the structural issues. Inevitably, tertiary education is also beyond the reach of most refugees, due to prohibitive fees and transport, stationery and clothing costs.

Finally, refugees lack access to the possibility of political self-education, thus limiting their opportunities for conscientisation. Conscientisation refers to the process whereby an individual or group grasps the political nature of his, her or their socio-economic or political life situation (Freire 1997, *passim*). It is a state of heightened political awareness characterised by both frustration and the determination to act at the local and global level. In this regard, the capacity-building efforts of Mission Armenia are limited. The refugees, as beneficiaries of Mission Armenia, are not primarily initiators, but junior partners in implementation.

There are also two internal factors limiting the possibility of self-mobilisation among the refugees. Firstly, Mission Armenia is funded by tied grants received from organisations such as the UNHCR, USAID and other international and governmental agencies. Though the rhetoric of ‘capacity building’ is built into their requirements, this aspect of the program is considered a means to an end rather than an end in itself by the funding organisations.

Secondly, Mission Armenia’s method of creating community leadership is based on the notion of community mobilisation. Though this concept is highly participatory and emancipatory and represents quite a breakthrough in the post-Soviet context, it is nevertheless limited and, as stated earlier, generally falls short of self-mobilisation.

#### *Creating opportunities for self-mobilisation*

We will now discuss ways in which Mission Armenia can address these limitations. It is suggested that Mission Armenia build on its present focus on social integration, economic self-reliance and education, while also addressing the need for conscientisation so as to strengthen the refugees’ ability to influence, and participate in, the broader society. Further, these initiatives can be undertaken with and through the Volunteer Committees.

Firstly, in addressing the issue of integration, it is important that refugees be encouraged to spend time outside their dwellings and in the public eye (whereas most of the integration

activities have so far focused on non-refugees visiting refugees). In addition, finding employment opportunities for refugees within the mainstream of society, outside the communal dwellings, would assist in integration, as would creating opportunities for refugees to attend university (see below).

Secondly, Mission Armenia's attempts to mitigate poverty through small business loans and vocational training in the trades are an excellent start. However, training in professions such as law, teaching, medicine would provide refugees with greater social power, self-reliance and the opportunity to participate in the broader society.

Thirdly, with regard to education, lobbying needs to be undertaken to ensure equal access for refugees to the schooling system, via improved transport to and from the refugee dwellings, and the provision of educational resources that can be housed at the dwellings. With regard to university education, some possible strategies include the provision of university scholarships, and on the lower cost end of the spectrum, creating opportunities for distance learning and inviting lecturers to teach certificate courses. These strategies would help refugees gain much needed knowledge (which equals power) and Armenian language and literacy skills (most of the refugees are highly educated but did not speak Armenian until their arrival in Armenia).

Fourth and finally, an important way to facilitate the process of conscientisation among the refugees would be the establishment of solidarity groups, which would build on the existing Volunteer Committees. The aim of these groups would be to raise the level of conscientisation of the refugees, by providing them with a space for sharing their stories, as a means of personal and collective healing, emancipation and empowerment. Various adult education tools could be employed to aid this process. (See, for example Kumar 2002, p. 53 ff, and the works of Freire).

***One of the significant contributions of solidarity groups would be that they would encourage the move from 'knowledge transfer' to 'knowledge creation', that is, the refugees would become owners of the information that they discover, and would find ways to utilise that information.***

Mission Armenia already uses focus groups. However the difference between focus groups and solidarity groups is that, while focus groups aim to identify problems and *propose* solutions, solidarity groups aim to develop a sense of common consciousness and ways to *implement* solutions. Further, while solidarity groups are initially facilitated by outsiders (social workers, psychologists etc), they are eventually run by the participants themselves, in contrast to focus groups.

The expected outcome of the solidarity groups would be the formation of decentralised, locally based action groups, consisting of refugees and seeking the assistance of non-refugees only as required. In other words, the refugees themselves would set the agenda of these groups. (Andrews, pp.163-165) A desirable spin-off would be the establishment of a refugee NGO or NGOs, which could apply for funding from both donor agencies and individuals, while also supporting their projects through small businesses. This would create a series of decentralised, 'parallel structures' alongside Mission Armenia, supplementing the work of the NGO. In this way, the refugees would gain the best of both worlds: they would continue to benefit from the immense financial and material resources, experience and professionalism of Mission Armenia, while also engaging in more flexible, radical and self-directed action (self-mobilisation).

In this way, too, the internal factors limiting the possibility of self-mobilisation – dependency on tied aid and a limited notion of community mobilisation - would be overcome.

### **Conclusion**

Mission Armenia's work among refugees provides valuable insights into the nature of community-based leadership. The NGO's capacity-building efforts have been focused on the creation of Volunteer Committees. These Committees undertake a variety of tasks and their

activities fall at the highly participatory end of Kumar's Participation Typology. However, most of these activities fall short of self-mobilisation. Strategic decisions are made by the NGO, mobilisation is still facilitated 'by' the outsider, and refugees largely rely on non-refugee groups and individuals to negotiate and lobby on their behalf.

Some factors limiting the extent of self-mobilisation are the refugees' lack of full integration, chronic poverty, lack of education and lack access to the possibility of political self-education. Mission Armenia being a donor-dependant organisation, and the limitations inherent in the concept of community mobilisation, are also contributing factors. This paper has discussed some of the ways these limitations can be overcome, namely, through measures aimed at integration and poverty reduction, education and the formation of solidarity groups and refugee-led NGOs.

Mission Armenia provides a model of community mobilisation, while also providing lessons in how to develop self-mobilisation, among marginalised groups.

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## **Non-profit sector (Third Sector) and community educational action**

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The aim of this paper is to restate in a synthetic way the benefits of non profit sector activity and voluntary action, especially when this action or praxis lays on educational policies and meaningful training processes of agents working in the non profit sector.

We focus on the area of the Mediterranean basin (North and South), analyzing in particular some examples of cultural community development linked to the action of voluntary networks, especially within the movements of women for the promotion of their rights.

The Mediterranean reality regarding the Third Sector is quite heterogeneous. Political, economic, cultural and historical factors have created very different legal and practical realities. By regions, the western Mediterranean arc, represented by the Iberian Countries, France and Italy, differs on the legal field from the Balkan block and Greece. On the other hand, the associative status of the Arab-Muslim countries deserves a special mention, as they have their own particularities, specially in the countries of the North African region such as Morocco or Algeria. Rather strong associative dynamics indicate or suggest higher levels of participative democracy in the case of western democracies, which is true in the case of societies where political and cultural participation is filtered by autocratic state structures (the case of Morocco). A general feature which is found in the western Mediterranean arc (Italy, France, Iberian Peninsula, may be even Malta) is formal associative freedom. Many Muslim states face realities of unique party and political control of the Third Sector. But national circumstances and history have produced unequal results, as we can perceive by comparing Palestinian and Egyptian cases.

In the last two decades, the discussion about the ambiguous concept of social capital and the educational potentialities of voluntary action of non profit sector has fully reached the popular education arena. It is not our intention now to extend such a debate, which would drive us far.

The discourse of voluntarism has reached a level of considerable popularity across most countries of this area. It is paralleled by the newly emerging phenomenon of voluntary work and voluntary service. In many societies of this area, regardless of their religious set of values, cultural background or political system, young people, house wives, civil servants and other people actually volunteer for their communities. Some states have passed bills on promotion of volunteering. This is the case of Spain and of Catalonia, where the Olympics of Barcelona in 1992 launched terms such as "volunteer" and volunteer service".

But there is here a key issue: there is not a real potential for effective volunteering without autonomous and independent associations and Third Sector organizations, or without a strong network of volunteer based organisations. So, how can we approach to this phenomenon from the perspective of popular education? Using methodological tools has proven helpful to establish and analyse the informal educational effects of voluntary networks in a historical comparative and sociological perspective. Developing such an approach is not very easy since the supply of studies about Third Sector and Education is so widespread as atomized.

We can hardly find any example of coherent and organic (transversal) inclusion of the corpus of the theory and the practice of volunteering within the primary and secondary school system and university curricula. This is the reality even so the official discourses acclaim the importance of encouraging volunteering at schools and in every day life, companies, etc. In particular it seems useful to define the factors helping to improve the conditions of training and formation of volunteers in associations.

First of all: voluntary service and the practice of volunteering cannot be imposed, applying a top-down approach. Self-motivation and spontaneity are essential.

Volunteering is easier when the level of social capital of the community and its ratio of associations per inhabitants are high. Cultural and historic premises are very important, in particular the existence of traditional community movement coming from ancient times.

Mediterranean societies have usually their own traditional special mutual-help and volunteer-practices, generally generated by the rural and agricultural civilization. But the imposition of colonial western (or Turkish) rule in the past led to the distortion and sometimes to the destruction of mutual aid networks and practices. The case of 19th C. Algeria, where French colonizers destroyed in an irreversible way, autochthon farmer's relations and institutions is highly illustrative.

But the voluntary service and the mutual aid practices stem from every day needs. Improving women condition, status, rights is one of these needs across the Mediterranean lands, "tous azimuts", and not the less important.

Let us discuss in the paper some examples of community cultural development associated to the action of voluntary networks, especially within the movements of Mediterranean women.

The empowerment of women through engaging themselves in specific associations is one of the paramount characteristics of Mediterranean civil society in the last decades. The aims of such a mobilisation range from improving woman's rights to bring up and protect youth to the promotion of education, the protection of human rights and campaigning against war (pacifism).

In these cases, empowerment comes through association and sociability. Cultural, artistic and entertainment values are cultivated from a non male perspective. The incidence of this movement in community life is growing.

On the local level women associations develop many formal, non formal and informal educational activities. They use to define as apolitical, but in a panorama of local apathy of organized movements and associations the voice of associated women can be decisive. The women associations have made steps to organize across the Mediterranean basin by holding international conferences or promoting projects. Some of these initiatives, sponsored by states, have reached international attention.

Who does not remember (from the early 1990s on) the action of the Serbian-based Women's International Network of Solidarity against war "Women in Black" (Alternative women's politics)? Among its principles, there were those of altering the patriarchal mentality by connecting with the international feminist movement and reaffirming the principles of non-violence, feminism, pacifism and anti-militarism. The movement, started on October 9, 1991, with the purpose of organising a permanent, public, non-violent protest against war, against the nationalistic and militant regime in Serbia, ethnic cleansing and all forms of discrimination. Black was a sign of mourning for all war victims and all forms of violence and constant provocation of war, hatred and violence in Balkans and abroad.

Such a protest had a pedagogical and a political dimension, by sensibilizing the public of the atrocities committed against the civilian population, inducing a feeling of responsibility for the war, seeking the truth about the missing, by "demanding that the ideologists, organizers and executors of war crimes be brought to justice", by giving support to and expressing solidarity with the refugees, displaced and banished persons and with all other victims of war and by supporting those men who refuse to go to war and promoting conscientious objection to military service.

Simultaneously with these protests, this Serbian association organized an alternative form of education in the streets by distributing leaflets, bulletins, presenting petitions for initiatives, and occasional performances. The organisation demanded cuts in military and police budgets, the banning of landmines and the conversion of military industry.

It developed pedagogical actions in order to encourage the development of civilian society, autonomous organization of women, and in order to create intercultural women's networks and coalitions for peace.

So, since 1998, Women in Black implemented a four-year educational project "Travelling Women's Peace Workshops", in four towns in Serbia and Montenegro, holding four cycles: "Women are Changing Women", "Women's Rights are Human Rights", "Interethnic and Intercultural Solidarity", and "Women and Power". This network brings together women from all the countries of the former Yugoslavia, Europe, North America, Latin America, Asia and Africa, promoting women's solidarity "above every state, ethnic, racial and religious boundaries and divisions, thus encouraging the creation of multicultural peace coalitions".

But women action do not provide for the only voluntary organisations showing us the importance of voluntary action through associations. The scopes of volunteering and associative movements volunteering-based cover many fields such as local community work, social welfare and health, environment and nature, education and consultation, international cooperation and overseas service activities, survey of elections, fight against corruption, protection of consumers, promotion of physical education and sport, arts, tourism and culture, managing disasters, traffic guidance, protection of human rights and improving public interest and welfare.

We can suggest different points from this particular "regional" (Mediterranean basin) inquiry which could be mainstreamed to most current countries, offering arguments that have certainly general relevance, as we observe from the experience of reported cases of other geographic areas, as Asia-Pacific. Social mechanisms should be established everywhere so as to improve the quality and control of voluntary engagement in associations with the help of (state) administrations but controlled by Civil Society, at least partially.

In particular, we propose the creation of private or public academic centres where research and teaching in the direction of connecting and inter relating experiences of associative networks and volunteer activities linked to the Third Sector across the Mediterranean space. Certifications and diplomas for learners and students should have European and trans Mediterranean validity.

Funding for such initiatives could come from Government Administrations and supra-state umbrellas as the European Union.

The curriculum of this sort of studies should cover all the historical, sociological, political, anthropologic, social-economic and psychologico-social aspects of the Third Sector, so as to improve the quality of volunteerism and Third Sector Engagement.

[This research draws on a many years historical inquiry on the role of voluntary associations (19th and 20th. centuries) mostly in Catalonia and Spain, but as well comparing Catalonia with Europe and Third Sector situation in the world]

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# Communication Technologies & Leadership for Resilience: Participatory Research Outreach in Five Coastal Communities

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## Introduction

Coastal communities of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) have experienced since 1992 the collapse of their major industry, the cod fishery and associated processing plants, and an out-migration of approximately half their populations. Added to this, a newly elected provincial government—while “encouraging” people to move to growth centres through the closure of community development offices, and the downsizing of schools and health facilities—has committed itself to “tough business decisions” and dramatic deficit reductions. This paper explores various means of communication—camcorders, interviews, videoconferences, brochures, computers, and workshops—used by a team of participatory researchers as we work with five outpost communities along the south coast of Newfoundland in assessing the impact of new technologies on education, health care and small business. Aware that there is more to participatory research (PR) than description and analysis, we outline here various forms of outreach as we try to make a difference in the communities and, we hope, leave them better off for our participation. We believe that, if change is to be lasting, leadership must shift from our hands, as facilitators, to those of local leaders.

## The Context

Several problems, each embedded in the province’s 500 years of European history, confront the “participatory” project’s success. The first surrounds a lingering colonialism, the second inheres in the isolation of communities, and a third springs from traditional social arrangements. The three are socially, culturally and economically rooted, as are the strengths of coastal Newfoundlanders which assist the participatory project. Positive aspects include people’s social cohesion, knowledge of the land and sea, cultural expression in arts and crafts, and resilience to a harsh climate.

Newfoundland, unlike other provinces, emerged from official colonial status to join Canada only in 1949. As a colonial outpost, it experienced paternalistic governance and the economic control of merchants who were, in turn, directed by the policies of the Mother country. Since Confederation, provincial and federal governments and national and multi-national corporations have directed, through the fishery, the socio-economic and educational trajectory of the province. Because of these influences, among others, Newfoundlanders are said to suffer from dependency and, now, to be somewhat lacking in entrepreneurial initiative; and we note that the people themselves have accepted the common construction of their dependency. We certainly observe this in people’s reluctance to step forward and take responsibility for their futures. While each community has its leaders, the majority prefer to leave decision-making to others.

Despite real or perceived dependency, remarkable examples of independence and collective initiative exist. In the early 1980s, for example, the coastal town of Burgeo pioneered a “narrow-band” television system. Through the medium of the not-for-profit Burgeo Broadcasting System (BBS), people in the town of then 2500 produced local news, entertainment and political commentary. Between 1997-99, as a response to the crisis in the fishery, two adult educators successfully extended the scope of learning through the BBS, adding video presentations and newsprint, to neighbouring communities in a project called *Communication for Survival*, only to see the project end through lack of funding and political support (Campbell & Gilbert, 1997; Harris, 2002).

In part to fill that gap, the BBS (population now 1700) in 2000 installed information and communication technologies (ICT)—i.e., broadband Internet and video conferencing—in their town, on Ramea Island (pop. 700), and in the smaller communities of Grand Bruit (pop. 36), Grey River (pop. 150) and Francois (pop. 180). At the same time, the provincial Library system,

with funding from the Bill Gates Foundation, installed Community Access Programmes (CAP sites) in the communities, each site equipped with computers, printers, scanners and digital cameras. As I was known in the region from previous research, I was asked to evaluate the new technologies. This I agreed to do, with a research team drawn from both east and west coasts of Canada. We involved the people who were using the new technologies, and—given women’s contributions to the ecology of rural life, and their under-representation in technology--focused on the contributions of women.

### Conceptual Framework

We entered the field in 2002 with three guiding assumptions. The first was that educational reality—and leadership in technology and community development is an educational accomplishment--must be understood through a framework of lifelong learning. For this reason, we examine learning as a social process that extends from pre-school into adulthood. The second assumption was, that we need to critically examine technology as more than simply a tool (Moll 2000). We share Heidegger’s (1977) view that it comes with the potential both to strengthen and undermine society but, in any event, will alter people’s way of being. The third assumption was that communication lies at the heart of resilience, and that the people affected by change provide the best lens through which to explore this resilience. To this end, we encourage local people (those without previous experience in leadership, as well as community activists, priests, businessmen, school principals and teachers) to take an active part in the evaluation of ICT with a view to steering their future direction.

Borrowing from Foucault’s (1980) interlocking concepts of power/knowledge, this study builds on the inextricable link between knowledge and the kind of power that emerges as people engage in their world. In this, we hold with Blaug (1977) that “the social world confronts us as something which is partly pre-given and partly the creation of our own actions. To learn is therefore both to make and to discover” (p. 101). While it is said that we live in a ‘knowledge society,’ we point to the distinction between gaining knowledge *about* the world (as gained through an accumulation of facts) and knowledge *of* the world, through engagement with it (Ryle, 1990).

### Coming to Participatory Methods

In my previous research, I attempted to gain knowledge *about* the world. As an ‘interpretive’ researcher, I went about the business of constructing a theoretical picture of the world, interviewing people to learn about their experiences and the meanings they held, and then proceeded to analyse their words in relation to my theoretical image of the world. While that approach, I believe, successfully advanced my understanding of reality (and, I hope, that of others), I became convinced that it failed to speak to the people whose needs were greatest. I left the research site always wondering if I had contributed in any substantial way.

I sensed the need for a more action-oriented approach. What I read about participatory research (PR) seemed to fit the bill. But I had no experience of this whatsoever. To rectify that, I enlisted the help of two adult educators, Darlene Clover as co-investigator, and Budd Hall as an advisor. Both, having worked and written extensively in the field of PR (e.g., Hall, 1994), contributed greatly to my own background in organizational studies as we came to five major precepts concerning PR. First, and relevant to my doubts above, the research must be of direct benefit to the community. Second, it must be part of a total educational experience, helping to develop a cyclic pattern of local and new knowledge. Third, the research must involve an interaction “between the community and the research facilitator(s), and between popular and academic knowledge” (Gormley, 2001, p. 42). Next, our political bias had to be not only recognized, but built into our research approach. Thus we acknowledge our stance with the coastal communities in their struggle both against corporate fisheries, and a government that would have the people relocate to ‘growth centres.’ Finally, and most importantly, our research is intended to build upon people’s creativity and imagination in bringing their collective will to bear in solving their own problems.

The research team, selected with these precepts in mind, included several graduate students knowledgeable in communication technologies, and people who shared the culture--and dialect--of community participants. Of the latter, Brenda is a NL feminist and sociologist who

has worked extensively with women fishers (Grzetic, 2004), and Lorraine is the director of a woman's centre in a nearby town. Fred, charged with making a video/ DVD for our project, was one of the initiators of *Communities for Survival*. Darlene is the adult educator, while I bring 20 years of experience in NL education to the project.

### **Participatory Research as Outreach**

Given the assumptions about PR, it is not surprising that methods, findings and outreach became threads of one tapestry. Our outreach activities *are* our research methods and, through these, findings emerge. The first activity, on going throughout the study, involved team members in visits to each of the 5 sites at least twice yearly. On two occasions, I made preparatory visits, talking with people about the team and our planned activities. The establishment of trust between researchers and participants cannot be accomplished quickly. Community members reminded us often that "officials" rarely come to them, preferring to make decisions from distant towns and cities that affect outport economies, schools, and health care delivery. We were told, by outside workers, about their fear of rough seas, and that they might become stormbound on the coast. While community people do not show resentment towards outsiders, they maintain a certain wariness. We had to prove to them that we cared about their futures, and that we were tenacious in accomplishing their objectives, as well as our own.

Other links with the communities were made through our website, posters and brochures. In the first year of the study, graduate students designed a website which described all aspects of the study—sites, research team, partners, and our desire to form a community/ university collaboration. Later, we designed brochures and laminated posters with much the same information; the brochures we gave out to individual participants, and the posters we placed in all public bulletin boards including those on the three ferries serving the coast.

Community workshops, a feature of our original study design, became the centrepiece of the project, and the most effective form of early outreach. It was here that we learned details about social activities, economic projects, and participants' use of the new technologies. We also learned that people perceived a serious lack of training for the technologies and that, in some cases, decisions had been made for them without their knowledge or consent. It was also in the workshops that we began to fully appreciate that people were unable to imagine new uses for the technologies that were, as yet, unfamiliar to them. At this stage, we team members reluctantly stepped out of our participatory role to suggest ways forward (Clover & Harris, 2003).

Halfway through our study, we produced an extensive report, addressed to the local Planning Committee for the BBS/ICT Initiative, of our findings and recommendations for the development of the new technologies. We used this as a discussion piece for our meeting with seven committee members. It was our impression that the Committee had very little prior knowledge about either the technical difficulties encountered by their employees, or community perceptions of the implementation process. In addition to this de-briefing session with the BBS, we circulated the report to our funding agency and to all project partners, following the latter with phone calls and meetings.

In this our last year of the project, having heard what the people said about technology, we have initiated five important outreach activities. The first is to hold, in collaboration with two faculty members from a regional college, a 3-day workshop in community development for leaders who have been identified *by community committees* for participation. This workshop covered such topics as making effective presentations, preparing business applications on the internet, conducting internet research, facilitating effective meetings, and building consensus; it also featured, at the request of community members, an overview and demonstration of medical uses for the video conferencing equipment. Our objective was to encourage organizational understanding, as well as technological skills. As a follow-up to this residential workshop, we are cooperating with the Dave, the man in charge of installing and maintaining ICT, in offering workshops on technical aspects of the equipment. For three days in each community, Dave will be available to individuals during the day, and will hold group workshops in the evenings.

A third outreach this year was undertaken by a graduate student, with Dave's permission, to write a short, humorous article about some of the technical difficulties and misunderstandings he encountered while installing the new technologies. This has been submitted to a nationally popular (among Newfoundlanders) magazine. The format provides an easily accessible entry into the difficulties and successes of the BBS/ICT project.

Yet another outreach initiative was to hire on contract Amy from Burgeo, a graduate in Community Development, to 1) facilitate meetings within communities, and discussions between communities, using video conferencing, and 2) meet with youth in their schools to talk about community development, new technologies and how these can be used in the service of the communities.

