YMCA

GEORGE WILLIAMS COLLEGE

centre for third sector studies

Contexts

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Contents

Preface

Welcome to the second volume of Contexts, our annual publication of writings by students. This collection again includes work which was written for different courses and at different levels. It offers you, as readers, a snapshot of the achievements, doubts and insights which accompany today's youth and community workers in their professional development.

The current edition has grown since its birth in 2008. It is fatter, but continues to look into its surroundings with surprise and curiosity, to question the people and events which surround it and, I believe, to engage our attention. This is not a traditional text book. It is aptly called Contexts because the writers open up for us all the context: that which accompanies or comes with the texts of their work with young people, within communities and alongside each other. Those of us who work as educators learn to value the place of narrative in our work. As the Nobel prize-winning author, Toni Morrison, claims: "Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created". On a daily basis, the writers of this collection engage with stories drawn from the lives of those with whom they work. These become the stuff of informal education, to be explored, respected and held. As often as not, such stories are offered as a mundane part of daily lives – it is in their telling and re-telling, as listeners return to them and illuminate them with experience – that they become ever more enriched and enriching. Through this process, we can see again the worth of the seemingly mundane and appreciate everyday life with its changing patterns of encounters, relationships and exchanges.

This volume is organised around three key themes. Interestingly, the editorial group did not invite work around these themes – perhaps they tell us something about the interests shared by this section of the "Class of 2008". Perhaps – and in my opinion more probably – you will see quite different themes and connections emerging from your reading. After all, the ever-present possibility of a different reaction is surely one of the great treats of reading.

The collection opens with three pieces which all, in their own ways, focus on communication as a resource in the practice of informal education. Peta Garbett's opening piece is a rich exploration of the creative, often subversive, never dull, writings of a group of young people who "would have classed themselves as illiterate". This is followed by a chapter from Elizabeth Hanrahan-Williams which opens up some of the complexities of a conversation with a young man in distress. As she takes us through the context of this piece of work, we are allowed to share some of the compassion and uncertainty that inform work with young people. June Spindler's piece which follows offers a glimpse into a contrasting example of a conversation: the more formal and pre-planned engagement between a supervisor and supervisee. She puts her spotlight on questions of professional confidentiality and on the ethical dilemmas which arise in working with a fellow professional on profoundly confusing issues. Together, these opening chapters hold different examples of professional communication up to the light and invite us to rethink our understandings – of the graffiti-embellished road sign, of the hesitant opening words from a young adult, of the deceptive formality of professional exchanges.

Melissa Griffin's writing stays with questions of how students do – or do not – communicate and co-operate. Her work also opens up the next theme: writings based in their authors' experiences as both educators and learners. Life in, and beyond, "College"! Griffin's piece offers an all-

too-rare scrutiny of a group worker's experiences of … group work. The negotiations, triumphs and sheer commitment which formal education requires of these students. Phil Watson moves our attention out into his experiences as an informal learner, committed to teaching himself how to achieve a more environmentally friendly lifestyle. As he warns us all; 'It's not that easy being green' (nor, we might add, being an informal educator, a student or a supervisor). Tahir Alam guides us through his personal commitment to his faith and to his work. As he opens up an ever-present aspiration to allow faith to guide working practice, he gives new meaning to the notion of a duty of care to young people. Geoff Phillips' piece which follows is also located in an experience of faith, and yet it has little other connection with Alam's work. Phillips, like so many of the authors here, allows us privileged access to a local group, in this case to a Protestant flute band in Northern Ireland. In a piece of writing characterised by its humanity rather than its judgement, he challenges us to think: about this community, and about this community education. Claire Naylor writes from a carefully-drawn position, as a heterosexual woman choosing to give practical support to a local pub's 'Gay Nights'. Fascinatingly, her work ends up by questioning itself as she invites us to consider her conclusions searchingly. Three chapters, three groups, three approaches to telling the story of working with groups filtered for us through the experiences of today's – and tomorrow's – community educators.

The closing theme is presented by two writers. Zoey Williams encourages a questioning of the usefulness of community education as a paradigm through an exploration of her work with the New Muslims Sisters Circle. She contributes to a closing theme which takes educational theory as the framework through which practice can be analysed critically. This leads to the closing chapter in which Jon Jolly takes something of a long view. He returns to Yeaxlee's 1925 writings on adult education as

lifelong education, flourishing in most settings beyond the educational. As he draws the collection to a close, he revisits for us the sometimes unrecognised and unreported instances of informal learning and of community development which are faithfully represented in these pages.

Before I hand the book back to its authors, I would like to thank them once again for sharing their insights and queries with us as their readers. Aristotle, in Poetics, tells us that story-telling makes for a 'shareable world': the writers here have shared their professional world as learners and educators in order to enhance the practices of informal educators. Our thanks go too to Colin Williams whose original generosity has made these publications possible. I would also like to thank the editorial team. And finally, of course, to you the readers!

Aristotle (1996 ed.) *Poetics* (trans. Heath) London: Viking Press.

Morrison, T. (1994) *Nobel Lecture on Literature*, 1993 London: Chatto and Windus.

The Contributors

Tahir Alam

Tahir left school with few qualifications after getting involved with 'an unhealthy crowd'. He felt that he was destined bound for nowhere until (in his words) he 'set his sight to God and asked for his aid and the most merciful answered his prayers'.

Tahir went back to college at the age of 19 and got a job as an office clerk in a legal firm. In time he realised that what he really wanted to do was to bring about some beneficial change to others. Tahir started doing a sociology degree but dropped out in his second year due to financial problems. He found a part time youth worker job at the London City YMCA and realised that working with young people was where his passion lay. After just six months Tahir's dedication and hard work was recognised when he was offered a full time senior post.

Having graduated from the YMCA George Williams College Tahir is now working as a Development Officer for Adult Education in the "Lifelong Learning Services" in Tower Hamlets. He helps to promote Lifelong education.

Peta Garbett

Peta Garbett has recently made the long trek up North to join the team at Barnardo's Highland, after 5 years as a youth worker for Holy Trinity Church in Weston-Super-Mare. She currently resides in Inverness, and is the project worker for a new and ambitious scheme that works with long-term unemployed 16-24 year olds, bridging the gap between employers and young people. She is excited about

seeing young people engage in their communities, and also runs a couple of other youth clubs in her 'spare' time.

Melissa Griffin

Melissa has been a Youth Worker for 8 years since leaving university following a degree in Psychology & Social Policy. She works as a Youth Support Worker with Lincolnshire County Council Teenage Services within Children's Services and as a Project Worker with the crime reduction charity Nacro.

Her two roles mean that she works with a diverse range of young people on a number of targeted projects. This includes focused work with young women, independent living skills with homeless individuals, providing sexual health services, working on alternative curriculum with school excluded young people and offering support for many related issues such as alcohol and substance misuse, self harm, mental health advocacy and much more . . .

Melissa feels that studying for the Diploma in Informal and Community Education has enhanced her skills as a Youth Worker, and has helped her gain a more critical approach to her work.

Elizabeth Hanrahan-Williams

After working in a pastoral role for three years in a Secondary School, Elizabeth (in her words) *'saw "the light" and recognised her calling as an informal educator working alongside young people' in her community*. She was appointed as a student Youth Worker at Newquay Christian Centre with H_2O Youth Project through The Rank Foundation where she has been working for the past two and a half years.

This has been a difficult as well as life changing couple of years for Elizabeth who during this time sadly lost her mother to leukaemia; but also enjoyed a fabulous adventure aboard Tenacious, one of only 2 specially

adapted tall ships in the world; made lifelong friends whilst studying at YMCA George Williams College and became a drugs and alcohol educator for the charity Hope UK.

Jon Jolly

Jon has worked as a youth worker in Littlehampton, West Sussex for the past ten years running creative activities to engage disadvantaged and socially isolated young people. Having started volunteering in his teenage years, he worked at The WIRE Project, an award-winning community organisation for eight years before the project closed. Jon now heads up the Children's and Youth Work Service at Arun Community Church overseeing a variety of clubs, activities and events in the same community.

In addition to his local work, Jon has led large youth programmes at national events, run training courses, and developed his writing with a regular column in Youth Work Now magazine. He is also currently chair of YARN, The Rank Foundation's network of youth workers and managers.

Claire Naylor

Claire has over 5 years experience as a senior trainer and youth worker for Lifetrain UK Limited. Within the company she has worked in a variety of settings and established new and innovative projects both nationally and internationally. Having extensive experience in residential's, Claire's work with young people has been inspired by seeing the accelerated learning and development you can get from the total emersion of a residential setting. As well as studying at the YMCA George Williams College, Claire also has a degree in Dance with Media Studies and is a master practitioner in NLP. Claire has a keen interest in travelling, alternative therapies and personal development.

Geoff Phillips

Geoff was born in Belfast in 1973 and grew up on a large council estate. Leaving school at 16 with limited educational achievement, he followed many of his peers into Harland & Wolff shipyard where he served an apprenticeship as a steelworker. Following 12 years of employment there, he re-trained as an aircraft fitter and worked in the local aircraft factory for a further 4 years.

All this time he had been working firstly as a volunteer, and then as a part time youth worker which was where his passion lay. With a growing dissatisfaction of his 'life's work' being spent making a group of faceless shareholders wealthy, he decided to apply for a full time youth work post in North Down YMCA. He is currently in his fifth year in post. In this time he has seen the youth centre's participation levels increase from 10 young people to now averaging 150 young people per week across a wide range of programmes and projects, supported by a staff and volunteer team of 25.

He feels that the YMCA George Williams College has been instrumental in developing his practice, and his capacity as a worker. He hopes to achieve his degree in the near future.

June Spindler

June has had a rich and varied career from wages clerk to wine sales all of which she is confident have informed her philosophy of youth and community work. June's involvement in youth work began as a Brownie leader (because there weren't enough leaders in the pack that her daughter wanted to join), but continued at a project on a local housing estate before moving on to the YMCA, some 15 years ago. Here she found a methodology that was ever-challenging but supportive to encouraging the development and inclusion of young people. June is

currently employed as Support Services Manager by North Down YMCA in Bangor, Northern Ireland.

A strong believer in continuing education, June has a plethora of academic and vocational qualifications from an RSA in Word Processing to a Masters of Philosophy in Reconciliation Studies from Trinity College, Dublin. She has been a college supervisor for distance learning students for almost 10 years and decided it was about time that she undertook the Certificate in Supervision studies for which her contribution to this set of papers was written.

Phil Watson

Phil started work as a part time youth worker with Essex County Council in 1991. After 33 years of employment as a toolmaker he gave up this trade to become a full time youth worker 7 years ago. He is currently employed as a Prince's Trust Team Leader during the day but also runs three evening youth work sessions each week. He is now in his third year of distance learning at the YMCA George Williams College. He also enjoys fishing, because the biggest decision he has to make is which tree to sit under.

Zoey Williams

Zoey first became involved in youth work in 1995 when she was in secondary school and was introduced to a youth worker in the school by some friends. The youth worker supported Zoey to start up a 'youth organising committee' and eventually she became a Junior Leader.

After leaving school she worked at Ensign Youth Club in Tower Hamlets as a Peer Motivator and although she enjoyed this work she never thought of youth work as a career until 2002 when she started working part time at Redcoat Girls Project in Stepney. Here she undertook a VRQ level 2 in Youth Work and went on to become Youth Worker in Charge at Haileybury Girls Project.

For the past 3 ½ years she has been working for Careers Management Futures in Redbridge as a Personal Adviser for PAYP (Positive Activities for Young People). Her role involves key working at risk 13-19 year olds by engaging them in programmes such as PAYP and Summer Uni., providing information advice and guidance on a range of issues, working in partnership with the youth service and managing a member of staff.

Acknowledgements

Tahir Alam would like to acknowledge his beloved wife Rahima Begum and all his teachers, both Islamic and those at the YMCA George Williams College especially Brian Belton and Simon Frost.

Melissa Griffin would like to acknowledge her Husband Robert 'Peach' Griffin, her mum Susan Thorpe and her tutors Jeff Salter and Richard Larkins. She would also like to acknowledge her supervisor Carol Birch and Manager Denise Benetello.

Jon Jolly would like to acknowledge his tutors William Mitchell and Mark Smith.

Geoff Phillips would like to acknowledge his wife Heather, his children; Ashleigh, Jamie and Owen and his tutors Simon Frost and William Mitchell.

Literacy as expression, rebellion and ritual

Peta Garbett

A study into the literacy practices developed and used within a group of teenagers.

> In the simplest sense literacy practices are what people do with literacy. (Barton & Hamilton 1998:6)

This work has stemmed from the foundational view that literacies, in the plural implication, are so pervasive that they are used in some shape or form by most people, much of the time. More recent challenges to a 'dominant emphasis on a single neutral 'Literacy' with a big 'L' and a single 'y' (Street 1995:2) have favourably suggested the ways in which specific and varied literacies can occur in particular times and places. This view is far more encompassing and accepting, of the types of vernacular literacies that are highlighted through this research.

Placed within this framework are the concepts of *literacy events* and *literacy practices*; the specific, day-to-day activities in which literacy has a function contrasted with the 'social and cultural conceptualisations that give meaning to the uses of reading and/or writing' (Street 1995:2). The notion of literacy practices is vitally important in linking day-to-day literacy events back into the social structure that a group or individual may find themselves in, may come from, or in turn may aspire to change. This research hopes to not only highlight the practical ways in which a group of teenagers use literacy practices, but to further 'situate [their] reading and writing activities in a broader context and consider motivations for use' (Barton & Hamilton 1998:11).

Context of Research

This study is focused around a social group of eight 13-14 year old boys, whom I had worked with for approximately 5 months as part of an alternative curriculum. Through this initial work I observed frequently occurring literacy events, which contrasted with how group members viewed their ability to read and write within the formal school context. As I began to monitor this use of literacy, I shared my idea for further research with the group. Each member was positive about taking part in a more in-depth study, including four observations and two interviews over an 8 week period. We discussed the ethical boundaries of the research, clarifying that group members could withdraw at any time, have their names changed in the final write-up, and discuss and question my findings in an evaluation session. The group were also aware that another worker would be present throughout observations, and they agreed to refrain from illegal activities whilst in my company.

I additionally asked the group what they thought of when I said the word literacy. Their answers showed a diversity of beliefs and gave some context to common preconceptions. Ashley assumed literacy was being able to read school books like Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Walker had overheard his teacher saying that their class had 'low levels of literacy', and Michael thought that reading with his mother at home wasn't important. As a group, they seemed to see literacy as something abstract, as a standard they could never reach, and as a 'condition' they would never aspire to have.

Literacy as expression

In the course of my group observations, four particular literacy practices became prevalent. They are of particular

interest to the research because they are not just regular activities using reading and writing; they are practices given specific meaning through social concepts and understandings. Members used graffiti and their display of clothing brands to exhibit the private message of the group in the public space. The groups' public behaviour (drawing on a wall, or choosing a particular jumper), was given meaning through private understanding. Social concepts brought clarity to what was written or displayed. Alternatively, the groups' reading habits, and the way in which they wrote rap together was completed privately. I have termed these practices 'corporate literacies', for not only were they accomplished collectively, but they were also the arenas in which the groups' mutual purpose was decided.

The private message in the public space

One of my first notes when observing the group within their school break-time was the importance they placed upon changing into their coats and trainers for a remarkably short period. Although I did not initially define this in my own recordings as a literacy event, later conversation with the boys led me to re-categorise it. Barton & Hamilton (1998:18) state that 'literacy is often used as display when wearing logos on clothes' and this group placed particular emphasis on wearing the brand 'Mckenzie' and displaying this name and logo publicly whenever possible.

The public reading of this brand was of binary importance. Firstly, group members identified themselves as part of the

group because all their clothing displayed identical wording. Jordan's fake shoes were noticed because of their faulty spelling; and although this was laughed about within the group, there was a deeper sense of urgency in the correction. Jordan was shown the accurate spelling of the word 'Mckenzie', and taken to buy the appropriate spelling, that was of the utmost importance to the groups' inclusive nature. Secondly, other local young people defined the group through reading their clothing brand. 'Mckenzie' gained members' respect amongst their peers; and the fake misspelling of the brand brought ridicule on the entire group. The private message of group inclusion was displayed publicly to other local young people.

My observations also revealed the regularity and importance of graffiti to the group as a whole. Although individuals refrained from undertaking in graffiti whilst I was with them, they spent much time showing me where they had drawn or written on private property, both in school and on the estate in which they lived. This literacy practice took place in the public space, displaying private messages of the groups' emotions, thoughts, feelings and social networks. Much thought had gone into the spelling used in these messages, and the consideration of what the group wanted to be publicly understood and what they didn't.

Within my first observation of the group on the estate I noted, 'we went to the three road signs that introduced the Bournville, each of these signs had been crossed out or vandalised in some way'. The group took immense pride in showing me this act of vandalism, and saw it as a great achievement. Damaging the signs displayed publicly, in a small way, the groups' private unhappiness about living in the location that they did.

Alternative areas which the group used for graffiti displayed written messages to others in the community. In one observation of the group I recorded that, 'the messages written on the wall were very social; happy birthday greetings; the group members' nicknames written in colourful marker; hellos to girls and other friends that they hadn't seen in a while'. Wolfe, in her study of graffiti writes that, 'the message realises a particular significance in a particular place and form: text in context' (Wolfe, M. cited in, Herrington & Kendall, 2005:304). For this group, the text that they wrote was only to be understood fully by those it was intended for. It was a literacy practice given meaning through the social idea that you could write a private message for someone else publicly. The group used a particular location as a type of community message board; the wall of a local shop. Wolfe again writes, that 'graffiti is used to subvert the authority of texts by imposing palimpsest like, an overwriting' (Wolfe, M. cited in, Herrington & Kendall, 2005:305). Below is an image of this 'social graffiti wall'. The group of young men took great amusement that they were drawing on a site that had been painted to deliberately try and stop them.

> Reading and writing are not unitary skills, nor are they reducible to sets of component skills falling neatly under discrete categories; rather they are complex human activities taking place in complex human relationships. (Robinson, 1987 cited in, Barton & Hamilton, 1998:329)

In the initial group interview the boys expressed their disbelief that I would find genuine examples of them using reading in everyday life. However, through my observations I saw that many of the literacy practices used a mixture of written and spoken language. They read corporately. Barton & Hamilton noted that 'it is clear in literacy events that people use written language in an integrated way as part of a range of semiotic systems' (Barton & Hamilton, 1998:9). When spending time with the group, it was a frequent occurrence for one group member to read something out loud, and for that to be digested and discussed by the group as a whole.

I witnessed an example of this when observing the group within the school environment. Ashley began conversation by reading the health warning from his cigarette packet, laughing, and saying, 'we're all going to die anyway, aren't we boys?' Following this, group members began to discuss the contents of the cigarettes they smoked. Ashley read aloud from the back of the cigarette packet, and the others tried to guess what each ingredient would do to your health. In reality, they were debating the merits of smoking over the health implications, and finding a group norm that they were all comfortable with.

The group also naturally compensated for members who had genuine reading difficulties through the method of corporate reading. Within my recordings, I noted instances that a secure reader from the group read from a magazine, and a school letter, so that all of the group members could benefit from the contents and join in with the subsequent discussion. This method of corporate reading can be seen

particularly clearly in how the school letter was used. '[Ashley] took it out of his bag and read it out loud – as the other boys in the group commented about how unfair it was, and made derogatory comments about the teachers who would have written the letter home'.