The final outreach this year involves the making of a video/DVD presentation, showing adults, youth and children as they talk about their experiences with new technological applications of distance learning (by internet and video conference); the computers, printers, digital cameras and scanners provided in their Community Access Programs; the few uses that have been made of telemedicine; and businesses that could benefit from more effective communicative links with the outside world. In this video of approximately 40 minutes, people describe how valuable many of the new technologies are for reaching their relatives and friends who have moved away, or who have left for seasonal work, planning to return. They tell about a few businesses that are being carried out by distance through the Internet. They describe social and economic features of their communities, the organizations that they prize, business starts in kelp products and hydroponic vegetable farming, and plans for eco-tourism and a new fishery cooperative. But they also speak about their lack of involvement when ICT was placed in their communities, and in the implementation of these new technologies; and of their need, now, for training and exposure to the new equipment, and their fear of the unknown—that they may damage the expensive video conference equipment.

Participants in the video also talk about technical issues, such as the breakdown of the video transmission when the weather is bad, and what this means to their school lessons or public meetings. School students speak appreciatively of their distance-learning teachers, but they also say, especially the female students, that they cannot take more than three courses simultaneously by this means. Distance learning, unsupervised or under-supervised by teachers in the schools, demands independence of students, and intense powers of concentration.

As we move into the final phase of our PR, applications of the video/DVD will play a central role. The issues introduced on the video will provide excellent stepping-stones to conversations about our project and plans for the future. It will also illuminate, for these communities and others, the findings we have made about such things as top-down implementation, the dominance of technical concerns over social and pedagogical interests, the planned obsolescence of the technologies, and the uneasiness, resistance, and indifference expressed by people when they experience little ownership of new technologies.

### **Discussion of Leadership for Resilience**

To this point, our story has been about the leadership role we play as participatory researchers. Admittedly, it is one of trying to transfer leadership from ourselves to community members. At first consideration, this should not be difficult; there are local committees in place in each community, and easily identifiable leaders. The two towns are led by men, two communities primarily by women, and the third community has a fairly even gender distribution, all with markedly differing patterns of involvement—some far more democratically organized than others. We strongly believe that communication among the communities will result in a cross-fertilization of practices, ideas and imagination that can only benefit everyone. The new technologies will play a large role in this exchange, and in the consequent breakdown of barriers.

Several outcomes of this study of PR, leadership and rural community resilience warrant comment. The first points to the advantage of inter-disciplinarily, in this case, the joining of forces among organizational theorists, adult educators, community activists, and sociologists of

gender and the fishery. The commonality essential to the success of our project lies in the critical gaze of each researcher. None of us is satisfied with the world as it is but, rather, we strive for one of more equitable opportunities and greater distribution of wealth between those prospering from an oil-rich province, and people marginalized in coastal settings.

Then there are the balances that we identify. One concerns a balance between communities and academe. In Foucauldian terms, the knowledge and thus the power of these two groups would lie disproportionately with university researchers. The diffusion of this knowledge/ power arrangement can only be accomplished through another balance – that between theoretical knowing and local traditional knowledge. Local people benefit from experiencing learning as a 2-way street, and from seeing that researchers as well as they are formulating new ideas for action. The recognition of these balances at the outset of study may facilitate greater participation and more equitable outcomes.

Yet another balance lies at the intersection of school and community as study sites. All too often, school/community committees (e.g., school councils in Canada) with their legislated composition of parents, business people and one or two school representatives substitute for truly democratic involvement. In our study, the equipment tended to be housed in schools and used for distance learning. As people met together in our workshops, they realized their lack of ownership of the technology for health care, community meetings, and other civic purposes.

Finally, we point out that democratic participation at any level demands a widening of the net for potential leaders. Established community leaders benefit from hearing of the gap that often exists between their own 'knowledge' and that held by others. In our study, we unearthed ignorance as well as knowledge, and silences as well as voices. Only communication—whether as face-to-face encounters or by new technologies—can close the gap of democratic participation for resilience. But we believe that this will not take place without facilitation. We hope that our limited time in the communities, training delivered on site by the BBS Director of Community Services, and now facilitation provided for one year by a local woman will catch fire and spread through each community. We are cautiously optimistic that it will.

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## **"Spot the Leader"**

### **What does the Khmer community recognise as leadership?**

**Marlene Henry, Fairfield City Council  
Nola Randall-Mohk, TAFE Outreach Granville**

#### **What is leadership?**

After an exhaustive review of available literature, it is evident that the concept of 'leadership' has not been able to be defined by a single all-encompassing statement. Indeed, leadership is very hard to define as one key concept or process. Leadership, and models of leadership, are constantly influenced by behaviour, by the environment they are practiced in, and by other circumstances.

As an introduction to this paper, we are proposing our interpretation of leadership that draws from a number of sources; that is, that leadership is often a continuing journey of learning that allow you to experience constructive and effective relationships with others who are working together with you, to achieve the same vision or goal. This may include understanding people and embracing them, listening to people, making a real connection to others, and taking them with you on your journeys [Yates 2001/2002]. Leadership can also be evident as a personal quality, rather than a learned quality or skill, which originates from qualities and behaviours [Doyle & Smith 2001].

Studying theories of management and leadership will not necessarily make you a leader, neither will researching leadership! Further, a good manager does not equate to a good leader, or vice versa. It is no use relying on theory alone – "you must have the maturity to be able to use it and energise others" [Yates 2001/2002: 15]. What leadership is about is how you put those theories and models into practice - how you find a balance in education and intellect, and capture the strengths of those you are working with. It is a culmination of skills, respect for peers and other colleagues that demonstrates one's leadership abilities and aspirations.

"A leader has a significant impact on the thinking, behaviour, and the performance of the people around him or her. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, or directly or indirectly, leaders motivate or drive people to behave in certain ways" (Human Synergistics/ Centre for Applied Research Inc, 1997).

#### **Qualities of a leader**

*Who are leaders?* Leaders come in all shapes and sizes, and can range from people we refer to as community leaders, religious leaders, people in government ([politicians), workers in the field, our peers, or committed individuals to a cause. They can also be organisations, community groups, networks, small business, or corporations.

*What kinds of practical qualities come to your mind when you think of a leader?* Leaders are often described as visionaries, those that can see the 'big picture'. They are considered to be strategic, who can envisage positive outcomes in change, and are prepared to take risks. Leaders are often motivators, and can be charismatic or inspirational. They need to be adaptable and open to new ideas, and supportive of the choices their peers and colleagues take.

These above mentioned qualities are those that we often seek in a leader, and are qualities of leadership we strive to demonstrate. However they are not definitive. These qualities can be harnessed to help people come together, to achieve and be as effective as they can be. However leadership is not only about strengths in personal attributes. Good leaders are often ordinary people, who are able to reflect on who they are, and use this reflective process to energise others.

#### *Personal leadership styles*

There is never only one style of leadership to prescribe to. Many leaders rely on different styles in order to be effective. The impact of their leadership based on the styles they practice can

either be positive or negative. Qualities of a leader should be balanced with an awareness of how your style influences others.

Over time, there have been many examples of leadership. Doyle & Smith's (2001) synopsis of classical leadership models and traits summarised several types of leaders and leadership. For the purpose of this paper we have included their styles:

- Leaders are those who **lead by their traits or personal qualities**
- Leaders those who **lead by behaviour**.
- Often leaders will revert to using different styles of leadership under different situations or circumstances. They have a **contingency approach** allows effectiveness based on the "leadership style and the degree to which the situation gives the leader control and influence [Doyle & Smith 2001: 6].
- **Transformational leaders** are those who act as a change agent – they encourage a new levels of awareness about what we need to achieve as opposed to what we want, and make the priority of the outcome based on the needs of the organisation or team [Doyle & Smith 2001: 6-7]; and
- **Charismatic leadership**, or people are "born" leaders, having special talents and are gifted.

The ability to use and move between styles in order to respond to people and other influences, demonstrates a well-honed understanding of leadership, and the role it can play in achievement and effective outcomes. Most leaders are not aware of the impact they have on others, so by initiating different styles, they are able to also gauge reactions and responses to how well they are able to work through problems, issues and relationships.

Some of the research uncovered referred to common qualities of leaders, which including the ability to:

- identify, cultivate and inspire enthusiastic followers
- focus their efforts
- face and overcome great difficulties
- expect more from themselves than they do from others
- are not afraid to make tough decisions
- have a vision and utmost faith in themselves to fulfil that vision
- are ambitious for themselves, their companies, and their people [Shelton 1999: 14].

Many leadership theorists and gurus have been born out of the recent movements to solidify the definition and paradigms of leadership. There have been many examples of theorists who have summarised key styles of leadership into layman's terminology. Daniel Goleman illustrated this in how his interpretation of leadership has led to having a common sense approach to theory. His presentation of leadership for the modern age indicated that leaders who achieve the best results, or who are most effective in what they do, rely on several leadership styles, depending on the situation.

The styles of leadership that Goleman summarised were:

- **Coercive** – where leaders demands immediate compliance to their work or direction;
- **Authoritative** – where leaders mobilise people towards a vision;
- **Affiliative** – where a leader creates harmony and builds emotional bonds in order to achieve or be effective;
- **Democratic** – where a leader forges consensus through participation. This example will be covered in more detail throughout this paper as Nola and I speak specifically about our experience with the Khmer community;
- **Pacesetting** – where a leader will set high standards for performance to achieve; and
- **Coaching** – where a leader's focus is on developing people for the future, often developing new leaders [2000: 82-83].

Each of these styles work well on their own, but when combined create a more effective approach and application of leadership. The *Coercive* and *Pacesetting* styles were regarded as the least effective, especially when used on their own. Yet, in some circumstances, quick top-

down decision making skills are necessary, and implementing standards for a highly skilled, competent and motivated team can ensure outcomes are achieved on time. Any style of leadership will have a short-term use that is you cannot rely on one style for more than too long. This will be largely influenced by the environment and the people you are working with.

### **Paradigms of Leadership**

What does history tell us about leadership, and leaders who have risen to the many challenges of the past? Internationally, many models have been researched. For example, the American model of leadership is often synonymous with charisma, where leaders are seen out in front, charging to battle [Dunn 1998]. The US Presidential elections are a visual example of this style of leadership, with the Democratic and Republican parties tugging at the heartstrings of the American public in order to make their representative look like they were 'born' to lead them and their country. Leaders, however as we know, are not always and are not able to be charismatic. Leaders will know how to deal with change and use this as part of their growth and development.

Historically, the Australian model of leadership has often been portrayed as an amalgamation of many styles and models based on the British model of hierarchy, aristocracy, and the right to rule. Today, the styles of leadership demonstrated by Australians are much harder to define, with recent research indicating an emphasis in the workplace on management over meeting goals and visions of organisations and staff [Farrelly 2003]. Often people skills are pushed aside, with career aspirations and saving face as the primary goal for many managers and so-called leaders.

It is often quite easy to envision what you want from a leader, and just as easily identify what you don't want. It is often hard to find leadership in those who have never taken on a challenge to look at themselves critically and in detail.

### **The Paradigm shift**

Leadership can sometimes be about challenging the norm, and taking risks that will make a positive difference for a situation or a relationship. But how are we to be sure of what's working and what isn't in leadership? How do we tell if we're 'stuck in a rut' or are progressing forward?

You may find that you and your organisation, or your team is working well together in order to achieve your intended outcomes, but the "leader" of your team may not allowing those challenges to impact as wholly as you would like. Is this issue of leadership not about the process but about the leaders themselves?

So what needs to happen to change leadership as we know it? It takes a brave person to challenge the status quo, and it is taking that step that often makes a difference in leading people or yourself to achievement. Development of effective leadership takes time, and as the commercial says, it "won't happen overnight". Commitment is essential to ensure it works for the best for everyone. Also, effective leadership as discussed above in this paper is not limited to individuals. There are many organisations who practice leadership in similar ways as individuals do, but the advantage of an organisation operating under a concept of leadership is that there is a stronger and holistic driving force behind any changes that may take place that can influence a wider array of people and organisations who wish to work together to achieve a common outcome or vision.

Nola and I will now provide for you our reflections on the Khmer community of NSW. What is common in our reflections is that leadership cannot be examined as a single entity. It must be linked and connected to the environment it is practiced in, and with respect to individuals and organisations. In the case of the Khmer community, and similarly for all cultural and linguistically diverse groups across Australia, qualities of leadership are more often intertwined with culture – Khmer culture and the general culture of Australian society.

### **An example of Community leadership NSW Cambodian Australian Welfare Council Inc**

The Cambodian-Australian Welfare Council (CAWC) is a small community organisation located in South-West Sydney which has adopted a working philosophy incorporating leadership as a driving force in growing the organisation and Khmer community across NSW. With a very strong and committed management committee, and a very small number of employees (one full-time and two part-time staff), they have managed to change the direction of their organisation, and influence the local Khmer and mainstream community to embrace new ideas, new projects and opportunities. I have worked with CAWC in various capacities over the past six years. I have been able to observe a very small non-government community organisation demonstrate their eagerness to embrace change and new visions for the local Khmer community.

The Cambodian-Australian Welfare Council (CAWC) of NSW was established in 1983 by workers assisting with Khmer clients. In 1996, the Khmer Interagency (as it was originally called) developed its management structures, and in 1997 it was successfully funded by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs under its Community Services Settlement Scheme for a Level 3 Community Development Worker. This worker was funded to develop community development initiatives, strengthen the community and its ties to mainstream and generalist services. The Interagency became an essential tool in informing the wider community about the issues and experiences of the Khmer community.

#### *CAWC's paradigm shift*

In 1999, CAWC received continued funding for the Community Development Worker position, which was renamed Community Settlement Scheme Worker. In September, the name of the organisation was changed to Cambodian-Australian Welfare Council (CAWC) of NSW Inc.

CAWC's annual general meeting and planning day in 2001 identified several community issues and a signal for change. CAWC began to question their own effectiveness, and the effectiveness of their management committee. Several questions were raised for discussion and further development: What resources does CAWC need? What resources can CAWC access? Is CAWC experienced enough to expand its services? What direction should CAWC's co-ordinating role take? What became evident from this discussion was the need to a stronger direction and expansion of its funding base to allow diversification of its role in the Khmer and mainstream community. Staff and management committee members needed to prepare themselves for change. They all had to be able to operate under a model of welfare and community development, but not limit to the settlement process.

In early 2002, CAWC identified a new focus to look beyond settlement as the only avenue to provide assistance to the community. CAWC began its transformation as a leading Khmer organisation recognising the strengths of Khmer community by instilling their common vision into the community, and giving the community confidence to achieve that vision.

The organisation strengthened and developed alliances with State and Federal Government, and was successful in receiving funding for several new projects which were not settlement-focused. The success in funding showed their leadership and ingenuity in bridging gaps in service provision, taking the next step in identifying "life after settlement" as defined by their original grant, and putting Khmer issues into the mainstream welfare service agenda. They showed organisational leadership by taking risks and challenging their traditional community welfare practices in order to continue to serve the community to the best of their ability. Their Women's Leadership Project is a great example of this lateral thinking, by targeting Khmer women to grow their skills and empower them to believe in their roles and contributions to the Khmer community, and wider communities of NSW they participate in.

#### *Participative democracy – CAWC Management Committee*

CAWC have accepted planning and participation as key drivers for their work, and continually challenge the issues raised within the community to focus on producing the best outcomes for the community. The management committee are a key example of where CAWC has been able

to identify, cultivate and inspire local Khmer and non-Khmer workers and residents to participate in a democratic process.

The management structure provides a business-oriented perspective to the work of CAWC, but also encapsulates the drive and commitment of those who volunteer to steer the organisation towards many continued successes. Management Committee members are entitled "Directors" of their given portfolios so they are able to specialise in their nominated roles and take ownership of the roles they provide to the committee and to the organisation. They share in training and development opportunities as does the CAWC staff members, and have gained insight into areas of management, public speaking, safety and first aid. As CAWC as an organisation grows, so do their staff and members.

Each committee member comes with a different field of expertise, including management, education, community welfare, university students, and public service. Learning from each other is pivotal, and is of benefit not only to each management committee member, but also from the members of CAWC and the wider Khmer community. The committee is growing its knowledge bank and sharing their resources and intellectual capacity to everyone has an opportunity to experience the wealth of knowledge and experience they provide to CAWC.

*Creating knowledge – awareness, education and recognising strengths in the community*

Developing and organising the 2003 conference, "Seizing our Future - Australian Khmer: reflecting on our cycle of life and creating a positive destiny" was a key milestone for CAWC. The conference was integral in dismantling the conservative mindset of many Khmer and non-Khmer workers and organisations by framing its themes of leadership and developing positive pathways for the community, and the organisation to grow. Hosting the conference was a key strategy in providing an educational outlet for workers, harnessing the knowledge and creative capacity of the organisation, and increasing awareness about developing a more empowered community "identity".

The community needs analysis completed in 2003 was another major outcome achieved by CAWC. Focusing not only on demographic changes and key settlement and re-settlement issues within the Khmer community, the needs analysis also touched on issues of community identity, leadership and succession, and group versus community need. It also paved the way for mainstream communities to learn about the many sub-ethnicities within Khmer culture, and that their experiences are not limited to their culture.

CAWC continues to demonstrate their determination to grow as an organisation, and embrace the challenges of the community sector, and show others that small organisations such as CAWC can grow, prosper and lead with their community in order to make a difference.

### **Setting My Scene**

It's more than 20 years now since I returned to Australia from 4 years in Chicago followed by 6 months of teaching in Bangladesh. I've had plenty of time to experience a range of leaders and leadership styles in the Khmer community. Plenty of time to become aware of the dirty linen in the community, the expectations, the prejudices, likes and dislikes, hierarchies, power struggles, family and political factions and the immediate history which catapulted Cambodians into the Australian society.

I should say at the outset that my involvement with refugees from Indo-China stemmed mostly from my belief in and commitment to a multi-cultural Australia. I believed that if I couldn't live in harmony with my neighbours, and make multiculturalism work on an individual level, then Australia as a whole was doomed in doing so. From one group of Australians to another, there are significant differences anyway, without the added burden of crossing cultural and language barriers. I set out on a most interesting journey which continues today in much more complexity now that I have married a Cambodian and parent step-children and grandchildren in a very blended, extended family.

As an outsider looking on at first, much of what happened went right over my head. I went to every function or activity that I was invited to and sat and listened, and watched and learned, much like a child learns its first language.

Through my time and involvement, I have watched the wider Khmer community go around in a number of circles, to the point now that I wonder how we can move it on, so that there is something for my children and grandchildren to be committed to. We can't all be leaders, but we must have them if we are to have any direction.

### **The Glaring Issues**

Why we think these are problems? Are they different from other cultures or are they the same? If they are different, how or why? I would like to identify some of the glaring issues which I have seen set this community in a cyclic pattern rather like the seasons.

#### *Status and education*

In the early 80's, the issue of maintaining former status (or class) was important, and it was even possible, being in a new place with no history, to make up a better bio-data than the real one! A few people have been caught out on that since Cambodia opened up again in the 90's. Linked to that was the issue of a high level of education gained in Cambodia being able to command for you a great deal of respect.

The problem with these two issues is that if you have no innate intelligence to manage the skills required in a new country and new way of life, all the status or education in the world will be of no use. In Australia you will be assessed on what you can do or achieve. Once the next generation can think and act independently, then they will treat the previous generation with respect but not be willing to place the future of the community into their hands – unless they can also demonstrate those transferable skills.

#### *Power and obligation – "The need to have power, or be associated with someone who has power".*

This could be in a family unit or in some other group. It is not just about helping your relatives but there is a belief that you don't mind being a server as long as you are serving on the winning team. The need to have power or be associated with power tends to get people to work within their clans and while it is a strength base for the family, it doesn't improve the wider society much. Australians see this as nepotism, but it is in fact more than that. It also has to do with obligation. The favours never end. If someone helps you, then you are mentally keeping score, so that you can repay the favour when the time arrives.

No one wants to get the hard work but everyone wants to get the glory. This often leads to wrong assumptions about motives for people doing things. Why would you want to put in a lot of time doing something if you aren't going to make money out of it or get glory for doing it. Misunderstanding motives. Character assassinations are common. So a person is persuaded to take a leading role, then gossiped about so much that they lose heart and leave, or after then have completed their term and done a reasonably good job, the person following boosts their own position by denigrating the leader prior to them. This is very common. It means that no knowledge is stored and passed on – community records are destroyed to maintain the fiction. There is not a pattern of co-operation but rather of competition. Setting out to make a mark by being better than the person before you! (This sounds awfully like Canberra to me but at least with our government, the departments maintain that continuity which is missing in Khmer organisations!! Each new group, with a few exceptions must start from scratch)

#### *Unexpected survival instincts*

The desperate situation often breeds a leader. Just when in-fighting looks like it is about to destroy the entire hard work of ten years, behind the scenes manoeuvring will produce an outcome that was unforeseen by the outsiders, or uninitiated to the culture.

*Being on the winning team*

Fence sitting is common. If you can't figure out who will win, or who will be the strongest, then don't take sides until it becomes very clear and then you jump to the right side of the fence. You always want to be on the winning team.

"Divide and Conquer" by spreading gossip and persuading everyone not to believe in someone else, and then they will be so fragmented that they will be unable to achieve anything. This is a simple technique from the Pol Pot time where this kind of gossip removed the person permanently

If you disagree with someone, then you never talk to that person again. This isolates them effectively and may limit their power base. In Western societies, we are taught to accept defeat graciously particularly through sport. We mightn't like the other person, but we learn to behave normally to other fellow travellers – from about grade 2 in fact.

If you can't run it, leave and make another organization that you can be in control of, no matter how few people you represent. This helps you get back your "face". This has happened so many times here in Sydney that it is hard to know how people expect to raise all the funds that are necessary to support community ventures.

Find someone you can put in, encourage him a lot and then once he accepts to stand as leader, get him elected, and then disappear to leave him to run the show with no support. Work him till his fingers fall off.

As soon as you've persuaded someone to stand for election and gotten them in, begin to criticise so that whatever belief they had in their ability to do the job disappears completely and they will never want to be bothered to take any public office again, even if it is community service. This will mean that instead of doing the job, they have to work out how to get out of it graciously so that they "save face" on all fronts – with those supporting them and with those criticizing them. This is a very tricky business.

*Identity*

Acknowledging or recognizing or creating identity is a major issue faced by all arrivals at some time early on. This is one of the emerging issues for the community as it seeks its direction. When the early arrivals came to Australia, it was much easier to define what a Khmer person should do, how they should behave and what they should think. Time is slowly changing that.

The ideas brought by the parents are passed on to the children, who are also taking in knowledge in school and in the other social associations that their parents aren't privy to. This sets the agenda for a cultural or generation clash. This is not peculiar to Khmer, but will affect future community leaders remaining connected to the community or leaving it as irrelevant.