Of final significance to the research, is the method in which the group wrote together corporately. This was predominantly done through the writing of rap. Interestingly, this is the one literacy practice that I was totally unaware the group used before beginning my research. Despite having worked with the group for a considerable amount of time, they only trusted me enough after I had witnessed other group behaviour. Again, through writing corporately, the group naturally alleviated the pressure from those who struggled with spelling and handwriting, with the whole group composing, but only Ethan writing down what was decided upon. The rap compiled also varied in topic. Some were written for humour, but other pieces of writing were composed because of a serious issue or an underlying problem. Much of their corporate writing seemed to help the group clarify their values and norms. It was composed privately, performed privately, and for the group's own private enjoyment. It internalised the principles of the group and gave members a sense of belonging, in contrast with the previous forms of literacy which were displayed outwardly as a public exhibition of unity.

We've got nothing to do,
'Cos we live where it's shit,
And we've got no money,
So that's about it,
But we do have each other,
To hang around with,
And we're there for each other,

We give, give, give!

We're brothers.

We're brothers.

Literacy as rebellion

When examining the ways in which these four specific literacy practices reflect the groups' purposes, objectives and priorities I have used a two-fold method of reflection. Interviews have enabled specific questions to be answered by the group, but it has further been necessary to critically question the literacy practices themselves. I have employed the questions suggested by Jessop, Lawrence and Pitt (Jessop, Lawrence and Pitt. cited in, Herrington & Kendall. 2005:298) as a basis for critical analysis.

One of the crucial issues that I considered with the group throughout our interview time was why they produced their writing and who the reader was intended to be. Particularly in respect to their graffiti, the group often created thought through and pre-planned messages, spelt in a specific way, and left in a particular place. When I observed them in the school environment, they showed me graffiti that they had written on the wall of the Learning Centre.

This surprised me, as the centre was a place they could go to as a retreat when they got into trouble in lessons or when they needed time-out in the day. However, 'Nick

told me that it was because they wanted the teachers in the ILC to know that they were still teachers and weren't really respected'. The group publicly and actively wanted their writing to show rebellion against the school system, and desired that their message be read by the teachers they deemed the most hypocritical. In contrast, when I asked the group about the rap they wrote together, they explained that it wasn't meant for anyone other than the group. It was their place of private expression. It fulfilled an internal group purpose, in that it kept the group bound together and gave space for them to express themselves corporately.

Examining the world-views assumed by the individuals involved in these literacy practices is additionally essential to understanding the groups' purposes. I asked the group why they expressed themselves like they did in writing, and Jordan answered, 'well, mainly because if stuff's shit, we tell it like it is and say that it's shit'. His world-view was affected by the fact that he thought life wasn't as good as the majority of people made it out to be, and he wanted to have his say in the matter. He wanted to rebel against people who glossed over difficult times. The group had all been affected by the sudden death of Michael's father, and many of them had high levels of dissatisfaction about where they lived and their lack of money. This world-view was a primary influence in their literacy practices. Coupled with this was their corporate level of aspiration. Particularly through reading together, the group developed motivation to learn about cars and trucks, and expressed the desire to be mechanics after they left school. Much of the reading, drawing and even some writing done communally stemmed from their belief that their lives would get better, and the hope of what that would look like when they got there.

When considering the group's specific communication choices I noted that many literacy practices were influenced by the group's corporate motivation. The

group saw how they communicated as active rebellion against the school, legal and community systems. Their graffiti was written in places chosen through inconvenience to others, expressing unhappiness at some situation or other. They refused to read and write effectively in school, deliberately spelling things wrong in some circumstances and putting no effort into learning. However, the group negated this rebellion through the ways in which they conformed to the precise linguistic structure they claimed to be rejecting. They compensated for those in the group who could not read and write, trying to teach each other certain words, and help each other spell correctly. They wrote their rap in English, and although using some slang or swearing, made it clearly understandable through the effective use of grammar and structure. They made reading and writing a priority through magazines, Internet searches, and clothing labels. They even made sure graffiti was spelt correctly, so it could be understood by others.

In my final evaluation with the group, I hosted a discussion around whether the group felt they were good at literacy. Ashley made the insightful comment, 'I just choose when I want to be good at it. If you asked half the teachers in this school they'd tell you that I'm rubbish at it all, but I know I can read and write, and that's good enough for me. I just choose not to do it for them. The funny thing is they probably don't guess that it's me doing the graffiti because they think I can't spell'. Hooks (1994:167) writes about the power of language use and cites a line from Adrienne Rich's (1971) work, 'this is the oppressor's language, yet I need it to talk to you'. These specific young men claimed the need to rebel against the current system, but only felt able to express this rebellion, their hopes, their fears and their aspirations in what some may term 'the oppressor's language'. They stated that their group priority was to defy current structure, but perhaps a more accurate way to look at their group objectives, is how their literacy practices have showed their motivation to fit in. They have feared the term 'literacy' because they have associated it with

failure, but these individual's have very much wanted to read and write effectively, so that they can understand and be understood by others.

My final consideration regarding how the group express their objectives through literacy, concerns the reasons behind the selection of particular literacy practices and mediums. Why do the group use graffiti to confront others? Why do they express their feelings in rap? Why do they read corporately? Kress states that 'we always draw on the resources which we have available to us, for the purposes of making the representations that we wish or need to make' (Kress, G. Cited in Herrington & Kendall. 2005:68). I find this very relevant to this group of young people, because their mediums of expression were guided by the sources that were readily obtainable. When they were socialising on the estate, the wall was the easiest object to write on. When wanting to express emotion, the group used rap, because talking about their feelings was not seen as socially acceptable. Kress goes on to highlight how this process reshapes the communication itself to suit the environment. Again, this can be observed, as graffiti messages became a more popular way to communicate, rap became socially accepted among the group as a situation where you could be open and honest about your feelings, and corporate reading took place with anything that was readily available, and there to discuss at the time. In this respect, the literacy practices of the group have been formed, at least in part, through mediums that have been available to these young people, and the areas in which they had the greatest access to resources. Their group objectives, be it rebellion, the promotion of group unity, or the expression of corporate thoughts and feelings have been moulded by the environment in which this group socialise and live within.

Literacy as Ritual

The frequency and regularity of the groups' literacy practices have been a central observation within the research. The customs and habits that are engrained within this group have a dual purpose; they ensure that literacy practices are passed on between individuals and therefore precede group membership, and they provide a framework for group members to respond to these literacy practices and therefore have a direct effect upon individual group roles. The 'ritual' of this groups' literacy practices have provided a stable foundation and given the group clearly defined boundaries.

Group membership

Within Saussure's structural approach to language, he draws a distinction between language as structure, and language made manifest in speech and writing (the langue and parole). More intricately, Saussure suggests the 'linguistic sign' is made up from both the signifier and the signified, from 'the sound image of the word as it is actually said or written down' and the 'concept of the object or idea' (Strinati, D. 1995:91-92). I find this model useful when examining how literacy practices are passed on between the group members. Popular linguistic signs, used in literacy practices within this group, are taught to other members not simply though the signifier, and the structure of language, but through the signified, and the language as it is used and understood. The word 'Mckenzie' is spelt that way because language and the structure of our English language dictates it to be so; but the understanding of the signified for this group of young people is far greater than the knowledge that this is a popular clothing brand; the word 'Mckenzie' means inclusion, fitting in, and group unity. When I asked the group about the importance of clothing brands, Nick commented, 'it gets you a decent reputation. Like, the brand isn't just a name, it means something'. For this group the concept of the words

'Nike', 'Adidas' or 'Umbro' hold consequences for what others think of them, and how they themselves are accepted. This literacy practice is passed on, because the cultural understanding of the signified for these young people, gives a simple word a concept far greater than its number of letters; and the correct spelling of that word becomes a matter of inclusion and exclusion.

In a similar way, Ashley's graffiti duck tag had taken on a meaning of its own, that was transmitted and understood between group members.

Whereas the picture itself would simply mean 'duck' to a passerby, it had a far greater territorial meaning for this group of young people and others on the estate. I record how I observed this tag, and discussed it with Ashley. 'I asked if he ever put words along with it, and he said that he didn't need to because everyone on the estate already understood what it meant. I asked about people who didn't live on the estate and he said they didn't matter'. For other group members seeing this picture, they understood that it meant they could go and socialise in the areas where it was displayed. The concept of the picture had been passed onto group members because a corporate understanding of what it meant affected the whole group in a practical and tangible way.

The way in which literacy practices were effectively passed on between group constituents promoted the sense of group membership and security amongst individuals. Where specific signs were given greater meaning, a feeling

of exclusiveness was felt amongst the group, and the young people felt that the boundaries of their network were enforced. It also kept the group small and protected. Although these young people had other friends, only the central eight young men were privy to literacy practices such as writing rap together, or the knowledge of the genuine reading and writing difficulties members such as Jordan, indisputably suffered from.

Group roles

The responses of group members towards the frequently used literacy practices and those who instigated them had a crucial effect on the group roles that were held. Barton and Hamilton (1998) state that, 'we rarely get the chance to use literacy to define ourselves or our world; it is others' uses of literacy that define us and place us in their world; and we are often complicit in this agenda' (Barton & Hamilton 1998:xiii). Throughout my observation, I have often seen leading members, such as Ashley and Jacob, use literacy to exhibit control over other group members. It was Jacob who teased Jordan and highlighted the faulty spelling on his fake trainers and Ashley who took control over Jordan's misspelling on the Internet searches. In many ways, the methods that Ashley and Jacob use to exhibit control over other group members through their greater understanding of language, bears similarities to the very elements of school that the group say they hate. I record how Ashley publicly laughed about cigarettes causing death from cancer, despite his knowledge that Michael's father had died from cancer only six months previously. It is elements such as these that introduced cruelty into the literacy events that took place within the group.