The parents are holding on fast to the identity they know, which includes the social forms and formulas that they are familiar with, while the younger people are taking on other ways of doing things. The Khmer organizations tend to stick to the way things were structured in Cambodia, even if the constitution and paperwork looks like it all fits the Australian scene. But more and more now, the younger generation with their local knowledge and education don't fit, and so eventually leave for associations where they **will** fit and be listened to. Very often they don't want to associate with the old system. So possible leaders are lost which is a great loss to the community.

**Experiences with various Khmer committees and the strategies they use**

Within the last twenty years, I have worked on the Central Management of the Khmer Community of NSW for 11 years in some capacity. My first experience was being co-opted to the education sub-committee of the Khmer Community. I was invited by the then general secretary. She was working with me as a bilingual assistant on a course for Khmer young people at TAFE. This was an interesting experience, since the meetings were held in Khmer of which I didn't speak one word at the time, and I fulfilled my duties by doing what was passed on without really knowing what was going on. My main function was to write any necessary

letters in English that needed to be done, and keep people informed about the correct procedures for Community organizations.

I could honestly say that I didn't know too much about how the relationships in the Khmer community worked then at all. I was a mere TAFE teacher trying to find ways to assist a group of people – young people mostly to settle into a new land and find employment. Having lived in the United States from 1975 to 1980, I was uninformed about what all average Australians had learned via the newspapers about Indo-China during that time – I can promise you news in the U.S.A was like a continuous war movie on Vietnam, but with little fact and not much substance. I was on a steep learning curve. My main focus was to implement courses which tried innovative ways of educating people to include literacy, (in two languages in many cases), social and living skills, work specific skills, work place information and very often fill in the gaps of a missed primary education (including maths, history, geography etc). I knew nothing of the community politics and was learning about Cambodia's history and culture.

Another experience I remember was at an election that followed. I only came to understand this much later. In order to keep one of the particular political factions in control of the community at the time, a person was nominated for leadership who I later knew was the most unlikely candidate to undertake such an office. The real power brokers were in employment which would not permit them to hold office at that time, so a relative was persuaded to stand. He stayed only two months, and then left Sydney not completing the work connected to the office. He was replaced without going to an election, since the constitution allowed for this. ...And business rolled on as usual – mostly the business of teaching Khmer language, maintaining traditional and cultural dancing groups and ensuring that the traditional festivals happened which were the initial concerns.

The following election (which, by the way I always attended but didn't vote in for many years at the beginning despite being on the committee), I was passed on like a comfortable shoe to the next committee. I say this, because reflecting back, I see I was able to maintain some sort of consistency by being there. This third committee worked very hard and during their term, we finally obtained the complex at Bonnyrigg and fundraised madly to begin the first building project. During this phase, we moved on to a different vision of what the Khmer community in Australia would be with a strong desire for tangible assets. It was not without its problems. It's not every day that the local member hauls you in to lambast you because someone on the committee, at a function the night before, has bailed up the Premier at the urinal to ask for funds!! Or issues of the staff being looked down on by some management members for merely being staff. But many things were achieved during this term. The money that was requested at the urinal was given to the community after we put it through the appropriate channels!!

What made it so successful? We were like a gang of Gung Ho illiterates who pulled off the job – by fighting and surmounting all obstacles! I think now it was the fact that we worked together on that committee as equals, we discussed things, we carefully followed up whatever rules in the new society which gave us any advantage and we had a goal to work for which was the Bonnyrigg Khmer Community Centre then just empty land but is now a multimillion dollar complex.

What saddens me most about this particular committee is that I rarely hear anyone praise the efforts or achievements of that committee, but rather, I still hear detrimental gossip about the negatives things that occurred.

There have been two other types of committees that I want to mention. The educated missionary type comes to mind – someone who has zeal and a belief in themselves because they believe they were born to rule. The community can go forward, but only some people are attracted to this and the rest are disaffected. The belief that people have to be educated – to be able to manage the problems – it takes on a negative connotation for some. I know a number of less educated people who manage others well and make more money than I do and have very good ideas. Many people stopped being involved during this time. Other people were attracted. Further building additions happened at the Bonnyrigg complex. It was steady as she goes. I rarely hear any comments about this time.

The final organisational experience that I want to mention, that also has positive lessons for us, was when I returned from living in Cambodia during the two terms of Mr Por Heang Ya who I will mention by name. During this term of office, the management had a very important goal of completing the complex at Bonnyrigg by building the temple, which it proceeded to do in co-operation with the Cambodian Buddhist Society. The hallmark of this committee was also one of working as equals, being committed, following up whatever regulations were imposed by government, making links to government, involving women and young people, operating inclusively by conferring with all other Khmer organizations so that everyone felt as if they were a part of the process. There was a good relationship with Khmer Interagency and CAWC and a clear defining of the different spheres of work that the Khmer Community would undertake in individual service delivery, the Buddhist Society in concerning themselves with religious activities and Khmer Interagency (KI) in Community Development and enhancing networking and professional development for workers. This did away with competition and removed the threat of people crossing into each other's patches.

On an individual level, the patron system is one that Australia does not really use. We get work by going for interviews based on our resume and our own skills and experience. While we may like to be part of a gang or group, we can operate outside of this as we move into adulthood.

The patron system is alive and well in Cambodia and people arriving here want to have a patron to feel secure, protected, make links to work, have someone to go to, to borrow money or socialise with – rather than operating as an individual. The patron system can operate in the family, or in groups with a natural leader who attracts followers. It may be a positive for the person. It can lead to corruption as well as it means obligations involve dependence, returning favours and paybacks are part of this obligation.

I believe that disunity among monks has compounded leadership problems.

#### **Solutions? Ways to work around these issues ...**

Khmer like most groups of people, have a complex range of opinions and views about most issues, with multi-layers in each view. There is not one single view about anything. My comments are not intended to be definitive. For every idea or concept that I discover, it is possible to find another to contradict or complement it. But I believe if we are to work together, we need to understand each other. We have to start somewhere.

As we have heard, it depends on what style of leadership we are considering or even for that matter, what style attracts us to follow as well. We can look at the qualities of leadership that Marlene has already talked about and of course these can transcend culture, but may not necessarily.

We need to recognise differences in using Linear Thinking towards solutions versus Circular Thinking towards solutions.

One of the things that is changing, is the move away from circular thinking which is the custom in many countries in Asia, not only Cambodia. As the young people are educated in the system here, they are taught a system of logic that moves through problem solving in a linear fashion and in talking to younger people, they are adopting this. This saves time, but older people will find this abrupt and possibly offensive. I particularly remember a meeting called to discuss the option of the Khmer Community of NSW becoming incorporated. The meeting went on from about 10 am until 5 or 6 pm at night and everyone keep repeating the same things, so that their voice would be identified with an idea, instead of just adding ideas in the way we would do, if an idea was missing from the discussion.

Education is always a key to changing. Through my experiences in CAWC, I have joined in the professional developments and have grown right alongside the other members, as we have organised for ourselves training on public speaking, management, first aid, had internal discussions about issues of contention within the group and the wider community. We have

looked at the various fields that the different workers are in and networked and shared the training specific to those areas, so that we all benefited.

So what are the negative strategies that they use? As with us, they also use control, fear, blame, avoidance, not acknowledging an issue.

And what can we observe in the way that Khmer in Australia particularly are organising themselves, that we may find instructive in working together? Teamwork and co-operation have worked very well. Participative Democracy has worked very well in CAWC over a long period of time.

In Cambodia, they do need a paradigm shift away from the patron system. But where to start and how to do it, is beyond my control or even imagination. However, in Australia, through participating in the wider community, we should be able to implement strategies that will shift the paradigm for the greater benefit of the entire community.

If you ask Khmer why they are glad to be in Australia, freedom and democracy are usually mentioned. I believe in CAWC, we have refined participative democracy to an art. Issues are put on the table, and more than one person is always involved in making a decision. This has been done through the monthly meetings and the posting of minutes to keep everyone abreast of the information. Everyone can have a say about all issues – you only have to attend. Now thanks to email, we can be in contact and participate even more efficiently.

What is important for the future is encouraging the younger people to work alongside us. At this point in time, to encompass the whole community, we need to encourage leaders who understand how to operate comfortably in both cultures so that they can tell either side why things are being done the way they are, and they can maintain their respect and appropriateness in both cultures. I'm so glad to tell you that Huy Meng Chhay, mentioned by Elizabeth Pickering, is on our management – and I'll also vote for him as Prime Minister.

### **Further Questions**

A very good question I have asked myself many times since I returned from living in Cambodia is, why does building temples get commitment, and why isn't temple building equated with community building or capacity building since this is investing in the next generation – similar to the next life.

Why does building temples get commitment? Of course it's related to religious beliefs and reincarnation. But how can we transfer this energy to building community or building capacity so that it will have significant outcomes not only on Khmer but also the wider community?

Have non-Khmer, working alongside the community done damage to the direction of the community by helping the wrong people – the ones who sound good to us, but aren't being listened to by them.

It's so important to listen to as many people as you can to make sure you are not making damaging assumptions. Don't just get with one person and listen to them, and throw all your weight in behind them. They may have a following, but is it just family, or is it the patron system meaning they have something to offer which you don't know about that is creating their following. Is it legitimate? At the beginning of my involvement, I remember spending lots of time with people who we assumed would go on to become leaders and transfer information and participate in community development. Some are no longer involved, and not even respected by many in the community. Can you spot the leader? No not always!

As a non-Khmer myself, I often ask myself if I am doing something that impedes progress – am I accepting the right things and holding out for the right things – or am I not listening enough. Is it their vision, is it my vision, or it is ours? I have never tried to be a leader in the community myself, but to serve those who were. Only Khmer themselves can comment on whether this strategy has been useful in the development of this community within a multicultural Australia.

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## Study circles – a mirror of a changing civil society?

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Education and training are seldom controlled by the civil society. Sometimes educational activities are justified and focussed on the needs of civil society, even if it is in the hands of the public sector. However, study circles have always been ruled by associations, movements and what is at least formally democratically ruled organisations, i.e. the civil society (Larsson, 2001). I will in this paper present a story about study circles and their relation to the changing character of the civil society. The context is Sweden. Since I assume many readers are unfamiliar with the phenomenon that the word “study circles” signifies, I will give some general remarks on its meaning.

The notion “study circle” can best be understood as a word that refers to a tradition, since its meaning is changing through history. Its contemporary identity also produces many faces. In Sweden and its neighbours in the Nordic countries, Denmark, Norway and Finland, study circles have been discerned as a specific educational phenomenon during 100 years with somewhat different histories. It can nowadays be considered as an educational institution, i.e. study circles have become rather institutionalised, with a bureaucracy and staff in a hierarchy. The study associations that organisations and popular movements have constructed as organisers receive a substantial state support, i.e. 30 % of their budgets (SoU 2004:30, 2004). One reason for taking an interest in the study circle is that it has played an important role and is nowadays a mass education phenomenon in Sweden. Another reason is its role as a form of education rooted in the civil society.

Study circles were developed in Sweden as part of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century popular movements, which at first were in conflict with the dominant culture and power structures (Arvidsson, 1989). They started within the temperance movement and soon ignited other movements, most importantly the labour movement. The study circle soon became a popular way to organise study activities in popular movements in the Nordic countries. Other movements, such as the free churches and farmers started study circles within their own organisations. During the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century one can discern a rather distinctive context for the study circles. The movements shared to some extent the same educational needs, i.e. the lack of any education above a very short elementary school. They also shared a lack of money, but had a strong will to put energy and time into the movement. It was the working classes’ movements, i.e. workers and small farmers participated and were also generally the leaders. Participants were young and the activities often covered a broad range of needs and interests among the members, from political activity to dancing and theatre. Among these education was one. The movements were the power centres for change of society in a more democratic direction and were the recruitment bases for the political elite on the local and national level after universal suffrage was introduced in the early 1920ies. The collective forms of the civil society thus had a strong impact on the construction of society, mainly through its influence on the state, but also through unions and the cooperative movement and its influence on the structure of the production.

An elaborated system of associations were, during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, on the local level in charge of many aspects of life – trade unions, tenants’ unions, political parties, sports clubs, electricity, roads, libraries, cooperative shops, dairies, houses that were meeting-places etc. These were often sub-structures within movements, but not always. Decision-making was democratic. Study circles became poor people’s way of solving their learning needs within this civil society structure. Rather early it became a form of study that attracted both women and men. It was also part of the movements’ efforts to foster members – often justified by views of an “ennobled” mankind (Ambjörnsson, 1988, Hartman, 1989). During this phase study-circles were an integrated part of the movements in their struggle to change society in various ways (Arvidsson, 1996)

The conception of a study circle has changed since the start. In the beginning it was understood as an activity where a group of people came together and chose a topic to study. The group was

often the starting point, where the choice of content was made. Participants belonged to the movements and normally took part in other activities within the movement. Around 10 persons typically gathered either in the popular movements' houses or at some participant's home. The emphasis often was to have conversations around texts. A library was therefore linked to the study circle (Arvidsson, 1985). These movement-based libraries became an effective link between literature and workers, farmers and others who normally would not have any contact with books other than religious texts. The conversation could be focussed on the personal appropriation of the message in the texts. The libraries should cover a broad range of subjects and also fiction – this was the vision of Oscar Olsson, who was the prime inventor and promoter of the idea of study circles (Arvidsson, 1991). However, there was no consensus about how to view education. In the workers' movement there were competing views, an enlightenment-inspired view as well as a neohumanistic one and a view that has been called self-education, which was launched by Oscar Olsson. (Gustavsson, B., 1991). The equality between participants was emphasized and instead of the notion of a teacher there was a leader who organised the dialogue and whose suitability was not necessarily based on having more knowledge than other participants. Decision-making was often inspired by the training within the associations' democratic forms. There were no examinations or tests and no merits to gain from participating. Study circles varied a lot, in order to meet the needs of movements with members who had an urge for all kinds of knowledge. The content was formed by the instrumental needs within the movements but also by their members' interest in education generally. It could focus on poetry, art and mathematics as well as knowledge of key importance for the movements. A key aspect of the knowledge gained is its relation to political and social action. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when study circles were part and parcel of a "movement life-form" one can notice that study circles were not the bases for social and political action. The action-aspect was taken care of by other parts of the specific movement. In the workers' movement social and political action was executed by unions and parties, but also through mobilisation for consumer cooperatives, associations for the struggle for better conditions for tenants etc. One can say that it was a conglomerate of organisations for special purposes where study circles organised by study associations were among the few that did not constitute the bases for external political and social action. However, study circles often served the action-oriented organisations.

In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century one can notice that this pattern slowly dissolves. The organic change and development of the tradition was early on acknowledged by leading persons. An unorthodox attitude was often taken. Distance education in combination with study circles activities was tried already in the 1930's (Larsson, 2004). However, the changes in the middle of the century were more profound and had to do with changes in the civil society. The popular movement as life-form is weakened on the local level (Ambjörnsson, 1988). Other ways of organising time off work becomes common. One can say that there is a tendency that the openly ideology-based organisation of activities is replaced by "neutral" arenas, such as television, travel, entertainment outside of the movements' context etc. This change can also be noted in the study circles. The link to a library has disappeared. The movement-based libraries were actually closed and public libraries took their place. The popular movements as contexts for recruitment have also become less pronounced. Instead, the study associations that were established as special branches within ideologically profiled popular movements eventually started to recruit participants outside of the movements. Instead of being integrated in the movements, study circles became autonomous (Arvidsson, 1996). The link between movements and study circles were therefore weakened, even if the study associations were in the hands of the movements. If the movements started to have problems, study circles became a success-story in terms of participation. A steady growth in participation in the circles has made them a real mass-phenomenon. There were in 1950/51 reported close to 31 000 circles with more than 315 000 participants (Johansson, 1954: 239). The increase was then steady until the end of the 1970's when the participation stabilised. Official statistics from Sweden give an estimate of more than 300 000 study circles with around 2.5 million participants for the year 2003 (Folkbildningsrådet, 2004).

Since many persons participate in several circles during a year, some are counted twice or several times, i.e. the share of the population is somewhat lower, but investigations from the middle of the 1990's found out that 75 % of the adult population had participated at least once

in a study circle. For 10% it was a regular part of their life and it is reported that for half of those study circle participation is a life style (Jonsson & Gähler, 1995). The background for this increase is complex. One reason was a financial state-support, that was in the 1970's rather generous. The activities have also been institutionalised with an elaborate administration and study circle leaders are often working as paid staff. Another side is the reduction of working hours that took place during the 1960's and a possibility to develop hobbies. The process where recruitment outside of movements became common was probably also a key aspect. Study associations became more and more "neutral" in their appearance. This probably led to the effect that study circle participation was not hit by the crisis of popular movements, which has been discussed since the 1950's in Sweden. A lot of study circles take place within movements and various organisations, but this has been overshadowed by the participation that is not based on such a link (Larsson, 2001).

An effect of the dissolution of the movements' life-form and the "neutralisation" of most study circles is that there is no link for the gross majority of study circles to arenas for social and political action. The relation between what is learnt in study circles and political and social action becomes obscure or individualised. It has been pointed out that one can discuss study circle participation as meeting-places and forums that strengthen civil society – an enclave outside of an educational system that is formed by the idea that the work-force can be more profitable through educational investments and also formed by its relation to a meritocratic society (Andersson et al. 1996, Oftedal Thelhaug, 1990, Wellton, 1997). Another perspective is to view study circle participation as part of consumerism in contemporary society. The study circle as a contribution to social and political action is undermined by the dissolution of structures where decisions were made within the civil society. The small scale has often disappeared – parties, unions, cooperatives and other organisations have been centralised. The public sector has taken over parts of the activities that were in the hands of the civil society – libraries and not least education in various forms. The market has invaded other parts, as in the reduction of the importance of consumer cooperatives etc. The space for participating in decision-making within the civil society is thus reduced (Larsson, 2001)

Study circles are often discussed as democratic education in our time. At least two aspects can be discerned here. First, the study circle tradition is in principle linked to the civil society. It emanated within the context of popular movements and the content is normally not instrumental to the market or subordinated to the state or local government in choice of content. In this way study circles are in principle a platform for culturing opinions independent of the state and the corporate market interest. Waldén (1994) has analysed the talk that takes place during breaks in handicraft circles and showed that it is expressions of concern that is of political nature. It is also an arena for people to learn more about things that they care about, without any consideration of its usefulness in any other way. Some have noticed the similarities between the processes in a study circle and those supposed to happen according to the theory of a deliberative democracy (Andersson et al, 1996, Larsson, 2001). Habermas' description of the conditions and ideals of communicative action seems also to look like the ideal of a study circle (Habermas, 1991). From the perspective of this theory of democracy the conditions and inner life of study circles become relevant. The lack of an instrumental rationality linked to examinations as well as the personal interest in the topic creates the conditions for studies that are related to the life-world of the participants rather than the needs of the economic and administrative system.

However, if the deliberations should lead to political and social action, study circles as has already been pointed out, seldom result in efforts to such action, if they are not already part of political or social movements. Most study circles in the Nordic countries are rather related to individual interests, and the relation to collective action outside the study circle context remains unclear. One can here discuss the importance of such activities that are cultivating personal interests, creating meeting-places etc that escape the requirements of the systems, i.e. that are related to the life-world in Habermas words (Habermas, 1991, Putnam, 1993). One argument is that it creates a place for studies that are of importance for political and social action, that is used by some, but is also a potential to be used by varying social movements. However, it seems that contemporary political and social action takes other forms than those where study circles becomes important. It seems as if media have the strongest impact in forming opinions

and that political action is reduced to voting between various parts of a professionalized elite. Sometimes there are demonstrations and other events, but most of the participants are not involved in such long-term activities, where study-circles become part of collective activities.

A key angle is the space for diversity and pluralism, which is argued to be the contemporary challenge for democratic thinking in postmodernity (Johnston, 1999, Usher, Bryant, Johnston, 1997). Diverse interests and identities, creating a fabric of collectives that individuals are involved in can strengthen their positions through study circles. In that case study circles will promote democracy by making society more pluralistic through supporting diversity, where a multiplicity of identities can be worked out or reproduced. The anarchistic character of study circles seems to fit this better than most known educational phenomena (Larsson, 1998). Based on traditional modern identities as the working class, it seems strange that they have created space for the development of postmodern pluralism of identities. It is obvious that the old movements were not that monolithic as one could imagine. Rather they fostered a certain form of pluralism (Sandler, 1937). However, the process of disintegration from the movements probably opened for more pluralism. The welfare-society, from the individuals' point of view, created less dependence on collectives from a materialistic point of view. The weakened traditional collectivism also gave space for more individualism, which some would argue created the possibility to develop a more flexible net of collectives.

However, such pluralistic networks do not challenge the increasing inequalities in material resources that follow the global capital's strengthened position. States are more and more serving the capital and is generally abandoning the welfare-society that somewhat compensated for the inequalities. This latter change also reduces the impact from the civil society in social and political matters, since the state was often the instrument that movements and organisations tried to use in order to change society. The civil society has lost power on the more grand-scale collective level and given space for market and state to form society with little influence from the civil society.

During at least the last decade one can notice that the study associations, which are organising study circles are tempted to also act as a general providers of education, i.e. a subcontractors of general education, besides organising study circles. One can foresee that this tendency creates a diffuseness of identity of another kind, where the boundaries between civil society and the state and the market are dissolved. Study associations are here subordinating themselves to the state and the market, which reduces their autonomy and the role of study associations to serve the civil society. However, this process has not yet reduced the level of participation in the "traditional" study circles, but it shows the attitudes from those in leading positions.

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## Shaping Our Futures Together

### The Importance of Women-only Leadership Courses for Rural Women

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#### *Introduction*

It has often been said that good women's education is good adult education (Coats, 1989, p. 105).

Rural women have a great capacity to contribute and lead within their communities, but often lack the skills and opportunities to access relevant training and support. Women-only courses provide springboards for women to learn in non-threatening environments and develop support networks. This paper will describe the Shaping Our Futures Together (SOFT) women-only leadership course developed by the NSW Rural Women's Network<sup>2</sup> (RWN), part of NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and outline why such training is important in increasing women's leadership aspirations.

What is SOFT?

SOFT provides a *space* where women can come together as women and recognises women's identity: it values women's personal experiences and *ways of knowing*. SOFT was developed in response to requests from rural women to provide accessible, appropriate and affordable leadership training, and focuses on three core themes:

1. *building self-esteem and confidence;*
2. *personal goal setting and action planning; and*
3. *effective networking.*

The 14-hour course is run over two consecutive days and is designed to engage and energise new and existing rural women leaders by providing a framework for sharing creative ideas, learning new skills, and establishing support networks. SOFT builds social capital and is contributing to the sustainability of rural communities. Courses have been delivered to over 130 women living in rural, regional and remote areas of New South Wales.

Since 2001 eight SOFT courses have been run in various locations across NSW. Participants have come from a broad cross section of the community and include Aboriginal women, younger women, older women, farming women, unemployed and employed women and business women. Most SOFT participants pay some kind of subsidised registration fee, with the balance of costs coming from various funding sources.