Throughout the research, I observed Ashley as the clearly defined group leader. Within interviews he often dictated the discussions and spoke more than other group members, and he also read out loud to the rest of the

group more often than others. Ashley was fundamental in orchestrating much of the graffiti that occurred, and the group aimed to please him in many respects. Brown (1994:71) segregated group leadership using two basic typologies; task and group maintenance. Ashley was a task leader, who always wanted the group to be occupied, frequently with one of the four literacy practices highlighted through this research.

Other group members had similarly clear roles that were directly related to their responses to the literacy practices of the group. Jacob took the role of the joker, often creating humour at the expense of those who could not read or write. He brought laughter to the group's literacy practices, writing comedy raps with Ethan, and leaving graffiti messages to girls he liked. Jordan was the scapegoat of the group. He showed hesitancy within literacy practices involving graffiti, and along with Nick, lacked confidence because of his genuine reading and writing difficulties. Although group members such as Michael tried to compensate for him, he was often blamed if the group got caught drawing on private property or if something didn't work first time round. Walker was the peacemaker of the group; protected by others because he was partially deaf. He kept the group literacy practices in some kind of balance by looking out for those who could not read, and by using himself as an excuse to get conversation repeated. Finally, Shaun watched from the sidelines in literacy practices. Although he would join in with conversation about an article, he often preferred to draw instead of write, and would draw a relevant image to go with a rap or piece of graffiti.

Conclusion

Evaluation of research

Throughout the research I have used a mixture of observation and informal interviews to gain a more

accurate insight into how literacy practices were used by the group. Although I gained an appreciation for how the group was structured through these methods, they have obvious limitations which must be considered.

Primarily, as a researcher, particularly one spending much time with participants, it is acutely easy to become subjective. Becker's (cited in Delamont, S. 2002:123-125) essay, 'Whose side are we on?' states that it is impossible 'to do research that is uncontaminated by person and political sympathies', and he specifically writes that researchers need to guard against falling into 'deep sympathy' with the people they are studying. Throughout my work with this group, there were instances where I felt compassion for them as they talked about being misunderstood within school and by the community. However, I had to be careful to keep this empathy in check, so that it did not become approving of their actions. Fundamentally, their use of graffiti as a literacy practice damaged private property on a regular occasion, and to lead the young people to believe that I permitted this practice in some way, would have been wrong. Similarly, to overlook some of the inequalities that existed in the internal structure of this group, would have not given a balanced or realistic picture to their literacy practices.

My research is further limited by the sample size. Although my findings will implicate my practice in a number of important ways, I am also aware that it cannot be generalised from or applied directly to other groups or individuals.

Implications for practice

> You mean, the reading that I do at home with my mum is just as important as the reading that I do in school? (Michael – group member)

This research has a number of potential inferences for my future work. Firstly, I now consider literacies as actively

involving social and cultural concepts rather than being singular events. Analysing the social notions that have directly affected the literacy practices used by this group, have let me see that these practices themselves can actually be used to in turn change or enforce the social structure; as when rap became a widely used medium for the group. I see the importance of examining the ways in which a variety of literacies take their place at the centre of communities and social groups in a permeating way; and have begun to reflect upon how these literacy practices can be used by individuals to impact and make a difference in their localities.

My perception of individuals as 'language users' has been challenged. Kress (cited in, Herrington & Kendall. 2005:7) comments that people are 'constantly innovative and creative in their relation to the resources of their language', suggesting that we should allow young people to be creative, rather than enforcing them to read and write through an 'acquisition' theory of learning. Throughout my research I have been amazed by the variety of ways in which these young men have resourcefully expressed their views, opinions, thoughts and feelings through a variety of literacy practices. The ways in which they have written rap corporately, used the Internet to search for their future careers, and discussed writing from a variety of sources on a regular basis, has challenged me to use more of these mediums in my work with young people and their communities.

Finally, I am increasingly aware of the importance of situating reading and writing within a broader context. As an educator, I have sometimes attempted to assist young people struggling with reading in an abstract way, through an impersonal book or magazine. My work with this group has displayed the importance of placing everything in a tangible setting. This group of young people were initially intimidated by the word 'literacy' and would have classed themselves as 'illiterate'. However, in reality, every single

group member used literacy practices every day. Each group member had developed their own coping mechanisms and the group itself had adapted to make sure, on the whole, that its members were not excluded. Raising awareness of multiple and vernacular literacies has been highlighted to me as an area of importance. Rather than labelling people as 'illiterate', we need to encourage individuals to be confident in the literacies that they use every day without pressure.

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Conversation, a hidden treasure?

Elizabeth Hanrahan-Williams

Like a diamond, the art of conversation is multi-faceted and I believe it is the most valuable jewel that we as informal educators possess. Conversation is the key component to our work and by reflecting on a piece of my face to face work this enabled me to explore the facilitating concept of conversation as a tool or rather as a treasure in Youth Work, Informal Education and Community Learning. In this piece I will discuss the notion of conversation and highlight the impact that these every day exchanges have upon the relationships we strive to build and the work that we are called to do.

No one could argue that conversation is not at the heart of all that we do. For instance, when looking at the statement of values and principles with regard to ethical conduct in youth work from The National Youth Agency, they state that the nature and purpose of youth work should, *'facilitate and support young people's growth through dependence to independence, by encouraging their personal and social development'* (NYA 2004:1). It is apparent when reading this document that nothing can be achieved in our line of work without a relationship of one form or another being built. A relationship can only stem from a mutual exchange of dialogue which is a skill that as informal educators we constantly rely upon.

The Oxford dictionary simply defines conversation as, 'informal talk between people,' Let us not be conned! Yes, the definition may be an elementary one, however the interpretation and the outworking of conversation as a means of communication is at times highly complex. A

multi faceted experience. As educators it is of paramount importance that we are at all times aware of the dynamics involved in conversing. What are these dynamics? They are the expected social pleasantries i.e. the "Hello's" and the, "How are you's?" that we use to open up a conversation which are usually closely followed by the deeper exchange of discourse which underpins conversation. *'We feel most comfortable when the tacit conventions of small talk are adhered to; when they are breached, we can feel threatened, confused and insecure'.* (Giddens, 2006:136). Conversation helps to keep the happy medium of our every day to the point that if a person doesn't follow these social pleasantries, more often than not, offence will be taken.

Ronald Wardhaugh in his book, "How Conversation Works", reflects upon communication and,

"*what happens when people converse: the rules, procedures, principles, maxims call them what you will – that people apparently follow in order to communicate effectively with each other*". (Wardhaugh, 1995:61). A simpler explanation for the above would be the '*reciprocal process'* that is followed when, '*two or more people are to communicate, then they must:*

- *Co-operate*
- *Think about others' feelings and experiences*
- *Give each other room to talk*

(Jeffs and Smith 2005:29)

These are the social norms that we are taught and strive to learn even from an early age when 'Children respond to parental speech patterns from birth' (Garton and Pratt, 1989: 58) and this continues as part of our human development right through into adulthood and even then there can still be room for improvement!

Wardhaugh maintains the idea that:

"*Talk is usually a social activity and therefore a public activity. It involves you with others, and each time you are involved with another*

person you must consider him or her. You must be aware of that person's feelings about what is happening…In this sense talk is a reciprocal undertaking". (Wardhaugh, 1995:2). This was certainly the case when I posed the question, "are you alright?" After a short pause, the young person responded with, "No, not really Liz".

This exchange of words which I shared with a young man who I had been working with for a while was the beginning of a complex and intense conversation. I was very aware, as I saw him sat alone with his head hung low in a state of distress that the purpose of this discussion would be to find out what was at the root of his problems. Thus the reciprocal interchange which succeeded followed the basic pattern or '*principles that prevail in most conversations which help you to narrow down the possibilities to a manageable set: mutual trust, the sincerity of participants, the validity of everyday appearances, and 'common sense'.* (Wardhaugh, 1995:7)

Exploring this concept helped me to realise that before our exchange even began I had prepared myself for the conversation by drawing on previously shared experiences. The mutual trust that already existed allowed us to enter into a discussion which followed the rules of engagement.

Conversation can take on many forms from a planned event to a chance meeting and this impromptu conversation came about because I picked up on the situation immediately and as an informal educator I believed that I could help to change it, "*We have to have an idea of what is possible and a belief that we can make some difference".* (Jeffs and Smith, 2005:20) Conversation was my greatest resource in this encounter and I used it to help him understand his feelings at that time and then find hope in his future. In my role of being an informal educator I supported the young person and facilitated his personal and social learning through conversation.

For a conversation to follow an orderly manner you must allow:

"one speaker- and usually only one speaker-to have the floor at a time. They allow for changes of speaker, for interruptions at appropriate points, and for a conversation to be brought to an orderly end". (Wardhaugh 1995:62)

or Jeffs and Smith's acknowledgement to *'Give each other room to talk'* (Jeffs and Smith 2005:29). As the statement by Wardhaugh suggests, the person who has the floor could be the one who is leading the conversation just as there is a lead partner who guides the movement in a dance where both individuals know the sequence but each takes their own steps whilst going with the flow of the music.

'Some researchers and theorists have described this as the development of synchrony (Isabella, Belsky, & von Eye, 1989). *One of the most intriguing things about this process is that all humans seem to know how to do this particular dance-and do it in very similar ways'.* (Bee and Boyd 2007:305). It takes a facet of interactive skill to be able to engage in the dance of conversation and this is the form that the conversation I had followed.

Another key feature with such an exchange is what is not said. I had broken off from our conversation at an appropriate point to allow us to have the necessary space and time to reflect on his situation. We could then resume later and pick up again where things had left off.

Reflecting upon the approach that I adopted, I decided that this young man wanted to talk through his concerns and anxieties. Therefore, it would have been of no benefit to have just provided a multiple choice questionnaire on driving skills to help him to unearth his problems at this time. Thus it is essential that *'the comments you make must be relevant to the topic under discussion and they must appear to be adequate to the occasion'* (Wardhaugh, 1995:63).