There are no selection criteria or prerequisite skills needed to participate. SOFT is appropriate for women with any level of education and has the flexibility to respond to the needs of special needs groups such as Aboriginal women.

*SOFT provides a broad range of activities to cater for diverse learning styles and includes thinking as well as physical or doing activities. Some activities include the whole group while others use small group work or require individual participation. The learning is experiential wherever possible and involves practising, reflecting and sharing personal insights with other participants. Examples of the type of*

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<sup>2</sup> The RWN program has a small team of three staff who work with its community-based State Advisory Committee and other non-government and government agencies to develop initiatives which stimulate actions on priority issues. It is also a key information and referral portal and provides input to policy development.

*activities undertaken include role playing, journaling, visualisation, creating collages, discussing values, learning to communicate more effectively, managing time, networking, visioning, goal setting and action planning. The final sessions focus on dealing with changes in self when returning to the 'real world'.*

#### *Why Women Leaders?*

Karpin (1995) states that Australian companies must have more diversity on their decision-making bodies to stay competitive on the world stage and argues that the attributes future leaders must have are very often those that women possess:

...people skills, strategic thinking, vision, flexibility, capacity for self management, the ability to solve complex problems, have high ethical standards and be team players (Karpin, 1995 cited in Alston, 2000, p. 55).

In 2004 women still occupy less than nine per cent of senior management and board positions in the Australia's top listed companies (Brouard, Annese, & Krautil, 2004). Despite some advances in the past ten years, men still predominantly occupy positions of power in rural communities, reinforcing leadership stereotypes (Alston, 1995; Alston, 2000, Department of Primary Industries and Energy, 1996; Haslam McKenzie, 2003; Lord, Kinnear, McKenzie, & Pike 1996; O'Hagan, Alston, & Spriggs, 2003; Pini, 2001; Sinclair, 2004). SOFT is one way of challenging this leadership paradigm by not only boosting women's self-confidence but by creating support networks so women confronting masculine structures and behaviours have other women to turn to for support and encouragement.

#### *Why Women-only Courses?*

Women learn best when their presence, perspective and experience is valued. This most often tends to occur with other women, in groups where women can engage in dialogues that expose issues and increases the possibility of empowerment. Best learning occurs where group processes of discussion and listening are encouraged and developed. Best learning also tends to occur when women can explore their own social construction through an examination of the similarities and differences that exist between different women and different groups of women (Ritchie, 1998, p. 37).

SOFT has a strong focus on women valuing their own unique ways of knowing. Research on women-only courses stresses the importance of creating optimal learning opportunities in affirmative and secure environments for women to share and explore their own experience and knowledge (Limerick & Heywood, 1993; McClure, 2000; National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), 1991; Ritchie, 1998).

Women and men share many similarities, but often think, feel and interact in very different ways because of varied social experiences such as defined roles within families (Alston, 2000; McMinn, 1995; NIACE, 1991). This socialisation process combined with prevailing attitudes can strongly impact on women's self-confidence and ability to participate in leadership positions (Claridge, 1998; McGowan, 1998; Alston, 2000; McClure, 2000; Pini, 2001; Haslam McKenzie, 2003; Muir, 2003).

For women attending women's education classes, the opportunity is often a significant break from the private world of the home... To share feelings and experiences with other women can lead to an appreciation of the commonality of our experience and recognition of social structures oppressive to women. From the social space where women are engaged with each other, it is possible to gain the confidence to move out into the public world of work, community involvement, local women's networks or further education (McMinn, 1995, p. 153).

An awareness of different gendered social realities needs to be acknowledged and women's ways of knowing valued so they can become more involved in decision-making arenas (Alston, 2000; Benjamin, Besant, & Watt, 1997; Claridge, 1998; McClure, 2000; NIACE, 1991; Pini, 2001; Sinclair, 2004; Wilkinson & Alston, 1999).

Women are not a homogeneous group. They are individuals with differing life experiences and situations (Ritchie, 1998). In each introductory SOFT session, considerable time is spent allowing participants to learn a little about each other as women. Emphasis is placed on who

they are as women rather than what they do, their jobs, finances, status, roles, and so on. Introductions centre on first names and connecting with important aspects of lives, such as family, friends and places. This connection to the *being* rather than the *doing* is where women can come together and start to build trust by valuing each and every woman for who they are. This is especially important when Aboriginal women or those from disadvantaged backgrounds are in the group.

*What is the SOFT approach?*

It is essential to the entire SOFT process that time is devoted to creating a *safe space* where women can feel free to explore and discuss any personal issues that may arise. *Ground rules* are also set at this time and all participants must agree to respect confidentiality and each other before the SOFT *journey* begins.

*Inherent in the SOFT design is a belief that women have the power to shape their own future but need confidence and practical skills to unlock their leadership potential. The course provides a number of simple tools and processes which women can use in the future. The decision to embrace opportunities or change is however always a personal one (Limerick & Heywood, 1993).*

Once you start to feel good about yourself, you will quite naturally start to feel competent, and you will find the confidence to believe that you really can do anything you want to (Kirner & Rayner, 1999, cited in Muir, 2003, p. 206).

Women's educational needs have been considered when developing both SOFT content and delivery. Research shows that women tend to value learning through discussing and connecting or sharing personal experiences with others in cooperative learning environments where they can feel positively supported and encouraged, and able to draw on their own experiences while relating new knowledge to prior knowledge (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; NIACE, 1991; Ritchie, 1998).

The experience of learning alongside other women in a positive and supportive environment, exploring and celebrating similarities and differences, not only enhances confidence and raises awareness, but also changes lives (NIACE, 1991, p. 9).

Women are often seen as natural *enablers* – helping others to *do* things (Claridge, cited in Williams, 2003). They learn not only in classrooms but also through relationships and engaging with family and the community (Belenky et al., 1997, p. ix). Bringing SOFT women together places them in a position to achieve individual and common objectives and promote social change. Valuing and reflecting on experiences and developing shared understandings is a basis for change within individuals and groups. The *group* experience is in reality a *social* experience of shared social action (Benjamin et al., 1997; Bolitho & Hutchison, 2003; Ritchie, 1998).

So much begins at the level of personal development, small changes for individual women – *little rumblings* – which add up to diverse and profound shifts in political awareness (McMinn, 1995, p. 153).

Selected music is played in the background during many SOFT sessions helping to create a warm environment and receptive atmosphere for learning (Millbower, 2004). The right side of the human brain is often described as the creative side responding to music, images, wholes and simultaneous connections (Hollier, Murray, & Cornelius, 2004). SOFT visualisation techniques, images and music tap into this creative potential.

Music enhances creativity, so brainstorming sessions are an ideal place to turn up the tunes. Slow reflective music can bring participants' brain waves in to the theta cycle, which encourages sudden insights and inspirations. (Millbower, 2004, p. 20)

Creating a safe environment where women can express feelings is essential to the SOFT process. Feeling able to raise issues and reveal thoughts on particular subjects without fear is essential to a group being effective (Benjamin et al., 1997). Women-only groups facilitate this process by providing *affirmative, secure bases for women where they can be accepted and respected... form relationships and networks, strengthen their identities, and at the same time, learn* (Sanguinetti 1994 cited in Ritchie, 1998, p. 37). Women's groups can help to promote mutual understanding - *I understand, because I too have been there and this is how I overcame adversity*. SOFT encourages

women to take risks, try new ways of thinking and doing and provides a platform for women who may not have had the opportunity or space to reflect and think.

#### *How are Participants and Facilitators Assessed?*

SOFT is co-facilitated by two women trainers who also participate in many of the activities and are present throughout the entire two days. This ongoing *engagement* helps to build the group rapport and provides each 'non-performing' facilitator with the opportunity to *read* the group and provide constructive and constant feedback to the 'performing' facilitator, thus ensuring the participants' needs are being met.

SOFT content and facilitation techniques are continually being refined to meet women's needs and at the end of every SOFT course each participant is asked to complete a simple feedback form to gather feedback on overall course experiences. This information is then used to enhance future course content and delivery.

SOFT participants also have the option to be assessed (over the two days) and can gain two national competencies - *Communicate in the Workplace* and *Contribute to the Development of a Workplace Learning Environment*.

#### *Why Non-Formal Learning?*

Research now acknowledges that non-formal learning is just as important as formal educational experiences (Purdie, 1993). Non-formal learning includes social and cultural aspects of learning and contributes to increased participation and cohesion by connecting people, building networks and developing social capital (Harrison, 2003).

Harrison's research (2003) shows that teaching methods for non-formal learning are responsive to people from diverse backgrounds and provides non-threatening and nurturing environments where learners participate equitably in learning. Women learn best in an environment that is supportive and nurturing rather than competitive (Ritchie, 1998).

SOFT has been delivered in many non-formal settings such as community halls, motel dining rooms or farm stays. Courses are run in partnership with a community person who is responsible for getting a group together and assisting with the local planning such as securing appropriate venues and helping with promotions and organising catering.

The non-formal learning environment created validates the learner as an individual with unique learning needs. Although SOFT is loosely structured, the atmosphere created is one of learning together and developing a personal pathway through the activities rather than being formal, rigid and prescriptive.

### **Conclusion**

The SOFT course relies on many forms of leadership with an emphasis on not *prescribing* ways of doing but rather providing experiences that allow women to find their own way of understanding and reflecting on what works for them. It supports women's own ways of *knowing* and encourages confidence to try new ideas, experiment with intuition and develop a meaningful path that is relevant to individual values and goals within a safe environment.

*Women do want to participate in leadership roles but are faced with numerous barriers. Some of these can be overcome by helping women to access appropriate training and support to feel more confident about their skills and experience. (Alston, 1995; Alston, 2000, Claridge, 1998, McGowan, 1998, McClure, 2000, Pini, 2001, Williams, 2003). Research supports a continuation of women-only, non-formal leadership courses. Grassroots training that is relevant and accessible is playing a key part in enabling rural women to identify issues, build networks, and set and achieve goals which shape their own future and enhance their contribution to sustainable families and communities.*

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations hope to address the issues of providing relevant, affordable and accessible learning opportunities for women living in rural, regional remote areas of NSW. They are in no priority order.

1. That women's ways of knowing and gender specific learning needs be recognised and valued by government and training providers when developing leadership courses targeting women living in rural, regional and remote locations.
2. That non-formal women-only leadership courses continue to be acknowledged and valued by government and training providers as an important step within the lifelong learning continuum.
3. That women-only non-formal leadership courses which focus on building self esteem, personal goal setting and provide opportunities to establish support networks be funded by government for women in rural, regional and remote areas.

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## **“The People United? Australian solidarity with Latin America since Allende.”**

### **Abstract**

**Viviana Ramírez and Robert Austin**

During the 1970s, national and international solidarity organisations arose in opposition to U.S. imperialism in Latin America. Washington’s support for repressive regimes across the region produced world-wide diasporas of Salvadoreans, Argentines, Guatemalans, Chileans, Uruguayans and Colombians, inter alia. In Australia’s case, these included significant numbers of political and economic refugees. The conjuncture of Latin American activists escaping authoritarian regimes and the broad-based coalition of Church, Left, human rights groups and Latin Americanists generated lasting solidarity with progressive and revolutionary movements which confronted U. S. intervention and ruling elites in Latin America and the Caribbean.

This paper rethinks this area of hybrid popular struggle, vital to focus countries and heuristic for the Australian Left. In reviewing the main Australian solidarity groups with Latin America, it addresses such questions as: what ways did the solidarity movement build from previous experiences? Did this movement generate new ways to challenge U. S. and Australian foreign policy? How successful were the coalitions that were built? What impact has Latin America popular culture had in Australia since the 1970s? What influence have Latin American social or revolutionary movements had on Australian politics? What activities have been conducted in Australia by intelligence organisations from countries such as Argentina, Uruguay or Chile?

## Governmentality and discourses of social action in inner city Sydney Neighbourhood Centres

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This paper is drawn from my research interrogating taken for granted assumptions about empowerment, community development, participation and social justice. Through the research discourses of feminism, multiculturalism and urban environmentalism are also highlighted. The research has a post-structural orientation and includes an analysis of the way that particular discourses have shaped community practices. I also propose that the concept of governmentality may provide a useful framework for examining community organization practice. In this paper I describe the key research questions I developed that aimed to stimulate thinking about past community organization practices and to encourage glimpses of future possibilities. The paper provides a brief history of inner city Sydney Neighbourhood Centres (NCs) and includes quotes from activists who contributed to the research.

In my PhD research I have used the title 'practicing place' as a way of describing what activists and critical community workers have been doing through their work in neighbourhood centres. There is ample evidence that activists and critical community workers have introduced and shaped discourses in ways that were supportive of what Dirlík (1996) calls 'a critical localism' and Massey (1993) calls a 'progressive sense of place'. This paper however concentrates on discourses, governmentality and NC histories. My research draws on 'dialogic conversations' with people who were involved in setting up the centres and community workers who have worked for these small community based organizations.

### Part 1 - Discourses and the Research Directions

There are a number of studies of community organizations that set up a duality of 'success' or 'failure' in bringing about some desired form of change, for example Sharp & Inwald (1996) and Nyland (1994). Another way in which this has been expressed is that attempts at liberation and social change have been 'exhausted' and that the community organizations and the people involved with them have been 'co-opted' (Bryson & Mowbray 1991) I critique these studies as having adopted a final conclusion or reading, a 'master narrative', which provides very few openings for future movement. (In the research one of the activists refers to these types of studies as offering '*an absolute view*' and that they need '*refutation*' because there have been other '*alternative experiences and ideologies*') In the studies by Mowbray, Nyland, *etc.* the organizations have been viewed as 'monolithic' in the sense of having only one trajectory or reading. In contrast, I propose that these organizations can be understood as 'heteroglossic' (see Garrick and Rhodes, 1998) and constructed in language and stories. Understood this way, there are many, different, possible narratives about the organizations and many lines of inquiry.

I find the way that Foucault describes discourse as both shaping social processes and as something that may be 'a point of resistance' is helpful for moving beyond models of power that set up dichotomies of liberation or oppression. "*...discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy*". (Foucault 1981:101)

In conversations the activists and critical community workers located themselves within discourses, for example 'economic rationalism', 'social planning' and 'social welfare', but describe also, how they activate other discourses as resistant practices. See below, for example, in Part 3 where the discourses of 'feminism' and 'urban environmentalism' are talked about.

The research examines the situated practice of activists and critical community workers. What post-structuralism contributes to this examination is that all claims to knowledge or truth require examination (see Ball 1990, Giroux, 1992, Lather 1991, Weedon 1997, Usher *et. al* 1994, 1997 ) and especially by those claiming identities such as 'activist' or those who adopt 'critical'

postures and who say they are involved in 'liberation' practices. In other words there is within the post-structural framework a questioning of the 'truth claims' of social actors who are theorising or claiming to bring about social change or empowerment. As a strategy this research takes the practice of deconstruction, in the sense of burrowing into particular discursive formations, to question the truth claims of participants in the research (and also, later, the 'truth claims' of the researcher).

*The central research questions*

Asking one of the central research questions, *"What do the terms empowerment, participation, community service and citizenship mean for community organization practices?"* is one way of setting up particular discourses, in this case the discourses of empowerment and participation, and beginning to examine those discourses for contradictions, ambiguities and different readings. I am not setting out to prove, for example whether empowerment occurred or not. Rather the de-constructive method teases out how these terms evolved, how they have been applied, how they have been interpreted, how they have been understood and how they have been practiced discursively.

Asking the other central research question, *"What have workers and organisers wished for when they become involved in these community organizations? What might this mean for current practice?"* is a way of continuing to burrow into the formation of particular discursive categories and positions. This question opens up another area that Weedon (1991: 13) describes as important in post structural analysis – individual consciousness and how it is constructed and shapes practice. This central research question, from which flowed a lot of the 'identity work' in the research, recognises the agency of social actors but also sets up a space in which these particular identity formations i.e. activist and critical community worker (and also later the identity 'researcher') can be troubled. This does not invalidate the stories of practice, wishes, hopes and desires of workers and organisers but engages the participants in exploring these stories and reviewing of how those stories, wishes and desires have been constructed. Clifford (2001) for example argues that the subject position of 'activist' is a recent formulation in political life and asks whose interest does this identity position serve?

The other central research question *"If these organizations were once sites of dissent or oppositional knowledges and there is evidence that these sites are now governmentalized (a proposition which emerged in the initial phase of the research) then what is the future shape of community organization practice?"* uses a concept which has also been developed in post-structural theorizing. I will give a brief explanation of what use could be made of the theory of 'governmentality' for community practice.

Governmentality provides another, and I argue, a productive line of inquiry. (In the research the activists and critical community workers also spent time examining this notion of governmentality.) It is a counter reading to the story of complete control, or co-option by government of community and community organization. It has been explored in the work of Rose (1999) and Dean & Hindess (1998) in their collection of 'Studies in Contemporary Rationalities of Government in Australia'. Their empirical work has covered a number of areas, although none directly focused on local community organizations. (I see my research as contributing to this research direction.)

Briefly, governmentality draws attention to the way in which communities are encouraged to take on responsibility for governing and managing themselves and their own affairs and the way that different subject positions e.g. 'community development worker', or, 'responsible citizen' are activated and engaged in this management. Governance and management are established by the state through a whole range of mechanisms, not the least of which is funding but also through many forms of legal control and moral persuasion. Self-surveillance and monitoring is encouraged and what emerges is the creation of 'community' as a mechanism of control. *"Within a rather short period, what began as a language of resistance and critique was transformed, no doubt for the best of motives, into an expert discourse and professional vocation – community is now something to be programmed...."* (Rose, 1999:175)

In other words (now quite familiar following Foucault) communities are constructed and rendered knowable. They are investigated, mapped, classified, documented and interpreted. Opened for colonization by agents, institutions and practices of control. Different identities are constructed, mobilised and deployed. There are new relations between 'community, identity and political subjectivity' and there are many 'educators, campaigns, activists, manipulators of symbols, narratives and identifications' who are involved in this re-working (Rose 1999, pp 167 - 197). In this analysis community organizations, community activists and community workers cannot claim they are separate from, or stand outside of the state power apparatus.

## Part 2 - A Brief History of the Neighbourhood Centres

This history is drawn firstly, from written accounts of resident and community action movements in inner-Sydney and secondly, from writings which analyse the development of community sector politics in Australia over the last thirty years. In these histories the NCs are seen as having a clear connection with urban social movements that were trying to bring about some form of social change. What happened to those discourses of social action and social change? Can 'governmentality' assist in some understanding of that?

### 1960s

Barry, Clohesy and Smith (1985) provide a history of inner-city Sydney community and neighbourhood work; from that account it can be seen that the organizations around which this research is based, emerged out of resident and community action in inner Sydney in the late 1960s. They describe the pre-conditions for the emergence of the resident and community action groups. A number of features including technological changes to traditional employment of labour on the waterfront and in the manufacturing sector threatening jobs, an increase in speculative land development, an expansion of tertiary institutions into residential areas of Darlington/Chippendale, and expressways planned through Glebe, Ultimo/Pymont, Woolloomooloo/Darlinghurst and actions by the state Department of Housing in Surry Hills/Redfern were forcing changes on the residential base of pockets of inner city Sydney that considered were 'working class'. Resident Action Groups brought together residents who felt threatened by these changes, planners who thought that there could be more effective ways of managing inner city environments and sections of the radical student movement who were looking for effective interventions beyond the provision of welfare services.

### 1970s

The organizations that developed were 'marginal' to the extent that they concentrated on information, advocacy and social action for groups who had traditionally been locked out of government planning processes. For example the Coalition of Inner Sydney Resident Action Groups was formed in 1972 with a brief to focus on specific topics such as housing; transport and energy; education and community services. The formal organizations that developed, among these being the NCs, retained strong ties to the inner city social movements that were described by Jakubowicz (1974, 1984). Although in his writing Jakubowicz concentrates on the class based nature of urban environmentalism and the difficulties of defending 'urban' working class interests, he does note the importance of cross class alliances, as did Barry *et. al* (1985). Burgmann and Burgmann (1998, pp 56 – 58) document the connections between the inner city Resident Action Groups and the environmental activism of the NSW Builders Labourers' Federation. They also note the cross class alliances, not only between residents and unions but also amongst resident groups as well as the central role played by women in these actions. Hardman and Manning (1975) document this history, in a rare photographic essay that highlights some connection between these local inner city Sydney social movements and international trends. Bullen (1997) notes that NC's grew, not only along with these early resident action groups but also along with the movements for self-help, community development and welfare rights.

The Social Welfare Commission, set up in 1973 had received submissions from these resident based groups which proposed government funding for the setting up of neighbourhood centres with responsibilities in planning, information and referral services, child care, education and support services. The Australian Assistance Plan (the AAP) instituted by the Whitlam government established a public policy and funding framework in which these organizations

emerged and established focus. The AAP provided seeding funding for many small community-based initiatives, including the NC's that are the focus of this study, (later the NSW Department of Youth and Community Services which became the Department Family and Community Services, funded the work of the NCs under the NSW Community Services Grants Program). The 1970s saw an exponential growth in co-operatives and community associations usually taking on some form of local resident management arrangement and seeking to employ professional staff in the roles of co-ordinators and community development workers (Roberts and Pietsch, 1996 p.144) There were various forms of enabling policy and legislation from the three levels of Government, such as the NSW Co-operation Act which provided a legal basis for the establishment of at least two of the NCs that are the focus of this study. (See Commonwealth Government Report on the Australian Assistance Plan, 1976)

#### 1980s

Government funding of community organizations linked their activities to government planning processes and frameworks, and community organizations at all levels were encouraged to be the delivery point for a range of social services (Everingham 2001, Kenny 1994). Discourses of community development, participatory democracy, urban environmentalism, feminism and multiculturalism had been circulating and were a focus for organizational activity however government funding emphasised a service delivery focus. The NC's early links to the environment and feminist movement, as well as their role in supporting cultural diversity through multicultural project initiatives is described by Edwards (1996) in a report sponsored by the Inner Sydney Council for Regional and Social Development, by the end of the 80s these earlier discourses were still evident but other discourses connected with increasing professionalisation, new managerialism and new funding regimes were beginning to cut across, but not entirely erase those earlier discourses. As noted by Barry *et.al* (1985) an efficiency and management rhetoric came to dominate community focussed projects and development work.

Writing in 1990 Yeatman characterized the preceding decade as a period of struggle between the 'managerial agenda' of the state and grass roots efforts to democratize the political processes in Australia. Yeatman pays particular attention to the women's movement but it was also the case that within these community-based organizations the managerialist agenda had become increasingly dominant. Yeatman argued that the micro techniques of scientific management were now being applied to the social service area. Welfare provision was becoming market oriented and consumer/client language was re-introduced. Increasing government requirements around funding arrangements and detailed reporting procedures forced these changes.