 In view of this I felt it was appropriate to ask him to reflect on his circumstances by asking him to write down, 'all the positive and negative things in/about his life'. I

requested information and after a little while I tried to draw him out by the use of questions. *"Questions are useful devices"*. (Wardhaugh, 1995:171).

The variable component of non-verbal communication in this conversation I would say, had a high impact on both participants, "*over a couple of minutes you will have been processing hundreds of messages subconsciously"*. (Hughes, 2002: 163).

Based upon this concept, I was able to read the situation by drawing upon my prior knowledge. By chance, asides being a young person who comes into my project, he was also a neighbour and attended the same church as I did. Therefore, there was already an existing mutual trust at the foundation to this conversation.

> *"As workers we do not just 'happen' to be around…We aim*
>
> *to place ourselves in situations and intervene as appropriate… this provides a good way in to starting a conversation".* *(Richardson and Wolfe, 2006:20)*

This information proved to be very helpful as I felt that it gave me a confidence and a freedom to help address and resolve the situation.

Moving on to exploring conversation in relation to the setting, the place where I found this young man sitting alone looking dejected was fairly dark and uninviting. This led me to decide that a more appropriate place such as my warm and well lit office would be advantageous. Smith states that this is a common occurrence as *'we will often, in the course of our work, deliberately change the environment'* (Jeffs and Smith, 2005:19). The environment in this case which I felt needed to be changed was the physical one. Based upon this notion, I decided that it would be beneficial to take advantage of the warmth of my office as I was aware of how the cold or the physical environment could potentially *'influence the way we feel and think about the activities we are engaged in'* (Jeffs and Smith 2005:19). At the time, I wanted to give him the best possible opportunity to speak

to me in an environment that would encourage him to be open and honest and be able to reflect on his situation with a fair amount of ease.

In relation to boundaries, due to the fact that I felt challenged by the fact that I was pressed for time potentially I could have ignored the opportunity to engage with the conversation at the time. However, this did not seem like an option as it would have been in total opposition to my own personal values as an informal educator and the commitment required in this role. In addition, reflecting on my own life, this young person's situation reminded me of myself when I felt that my parents didn't understand me. The other thought I had during our exchange was that this could be my own son in the future and how I hope that someone will be there for him if he ever feels that I'm not listening.

He must have been feeling upset and seemed overwhelmed, alone, with nowhere else to turn to except the church. I felt that when I found him he seemed to be confused and frustrated and this was reflected in his body language of tightly crossed arms, inability to sit still, huffing and puffing and an overall edginess combined with a heavy sadness. At the time I had full empathy for him so I decided to commit the time to converse and ultimately try to help.

With regards to my response, as an informal educator I kept neutral with regard to the position that I felt he was in with his dad. Instead I helped him to see why he had originally chosen the college course and where it could lead him. In addition, I helped him to explore what a career in plumbing would involve and come to the realisation that this was not a positive option for him despite his dad's views that it was a *"proper job"*. I know that this was a time of overall learning for him and on a personal level I was pleased to assist by making the appropriate intervention.

Changing the environment allowed me to take more pro-active action with the assurance of being in a place of

safety and this was soon reflected within his change of body language. He became more relaxed and eventually even managed a smile. *"When you analyse conversations in this way, you see how non-verbal signals can impact on communication".* (Mary Wolfe, 2001:128). Hope had been restored, the music and the dance were now over and it was the appropriate time, '*for a conversation to be brought to an orderly end'*. (Wardhaugh 1995:62).

In talking things through with me, the young man was able to come to terms with his feelings, put them into perspective and face the situation that he had been dreading. Being able to pluck up the courage to address the issue with his dad and explain that he felt in fact he was following the path of his choice. Coming to this realisation, allowed him to break out of the rut he was in and be in a place of certainty in relation to recommitting himself to his studies.

 This major shift, in turn gave me great job satisfaction and a sense of worth. The conversation was more than worthwhile as '*informal educators supposedly offer choice not compulsion; freedom not order; 'empowerment' not indoctrination'* (Jeffs and Smith, 2005:22).

 In conclusion, we need to remember that,

> *"Those working in everyday social situations need to define themselves primarily by conversation…By becoming part of the familiar and everyday, educators can embed relationships, values and ways of being with each other, that foster understanding, democracy and learning. This is the promise of informal education".* (Jeffs and Smith, 2005:25).
> Conversation is significant and analysing this one made me realise and come to terms with the fact that by nature they can be unpredictable so can cause a level of fear or excitement but,

> *"Such recordings offer a constant reference point to explore ourselves and our clients in practice, an opportunity to ask ourselves, 'What is going on here?' In their complexity, as*

much as their simplicity, they offer us food for thought and reflection". (Wolfe, 2001:125). Which in turn will make those engaging in conversation grow in character. As a result of this conversation I now have a greater self-confidence with regards to the possibilities of my role.

Conversation is the multi faceted gem which we all possess and like a diamond when it reflects the light it sparkles, can be colourful and outshines all other precious stones. When this happens, conversation like a diamond is priceless.

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When does disclosure not constitute a breach of confidentiality?

June Spindler

Introduction

This chapter will seek to explore the concept of confidentiality as it relates to the practice of supervision. I will first look at what confidentiality is before investigating its function and purpose within the supervisory relationship. Placing the concept of confidentiality in the context of professional ethics, I am assuming a professional stance for the role of supervision within informal education.

Using some examples from practice, I will examine the circumstances within the supervisory relationship where confidentiality is created and how this might be handled and will attempt to bring some clarity to the conditions under which confidentiality might be breached for ethical or legally justifiable reasons. I will look briefly at the legal responsibilities and imperatives which may apply in such situations. I will conclude with recommendations for ensuring that all parties are aware of the parameters which apply to confidentiality within the supervisory relationship.

What is confidentiality?

Woods (2003:8) states that:

> The words 'confidence' and confidentiality' come from the same Latin phrase, '*con fidem*' meaning 'with faith'. It is important that both parties 'have faith' in the supervisory relationship. Confidentiality

implies that the material discussed is not the subject of gossip or talk over teacups with other staff. But confidentiality is not about keeping secrets, but about only discussing the session on a 'need to know' basis.

According to Illingworth (2007), 'observing the principle of confidentiality means keeping information given by or about an individual in the course of a professional relationship secure and secret from others.'

I admit that I am more drawn to the definition provided by Woods. Secrecy is not a requisite that I would comfortably apply to the supervision process for reasons that will become clearer as this item progresses.

For Woods, this confidentiality then is seen as central to the maintenance of trust between the supervisor and the supervisee. If we are to show respect to the supervisees with whom we work and to demonstrate that we regard them as autonomous learners, then we must understand that this includes handling information professionally and with assurance.

What is the function and purpose of confidentiality in the supervisory relationship?

Supervisees will frequently bring issues to the supervision table that they feel they could not share with their line manager. This might include an incident which has happened in the youth centre that they feel they could have handled better or differently. They may simply want an opportunity to reflect on how a situation arose and the circumstances that created it. A confidential supervisory discussion provides the space to examine such an incident particularly if the supervisee is unsure whether something they did contributed to the situation arising in the first instance or if their actions exacerbated the outcomes. In this regard the supervisee may not want to appear incompetent in front of their line manager or may wish to

work through and resolve the incident before discussing it with the appropriate person.

If we accept that the content of discussions between the supervisor and supervisee is confidential, it is this confidentiality that allows the supervisee to raise delicate matters, which might be difficult to broach in another environment. More significantly, it allows the supervisee to discuss the feelings raised by their practice.

Tash saw the importance of a worker having somebody to talk to who was 'interested in his problems, his difficulties and his needs', (Tash 2000:154) but emphasised that supervision was a work-centred relationship about support and education. She went on to say that supervisees found it valuable to be supervised by somebody who was not connected with their place of work because they could talk openly about work without having concerns over how the information shared might be used (Tash 2000:162).

A supervisor can experience a level of frustration when matters of confidentiality are being discussed. The nature of the supervisory relationship is to promote the autonomous learning of the student and therefore the role of the supervisor is to support the student in finding their own course of action to handle incidents arising from practice. For me, working in the role of supervisor, one specific incident raised a dilemma around information transmitted during a supervision session and my inclination to use this information to improve support structures and service provision.

The incident related to a disclosure by a young person which raised a child protection concern. The supervisee followed his employing organisation's policy and procedures implicitly but was left unsupported by those same procedures in terms of his own feelings and actions. Confidentiality required that he report the disclosure directly to the designated officer who in turn dealt with social services. The supervisee was not informed of further processes and was told not to discuss the matter

with anyone outside this reporting structure. Not having dealt with social services in any previous capacity, he was not aware of what would happen nor was he prepared for the abuse to which he was subjected by the family of the young person who lived in close proximity to his own home. He was not debriefed or supported by the organisation for which he worked during this time and because 'confidentiality' applied also to the designated officer, he was also denied contact with this person.

This lack of support forced the supervisee to bring the incident to the supervisory setting as he was aware that it was affecting his relationships in the workplace and with the young people. As the supervisor I could provide the debriefing around the incident and course of action taken within the confidential constraints of our relationship. However, while I could lead the discussion into the realms of 'what might your organisation have done to support you better and how can you address this with your employer for the future?' the confidentiality of the supervisory relationship prevented me from going to representatives of the employer, whom I know well through my own networks, and advising them how they should have responded and supported this particular worker and others caught in similar circumstances.

Reports and Assessments

In setting out the supervisor's responsibilities, Inskipp and Proctor (1995:35) identify one of the tasks to be 'to clarify issues of confidentiality, any limits to it, and the procedure for the compilation of any reports or assessments about the supervisee'. In outlining his expectations of a supervisor, Christian (2003:6) also states that 'She should be able to maintain confidentiality about the processes and contents of the supervision sessions.'

A concern raised by some supervisors is that of record keeping from conversations in notes or recordings. 'It is

feared that records might unwittingly fall into the hands of others, and that the confidential information contained in them might be used against the supervisee' (YMCA 2003:9). It should be obvious that recordings must be handled carefully and not left lying around for others to read. A supervisor should also ensure that they do not disclose in writing assessments or essays any confidential or personally identifiable information concerning individual supervisees or other service recipients (such as young people) obtained during the course of the supervisory relationship.

It is likely, however, that the supervisor will take material from the session to her own supervisor. 'Here the emphasis will be on her interventions with the supervisee, with the purpose of learning how she can be more effective' (Woods 2002:9). In this instance information may be anonymised so that it does not identify, directly or indirectly, the individual to whom it relates. One of the difficulties of this is that it may not be possible for people who know each other or each others work context to use processes such as changing the name, or using a job title.

When undertaking the Certificate in Supervision, my own supervisor also worked within the Youth and Community sector in my area and was involved in many of the same networks. When bringing interventions to our meetings it was difficult to find ways to anonymise youth service personnel with whom we were both familiar.

When is confidential not confidential?

A purpose of supervision is to ensure that the supervisee is practising safely and that young people are protected as a result; the contract between supervisor and supervisee dictates that supervision must ultimately result in better youth work skills for the supervisee. In order to accomplish this, it is generally accepted that the supervisor

receive training in the performance of supervision as well as supervision of their supervision.

For my own professional development as a Supervisor, I was motivated to undertake the Certificate in Supervision Studies with YMCA George Williams College. However participation on this course has also raised a confidentiality issue in relation to the process of group supervision utilised on the study days.

All participants as practising supervisors are required to present an issue from their own practice for discussion in the group setting. In order to do this, I asked permission from one of my current supervisees to relate an incident from one of her sessions. While this particular supervisee was aware that I am undertaking the course (she will sign off that I have completed eight supervision sessions during the period of study) I felt that I still needed to obtain her permission for a specific release of information regarding this incident. When the supervisee is asked to give consent to the disclosure of information about themselves it is important to ensure that they understand what will be disclosed, the reasons for the disclosure and the likely consequences of that disclosure. In this instance we discussed the format for the disclosure, I showed her the paper that would be circulated, and we reached agreement on what would be presented.

At the beginning of the Certificate course, recognising the legitimacy of the study situation, like all good youth workers we had participated in contract setting. This had included the need to preserve confidentiality particularly as some workers within the group came from contiguous areas and also in recognition that we were mostly engaged with practitioners currently studying with the College.

During the break immediately following the presentation of my practice on this issue to the group, a fellow supervisor took a telephone call from a work colleague during which he jokingly released the content of the presentation out of context in a flippant remark. While the

participants in the case study had been anonymised the area youth service was brought into disrepute by the out of context comment. While I was exasperated at the lack of sensitivity and disregard for confidentiality, there was also a heightened awareness of how easy it is to breach confidentiality without due regard.

Liability and Legal Responsibilities

Statutory obligations (and in some cases professional codes of practice) may require confidentiality to be breached for reasons such as the risk of 'serious harm' to identifiable individuals or to society at large. However, it should be noted that there is no general consensus or legal definition on what constitutes harm that is serious enough to outweigh the obligation of confidentiality.

The earlier circumstances outlined in relation to child protection allowed confidentiality to be breached for both ethically and legally justifiable reasons because the supervisee suspected that minors were being exploited or abused by others. This would also have been the case if the supervisee had known or suspected that a vulnerable adult was being exploited or abused by others.

It is also generally accepted that confidentiality can be breached where it is known or suspected that an individual is acting illegally. For instance, should a young person disclose that in order to raise money to feed their own drug habit, they are dealing drugs to other young people it would be appropriate to inform the authorities as it could then be reasonably known or suspected that this individual is harming others or could be responsible for harming others in the future.

A growing concern in youth work is the increasing number of young people that are engaging in self harm. Concerns were raised in DHSSPS (2006) where it was reported that suicide is the largest killer of young males in the province with an increase of suicides in Northern Ireland between

2003 and 2006 of 102%. *Protect Life* records that recent increases in the rates and number of suicides in Northern Ireland are due mainly to the rise in self harm among young people.

Where it is known or suspected that an individual is harming themselves or where it is known or suspected that an individual might harm themselves in future it may also be appropriate to break confidentiality and seek help from appropriate professionals in other agencies.

In some circumstances the law may impose specific restrictions on the disclosure and use of certain types of information, and both supervisees and supervisors must be aware where these apply to their own practice.

The child protection incident noted earlier in this item related to two sisters, aged 14 and 10 years, who disclosed that they were sexually active with men over the age of 18. The supervisee had no doubts about the necessity to break confidentiality in this regard but he had wanted to involve the carers (maternal grandparents) in the disclosure. This was not permitted under his organisation's policy as this required only those deemed to 'need to know' of the procedures to be informed. Informing the grandparents was delegated to the Social Services' investigatory function.

In this instance, the law required the supervisee to disclose the information to Social Services regarding the possible sexual abuse of these children. However disclosure to the grandparents would not have been appropriate as it was outside the competence of the worker to decide whether the grandparents were colluding in the abuse or negligent in their care of the children.

Conclusion

In relation to confidentiality it is ethics that call the supervisor to a standard of practice sanctioned by the profession (see National Youth Agency (2008)) while any

current legal statutes define a point beyond which both the supervisor and/or the supervisee may be liable if they do not protect the confidentiality of others.

It is imperative that both parties understand the directive to honour information as confidential (including records kept on young people or others) as well as understanding when confidentiality must be broken and how this should be done. Equally important is a frank and open discussion about confidentiality within the supervisory relationship and its limits. The supervisee should be able to trust the supervisor with personal information, yet at the same time, be informed about exceptions to the assumption of privacy. For example, supervisees should be apprised that at some future time, their supervisors will be asked to share relevant information regarding their readiness for practice and will include information drawn from supervision discussions in writing up their assessment on the student.

The most appropriate place to ensure that all parties are aware of the extent and limits of confidentiality is in a contract setting boundaries at the outset of the supervisory relationship. Informed consent is key to protecting all parties from any breach of confidentiality. Put simply, informed consent requires that the supervisee is sufficiently aware that statements made during the supervisory relationship may be open to disclosure in certain circumstances.

As gatekeepers of the profession, supervisors must be diligent about their own practice. 'In this case, perhaps more than in any other, supervisors' primary responsibility is to model what they hope to teach' (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992:150). In treating the information shared by supervisees with respect, it is to be hoped that the supervisor can ensure that they develop similar practices in those they supervise.

As Stapleton (2003:14) records, 'The challenge is to be part of the process which ensures that only those practitioners who are competent and safe to practise do practise and

that those who are not do not. The importance of this role as guardian cannot be stressed enough.'

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Interaction, collaboration and conflict – Group work on study days

Melissa Griffin

'You are thrown together with a collection of people whom you may not know very well which is expected to become a cohesive and productive team.' (Hartley 1997: xi)

Introduction

The majority of our life is spent interacting in groups; they are the foundations of our society. Within them we develop relationships with other members that provide us with a sense of belonging and purpose. Within each group we have different expectations and we take on different roles. As working in groups is such a large part of our lives; knowing how to work effectively in them is an important inter-personal skill we need to develop and maintain. Negative experiences in groups can have a detrimental effect on self, other members and society as a whole.

This assignment will explore what a group is, the processes that occur within a group and the implications of group interaction on self and others. This exploration will concentrate on my experience in a Regional Study Group (RSG). An RSG is a collection of students who are studying a course of distance learning with the YMCA George Williams College. It is a requirement of the course that students attend study days in which they participate in discussion based learning activities. The purpose is to

allow distance learning students the opportunity to interact face to face and encourage the development of praxis. Not all theory and concepts can be examined here so I have focused in on those most relevant to my RSG.

Definition of 'us' as a group

Forsyth (2006:2/3) comments that to be a group there must be a purposeful function linking the individual members, a collaborative task that establishes interpersonal relationships and creates cohesion. These basic defining features are present within my RSG. We have a purposeful function, a collaborative task – we must participate in regional study days and the associated activities together to pass our course. We have established interpersonal relationships to complete the task – regional study days require us all to be communicative with one another in order to encourage reflective learning.

Barnes et al (1999:2) highlights that when cohesion happens a separation occurs between the group and the environment creating a boundary that has to be managed. This relates directly to a systems theory approach to understanding groups. The environment within which our group is functioning is the YMCA George Williams College. This is the responsibility of the tutoring team, who have rules about the way the work is carried out (the study day has to include certain tasks, last a certain length of time etc). The members of the group in turn exert influence over what they wish to include on a study day. This creates interaction between the environment (YMCA) and the system (RSG). Furthermore, systems theory also emphasises the importance of interactions within the system – the processes taking place within the group – this includes both task interaction and relationship interaction (ICE 201: Working with Groups Unit 1).

From analysis of group types within Forsyth (2006:9) I believe that my RSG began as a secondary group, formally

organised, short term and goal focused (Cooley). This is because the group was deliberately formed rather than emergent (Cartwright + Zander). In addition, my RSG could be considered a concocted group as it was planned externally by the YMCA College (Arrow et al) and was task focused, working towards group goals (Lickel et al).

However, I have found that my RSG no-longer sits easily within the above categories. We are a group characterised by face-to-face interaction and high levels of cohesiveness that predominate within a primary group (Cooley). I also feel that the type of group we have become is emergent, our interactions and level of cohesiveness have been a gradual process (Cartwright + Zander) and I now feel that membership of the group is an end in itself; it is personally important (Lickel et al). Group types can therefore change over time.

> '…. I could have done with the groups support. I've noted more and more that when something happens at work I want to seek their opinions and understanding' (Extract from RSG session recording)

Forsyth (2006:119) noted that groups offer members social support – personal actions and resources that help members cope. This support includes emotional, informational, instrumental and spiritual.