A report produced in 1994 '*We Just Grew like Topsy*' by the Local Community Services Association of NSW, the peak body for community and neighbourhood centres, described what had happened in the 80s as the overloading of these organizations by a raft of new government directed programs with strict and generally unmanageable reporting requirements. The community management structures were being challenged, the organizations were being asked to produce outputs more in keeping with government programs and there was an attempt to shape those that retained a local focus into larger, administrative multi-service centres.

#### 1990s

In the 90s cutbacks in welfare expenditure; along with government preference for larger, more institutionalised and more stringently monitored community care programs had a significant effect on what remained of those small and local oriented NCs. The shift in focus of Australian social policy continued to impact on the processes within community organisational structures (Everingham 2001, Kenny 1996). This social policy, directed by a conservative Howard government focussed on the goals of social order and control of community processes rather than using a social justice and rights perspective. The language of 'mutual obligations' and 'contractualism' brought about a new politics where 'community' was charged with the responsibility of being an agent for implementing a government directed social inclusion agenda and other welfare reform processes. Everingham (2001) provides a detailed account of the way in which the dominant economic philosophy of economic rationalism had impacted on the community sector throughout the 80s and 90s. And concludes that, "Two decades of public

service reforms under economic rationalism have eroded the semi-autonomous position of the community-based organizations...organizations which had drawn their inspiration from the emancipatory objectives of the new social movements mobilised in the 1960s around issues concerned with personal liberation, and exemplified by the women's movement, the sexual liberation and... civil rights" (Everingham 2001:108)

#### *2000 onwards*

Increasingly centralized control of local services became a feature through the 90s (Kenny 1994 pp 40-44, Onyx 1996). Further, through a contract state paradigm that became evident in the mid 90s and continues through to the year 2000 and beyond, government, at all levels have linked community organization activity to a series of contracted service arrangements with very specific, limited measurements and service outputs (for more on the 'contract state' see Hoatson et. al 1996, Everingham 2001).

In this brief history highlights the changed focus of the organizations as political and economic changes occurred and as other discourses came to dominate in the social processes. A major theme, explored throughout the research is – what happened to that earlier counter-hegemonic intent? Were they entirely erased? What happened to those discourses of environmentalism, feminism, and multiculturalism, and social justice? Were any of the goals of social equity and social change achieved? Were these goals changed or displaced? How did that happen?

### **Part 3 - Input from the Activists**

At the beginning of the research two of the activists presented their view of the history of the community based organizations. In my research I have written up conversations with the activists as 'constructed dialogues'. I include here excerpts highlighting the importance of social action discourses in the histories of the NC's. Also excerpts which pose some very provoking questions about the roles of community workers and adult education in those histories.

"I recall that in the 1970s and early 80s various residents, particularly women took an active part in pressing for the upgrading of child-care services in Surry Hills. At that time there were large numbers of children, there were migrant families who by the 70s, had settled in inner-city suburbs like Surry Hills. They needed a variety of child-care services in Surry Hills, and to be introduced to a new country. There was another group of newcomers, well educated but economically poor Anglo-Australians who were attempting to renovate old terrace housing (do-it-yourself manuals were the main reading!), have children and work full time all at the same time. It was a long way from the silly yuppie image pedalled by some and still used indiscriminately. Much of Surry Hills renovation was and is done by women who need the particular ambience of the Inner City.

And the other starting point was the environment. It's not just about trees and forests, it's about where you live and for most people in Australia that's in an urban, city environment. The neighbourhood centre has taken up these urban environment issues through lobbying about traffic, transport and urban amenity. This followed on directly from engagement with the greens bans movement, which linked unions and class issues and the environment. The feminist view and environment view go together. The focus on urban amenity - or whatever you want to call it - became the community development arm of the neighbourhood centre here in Surry Hills."

"As far as adult education is concerned more needs to be written. There are some accounts where I think the authors are advocating a disempowering or deskilling of local communities. What ought to be explored are genuine empowering experiences that people have had. The point is not about having community workers acting as crash hot managers of services. Management is not the issue but understanding how people have become more 'able' is, and there are many people who have certainly become more 'able' following on from a lot of the interventions of these organizations.

I've often heard community workers, community educators, whoever, say things like 'people are offered these services and alternatives but they don't take them up' or 'we set up things for people to take community action on but nothing happens, they don't take any action, they just stay doing the same old thing'. So it's a question of the workers practice needing examination. Because the alternative is that people are constructed as dull, dim-witted, stupid, cranky and obstructive - which I have often heard teachers, social workers, community workers - lots of people say when they try to do this 'empowering' work. But I don't accept that view. Workers get burnt, because this is hard work, and, then the workers go away, quite pissed off and blame the people they were supposed to empower! Recording needs to be done of the other ways of working rather than accusing those whom we work with of being lazy etc..."

#### Part 4 - Futures? Directions?

I tried to carry out the research around inner city Sydney Neighbourhood Centres in a collaborative manner. In the conversations with the activists and critical community workers we talked about the uses of post structural analysis and methods. I established research relationships where the principles of reciprocity (Lather 1991) became a measure of the validity of the research. The research procedures included a number of iterative loops where the activists and critical community workers told their own stories of practice, exchanged ideas about current literature in community work and social theory, commented on each others views and ideas, re-viewed the conditions in which their own work and ideas were formed and talked about possible social futures (see The New London Group, 1996, who talk about a 'pedagogy of multiliteracies' and 'designing social futures').

During the research, the participants, who I engaged with as co-constructors of the research directions encouraged me not to restrict the research direction to that of 'governmentality', one of the activists argued that this would be to simply substitute another 'explanation' or 'master narrative' about the rich histories of these NC's. And so to finish this paper in a way that provides an opening up I use a quotation from Agamben, a writer who the research participants draw upon, as well as Rose (1999) in his very useful chapter on community. For Agamben there are possibilities in thinking about 'be-coming communities' and maybe this is another way of talking with others about future directions in community organization.

*The novelty of the coming politics is that it will no longer be a struggle for the conquest or control of the State, but a struggle between the State and the non-State (humanity), an insurmountable disjunction between whatever singularity and the State organisation. This has nothing to do with the simple affirmation of the social in opposition to the State that has often found expression in the protest movements of recent years...What the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging (even in the form of a simple presupposition). (Agamben, G (trans.) Hardt, M, 1993, p 80)*

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**The following organizations have been supportive of the research project**

Harris Community Centre. Ultimo / Pyrmont

Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development Co-op Ltd. Waterloo

South Sydney Community Aid Coop Ltd. Redfern

Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre Cooperative. Surry Hills

The Settlement Neighbourhood Centre. Chippendale

Walla Mulla Family & Community Support Ltd. Woolloomooloo

**“What we see, we see  
and seeing is changing”  
– Adrienne Rich**

“It’s a question of who does the seeing”  
– Research Participant

## **Local values and knowledge shaping community involvement:**

### *Role of a regional university*

**Helen Sheil, Centre for Rural Communities Inc. in partnership with Monash University**

**Lola Gay, Ninde Darna Quararook, (Central Gippsland Aboriginal Health and Housing Co-operative)**

**Teresa Pugliese, Community Development Officer, Latrobe City Council**

*It is only with a community heart that a regional leader can see rightly*  
(Garlick 2001:10)

The theme of education, activism and organising for robust democracy is timely in the context of regional development. The domination of economic policies concerned to centralise ownership of markets and privatise public assets in the 1990s dramatically undermined trust in democratic processes and the public sector bureaucracy (Rayner 1997, Cox 1998). This paper shares a response from within rural Victoria challenging the mindset born of urban insulation that towns of under 3,000 people are unsustainable. From the perspective of the author rural and urban lifestyles are interdependent and the goal of establishing ways for the diverse lifestyles of 15% of Australia's rural population (Haberhorn et. al. 1999) to be visible within planning and policy development underpins this work. While the context of the work is rural the systematic approach has relevance for people in any locality.

### **Diverse landscapes**

Rural Australia comprises diverse landscapes (Sorensen 1999-2000, Garlick 1997, McKinsey 1994) and changing opportunities for local people to participate in decisions which impact on their futures (Sher & Sher 1994). Diversity made invisible through the use of generic terms such as 'the bush' reinforcing the myth of uniformity of rural landscapes disguising the need for flexibility in programs across regional communities. As environmental wellbeing is intrinsically linked to social and economic wellbeing an introduction to place sets the scene of this work.

### **The Latrobe Valley**

Once covered in massive forests growing the tallest trees in the world and rich deposits of black and brown coal the area has known both wealth and poverty. Like many single industry towns the population was vulnerable to the changing fortunes of this industry. In 1954 known as the 'Valley of Power' due to the financial fortunes of processing the brown coal for the generation of the states electricity. By 1990 policies of privatisation resulted in the sale of the State Electricity Commission broken into five separate entities and sold to Britain and the United States (Crooks & Webber 1993, Productivity Commission 1998).

By 1997 the byline 'Valley of the Dole' (Sunday Age, 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1997, Fletcher 2002) indicated a change in fortunes. While national indicators recorded increased productivity through the sale of this asset the reality for those living in the area was high unemployment as the flow-on effect from cutting 8,000 direct jobs impacted on businesses, services and schools (Kazakevitch et. al. 1997). By 1996 two of the major towns, Moe and Morwell had 66% of households below the state average, and Traralgon marginally under the state average (Department of Infrastructure 1999:23) For those who stayed an increase in mental health issues, gambling addiction and violence were outcomes of the social dislocation.

The case-studies of two groups traditionally experiencing barriers in actively participating in public decision making that impacts on their lives share their reflections of utilising the Graduate Certificate in Regional Community Development. These are the Latrobe City Council's Strengthening Seven Small Communities Project and the Board of Ninde Darna Quararook the Aboriginal Health and Housing Co-operative in Central Gippsland.

### **From margins to mainstream**

Monash University's Gippsland Campus enabled the dream of a home where rural issues are regarded as central to national wellbeing come into existence in 1995. At this time rural communities were experiencing rapid and continuous change and the Centre for Rural Communities Inc. was established to provide access to educational resources for rural communities of up to 10,000 people as they sought to establish ventures within their communities. Universities are the home of learning, research and teaching and staff at the regional campus were sympathetic to the goals of the Centre.

In reality the regional campus had little capacity to resource direct engagement with rural communities. Consequently work began with researching past inclusive programs that had enabled rural women to become active participants in determining their lives (Brophy 1995, Mitchell 1996). Philanthropic Trusts enabled this work to be implemented into a program for people in rural communities through the funding of a study circle kit, *Building Rural Futures through Co-operation* (Sheil 1997). Regional workers with experience of facilitating groups towards collaborative outcomes used the kit in four Gippsland communities with inspiring outcomes (Sheil 1999).

Interest in the work exceeding the capacity of the Centre's programmatic funding, without skilled and resourced facilitators the kits sat unused on shelves (O'Connor 1998). This experience of educational resources not achieving their potential outcome through lack of access to skilled facilitators was common in other sectors, (Australian Association of Adult & community Education 1996, Maclennan 2001). Evaluation of the project reinforced this understanding (O'Connor 1998).

Efforts to obtain funding for facilitators were frustrated by territorial attitudes of regional agency, so the Centre turned its attention to developing educational resources to support the professional development of community engagement. Philanthropic Trusts funded a manual that introduced regional workers to the systematic approach used in the study circle kit. The manual *Growing and Learning in Rural Communities* (Sheil 2000) became the text for a Graduate Certificate in Regional Community Development accredited by Monash University.

The development of the research by the Centre to the status of accreditation was funded by the Commonwealth Government's Regional Solutions program. By 2001 the language of community building increasingly featured within public policies of federal, state, regional and local governments based on the international work of Robert Putnam (1993) raising awareness of the value of social capital, and work shifting attention away from needs to the capacity of communities across a plethora of agriculture, social development, third world development and rural health. Case studies from within rural Australia promoted by Peter Kenyan (2000, 2001) and from practitioners abounded. While these were inspiring stories there were few accredited programs to skill workers undertaking community engagement.

### **Graduate Certificate in Regional Community Development**

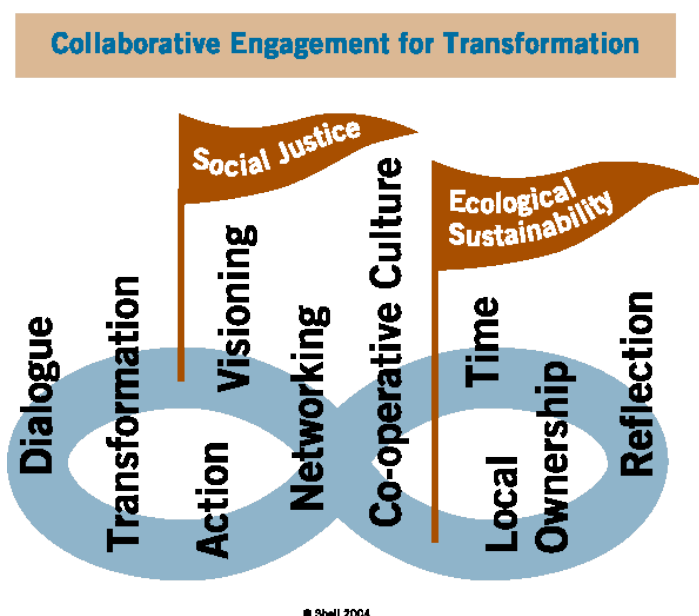
Participants within the Graduate Certificate in Regional Community Development come from diverse backgrounds of health, indigenous communities, recreation and culture, natural resource management, business, local government, women's groups, environment groups, agriculture, spiritual groups, enterprise development, youth groups and adult education. These seemingly diverse disciplines share a commonality in concern for local people and the environment and each contributes understanding of importance to determining resilient futures (Ife 2002).

The course incorporates both HECS funded and fee paying places ensuring a mix of community members and professional people. The required on-campus attendance establishes an interdisciplinary regional network. As workers meet face to face on a fortnightly basis they are introduced to the theoretical concepts of strategic questioning and the importance of dialogue through experience. Workers introduce knowledge of situations experienced within

communities while the resources and knowledge from the course enhance understanding of the potential value of a collaborative approach to community engagement.

### Model of Collaborative Engagement

The approach incorporates each of the nine strategies within the model of collaborative engagement. The process provides space for people with different views of the world to come together and establish respectful ways of working prior to requesting that they establish common future goals. Each strategy is introduced through experience then reinforced through practice.



- *Dialogue*

From the first session the focus is on the learner, acknowledging that while the process introduces understanding of how to assist people learn it is local people who have intimate knowledge of local histories and landscapes. Conversations are with other learners, across a table, there is no expert, solutions will be yours. The focus at this stage is the development of language, the building of relationships, the building of confidence and the development of listening skills, along with respect.

- *Time*

Collaborative educators recognise that it takes time to develop language and confidence, to listen to others and understand both the complexities of a situation and the potential opportunities to approach a situation (Freire 1974, Vella 2002).

- *Visioning*

Moving from reaction to setting goals for the future of a community is a major step in finding partners towards achieving these goals. The sequencing of this step requires that it be undertaken only after trust has been established between the participants. Premature attempts at initiating this step can result in harmful divisions within communities if the interests of one group are pursued at the expense of others.

- *Local community ownership*

Ensuring that ventures will first of all care for local people and the locality is a primary concern. It has now been acknowledged by O.E.C.D communities that development from within communities has the capacity to tap into local knowledge, resources and energy in a sustainable manner whereas ventures imposed from outside will at best slow down decline (Huggonier 1999).

- *Networking*

Rural communities just like bureaucratic institutions can become less functional in meeting local needs and capacity if they become too insulated and dependent on too few people. Visiting other communities, attending functions, sharing experiences and resources are essential steps for maintaining energy and reducing the burden on those with least resources. The free sharing of information also provides public forums for others to learn of your situation and offer support and relevant policies.

- *Co-operative culture*

Seemingly paradoxical the future of rural communities has a competitive edge through co-operation. When people within communities have the space and time to establish common goals opportunities to work together become evident.

- *Action*

Taking manageable steps in implementing change is an essential component of collaborative engagement for it is through this step that relationships change and public perceptions transformed.

- *Transformation*

Becoming involved in activities for the future will both inform the next steps and challenge those involved to continue working collaboratively. Having undertaken project together new relationships now exist, new language and new stories of what is possible.

- *Reflection*

Values and goals must guide all strategic work. Collaborative engagement is guided by the community development goals of caring for people and the places in which they live – social justice and ecological sustainability. Graphically the nine strategies are presented as existing along the loop of infinity to represent the continuing journey involved in collaborative engagement. Each cycle of activity will require opportunities for reflection to evaluate what worked well, what could have been improved – it is a cycle of growing and learning.

### **Facilitating Community Engagement**

Participants make the transition from learner to facilitator by establishing a study circle or a work based project. The study circles are accredited by TAFE providing recognition of this learning within the community and access to facilities. Public facilitation is personally challenging, yet each participant reports the powerful integration of practice and theory that results. Comments such as 'Now I know what those words mean!' and 'Its like a light going on for me, all that practice in class, that's what I'm doing in my group' are not uncommon.

Study circle members are supported to take responsibility for facilitating sessions extending the experience of the transformative capacity of working and planning collaboratively. Community members begin manageable projects together and take these skills and confidence into other organisations. This expansion of public involvement challenges the traditional wisdom of leadership and educates of the importance of taking time for people to learn the foundational skills of working democratically.

## **Case Study 1 Strengthening Seven Small Communities Project – Latrobe City Council**

*By Teresa Pugliese*

Community development...what's that? Like many others before me, I happened to 'fall' into the community development field. I had a strong interest in working with community and non-profit organisations within the municipality. I'd been involved with various committees over a number of years; especially sporting clubs and the local Chamber of Commerce. I'd worked on a number of projects through the StreetLIFE program, I'd organised and coordinated an International Food Festival in Traralgon for three years...all of this and more, and it still took me a some time to realise that over the years I had been working in the community development field (even though at the time it wasn't defined in those words).

I came to Latrobe City Council with a business degree in one hand and an ambitious spirit full of visions and goals for the future. I am now a Community Development Officer, within the Community Planning and Safety Team. I am responsible for a number of projects, but the one that I really wanted to talk about is the Strengthening Seven Small Communities Project. I 'acquired' this project in November 2003, with a very basic understanding of what it was and how we, Latrobe City Council, were involved in the project development and implementation. In all honesty, I hadn't taken a great deal of interest in the project as it didn't sit within my portfolio, and someone else within the Community Development Strategy (as it was then known) team was responsible for it.

At the time of acquiring the project, I had almost completed the Graduate Certificate in Regional Community Development, through the Centre for Rural Communities Inc. and Monash University Gippsland. I believe that my undertaking of the course during 2003, influenced my general manager in placing his trust in my abilities to pick up and run with a project that many people were going to be watching from the sidelines. The project was significant; Council secured \$283,900 from the Commonwealth Government Department of Family and Community Services to deliver a community development project over a twelve month period, where Township Facilitators were going to be employed in each of the seven small towns to assist with the general development of the townships.

A component of the funding was allocated for Professional Development and Training opportunities for the Township Facilitators. This funding allowed all of the Township Facilitators to undertake the first semester of the Graduate Certificate in Regional Community Development, with a further opportunity to undertake the complete course (second semester) if they chose to do so. Four Township Facilitators took up the offer to undertake the whole course.

In addition to the Professional Development and Training funding component, funds were allocated for the development of projects/activities within the communities.

The Township Facilitators were all very different; they had different levels of education, they had different life experiences and different levels of involvement within their communities. Despite the differences they all had one common attribute – they were all very passionate about their communities and wanted to assist in their future development.

### **Strengthening Seven Small Communities Project**

The Strengthening Seven Small Communities Project is a community development project which has developed over the past four years. The project was initiated in early 2001 when Latrobe City entered into negotiations with the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) to strengthen the local community and improve the well being of disadvantaged groups in the City.

The employment of seven Township Facilitators by Latrobe City represents the commencement of the third stage of a project.

The planning and development process has involved three stages as follow:

#### *1. Service Mapping*

Following initial discussions Latrobe City was requested to undertake a 'mapping' of community services, needs, issues and capacities for the information of FaCS. This was to be used as the basis for the development of a project that FaCS would consider for funding. This mapping was undertaken and submitted in August 2001. It included a listing of all services in the city and a wide range of information related to its population profile, unemployment, incidences of poverty and other areas of disadvantage, and the self help capacity of the community.

## *2. Project Proposal*

FaCS then considered the information provided and in late 2002 requested that Latrobe City provide a detailed project proposal that could be considered for funding.

At this stage Latrobe City identified the needs of its smaller townships for particular attention and conducted two meetings in each of the seven townships in early 2003 to discuss local community needs, and to assess the levels of local support for the possible appointment of Facilitators to work with the communities. These meetings were coordinated with the assistance of local township associations. Although attendances at these meetings varied considerably all townships indicated their support for the proposal and also identified some priority needs that required attention. Following further discussions with FaCS the Smaller Townships Facilitators proposal was then submitted to FaCS in May 2003. In October 2003 FaCS advised Latrobe City that funding for the project had been approved. This approval was for the period to 30 June 2004, with the probability of funding for a full 12 month period.

Throughout this process Latrobe City Council worked closely with a Project Reference group, which was made up of township association representatives, interested community members, Latrobe City staff, Centre for Rural Communities staff and a number of community based agencies.

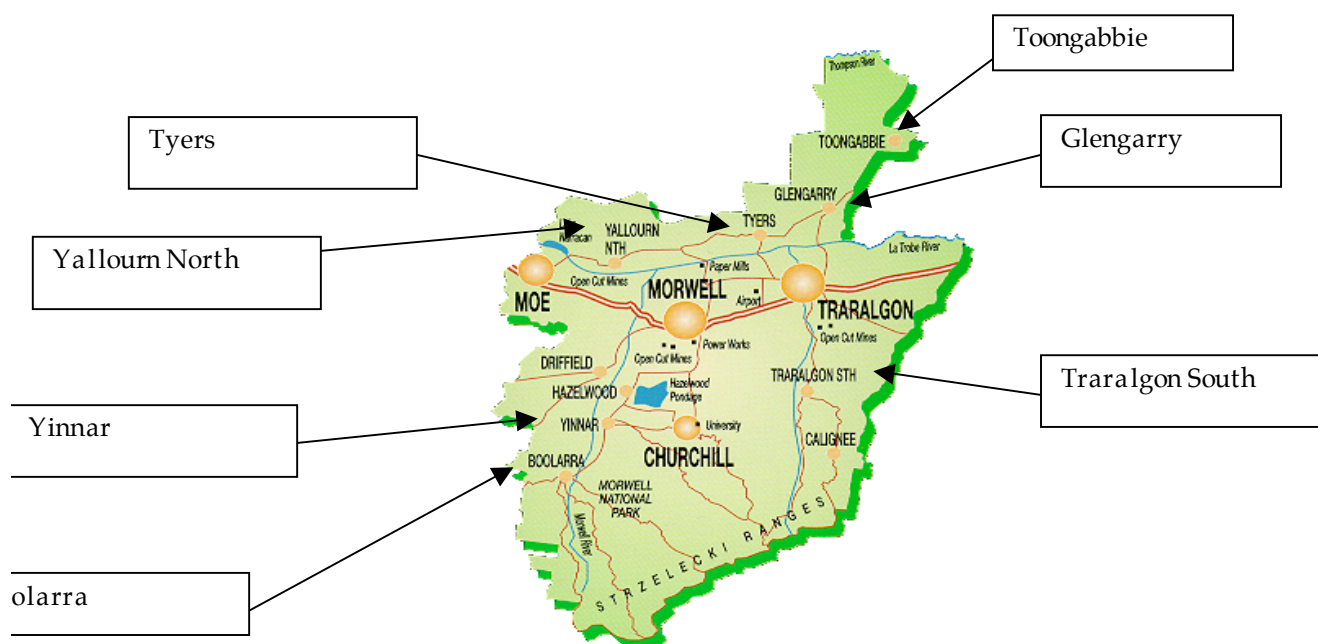
This Reference Group has continued to meet on a regular basis throughout the duration of the project.