Group Structure + Process

As outlined above my RSG was formed to fulfil a particular task and we converged as individuals from all over the country having never worked together before. In order to work effectively we had to become a functioning group. Tuckman (1975) identified that there are different stages in becoming a group; these are forming, storming, norming and performing (ICE 201: Working with Groups Unit 1). I will use this theory as the foundation for

examining my RSG. However, it should be noted that though referred to as stages they are not separate phases but overlapping processes of group interaction.

Furthermore, within these stages, there are important group characteristics that emerge. Forsyth (2006) notes the development and use of norms and roles. Tajfel + Fraser (1990) highlight another four characteristics; these are interaction amongst members, perception of how group members view themselves within the group, the group's goals and affective relations among members (Hartley 1997: 22).

During the **forming** stage there is a high level of insecurity as we are uncertain about how our abilities compare to others and what we can offer to the group. Individuals demonstrate what they have of value and seek something back in return. We want to be accepted as members of the group.

> 'Amelia makes me feel secure . . . Helene thinks along similar lines to me' (Extract from RSG session recording)

Morris et al (1976) identified 5 types of behaviour that occur when people feel uncomfortable in a group situation. These are interaction – talking about the situation, action – examining the equipment, withdrawal – doing something separate, controlled non-reaction – changing the subject and escape – complete removal from the group (Forsyth 2006;114).

> 'I switched off and drew flowers on my notepad' (Extract from RSG session recording)

> '…I kept re-examining Gareth's notes to look like I was doing something relevant' (Extract from RSG session recording)

I found the initial group meetings difficult as I tend to be an avoider of groups. I tend to be an introvert, becoming quiet and withdrawn in groups. I am fearful of rejection and new group situations heighten my anxiety.

During the forming stage, we very much relied on our tutor who acted as leader, organising and motivating us to achieve group task, and encouraging us to communicate. Barnes et al (1999: 58) notes that the entry of a facilitator marks the group's boundary from general chit chat to specific purpose. Furthermore, as conflict occurs in the early stages there is a tendency to resolve it through dependency on the tutor. There were many silences when the group lost momentum and because no roles had been established other than tutor as leader we would wait for him to refocus us.

Once membership of the group has been established a **storming** phase takes place, categorised by conflict. Dissatisfaction can occur if there is a discrepancy between expectations and reality, the group may not provide what the individual needs, and the individual may not provide what the group needs.

> 'I do not work productively in groups on such a task, I like time and space to think alone' (Extract from RSG session recording)

> 'Michelle reluctant to participate, body language closed, I feel she does not value this type of interaction as much as the rest of the group' (Extract from RSG session recording)

Roles within the group become established, specific positions given to or taken on by individuals within a group. Each role will have attached expectations about behaviour; matching to personality types can result. Roles can help to organise a group and facilitate the achievement of task. They can also help develop and maintain interpersonal relations between members.

> 'Amelia has a mother type role; she encourages others through support and praise. Amelia attempts to ensure that everyone is equally participating' (Extract from RSG session recording)

Groups established from individuals who do not know each other also provide an opportunity for members to take on new role experiences. It can be an arena to develop self.

> 'For me this leadership type role was a new experience . . . but involvement in the group has allowed me to develop confidence. . '(Extract from RSG session recording)

Forming and storming can occur again if once a group is established new members enter the group and have to be integrated. This happened when we moved into level two and we had a new tutor. There was much insecurity about whether our group practices would meet his approval. There was anxiousness about whether we would have to adjust our expectations and level of achievement.

> 'We knew what our level one tutor wanted from us in assignments etc, but our level two tutor may want different things – feels unsettling' (Extract from RSG session recording)

Once a group has got through the storm they become more settled and will have developed group **norms**, a shared set of standards that define and regulate how group members behave, how they interact. They are more than individual personal standards, there has to be member consensus. This is a time of cooperation with respect and trust developing, giving all a sense of belonging.

Festinger (1954) proposed that we use groups to seek whether our own opinions and attitudes are consistent with others; we need to socially compare, to see if we are correct. Most groups prefer to be in agreement. When disagreements occur attempts are made to resolve the conflict but if deviation from the majority continues rejection occurs (Baron et al 1992:60/61). The size of my RSG has reduced over time from 12 members to 6 members. Much of this reduction has occurred I believe

due to conflict caused by deviation from norms, though some loss of members has been down to external factors.

> 'Sam, she always arrived late, never had anything she needed with her, she gave nothing of self in presentation of practice and she showed no commitment' (Extract from RSG session recording)

> 'Ben's behaviour was rude and disrespectful. He did not speak or engage with the group; he often fell asleep or rolled his eyes at someone's statement' (Extract from RSG session recording)

Member conflict often occurs when people do not take on group roles related to task or relationships but maintain individual roles. For example, in accordance with Benne et al (1948) Ben can be viewed as an aggressor, expressing disapproval through his actions and attacking group norms. Sam can be seen as a blocker, resisting the groups influence and acting in negative, disruptive ways. In addition Lewin's level of aspiration model proposes that people set goals for self and their group, they enter achievement situations with an ideal outcome in mind. Unless people want to be in a group they will not be productive (Forsyth 2006: 54).

I felt extremely frustrated by the attitudes of Sam and Ben. It was quite clear that neither wanted to be part of this process and to me that felt like a personal rejection. I thought it was okay to not feel comfortable or happy about the situation, I was anxious too but out of respect for other group members an effort should be made. As with many previous experiences of rejection I closed off to these individuals and did not attempt to get to know them. Nor did I attempt to challenge their attitudes. Other group members reacted differently, going out of their way to engage with them. They were more upset by their departure from the group as closer personal bonds had been formed.

The final stage of development is when a group becomes more focused on the task at hand, they **perform**. There is confidence that the group work well together and that the task can be achieved by joint effort. Most tasks undertaken within my RSG are unitary tasks – tasks which cannot be broken down into subtasks. All members perform more or less the same job.

The potential productivity of a group is dependent on member resources and task demands. It is rare for a group to reach its full potential as most fail to act in the most productive way. There is usually some lack of co-ordination and motivation that occurs (Steiner 1966, 1972 in Baron et al 1992).

> 'I did not participate very well in this at all . . . because I get very little learning from it' (Extract from RSG session recording)

> '. . She always arrived late, never had anything she needed with her. .' (Extract from RSG session recording)

When one works alone, success or failure rests entirely on one's own shoulders. However, when one works in a group, then responsibility for the group's success or failure is often shared among group members (Baron et al 1992).

One criticism of group performance I have within my RSG is our tendency to focus on practical solutions rather than reflection of self in presentations of practice. We are still struggling to truly reveal ourselves to one another.

> 'I think we have taken a step back . . . we were more open to asking about self rather than getting into lengthy debates about organisation/culture/practicalities' (Extract from RSG session recording)

My personal learning from this exploration has been to acknowledge the progress I have made working within a group. I have never been an active interactor in groups before now; I usually avoid group situations as much as possible. But the mostly supportive environment of my

RSG has allowed me to develop confidence in expressing myself and on occasion taking the role of leader. This has been a lengthy and continuing process involving many factors, but significantly developing more awareness of my professional frame of reference has been a major indicator. Initially, I was more critical of others as constant self reflection made me compare my own approaches to how others act. I would be easily frustrated by people that I consider acted unprofessionally but very rarely challenged their behaviour, as with Sam and Ben. However, through the discussions and debates I have been involved in with my RSG I have begun to see that my own personal and working experience is different to others. This makes our personal and professional values diverse and thus impacts on how we would handle a situation. I have become more appreciative of not jumping to conclusions about people's actions but take time to learn about where they are coming from and to offer my points of view constructively; I seek for us to have a mutual learning experience. This has required me to open up and reveal myself to others, rather than close up when I feel anxious or rejected.

Conclusion

A group is defined by the presence of a collaborative goal and the interaction that occurs to achieve that goal. It can therefore be assumed that interaction within a group will result in certain outcomes being achieved. These potential outcomes are what motivate people to join and stay within a group. Members of my RSG have joined and remained within the group to develop learning in order to pass the course. The aims of the group coincide with members personal aims, the group task is important to us.

The stages of group development identified by Tuckman are evident within my RSG but as ongoing processes rather than distinct phases. For example, the introduction of a new member could see a return to forming and individual

member changes from one study day to the next can see a return to storming. Furthermore, I do not feel that individuals within the group have clear-cut roles. Those roles that do exist are more focused on relationship maintenance than task interaction. I also feel that any norms that exist within the group are not group specific but social norms that exist in many contexts, such as listen when others are speaking, complete action that you have committed to etc.

(All names have been changed)

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It's not that easy being green

Phil Watson

This article takes the form of a field study report, where I will explore an issue by doing something outside my normal academic or professional experience that I judge to be socially useful, and critically reflect on my learning from the task.

For this practical exercise, I have chosen to adopt a more environmentally friendly lifestyle. My initial reasons for choosing this issue are that I am possibly one of the most un-green people that I know. I anticipate that at some stage I will be compelled by Government policy to change my outlook on this subject. Thinking more widely than just recycling my own waste, should I be actively encouraging others to follow suit? If so, I feel I should do so out of a strong conviction.

> By our choices and statement of problems we must first translate indifference into issues, uneasiness into trouble, and second, we must admit both troubles and issues in the statement of our problem. In both stages, we must try to state in as simple and precise a manner as we can, the several values and threats involved, and try to relate to them. (Wright Mills, 2000:131)

This would appear to sum up what I need to achieve. Translating 'indifference into issues' should be quite straightforward, but the 'simple and precise manner' may be problematic and challenging for me.

It seems to me that in order to attempt this exercise I must first decide on what basis I make my judgements. In her study notes, Stapleton sees judgement as being an ongoing process: starting with a trigger, then an appraisal of the

evidence available, leading to a conclusion. (Stapleton, 1999:47). Although I may have over-simplified her views, and she does go on to develop this process to make some interesting and useful points in relation to professional practice, it does seem to me to be almost reduced to a problem-solving exercise. I feel that maybe judgement should be more than that.