## *3. Township Facilitators*

In February 2004, Latrobe City Council employed a part-time Township Facilitator (community development worker) in each of its seven (7) smaller townships of Yinnar, Toongabbie, Glengarry, Traralgon South, Yallourn North, Boolarra and Tyers to strengthen and improve the well-being of these communities.

The townships are relatively isolated from most services and self-help activities were to be encouraged to enhance community life. Particular attention was to be directed to youth, the aged, isolated families, leadership, volunteer and neighbourhood house type activity.

Funding was originally secured for an initial five-month period from February 2004 to June 2004 with the continuation of the project being subject to further FaCS funding approval. This approval was subsequently granted and the project is now due for completion in January 2005.



### The Smaller Townships

The smaller townships in Latrobe City experience the same range of individual, family and social problems as the larger centres but have very limited services locally available to provide the support and assistance required by these communities.

#### *Smaller Township Populations – 1991, 1996 and 2001*

	Population 1991	Population 1996	Population 2001
Yinnar	511	477	550
Boolarra	607	532	475
Glengarry and Dist.		1196	688*
Toongabbie and Dist.		902	460*
Tyers	207	244	226
Yallourn North	1266	1216	1182
<b>Total:</b>		<b>4567</b>	<b>3581</b>
Latrobe City	71 086	67 564	67 023

\*ABS boundary changes in these areas. Community meetings in these townships questioned these figures and reported population gains in the period 1996 – 2001.

Traralgon South is currently included in the Traralgon data.

Latrobe City Council considers that the combined population of the seven townships to be approximately 5,000 people.

#### *Smaller Township Issues*

Latrobe City has been keenly aware of the levels of disadvantage, poverty and unemployment in the region for some years and has sought to introduce programs to advance the well being of these groups. This is one such initiative.

The seven smaller townships have a total population of about 5,000 residents. They appear to experience similar social and community issues to those experienced by larger centres but with an extremely low level of local service capacity.

In the development of this project two meetings were held in each township to brief the communities and to engage them in the identification of items for attention in their respective communities. The items identified for attention are listed below:

*Issues and Items Identified at Township Meetings*

Township	Issues/Items Identified
Yinnar	Youth engagement and leadership Isolated families Problems tend to be concealed Neighbourhood House Develop new/younger community leaders Inter-town meetings and communication
Toongabbie	Youth engagement / Club Isolated elderly Neighbourhood House Community BBQ facility
Glengarry	Youth Isolated families Elderly
Traralgon South	Socially isolated Integration of new and existing families Increasing sense of community Increasing members of parent group at school
Yallourn North	Youth Parents with disabled children Isolated young mothers
Boolarra	Youth Underutilized facilities Engage community – bring groups together Skill development
Tyers	Engaging with young people, and bringing them into the community association. Engaging with isolated and new families. Support with community newsletter.

*The Township Facilitators*

The role of Township Facilitators is generally to develop and support local community groups or associations and assist them to better meet the needs of their communities. The items for attention have been identified and it is the responsibility of the Facilitators to work with their communities to address them, and to put in place networks or systems to maintain developmental activity beyond the 12 month funding period. The approach of the project is one of community development to strengthen the capacities of the communities to better meet their respective needs.

In this process it is expected that isolated families will be engaged, additional community leaders will emerge from the youth and other groups, new or expanded services will be encouraged and developed, and new partnerships will be formed within and between communities and with various government and non-government services as appropriate to the communities involved.

*Management Arrangements*

The Facilitators are employed by Latrobe City Council and are based in and are supported by the local communities. The benefits of this arrangement are as follow:

- The local community is relieved of the various issues associated with being an employer;
- The Facilitators have direct access to Latrobe City Council supports, staff, programs and resources; and,
- Locally based Township Facilitators have optimal contact and linkages with their local communities.

The Township Facilitators be employed for 20 hours per week each (flexible arrangement that allows for attendance at night time meetings and so on).

The Township Facilitators regularly report to their communities and to Latrobe City Council.

#### *Project Linkages*

To progress development in their respective townships the seven Township Facilitators have developed links with the following:

- Local township associations where they exist and other community groups.
- Latrobe City Council services, including community planning and safety, aged & disability services, Maternal and Child Health services, transport development services, HACC services and others as appropriate.
- Services provided by government and non-government as relevant to the various township activities and initiatives.
- Township Facilitators and communities in other townships to exchange information and experiences and to support each other as they progress their various activities. This inter-township communication is encouraged by Latrobe City.

#### *Local Structures*

Structures vary from town to town in accordance with the activities and preferences of local Township Associations. Township Facilitators work closely with local associations or with a local project support group in each township.

#### *Project Achievements*

- Personal and professional development;
- Development of partnerships and networks;
- Engaging community, government and agencies;
- Establishment of a Township Association for two of the communities;
- Township Newsletters;
- Community Showcases/Community Expos;
- New Residents Kits/Welcome Packs;
- Development of volunteer registers and programs;
- Development of Community Directory/Business Directory;
- Fitness classes including gentle exercise, aerobics, kickboxing, belly dancing, 'come and try', within the small towns;
- Adult education opportunities - Neighbourhood House classes and activities;
- Trial Bus Run (public transport options) in two communities;
- Country Market;
- Study Circle Groups (five groups in four townships);
- Voice and Music Workshop;
- Tennis Fun day – 'come and try'
- Youth;
  - Youth forums
  - Establishment of youth groups/clubs and youth activities
  - Primary kids health and fun program
  - Girls dance group
  - Bus trips to skate parks, movies
  - FREEZA events (in collaboration with Latrobe City Youth Services)
- Supporting the Other Awards.

*Where to from here?*

- FaCS funding runs out in January 2005.
- Latrobe City Council has agreed to auspice the project for a further 12 months, if additional funds be secured.
- Latrobe City Council has had discussions with some government departments to discuss future funding options for the project.
- Township Action Plans (for the next 1-3 years have been out together);
- Future funding applications will rely on the continued collaboration between Latrobe City Council, Township Associations (or equivalent) and the Project Reference Group members.

**Case Study 2**  
**Ninde Darna Quaranook**  
**Central Gippsland Aboriginal Health and Housing Co-operative**  
 By Lola Gay

I work at an Aboriginal Health and Housing Co-Operative. Working as I do at the “coal-face” of the community gives me many opportunities to use the skills and knowledge gained through the study of the Graduate Certificate in my everyday contacts and work. The case study I would like to relate concerns the election of a new Board of Directors for Ninde Dana Quaranook. I will tell how the Woman’s Group used the skills they had learnt at the beginning of the group to organise and effectively change the manner in which the Co-Operative is managed.

The Co-Operative is governed by a Board of Directors. The Directors are elected at an annual general meeting by the paid up community members. The Board meets once a month and makes the decisions about the type of programs run through the Co-operative plus major financial decisions. Directors are responsible for the policies and procedures which cover the day to day running of the business. The Board should be the voice of the community. The Directors hire (and fire) the Chief Executive Officer who carries out all directives from the Board and oversees the general running of the Co-Operative.

For many years this had not happened. The community was becoming very disillusioned with the running of the Co-Operative and the programs available to them. Aboriginal people as a rule do not like or trust mainstream organisations and therefore if the assistance they required was not forthcoming from a body they trusted, run by their own people; they would go without rather than using mainstream programs. Housing, health, family breakdowns and drug and alcohol abuse are the major problems facing the community. As the problems mounted and there seemed no solutions the ground swell for change came slowly and grew steadily firstly from the woman’s group and then openly discussed within the wider community.

The Woman’s Group first began 18 months ago. The Elders wanted to pass on their knowledge of mothering, weaving, fishing, painting and storytelling to the younger woman before this knowledge was lost. I had the privilege of being the first facilitator of the group. After 6 months it was clear to me that the woman had learnt the principals and skills to run their own group. The group is now strong and vibrant.

The women were the first to openly discuss the problems within the community and the running of the Co-Operative. When the date for the AGM was announced they had six weeks in which to use the skills they had learnt at the beginning of the group. Meetings are never formal and over a “cuppa”, there was no subject taboo. This made a very safe environment and even the quietest of community members found a voice and was encouraged to speak. This empowered the entire group. There were many discussions as to what they wanted for their Co-Operative. What everyone felt a Director should do, what they should not do. They voiced their fears that this important part of their lives would close and leave a vacuum that main steam could not fill. Ninde Dana Quaranook is not just a building but a place many come

for socialising within their own community. Many have happy memories of togethers held in the main building. The importance of running our own housing, health, child-care and social and emotional wellbeing programs cannot be emphasised enough. In this particular community men have always taken the dominant public role. Women were dissuaded from standing for a Directorship or participating on Committees.

The importance of speaking up and voting became very apparent. The changes the women felt needed to happen were not going to happen if the Board of Directors remained the same. A week before the Annual General Meeting nominations for the Board closed. There were a lot of surprised men when 6 women were nominated and could not be persuaded to stand down. Campaigning and a membership drive was organised and run by the women.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> October 2004 Ninde Dana Quaranoock had a Board of Directors of 7. Four are women and three men. Only one of the old Board remains. The new Board is ready and open for business.

Without realising the women of Ninde Dana Quaranoock had used every one of the 12 principles for effective adult learning.

- *Needs assessment:* Community members recognised the need change in the way the Co-Operative was being run.
- *Safety in the environment and the process:* By using the format of informal “cuppas” there was safety in the familiar environment.
- *Sound relationships:* The Woman’s Group works on a basis of equality. No-one person is in charge. All opinions matter and are heard.
- *Praxis:* The woman knew their actions would cause changes but felt confident with their new skills and continued working towards change.
- *Respect for learners as decision makers.* Every woman respected the opinions and life experiences of the others.
- *Ideas, feelings and actions:* Each participant was keen to be apart of this change.
- *Immediacy of the learning:* All past skills and learning were discussed. No knowledge was discounted.
- *Clear roles and role development:* The only role the women recognised was to initiate change.
- *Teamwork:* Teamwork abounded. It took very little time for the group to identify that they all wanted the same end result.
- *Engagement:* The group were very focused and positive. This became contagious within the wider community.
- *Accountability:* All involved knew the consequences of the changes and were ready to defend, if required, these ideas.

The results prove that effective changes can be made and I am hopeful that the groundswell of support for the new Board from the Community gives them the strength to make the necessary changes to bring Ninde dana Quaranoock to its full potential.

### **Role of the regional university**

The Centre provided a mediating role in negotiating between local government and the federal government to support workers in moving into community building roles. Mutual benefits resulted for the regional campus and local organisations as workers became actively engaged with community issues. This forum at UTS provides an important forum for graduates to share their experiences of personal and community changes nurtured through access to the Graduate Certificate of Regional Development.

In a critique of the Victorian Governments contribution to the policies of community engagement, social researcher Mike Salvaris noted ‘that community building is potentially the most important long term political and policy strategy for social democratic governments... offering a coherent agenda to counteract the current decline in citizenship, democracy and the ethic of the public good’ (Salvaris 2004: ).

While endorsing his optimism, it is our experience that each organisation with responsibility for community members can contribute to community engagement and that resources and responsibility should not be restricted to local government.

### *Recognised constraints*

Regional engagement is becoming an area of responsibility for Universities and the Centre in its partnership with Monash University has been named one of six best practice models in Australia (Garlick 2002). Outcomes are impressive and interest in the course continues to grow. Monash University has agreed to partner the Victorian Universities Regional Research Network (VURRN) roll the program out to other regional universities in Victoria beginning with RMIT in Hamilton in 2005. Regional universities are uniquely placed to resource rural and regional communities, workers and organisations. The dynamic engagement with local issues informs regional research bringing to public forums issues which are beyond the scope of small communities in isolation to find solutions to. Yet the Graduate Certificate with its face-to-face requirements, regional networking and supervised placements has a high level of community engagement for which regional universities are not funded. The work to date has been dependent on external project funding and remains tenuous within a centralised university program.

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## Using action research to connect with young people

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### Abstract

'Stop doing research **on** young people, get involved in doing research with young people or better still support and train young people so that they can do the research, collate the results and present their own findings by themselves in their own way'. This presentation reflects the journey undertaken by a group of young action researchers and an academic as they worked together over an eighteen month period carrying out an action research project. Young people undertook a major piece of research which culminated in them planning and preparing to tell their stories to an audience of researchers, policy makers and practitioners at a conference on action research by young people.

'All we really want is people to listen to what we have to say, help us make a change and be honest; tell us the truth' (Male 18: B-YEARD Research March 2003)

### Introduction

Twenty years of working with young people as a youth worker coupled with a further ten years training youth workers and I have still maintained my optimism and belief that young people *do* know best. What never ceases to amaze me is the unending discussions that persist on how to engage young people in decision-making. The importance of young people's participation in local affairs and the need for youth representation was highlighted as long ago as 1949 (Ette) and yet over fifty years later we still appear to be struggling with how to make this happen. The exclusion of young people from policy creation and implementation processes at local and national level continues to be a matter of widespread concern (Cohen 1997). Not only will policies fail to respond to the needs of youth when their voice is not heard, their development as young citizens, who have a right to take part in the making of communities in which they live and work, is diminished (Chandler 2000, Cohen 1997, McGuinness 2000 and Wyn & White 1997). I argue that research that doesn't support and empower young people to grow in confidence, to trust in their own abilities and to voice their thoughts and views is not good practice. Research that is not based on supporting and empowering young people to use research to let their voices be heard is not good practice. Research is often seen as something that other people do: consultants, academics, government departments etc. Action research is based on building supportive and trusted relationships with young people often over a long period of time.

### Research Context

The action research process set out to support and enable young people to design and take control of a piece of research that had the potential to significantly affect how decisions are made. The project was developed with and by young people and it created opportunities for them to prioritise their own needs and interests in research themes with an aim to reducing the social exclusion that many young people, unable to access the traditional structures of decision-making processes at a local level, experience.

I thought 'how about asking young people to carry out the research themselves'. This certainly isn't a new idea (Clark *et al* 2001, EYSIP 2001, France 2000, Kirby *et al* 1999). However, whilst I would agree that there is considerable evidence and numerous examples of young people being engaged in research, I struggle to find examples of young people taking ownership of the process in terms of design, data collection, analysis and final presentation of the findings. Here in Australia, in a report for The Foundation for Young Australians entitled *Sharing a New Story: Young People in Decision Making*, young people formed part of the project team and

were engaged in carrying out interviews, literature searches, reviewing the research process, editorial conversations and in framing the final report (Wierenga 2003); this approach is a refreshing change.

The research sought to address gaps in existing research and the evidence base relating to engaging young people's participation in decision-making. In a report by the Carnegie Young People's Initiative (2002) summarised the details of twenty-seven evaluations and research initiatives between 1998 - 2002 that explored young people's participation in decision making. Only three of the projects engaged young people directly as researchers. None of the projects listed adopted an action research process, nor was there any evidence of young people directing the research process. I feel that when it comes to researching with young people, young people are not driving the process, nor are young people co-writing and presenting the findings at conferences.

### **Research and Evaluation**

*'People say that we are the future, but the truth is that we are the NOW, let our voice be heard and let us be the now.'* (Female 21: B-YEARD Research March 2003)

If we genuinely seek to involve young people when discussing youth strategies and policy initiatives to engage them, then we might start by listening. Action research can be an effective way of doing this. The Birmingham: Youth Empowerment Through Action Research on Decision-making Conference (March 2003) was the culmination of nine months fieldwork by young people who engaged with over 300 hundred young people by the use of questionnaires, interviews, storying, group discussions, e-mail, chat rooms, question & answer activities, video box and role play & drama sessions. The conference design, programme and format of presentations took almost six months to come together. Initially I thought we could do this by December 2002. In reality I learned that when young people took charge I had to allow the process to follow its natural course at a pace dictated by the young people themselves. This was perhaps the most significant learning outcome; we live in a time when research is happening all around us and yet much of this work is short-term, target driven research that is carried out over very short timescales. Short-term, 'outcome' driven research projects make it difficult for good qualitative research to be done by young people at a pace that can be managed and directed by young people.

### **Engaging young people as researchers**

Engaging young people in research is not new (Clark *et al* 2001, France *et al* 2000, Kirby, 1999 *et al*), therefore one might ask, 'so what makes this different'? Although a great deal of research does in reality involve young people doing research, they still lack the power and authority to make decisions with regard to the research focus and design and most importantly the presentation of research findings. This research set out to explore the extent to which exclusion from decision-making processes is linked to the powerlessness experienced by young people. In order to do this it was felt important that a piece of 'action research' with a 'bottom up' rather than 'top down' approach be set up, hence the start of a project entitled Birmingham Youth Engagement in Action Research on Decision Making (B-YEARD) which engaged with and trained sixteen young people to undertake research amongst their peer groups. The research focused on young people's perspectives of how various models of participation work, with a view to identifying examples of effective methods of engaging young people in decision-making processes.

*'My voice is just as important as a person that is 30 years older than me; I might not always be right, but what's to say that the older person will be.'* (Female 15: B-YEARD Research March 2003)

*The B-YEARD action research project attempted to ensure that young people took the lead in highlighting the training and support they needed and that they had control over the timescale involved in order that they could carry out the research.*

### Background to the project

In the autumn of 2001 Birmingham Association of Youth Clubs (bayc) embarked on a journey to explore ways of enabling young people to become more involved in issues and decisions that affect their lives and the communities they live in. This was prompted by the rapid increase in the development of youth forums and parliaments, yet at the same time by a clear lack of involvement by young people in the regeneration and devolution agendas. Through discussions with the Community, Youth and Play Studies department of the University of Birmingham, BAYC and UK Youth it was clear that there was a shared position, in that there was a need to develop action research models with young people as an alternative to offering 'top down' structures designed by adults. Our experience was that these models were difficult to sustain and tended to involve only those young people who already had access to a range of opportunities through youth services, school, college or university. In January 2002 the Birmingham Voluntary Services Council (BVSC) was seeking to commission work with young people around their involvement in local communities as part of the Single Regeneration Budget 4 Programme (SRB4). It was monies from this programme that made the research project possible and \$40000 was made available to support the B-YEARD project.

*The objectives were:*

- To identify examples of effective models of engaging young people in democratic processes.
- To undertake a piece of 'action research' with a 'bottom up' approach rather than 'top down' i.e. to support young people in undertaking research amongst their peer groups, focusing on young people's perspectives of how various models of involvement work.

*In addition, the project set out to support this process by:*

- Identifying young people, as individuals or as members of groups, to participate in this initiative as action researchers.
- Delivering training programmes for young people to introduce them to the problems and possibilities of doing action research; to equip them to use the tools of action research in their own settings, and to encourage a realisation of the ways in which action research can lead to practical outcomes.
- Working with young people to identify priority research topics and themes within their own local communities (of interest or of geography), focusing on their involvement in decision-making.
- Supporting action researchers through the whole research phase.
- Supporting young people in the analysis of findings and developing recommendations
- Creating a 'resource bank' of young people with action research skills that can be transferred to peers and local communities

*B:YEARD - the basics*

- Although young people are often one of the priority concerns of regeneration and social inclusion initiatives, they have been excluded from engaging in these programmes in any meaningful way. The B:YEARD project – Birmingham Youth Engagement in Action Research on Decision-making – aimed to find ways of changing that situation.
- The driving force for the project was a conviction that a combination of action research and youth work skills and methods offers a means of enabling genuine community involvement by young people.
- B:YEARD's goal was: to identify examples of effective models of engaging young people in democratic processes.
- The project worked by supporting young people to undertake research amongst their peer groups, focusing on young people's perspectives on how various models of involvement work.
- As a piece of research, B:YEARD was qualitative. It was concerned with hearing and presenting young people's stories, rather than simply 'mapping' their presence. Young people developed their own framework for representing and understanding their experience, rather than having to fit into structures made for them. B:YEARD was, therefore, a piece of youth work *and* a piece of research.

### The action research approach

If we genuinely seek to involve young people when discussing youth strategies and policy initiatives to engage them, then we might start by listening. Action research can be an effective way of doing this. The concept of action research is at the core of B:YEAR's approach. Action research is 'learning by doing' – exploring issues *with* young people. Most importantly it can be a way of engaging young people, workers, communities and, ultimately, policy makers. Research is often seen as something other people do – consultants, academics or government departments.

The main difference between action research and other forms of research is 'you'. Individuals, not 'experts' from the outside, take action research forward. As such, the role(s) of youth workers and young people is all important in ensuring that the action research is empowering for those involved, that learning takes place, and that it brings change as a result of the project. (Edinburgh Youth Social Inclusion Partnership, 2001: p7)

### Recruitment of action researchers

The original aim was to recruit thirty young people. In addition, we set out to gain support from agencies and workers in contact with young people to work with us to offer 'in the field' support on a regular basis. Two open days were held in different parts of the city where agencies, youth workers and young people came together to explore the whole idea and to see whether or not they might want to embark on this type of project. From these open days a number of youth workers and sixteen young people expressed an interest in the project and so the journey began. All the action researchers were paid an amount of money for the work undertaken and all transport costs were met.

### Methods of Inquiry

Young people defined the framework in which the findings were collated and evaluated. They were supported to design their own research tools that were relevant and appropriate to them. This included training in the use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The training equipped the young action researchers to deploy a range of research techniques amongst their own peer groups, which included:

- Questionnaires
- Interviewing
- Focus Groups
- Case Studies
- Storying\*

\*Storying is the act of listening to, telling, re-telling or revising a story. Rather than being completed products, stories can most usefully be understood as ongoing creative endeavours. This is a collaborative process which is differently available to people. Within academic circles, interest in people's stories is not new. Literature from anthropology, sociology, moral philosophy and education has highlighted the significance of stories both for ongoing community life and for individuals constructing their own lives (Wierenga, 2002; pp3-4).

### What did they find out?

Their presentation did not set out to give a detailed account of the data collected by the action researchers, in reality this was a secondary aspect of the research. The action researchers told their story of how the research findings came together and naturally presented a range of themes under which they were able to locate their findings:

- **Access** Access isn't about disability, access affects everyone. Transport, locality, timings, money, information; all these things can lead to:
- **Isolation** Getting involved can seem quite scary and to others unimportant as so many people feel isolated and disconnected from what's going on. 'Where I live, what I look like affects what I can do, where I go. What can you do about that? I can tell you how to change it, will you listen?'

- **Communication** How do we find out about these opportunities? Who will tell my parents? Why doesn't anyone listen? Does it make any difference what I say? Why don't you talk to us as people? Will you listen to what I have to say, will you DO something about it?
- **Holism** This is a strange word, and we must recognise and accept that this word came from the group of action researchers. 'Young people cannot be dealt with in terms of single issues or policies; we have emotions, feelings, physical and mental needs, we know when we are being 'listened' to, and right now no one is prepared to look at the whole picture''

*Levels of interest: why do you want to be involved?*

- Levels of interest varied: in the younger age group many of the participants were not concerned about having a voice, but all participants over the age of 13 said that they believe that they can and should be able to contribute towards their future.
- The main problem in becoming involved is that young people have to approach others (organisations, groups, youth parliament, etc.) to have their say, rather than them being actively consulted or involved.

*Previous experience*

The most worrying finding was that most participants said they had no experience of being involved in community decision-making.

*Obstacles*

- Most participants found that the biggest obstacle to getting involved in decision-making was the belief that the elder generation did not value their point of view.
- Some said that they felt that even when they might get the chance to participate in decision-making, they were there as a token for their colour, gender, etc.
- There was a strong feeling among young people that all the decisions are made in the same small circles.

*Some comments from conference participants:*

- 'Having young people in total control of the conference was fantastic'
- 'I think more partnerships with young people need to be created'
- 'I got a lot out of the conference - but I would like more please!'
- 'I feel I know much more about how to engage young people'
- 'I learned a lot about action research'

### **Learning from the action research process**

- Growing evidence suggests that young people want to play an active role within their communities. B:YEARD came into being to try to find a way to enable young people and their local communities to increase the opportunities for young people to be active. Young people need to be consulted on issues that directly or indirectly affect them, if we are serious about wanting them to engage with the wider political process.
- The original objectives and targets in the B:YEARD project proposal were geared to achieving 'product outcomes' rather than 'process outcomes', as the basis for measuring impact. This raised unrealistic expectations in relation to the project, and meant that appropriate evaluation criteria were difficult to establish. This was made more difficult because of the innovative nature of the project, which had no obvious benchmarks from similar projects.
- Our approach was to stay with the process and trust young people to find the key issues for *them*. When young people are enabled to take charge, the process must proceed at a pace dictated by *them*. This was perhaps the most significant learning outcome. The Birmingham Conference (March 2003) was the culmination of nine months fieldwork by young people. The conference design, programme and format of presentations took almost six months to come together, initially we thought we could do this by December 2002. However, the young researchers insisted that this was putting an unrealistic pressure on them and they decided to readjust the time frame, in order to complete the task to a standard that would satisfy them.

- Research is happening all around us and yet much of this work is target-driven and carried out over very short time scales – it is about ‘mapping’ young people’s lives, rather than *understanding* them.
- Of the group of 16 researchers who finished the training, 13 maintained their involvement through to the dissemination conference.
- The original plan was that the researchers would be supported by youth workers in their local settings. Although some youth workers were able to offer support, in general this proved unrealistic. However, ongoing support was essential for a group of young people who had little previous experience of engagement at this level. The solution was to deliver that support through **bayc**. The capacity to offer this was vital to the success of B:YEAR.
- A part-time peer education support worker was given the role of offering ongoing support to group members, acting as the common reference point and link for the team. In practice, this would mean offering practical support, such as organising transport, as well as talking through personal issues that came up in their lives – which may or may not be directly related to the project’s work.
- Time was needed, too, to visit parents, often to reassure them about what was happening. This was especially important for the families of the disabled young people and the young women from Muslim families. The group met as a whole, on average, about every two weeks during the project, with more frequent sessions in the lead up to the dissemination conference.
- Email, mobile phones and, especially, texting proved to be effective ways of maintaining contact with the research team – and of encouraging them to remember the times of meetings, dates for completing tasks etc. Supporting the team proved to require the equivalent of one half of a half-time worker’s time over the period of the project. This was on top of occasional specialist support from University or **bayc** staff.
- The action researchers were paid an amount of money for the work undertaken and all transport costs were met. The transport arrangements for the disabled young people are estimated at approximately \$4500 over the period of the project.

### Final reflections

As someone who was engaged working with young people as a youth worker for twenty years and is now an academic/researcher able to continue working with young people, I consider myself to be a very lucky person. I have been fortunate to work on many exciting projects with young people over the years, however I have to say that the past eighteen months has provided me with some of the biggest challenges, both personally and professionally. Yet, I am happy to say that this has been one of the most exciting, innovative and creative pieces of research that I have ever had the privilege to be part of.

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## Community newspapers for grassroots democracy

### Abstract

Mark Snell

Peninsula Community Access Newspaper

Effectively run local newspapers, staffed by volunteers and promoting wide participation, can make an enormous difference to the strength and resilience of grassroots democracy. However, they are rarely seen as important social infrastructure at a community level. Establishing a newspaper for a local community can be one of the most profound actions of community leadership that a person or community group can make. And it can be achieved with a little thought, a few skills and with just basic resources.

Grassroots democracy is often spoken of in terms of giving a voice to the underprivileged. But it must be remembered that democracy is a process, based on a set of values and principles. Democracy requires the encouragement of participation and the expression of a diversity of views, including the marginal, unpopular and radical. In a grassroots democracy, this can be particularly challenging, with social relationships blurring the distinctions that can clearly be made in larger democracies. For example, conflicts of interest are not so easily quarantined as they can be at a regional, state or national level. Nor are clear ethical guidelines available for conducting a grassroots democracy. Democracy is based on well-informed representative decision-making.

Despite technological advances, newspapers remain one of the most effective means of sharing information and views amongst the most people in a community, including poor and vulnerable groups. Community newspapers can also encourage people to appreciate the diversity in their midst, and the achievements that this appreciation can lead to.

At the Central Coast Community Congress, it was clear that local government and non-government agencies alike have adopted "Asset-Based Community Development" as the underpinning approach to their work. This approach is very much about putting social infrastructure in place.

There are some examples where the production of neighbourhood newsletters have been encouraged but, where this does occur, the emphasis seems to be on the community group producing the newsletter, rather than the newsletter itself as effective social infrastructure for the community as a whole.

We now have few truly local newspapers and those publications that call themselves "community newspapers" are usually regional advertising media. This is because the retail industry now is regional, dominated by corporate giants and national franchises, whose interests are not served through advertising in local newspapers.

The introduction of GST has removed the tax advantages of producing local newspapers, rather than advertising catalogues. Prior to GST, sales tax exemption was available for newspapers which contained at least 17 per cent "news". The removal of this concession has seen the demise of many local newspapers that were already only marginally profitable and under threat from the nationally-owned regional advertising media. While some ideological objection to government ownership of newspapers was expressed with the recent Telstra proposals, there is a strong argument for public sector support for such social infrastructure. For example, government ownership of the ABC is seen to be in the community interest, as long as its independence is guaranteed by a charter.

Different ownership models can be explored to facilitate the establishment of local newspapers to strengthen grassroots democracy, taking advantage of voluntary community participation to succeed.

This 90-minute workshop will take a participatory approach to address the practicalities of establishing and running a local newspaper and the community leadership required to do so. In a combination of individual, small group and whole group work, participants will:

- Discuss, with detailed examples, the nature of grassroots democracy and its ramifications for communication media.
- Design their own local newspaper and formulate editorial policies and standard practices, which embody useful and ethical principles supporting grassroots democracy
- Look at the skills, capacities and resources required to operate a successful local newspaper on an on-going basis and how these might be brought together.
- Discuss the ways in which community workers, service providers and local government can encourage and support the establishment of local newspapers.

In the process of this workshop, participants can be expected to formulate a list of useful pointers relevant to their own circumstances, which they can take away for subsequent implementation.

## Community Leadership: A Tale of Two Residential Parks

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If community leadership is to truly promote grassroots democracy in residential parks (e.g. caravan parks and mobile home villages), there are implications for who is included in community leadership strategies, and how we conceptualise and promote community leadership. As a community worker with the Caravan Project in the Hunter, I will discuss these issues based on our on two very different residential parks (“The Hollow” and “The Gardens”).

In general, people who live permanently on residential parks either:

- Choose to live in a park as a lifestyle choice;
- Are itinerant or seasonal workers choosing to live long-term or permanently in parks; or
- Have few, or no, other options: they may have been blacklisted from other housing, they may not be able to afford the bond and rent in advance, or they may be homeless (Wensing, Holloway, & Wood, 2003).

Parks can vary across a number of dimensions including:

- The mix of tourist and permanent residents: ranging from ones that are just for tourists through to ones that are just for permanent residents.
- The permanent residency arrangements: for example residents can own their own dwelling and rent the site (owner-renters) or rent both (renter-renters); stay for a few weeks or months, through to many years; and live in a three bedroom relocatable home through to a small caravan with no annex.
- The geographical location: there is a great variation in the locations of parks although many are poorly located in terms of their accessibility to local services and facilities.
- The park standards: parks vary from very successful parks with a high standard of facilities to derelict, poorly maintained caravan parks with considerable variation in between. The less well-managed and maintained parks are more likely to cater for people who are living there as a last resort.
- The perception of park residents: some residents see parks as a positive housing choice while others see them as a negative option over which they have little control.
- The park management: some parks are very well managed and there are good relations between residents and park managers or owners, while others are poorly managed and there is a history of conflict (Wensing et al., 2003).

### The Two Parks

The Hollow and The Gardens highlight some of the dilemmas the Caravan Project encountered in facilitating a two-year community leadership project funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. The Hollow is a small, poorly maintained park renting caravans to residents who have limited accommodation options. Most people stay for under 12 months. The Gardens is a well maintained, larger park with good facilities catering for both tourists and permanents; mobile homes and caravans; people who own their dwelling and rent the site, and those who rent both; and people living there by choice and those with limited options.

According to a recent Caravan Project survey, residents from The Hollow were more likely than residents from The Gardens to have experienced mental health problems, homelessness, unemployment, and sickness or disability. People living at The Hollow were more likely to say they felt unsafe on the park, to have experienced physical or verbal abuse in the past year, to be seeking alternate accommodation and to be affected by the drinking of people close to them. Caravan Project staff also report The Hollow has higher rates of domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse than The Gardens. There is frequent tension between residents at The Hollow and much of the socialising is based on alcohol and other drug use. At the same time, some residents of The Hollow appreciate a sense of community on the park. The Hollow will be closing soon following the lodgement of a development application, which has increased the

sense of insecurity amongst the residents. There are no formal community leadership structures on The Hollow although a park resident is the caretaker, receiving free rent in exchange for caretaker duties.

The Gardens has an active elected Park Liaison Committee, the managers hold meetings for all residents at the end of their meetings and there is an active Park Residents Association. In some ways there is strong, active community leadership on the park but the social divide between the mobile home and caravan residents has a large impact on this leadership. The residents who would traditionally be identified as community leaders (e.g. the Park Liaison Committee) are mobile home residents and largely represent the interests of other mobile home residents. The caravan dwellers, who are more likely to experience some of the social problems experienced at The Hollow, may even have their interests undermined by the "community leaders".

### **Who is Included in Community Leadership Strategies**

Through our work on these parks and other parks the Caravan Project has identified a number of key questions in relation to community leadership. The first is: who is included in community leadership strategies? People living in residential parks as a last resort often experience social isolation which can be compounded because they may be overlooked by community education programs, may have difficulties accessing outreach services and may not even receive local newspaper and/or hand delivered postal items (Wittich, 1999). There is a danger that community leadership strategies focusing solely on residential parks could increase the social isolation. It is important that strategies assist park communities become integrated with the broader community rather than addressing park residents in isolation.

Park communities are not homogenous entities: there are different and/or competing interests and priorities. For example, the Resident Liaison Committee at The Gardens recently assisted the managers to evict a family in crisis who were creating problems for other residents. The Resident Liaison Committee, none of whom have young children, also supported the decision to remove play equipment due to insurance concerns. There is no doubt that the Liaison Committee was acting in the interests of some of the park residents, but at the expense of more marginalised residents. Grassroots democracy is clearly more than majority rules, and community leadership strategies need to promote the inclusion of people who are often voiceless (Carson, 2003).

As well as involving marginalised or voiceless residents in community leadership, it is important to involve park managers. The managers of caravan parks play a much greater role in the lives of residents than in traditional tenancy arrangements such as renting a flat or house. In caravan parks, dwellings (whether owned or rented) are situated on private property, and onsite managers are usually present: thus residents, and their visitors, are under greater scrutiny and control. Because parks are private property, visitors do not have automatic right of entry, they can be banned or refused entry, workers from community and health services can be required to report to the office before they enter the park (raising issues of confidentiality) and they may not be allowed to take their vehicle on to the park (a problem for people like community nurses with bulky or heavy equipment).

Managers have a major impact on the lives of residents. A couple of years ago, The Gardens had a change of owners and, not only have park standards improved, but the new managers are friendly, approachable and understanding and residents report being much happier since the change. Managers can also facilitate or obstruct resident involvement in decision making about issues affecting the park. The NSW Residents Park Act requires parks with more than 20 sites occupied by permanent residents to have a park liaison committee. The Gardens is unusual in that many of the residents (including members of the residents association) believe their liaison committee works effectively. Residents of many other parks believe liaison committees are ineffective and, at times, divisive.

Despite difficulties in engaging some park managers, we believe it is important to build partnerships with them and assist them to see the benefits promoting processes that encourage community leadership rather than seeing them as opponents (as occasionally happens). At times there is a tension between building strong relationships with managers and a need to

address park standards or specific issues on parks. At The Gardens we have a good relationship with the managers, they are open to our involvement and some advocacy can occur through the park residents association or the Park Liaison Committee. We have even been able to raise concerns affecting more marginalised residents. Our relationship with the managers at The Hollow is more problematic. Although they are happy for us to be on the park, we have not found them very approachable. At present there is a likelihood that the park will close and if we became active in protecting residents' rights and helping residents organise, we could run the risk of being banned from the park. There is already tension because we responded to the development application and expressed some concern about the park closure.

The threat of being banned is a real possibility. In the past we have been banned from parks, or threatened with banning, and were recently refused permission to commence work on a park with numerous problems. Earlier this year Affiliated Residential Parks Residents Association took some park owners to the tenancy tribunal after they were banned from using community facilities on parks to organise meetings. They won on the grounds that the Residential Park Act specifically prevents managers from interfering with the rights of residents to belong to any organisation of park residents (s67). The Caravan Project does not have this protection and there is no legal impediment to managers banning us from the parks – although individual residents could have the right to invite us to visit them as long as we did not “unduly disturb the peace or quiet of the park” or fail to “observe reasonable rules of conduct established by the park owner” (s69).

### Meaning of Community Leadership

The second question we have identified is: what do we mean by community leadership? In order to minimise the possibility that community leadership results in individuals or sections of the park community creating power blocs or protecting their interests at the expense of others, promoting community leadership needs to focus on the whole park community, not just on individuals within the park. Barker (1997) identifies three main theoretical views of leadership:

1. Leadership as an *ability*, or a set of traits or behaviours that can be learnt. Community leadership strategies derived from this perspective focus on individual “leaders” and enhance their ability to lead. Barker argues that this perspective confuses leadership (which is about change) with management (which is about creating stability).
2. Leadership as a *relationship* between leaders and collaborators. They work together to create change by bringing resources to the relationship that assist in achieving their aims. Strategies derived from this perspective seek to improve the collaboration between leaders and collaborators, improve the functioning of community groups and assist leaders to use power resources to exercise greater influence.
3. Leadership as a dynamic *process* of interaction and collaboration that creates change. Leadership is “a democratic process where no one person does an inordinate amount of leading, and every group member performs some leadership function at some point in time” (p. 352). Community leadership strategies derived from this perspective are likely to focus on community development and assisting in the development of a shared vision based on collective wants and needs.

Through the project we have begun to operate more from the third paradigm. At the start of the project our approach was based on understanding leadership as an ability and attempted to build relationships between identified leaders on the parks and other residents. We thus supported individual leaders and helped established “leadership groups” to work on issues of interest to residents. We mainly worked on mobile home villages with people who had chosen the life style. After 12 months we decided to concentrate on more marginalised residents of caravan parks who were living there as a last resort. With the change of focus we realised we could not promote community leadership without first promoting community membership. We thus began to focus on community leadership as a process and our work increasingly involved community development strategies and building social capital.

### Community Leadership Strategies

Given our changing focus, the final question to be considered here is: what strategies should we use to promote community leadership? We realise that we have to do much more than increasing the leadership skills of individuals or improving the relationship between leaders and collaborators. These strategies can play a role, but they are insufficient to promote real community leadership. According to Falk and Kilpatrick (2001), "social capital is the product of social interactions that may contribute to the social, civic or economic wellbeing of a community-of-common-purpose. The interactions draw on knowledge and identify resources and simultaneously use and build stores of social capital" (p. 103). Social capital is an important ingredient in community leadership processes (Falk & Mulford, 2001) and, along with community development, provides a frame work for strategies that move beyond a focus on traits and relationships. On The Hollow, the main focus of our work is low key, informal activities that provides residents with the opportunity to mix and to develop connections. The aim is not to train community leaders, but to help create an environment in which community leadership can occur. For example, when residents first heard of the development application affecting the park, we discussed the potential closure with them at one of our groups. We suggested that it might be worth talking to the Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service and, when we returned the next week, we learnt that some of the residents had organised for someone from the tenancy service to come and talk to them about their rights.

In addition to focusing on social capital and community development, we have found it helpful to think of our involvement in community leadership in terms of levels. Drawing on Hart (1992) and Wierenga et al. (2003) we have identified six levels of agency involvement in community leadership (see Figure 1).

↑	Level 6	Community leadership part of the park culture	Leadership roles are shared between residents, park manager and other stakeholders and the whole park is involved in creating a shared vision for the park
	Level 5	Initiated and lead by residents	Park residents initiate and direct a project/ program. Agency not involved or only involved in a minimal way
	Level 4	Initiated by residents and developed with support of agency	Park residents initiate projects/ programs that are developed with the support of the agency
	Level 3	Agency initiated, shared decision-making	The agency initiates projects/ programs and decision-making is shared with park residents
	Level 2	Agency initiated, residents consulted and informed	Park residents give advice on projects or programs designed and run by agency. The residents are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by agency
	Level 1	Agency initiated, residents informed	Park residents are assigned a specific role and informed about how and why they are being involved
	Community exclusion	Agency controlled, residents tokenised	Park residents appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate, and there is a pretence that the causes are inspired by residents

Figure 1: Levels of agency involvement in community leadership

While our aim is to create a park culture which values and relies on community leadership, each of the levels can be appropriate and strategies from multiple levels will be employed on the same park. As a starting point we need to recognise the extent and value of community leadership already existing on parks. There are many examples of residents supporting each

other, initiating activities, challenging decisions or actions of park owners, and improving life on the park. There are examples of park managers working in partnership with residents, involving them in decision making and creating cooperative working relationships. Many of these occur without our knowledge or involvement, some involve a partnership between residents and us, and others are initiated and led by us. We try to build on existing strengths of residents, managers and the park, capitalise on the numerous opportunities for residents to adopt leadership roles and help create structures and processes promoting community leadership. Strategies can range from holding informal coffee mornings or BBQs, informing residents about their rights or how to advocate on their own behalf, supporting residents respond to inquiries or policy issues, encouraging managers to involve residents in decision making, promoting links between the park and the broader community, and providing support when requested by resident associations. At times we need to get out of the way and allow residents to do it for themselves.

If we see leadership as a process, we also need to address some of the structural and cultural impediments to meaningful community leadership. These barriers exist not just within the context of a park, but in the broader community as well. We thus need to move into the realm of social change. Moyer (2001) identifies four approaches to social change which indicate ways in which we can contribute to a broad social agenda. The roles are:

- The citizen who upholds a widely held vision of the democratic, good society
- The reformer who works through parliamentary and legal channels to improve laws/policies
- The change agent who supports the involvement of large numbers of people in the process of addressing social problems
- The rebel who puts issues on the social/political agenda through dramatic, non-violent actions.

Community workers are well placed to undertake a variety of roles and need to be willing to address broad social issues to create an inclusive, just society.

Residential parks provide both opportunities and challenges in promoting community leadership. The social isolation experienced by many residents mean that they are not used to adopting community leadership roles and the private ownership of the parks limits the extent to which resident can exercise control over their environment. At the same time, many residents see parks as a "community," the communal nature of the life style means that community leadership does occur on a daily basis, and community leadership processes can make a significant difference to park life.

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## Popular Education and the Democratic Imagination

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This paper wants to explore a foundational project of popular education concerned with fostering a democratic imagination. It argues that behind inclusive and courteous social democracy is an ideal that lives in a reflective, pragmatic and critical imagination – i.e. an imagination that sees inclusive democracy as a possible and desirable future which needs to be visioned and re-visioned constantly. This project wants to look at the learning involved in constantly renewing this reflective, pragmatic and critical imagination – how it can be fostered and what barriers exist to impede it. The quest is for educational ways to promote the realisability and desirability of inclusive democracy and at the same time to understand and confront forces opposing this.

Following Ralston Saul (2002) it is not argued that inclusive democracy depends on a reborn and re-invigorated imagination alone. Humans use other human faculties particularly logic and reason and emotionality in their lives. To some extent the work of this paper does create an unreal distinction between these various functions of the mind but, as shall appear, logical rationality, emotionality and imagination, even when intertwined in ordinary life, refer to very different things and require different forms of nurturance.

### Restoring democratic ideals

Many evocations of democratic values in current Australian economic rationalist political discourse are not fully representative of the complexity of humans seeking to live together. One current democratic ideal being evoked sees humans as shareholders in the nation imagined as a great financial business where exchanges are made and entered into against a profit and loss criterion. While 'profit' could refer metaphorically to many elements of human nobility and betterment, an exclusive literal concern with financial matters omits and removes from concern and celebration other valuable elements of human life and activity: community service and inclusivity, creativity and the resistance to and overcoming of injustice.

This project wants to look at ways in which the democratic power of human imagination to envisage scenarios of compassion and inclusivity is and can be fostered. The view here is, following Foley (2001, p.63), that democracy as an ideal is essentially about humans consciously choosing to share power in the different arenas of human life. The project of this paper is then to explore possible educational and cultural practices through which such imagined democratic and utopian futures can be envisioned and embraced and toxic alternatives resisted.

Democratic societies where men and women seek to construct a shared life of freedom, equality and inclusivity through time, are theoretically held together by a shared vision of ways these ideals are to be pursued together with a combined will to pursue that vision. Given the slippery nature of human thinking and judging and a general kind of moral entropy that sees human ideals eroded over time, there has always been the need for such democratic societies to reflect on their culture and to renew themselves in the face of the changes encountered in their history. This has a strong link with emancipatory and communal notions of lifelong learning.

The sociologist, Arthur Frank (2000) explored the ways people with illness manage their lives when caught up in the so-called health industry with its powerful forces for disenchantment. He suggests that some people with chronic and serious illness, in their support for others similarly placed, display what he calls, re-visiting Weber's idea of the need for charisma to re-enchant society, a 'mundane charisma'. Their engagement serves to re-enchant and re-moralise disenchanted and demoralised people caught up in illness. He refers to:

Their capacity to enlarge the sense of human possibility among those who feel affected by them (p.322).

Frank suggests that the root of people's disenchantment and de-moralisation is a contest between 'the ride' and 'the story'. Although Frank is concerned with how the ride is realized particularly in the commercialized medical world of North America, it is a useful metaphor for similar processes in civil society which label people with abstract names like: long term unemployed, teenage mother, alienated youth, human resources etc and are served by powerful computers which are instruments of classification and record. Bureaucracy classifies people not in terms of their social status but in terms of the extent to which their circumstances can be correlated with categories to which resources are allocated according to government policies. Notwithstanding these equity ideals, when put into practice by various agencies, bureaucratic processes by their nature tend to objectify and de-humanise unless ameliorated by a humanizing climate that shares and cherishes people's stories. Frank pushes this further suggesting that such forms of communication amount to the capacity to be able to hear and attend to the stories that others tell and the feel confident to share one's own. He says (2000, p.21):

the dialogic task – and the profoundly ethical task – is for people to see themselves as characters in other's stories. It is this desirable even necessary capacity that is a direct product of an energized and democratic imagination.

Ralston Saul, refers to a similar dimension of the democratic imagination which emerged in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. He talks of Baba Sikwepere, beaten and blinded during the apartheid regime, who said that he felt he got his sight back by being able to tell his story in this formally constituted arena and being heard. He writes (2002, p.126) that Bapa

is still blind. What is the sight he has regained? The ability to imagine himself and his experience as a public part of a society's experience; its self-declared reality. His sight is that he can now be seen by others through his story.

This form of democratic imagining involves people consciously listening, consciously giving space in their imaginations to allow the imagination of another enter our own, a merging of stories, to use Frank's phrase.

It is the inclusive and compassionate quality of this democracy and its promotion, that is the central question here. And of course one of the difficulties in seeking to broaden Australian national and interpersonal ideologies is to find forums where images and ideals of compassion and inclusivity can be evoked and explored.

The democratic ideal like any human cultural entity held through time re-invents itself many times in different environments and epochs. For some the democratic ideal tends to be seen as a *negative freedom*, – a freedom from constraint and thus maximum opportunity for individual enterprise and development. An alternative view favoured by John Dewey (1916) and many others, refers to a *positive freedom*, a freedom to work towards living together in peace and collaboration. It is the promotion of the latter view through appropriate educational practices with their concern to cater for the essential role of the imagination in this, that concerns this project.

Democracy is predicated around the notion of fundamental equality of citizens whose rights are protected by law and by related social processes e.g. voting. As an ideal it stands against individualistic human tendencies to amass wealth and influence at others expense. The active ideal of inclusive democracy draws on a sense of fairness and equity which is derived from the ideals of the golden rule: *do unto others as you would have them do to you*. Groups practice sharing power and implementing the golden rule by courteous tolerance and inclusivity and it is in the development of these practical ideals that education for pro-active democracy can be promoted.

Countering this egalitarian ideal has been the ideas of recent capitalism which stress individualism, competition and at least implicitly, the survival of the fittest and the exclusion of the less fit, the

'losers'. Under this more competitive notion, democracy is invoked as a laissez faire social system that promotes freedom from constraint on the one hand and enterprise on the other. Inclusive democracy wants different changes and emphases. It seeks to look at structural and cultural approaches. Structural approaches look at the kinds of changes to laws, policies and customs that would have to occur to increase the inclusive quality of a democratic society. An example is increasing real equality of opportunity to public goods and services for groups who are excluded by reason of age, race, ethnicity, sexual preference, age. Working to increase opportunity tends to mean that in one way or another the 'haves' would need to share their entitlements to include the 'have nots'. This immediately introduces the cultural dimensions of social change to the educational project. It includes adding a culture of inclusivity to the dominant culture of competition and social segmentation. Changes to public culture and values are an essential way to encourage the public will to implement changes to the structures and policies of a society.

In a few words the actual challenges of increasing the level of inclusive democracy in a society are revealed. What is needed, in abstract terms, is a way by which people could be internally motivated to include the 'well-being of strangers' in their consciousness. At the moment in Australia, the discourse from much public leadership is informed by fear and insecurity which finds resonance in and of course amplifies people's similar feelings. These are generated in part by globalisation and terrorism and by instability of employment and social opportunity. It is variations on this combination of factors which seem to have hardened Australian hearts. The smaller voices from some churches and political parties, evoking Australian ideals of mateship' and a 'fair go' have not found additional support from more populist forces of talk-back radio and local government.

#### **Democratic culture and the media**

What is of great interest here is the different way ideals are placed before the minds of citizens. The media, largely owned by exponents of a competitive modes of social living, tend to assign celebrity status to rich and powerful players in the competition game, and with such status comes their imaginal power to mould ideas of life achievement in the young and not so young. The virtual world mediated through popular media particularly soap operas, talk back radio and the raft of images used by TV advertisements can conspire to exclude or 'make strange' certain people's experiences so they are not in fact actually attended to nor factored into ongoing social policies and practices. People embodying more inclusive and critical notions of democracy to a marked even heroic degree are not necessarily newsworthy.

This raises a key question about ways in which inclusive ideals of civic life can be promoted by education (seen broadly as deliberate processes to foster learning), to modify the strong forces mentioned above. In the context of this project, the question is: In what way can education in its various forms promote imaginations of democracy which are more inclusive and compassionate. In order to explore this further, it is necessary to examine the context in which this learning is to take place.

Contemporary audio-visual media particularly TV and their links to broader media in advertising and popular culture of fashion and style has created a largely constant informing, entertaining and learning environment which has a strong influence on popular taste and opinion.

Popular media based culture combines a seductive mix of advertisement and populist entertainment carrying strong values, opinions and fashions. These are rarely articulated or defended but are assumed and promoted by the 'story telling' capacity of the media to interpret the world. Anderson, in his book, 'Reality isn't what it used to be', stressed this 're-storying' power of popular media. He wrote (1990, p.126)

The media provide the theatre (sic) in which people experience political life and define their identifies, and in turn the experiences of people – all kinds of experiences, from the romances of movie stars to the conflicts of world leaders – become the merchandise of the media. The media take

the raw material of experience and fashion it into stories – they retell the stories to us, and we call them ‘reality tv’.

On top of this is the comment by Donavon Plumb (1995, p.171) concerning the way image has replaced reason in much of the products of media particularly when they have replaced the communicative function of language and its claim to reason with the image. As he points out, in the current media setting the unsupported and un-interpreted image achieves its goal ‘by direct appeal to the observer’s emotions’. As he writes further, (p.176) ‘Representations produced as images are consumed without making sense’.

He lists three tendencies in postmodern culture which are most evident in media presentations. The first is *de-linguistification*: the replacement of language and its rules of presentation by images which are ‘consumed’ aesthetically for their appeal without being de-coded for their meaning. The second is *de-differentiation* which refers to the penetration by aesthetic modes of experience over theoretical and moral realms so there is no room for a reasoned response concerning truth or a moral response concerning goodness or evil. The third is what he calls *de-politicization*. He suggests that once the aesthetic becomes more relevant than rationality or morality, there is no firm basis for moral and ethical reflection and hence no foundation for emancipatory political action.

While Plumb hastens to assure the reader that these three features are to be seen as tendencies rather than accomplished realities in current post modern society, his insights form an important and disturbing background in the considerations of this paper.

Anderson, already cited, pointed out that, besides its story telling function, there is a kind of theatricality which extends to national and local governance. In the business of running western democracies it is difficult to tell where the real ends and the virtual begins. He points out (p.182) that

The dilemma of democracy is that, while governance issues grow ever more complex and information more copious, the systems of mass communications make it ever more possible for political operators (left, right, and centre) to distort this complexity – to reduce it down to simple stories most people can understand without too much trouble and can believe as long as they don’t take in too much information.

He goes on to wonder how it will be possible to ‘get behind politics to governance’, by which he means how to get behind the ways used by political figures to stay popular and in power in order to get to where actual decisions are made and policies actually implemented. Of course even if one does get behind politics, the other realisation is that there are no absolutes and so people have to work out ways of getting along without being absolutely sure of anything. Anderson again (p.183):

Lacking absolutes, we will have to encounter one another as people with different information, different stories, different vision – and trust the outcome. Because once we enter fully into a world in which reality is socially created, democracy is all we have left.

It becomes evident that the kind of education for democracy envisaged here is not seen as ending in a standing ovation for some virtual media construction. It needs to support forms of inclusive and respectful grounded *action* generated from reason enriched and deepened by heartfelt feelings. In the scenario being pursued here which seeks to give much scope to the imagination, there is plenty of room for the generative and empathetic power of image provided it is linked to an inclusive and emancipatory discourse and praxis and not purely to a virtual, aesthetic function evoked by media. This is the heavy task that popular education, with its range of strategies is charged with

### Curriculum elements and processes

There are two related imaging processes in a democracy-enhancing pedagogy. One is the *visioning* process (an idealising pedagogy) by which citizens invent and develop ideals of good management and enterprise radically informed by equity and inclusivity. The other is a *grounding* process of compassionate empathy (a kind of empathy pedagogy) through which people try to imagine themselves in the shoes of others, seeking to share in some small way their feelings and experiences. As Greene (1995, p.3) says of the imagination, 'it is what, above all, makes empathy possible'.

The *visioning* curriculum builds on the work of the democratic futurists to envisage possible worlds and the real challenges that inclusivity and equity bring to human life, together particularly in relation to local, national and global scenarios. The *empathetic* curriculum seeks to evoke compassionate understandings and fellow feelings for others in the local, national and world community.

The question is how these two parts of the democratic imagination can be fostered in Australian society, what 'curriculum' can be used to inform educational encounters (Garman 1991, p.279) to foster the democratic spirit and heart and how these can be tailored to different educational settings. The desirable outcomes of such a curriculum will be firstly the purposive desire for equitable social collaboration in creative and productive enterprises and secondly compassionate awareness of the experiences and needs of others. These are essentially acts of a cultivated and somewhat altruistic imagination committed to democratic ideals. Such a project is linked to radical adult educational thinkers and practitioners like Paulo Freire (1970, 1972, 1973) and his associates, and to so-called 'progressive' thinker and practitioners like, among many others from many countries, John Dewey (1934), Maxine Greene (1991, 1995), Roby Kidd (1959) and Jack Mezirow (1977, 1991).

Lifelong learning refers directly to a necessary response to the rapid change of current social and economic life circumstances which confront everyone to a greater or lesser extent at all times in their lives. It can also refer to Western policies developed in response to rapid economic and technological change, promoting and to some extent funding ongoing learning opportunities mainly to increase workers' productivity. For the purposes of this book, the basic notion of lifelong learning as an adaptive response to changing social and economic circumstances is the general concern. The main agenda in these changing times is to reflect on and promote imaginative learning for an inclusive democratic culture on the grounds that equitable social relations in work and civil life, which are under serious threat by anti inclusive cultures and policies, must be promoted along with productivity related training.

A key element in contemporary research around lifelong learning (cf Alheit and Dausien 2002) has been the importance of the emerging individual learner networked in many ways whose biographical needs at different times becomes a key element in educational policy and provision. This correlates with du Gay's notion (2000, p.79) of the 'entrepreneurial self' with its interest in *informal networks and an emphasis on individual creativity and deal making* and his or her centrality in educational and learning policy.

With these reflections in mind, the question of the promotion of inclusive democracy through education surfaces, and with it, the quest to discover the locations and culture of educational sites and their influence on the lifelong learning agenda.

Formal educational experiences, begun in the years of schooling, continue, though less frequently, into adult life as when people enrol in tertiary study or short Adult education courses on computers, cooking, literature or rose pruning etc. There are also more informal learning environments of popular education generated in the exchanges and conversations which occur among children and adults who are members of clubs, churches, political parties and interest

groups of one or other kind. These are the arenas in which specific forms of learning, like those relating to inclusive democracy, can be clarified and fostered.

This paper suggests there are three ways to promote visionary and empathetic learning for inclusive democracy which would not necessarily claim to be exhaustive. The first is a focus on predispositions as a necessary preparation for learning inclusive democracy. The second is the use of works of art and performance evocatively – not analytically – to draw from learners an empathetic and compassionate ‘feel’ for inclusive democracy. The third characteristic is the use of stories of inclusive democratic life to encourage learners to create their own inclusive visions and to withdraw from and reject the grand narratives of competitive consumerism.

### **Finding the dispositions for inclusive democracy**

One of the essential tasks is to identify desirable dispositions for pursuing inclusive democratic practices in an appropriate manner. The following nine predispositions were the main ones generated in 2003 over two days of brainstorming at the school of Social Ecology at the University of Western Sydney, Australia.

The first and foundational pre-disposition is *purposive attention* through which people learn to become consciously aware of the real dimensions of their life events.

The second pre-disposition is *embodied awareness* which inclines people to be aware of and respond to the bodiliness of life experience – growth and decay, eating, drinking and defecating, wellness and illness, capacity for pleasure and pain, sexual desire and decline, anger, passion and fear.

The third pre-disposition related to bodiliness, is *ecological awareness* which inclines people to become groundedly aware and appreciative of the environmental system of which they are a part. The fourth pre-disposition refers to a human preparedness and desire for *aesthetic delight*, the pre-disposition seeking to be moved by natural and artistic beauty.

The fifth pre-disposition is a *constant feeling of connectedness* in which the unconscious boundaries of a people’s sense of self and self interest begin to widen to include others who up to that point were perceived as intrinsically different and separate and now somehow perceived to be one with rather than separate from.

The sixth pre-disposition is a *generalised feeling of belonging and agency* which, when held strongly, leads to a person taking responsibility for national and local issues and seeking to collaborate in appropriate social action.

The seventh pre-disposition is a general stance of *compassion for living beings* founded on a perception of some kinds of oneness with ‘the other’, with people usually and privately judged as ‘strange’ and ‘different’. This is believed to generate feelings and actions of inclusivity: welcoming the stranger and offering hospitality to her or him and treating them as one would want to be treated should the positions be reversed.

The eighth pre-disposition is a *permanent desire for fairness and justice*, which leads to espousing social justice and resisting injustice.

The ninth pre-disposing disposition is a *taste for courtesy* grounded in respect for others, which inclines a person to respect and celebrate others ‘with’ rather than ‘in spite of’ difference. What is suggested here is that much depends on the cultivation of appropriate pre-dispositions by which people become able to hear and be smitten by powerful voices of goodness and inclusivity. This stance of ‘attentive awareness’ is radically different from the passivity which media based advertising requires and evokes and needs its own ecology, its own set of conditions in which it can flower. It is these that this project is concerned with.

As such, the cultivation of enabling pre-conditions involves individuals in their own self education so that they can bring to their times of social action, when they need to resist injustice and social exclusion, a certain strength to retain the spirit of inclusive democracy even in times of conflict.

Maxine Greene saw that citizens needed to make a space in their imagination and their heart, before any social movement would have the necessary depth to promote human equity and inclusivity in an equitable and inclusive way. And of course Greene's pre-occupation with art and the aesthetic seemed to be aimed at the depths of the psyche where pre-dispositions find their roots. It was this that introduced the second curriculum theme.

### **Aesthetic Education**

Works of art are perceived to have power to capture the imagination and move the heart of suitably disposed people who engage with them. People in the right mood, hearing a poem from Seamus Heaney, or a 'blues' song from Nina Simone, or looking at a beautifully designed Japanese garden or Matisse's Icarus painting, can be transported through the very process of engagement into a space of enchanted possibility of time out of time. The capacity to be smitten by such works requires the pre-dispositions discussed above which Maxine Greene calls 'wide-awakeness' and 'attention' and it is her belief that people can be assisted to learn how to be moved through the process of what she calls 'aesthetic education'.

According to Greene, (1995) the human contemplating eye and engaged heart can be invited and encouraged to become compassionate and discerning through evocative, non intrusive educational activities which assist and encourage learners to become oriented to the aesthetic power of a work of art; to listen to it and allow it to take up residence in their mind and heart.

Popular culture can have a huge capacity to evoke the aesthetic sense of brother and sisterhood in state funded festivals. The 2000 Olympic Games held in Sydney were an excellent example of a feeling of oneness that gripped Australia through the rituals and artistic practice surrounding it. The thousands of friendly volunteer guides that peopled the streets of Sydney and the striking opening ceremony which revisited many national historical experiences and their icons, contributed to a strong 'feeling of oneness' among many Australian people. Of course the point to notice in this context, is that such oneness without any other underpinnings is as quickly dissipated as any experience from 'show biz'. These powerful events may however retain a kind of residual image in memory particularly if linked to interpretative stories where, as has been suggested, human culture invents and re-invents itself.

### **Compassionate Stories**

Among human cultures one of the powerful vehicles of cultural renewal both personal and communal has been through the use of stories which embody the ideals of a culture and show these ideals brought heroically to life in significant events. Many religions carry their foundation stories in sacred texts which are read and re-read, interpreted and re-interpreted in response to the historical conditions they encounter.

Nations in a similar way attempt to encapsulate their core values and achievements in great public monuments, annual festivals and holidays. At such times attempts are made to evoke among citizens, images and feelings of pride in their national identity by re-visiting significant national events and re-interpreting them in the light of the national mythology – the interpretative story which citizens are encouraged to live out in their lives. These stories, implicating citizens in the greatness of past deeds and events, seek to implicate them as well in feelings of solidarity in which they transcend their own personal desires and needs for the sake of the nation.

What has made this process problematic has been the proliferation of stories which people are encouraged to live by which carry radically different messages and evoke radically emotions and images. Consumerism with its links to image based advertising tends to evoke mythologies of

individualism and competition together with a blurring between real and virtual realities. Racism and sexism run strong stories which run counter to the nobler democratic sentiments mentioned.

In order to safeguard inclusive democratic ideals, a strong alternative message needs to take root and grow in people's imaginations and hearts. Whereas advertising and its forms of myth making depend on the speed and undefended impact of seductive images, a deeper alternative is necessary. It would need to seek a more embedded place in human hearts promoted within the conventions of its democratic ideals avoiding the short cuts of proselytising and purely image-based persuasion. And that lead to a collaborative project where popular educators from Australia, New Zealand, England, Scotland, South Africa, Canada and USA produced a collection of essays exploring the themes of this paper with reference to local issues and challenges.

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# Revitalisation of Glebe – Building Community

## Abstract

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In order to work with the community of Glebe, one has to understand its history and the relationship with present status of the village as a whole.

### Past

What is now Glebe was formerly part of a thousand acre area surveyed by Governor Philip, divided between the Church, the Crown and the schoolmaster. The area granted to the church was considered poor farming land and despite the growth of small farms in surrounding areas, it remained relatively untouched until 1826. In 1824 the NSW legislative Council established the Church and School Corporation *'for the maintenance of religion and education of our youth in the colony of New South Wales.'* This body was authorised to create the funds needed for the erection of churches and schools and other improvement by working and selling church lands. The Corporation subdivided the whole of Glebe land into twenty-eight allotments and by 1828 all but three portions of land had been sold or put up for auction. Many of the existing streets have been named after the original landowners and estates for example Allen, Toxteth, Lyndhurst Streets. In 1972, the Government saved houses from destruction and buildings were preserved. Many of these buildings are now owned and maintained by the Department of Housing.

### Present

At the last census, the population of Glebe and Forest Lodge was 13,747 people. Residents apart from Australians, include 4,000 people born overseas and 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Over 1,200 people are over the age of sixty-five and approximately 2,386 under the age of nineteen. There are some 900 public houses accommodating people with different family structures, age ranges and very diverse needs. Occupations include mixed range of professions, academics, small business owners, students, writers, artists and others. As a result there is the full spectrum of annual income

Issues as articulated by the community include youth involvement and education. Safety and perception of crime in the community is a concern among older residents. There is an increase in the number of unoccupied shops in Glebe Point Road and poor commercial activity. In addition, there has been loss of commercial businesses, whose employees generated income for small businesses.

On the positive side, it is recognised that Glebe has a village atmosphere, where many people know and connect with each other in the main street and shops. People live in Glebe, because it has a vibrant and diverse population with many identifiable 'characters'. Residents have a sense of 'belonging'. There is a good public transport system with proximity to CBD. The village is well situated for its closeness to universities and other educational institutions. Being a harbour side suburb, Glebe has excellent foreshore parks and walkways. There are many different stakeholder groups to support the needs of local residents. Glebe is well renowned for its bookshops, coffee shops, markets and exploring the heritage architecture.

There was concern of residents, community groups and businesses that Glebe had become tired and shabby and energy had to be harnessed to revitalise the suburb. With the boundary changes in local government in 2003, Glebe came under the

control of the *City of Sydney Council*. This change afforded a new opportunity to address many of the issues which different groups and stakeholders in Glebe had been attempting to work on in the past. In order to move from issues to actions that could be implemented, a community workshop was planned.

The aim of the workshop was to focus on the revitalisation of Glebe. A workshop was held in 2003. The genesis of the workshop resulted from the Glebe Society meeting with the Glebe Chamber of Commerce. This action presented an opportunity to bring together the various groups that had worked on specific issues. The aim was to share ideas and develop priority actions for commerce, arts, community and infrastructure. Teams were asked to take responsibility for further action. There was representation from the Department of Housing, Police, Glebe Youth Service, Chamber of Commerce, businesses, Community Action Groups, the Glebe Society, Metro Light Rail, City of Sydney Council employees, residents and the Lord Mayor.

Four areas for strategic consideration were identified:

- Urban design and space
- People and safety
- Culture and the arts
- Traffic and transport.

These four areas constituted a strategy for making Glebe a vibrant and safe village. The actions were driven by the creative and commercial input by residents and business people. In turn, this process supported the Council's philosophy of the "City of villages", whereby, the community was to drive the initiatives and subsequently be supported by the Council. Most residents already perceive Glebe, as a 'village' hence there already existed some very strong community groups. The most important issue was for a collaborative approach and shared understanding.

#### **Future**

By working with all stakeholders in the community and the City of Sydney the aim is overcome the following identified issues:

- unclear positioning
- inefficient implementation
- uncoordinated efforts
- lack of commercial activities

#### *First steps:*

In 2004, there have been two major outcomes towards achieving these initiatives. Firstly funding has been granted from the *City of Sydney Council*. Secondly, consultants have been engaged to plan a sustainable project that will bring benefit to business in Glebe and vitality to the whole of community.

#### **Issues**

- As most of the work in the community is being done voluntarily, strategies must be developed to avoid 'burn out'.
- Most importantly, momentum must be sustained
- Volunteers must be acknowledged.
- Communication strategy to inform whole of community of actions and events