Looking towards Wright Mills, he says there are three overriding ideals that seem to be inherent in the tradition of social science and involved in its 'intellectual promise', these being truth, reason and human freedom. (Wright Mills, 2000: 178 -179). These ideals seem to me to encompass, underpin and expand on Stapleton's notes, and I believe that they give me reasonable foundations on which to make my judgements.

Having established this, I must consider what I understand by the term socially useful. My Collins dictionary defines useful as 'able to be used advantageously or for several different purposes'. This shows that my pen knife is useful to me, but I know if I lost my knife it would not really matter to me. If I apply this meaning to socially useful it is hardly an inspiring basis for a critical enquiry. However, advantage is defined as '1. more favourable position or state. 2. benefit or profit.' This brings the definition closer to how I understand the term socially useful, benefit being defined as to 'do or receive good'.

To summarise, the rationale for my judgement will be made through a process of appraising the truth, reason and human freedom in order to reach a conclusion as to whether being environmentally friendly is good for society.

My approach to completing this assignment has been to undertake the practical aspect of the task while researching and questioning the issues as they arise. This would fit in with Stapleton's process, with the assignment itself being the trigger.

When setting about my recycling task, my aim was to reduce my contribution to the landfill problem by reducing the amount of black bags I put out each week; which sounded quite straightforward. However, when I emptied the contents of the five sacks that I had accumulated during the previous week, I was faced with the fact that I had no idea what I was supposed to recycle or where to put it. The local borough council web site was very informative, giving a calendar showing which alternate weeks recycled materials could be collected. The materials that they would take for recycling were paper, cardboard, cans, glass bottles, textiles and plastic bottles. I was rather confused by the fact that the council only have recycling facilities for PET and HOPE type plastics; further reading enlightened me to the fact that these two types of plastic are identified by a triangular symbol with either a number 1 or 2 in the centre. As there are a further six types of recyclable plastic that the council are unable to deal with, it is left to the householder to search very carefully through his plastic waste to find the correct mark. This is further complicated by the symbols being very small; trying to find them inside a clear plastic container can be very time-consuming. On the other hand, it does add some interest to the process when after scrapping out the remaining contents of the container and squinting against the light you eventually identify the symbol. You experience triumph or failure depending on the number revealed. However, I feel this 'excitement' will soon give way to irritation; and I expect that if, in the near future, the markings are not readily obvious, then the material will end up in a black bag.

A further complication was that food waste needs to be composted. I feel the council may be leading people to believe that this is a simpler process than my personal experience of composting would suggest. 'Why buy expensive compost when you can create your own?' asks the leaflet. The answer is probably because the waste goes into the cycle a lot quicker than the compost comes out the

other end, and results in an overflow. Undeterred by this, I resolved to build a very large compost container that I calculated would at least give me a fighting chance of keeping the waste under control. I have to say that I experienced a lot of satisfaction when I resisted the temptation to go out and buy any new timber to build my structure and instead reused only old off cuts that I had lying around.

To date, in spite of my reservations, I am finding it is very easy to recycle a large amount of my waste simply by using four carrier bags hanging in the kitchen to accommodate the various recyclable materials. I calculate that by volume I am now recycling approximately 80% of my household waste. This has radically changed my 'life is too short' view. However, I find I cannot now relax in my new-found 'greenness'. The Draft Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Essex [DJMWMSE] states quite sensibly that the first priority should be reduction, followed by reuse, and only then, recycling (ECC:31). I fear there is much more to be done.

This is all well and good, but is what I'm doing socially useful? Let's look at some of the facts or **truths** first. The Government's defra web site says 'all ten of the hottest years on record have been during the period 1990-2005'. 'Current climate models predict that global temperatures will rise by 1.4°C to 5.8°C over the period 1990 to 2100.' 'Global mean sea levels are also predicted to rise by 9 cm to 88 cm between the years 1990 and 2100' (defra, 2007:1). 'Carbon dioxide the main greenhouse gas has seen its concentrations increase the most – by around 30% since 1880.'

These facts tell us that the planet has got warmer, that sea levels have risen and we have put a lot of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Defra, in its Waste and Resources Evidence Strategy, links waste management to climate change: 'Living in excess of our environmental limits contributes to environmental threats, such as climate

change. The biodegradation of waste itself can contribute to greenhouse gas emissions' and states 'better waste management can contribute to: reducing greenhouse gases – notably methane from landfill sites but also carbon emissions [through reuse and recycling].' (defra, 2007:5-6)

The rest are predictions, projections and estimates based on statistical information. This in itself can raise doubts: 'It was Benjamin Disraeli who said there are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies and statistics. He must have been thinking about weather forecasting' (Johnston, 2002:130). Although this quote is taken slightly out of context, I feel to a lot of people, this sentiment may have some substance. Giddens is also cautious: 'if global warming is indeed taking place' (2006: 956). In his book *The Third Way*, he argues against Simons and others that global warming is not happening, or it is a natural occurrence and not brought on by human activity. But he says, 'to be sanguine about environmental dangers would itself be a highly dangerous strategy. Recognising this fact means engaging with ideas of sustainable development and ecological modernisation'. (Giddens, 1998:55)

Based on these and other readings, on balance I would judge that the planet is warming and this is leading to rising sea levels and that to some unpredictable extent this is being expedited by human activity and this issue cannot be easily dismissed. So my attempts at recycling should in some small way, be socially useful.

And so to our second indicator of sound judgements, **reason**. Reason, if I have understood Wright Mills's interpretation correctly, means that we should not be manipulated by 'dogmatic silliness', as he puts it (Wright Mills, 2000: 180) and that we should question the values and motives of those who seek to influence us. Put crudely, are we being brainwashed? If, as an extreme example, Nazi Germany was the result of the population losing their reason and values in the name of what was

seen as the common good, then how can we ensure that reason is a consideration when making judgements?

There appear to be political factors involved in the environment debate. Local councils currently incur a landfill tax of £24 (2007-08) per tonne which will rise due to an £8 per tonne escalator which is applied each year. Further, they face Government penalties of £150 per tonne if they fail to meet landfill diversion targets. (ECC:7). I am left to wonder if, given these financial pressures, councils will be tempted to use recycling methods based on cost rather than how environmentally sound they are. How much pollution is caused by the recycling processes and the transportation of materials? How many of the council and the Government decisions are based on the fear of raising taxes and the unpopularity that this brings? My own view is, where money and votes are concerned, we need to be wary of politicians riding bicycles.

Stapleton points out that there is continuum of consciousness in making judgements (Stapleton: 46) and I feel it could be that many people who judge recycling to be good do so at low levels of consciousness. At a recent study group meeting, I asked the question, 'Is recycling good for society?' I found the response rather worrying. Everyone immediately, unhesitatingly and without reserve said yes. Maybe as students they had considered this issue in depth and had already made high- consciousness judgements. If not, it could demonstrate how susceptible we all are to the messages being put out about the environment.

I would judge that we need to be very careful about blindly supporting every political decision that claims to be environmentally friendly.

What about **freedom**? On a worrying note, the *Daily Mail* recently reported 'that the Local Government Association, the umbrella body for councils, claims two-thirds of the public support bin taxes'. It also reports that 'in the poll

those questioned were told that those who recycled rubbish would pay lower charges'. I find myself agreeing with the comment column when it says on the same subject 'you could get turkeys to vote for Christmas if you asked them the right questions' (*Daily Mail* August 23rd 2007). And does this again reinforce the need to be aware of Stapleton's low level of consciousness?

The poll mentioned above could be used to give credence and permission for less responsible councils to impose draconian measures to force us to recycle. These could have a considerable impact on our freedom. There are, I believe, areas where huge wheelie bins, some of them with computer chips in them, are being forced onto households. There are stories of over-officious council staff imposing fines for minor transgressions. Even if these are isolated and exaggerated incidents, there remains the fact that rather than serving us, the state could again be forcibly intervening in our lives. This represents another erosion of our human freedom by removing our choice.

However, we cannot put all the blame on the government and those that will financially gain from its policies. We have to share the responsibility. The Draft Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Essex reported in their public consultation that 'there was not a high level of response from the public due largely to lack of interest in the issues' (ECC: Annex 3). This echoes the view of the political scene taken by Wright Mills:

> many people who are disengaged from prevailing allegiances have not acquired new ones, and so are inattentive to political concerns of any kind. They are neither radical nor reactionary. They are inactionary. (Wright Mills, 2000:41)

If people are 'inactionary', then those in power have no need to even make a case in support of what they want to do. They can just do it. Wright Mills concludes, chillingly, that 'the frequent absence of engaging legitimation and the prevalence of mass apathy are surely two of the central

political facts about Western Societies today' (Wright Mills, 2000:41). If we remain largely 'inactionary', then government schemes that impinge on our freedom will continue.

Now I must judge whether being environmentally friendly is good for society. My conclusion is yes it is, but we will have to balance this against the loss of some freedoms. How great these losses will be depends on how, and whether, we as a society take a full and active part in the democratic processes. There will always be compromises. 'An imperfect society produces imperfect individuals, and imperfect individuals make for an imperfect society'. (Stevenson, 1974:28).

This has been a stimulating and satisfying piece of research. There were times when I wished that I had taken a simpler approach to the question, but even if I have missed the point and not been able to express my thoughts clearly, I have learnt a lot during the struggle.

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Islam and youth work

Tahir Alam

Introduction

Over recent years Islam has come more into the global public domain. Its arrival came not as expected in accordance with its overriding message of peace, justice, tolerance and harmony, but, to the shock and horror of many – especially Muslims – associated with injustice, intolerance and injury, not just to people but to the essential Islamic message. This commotion has been aggravated by groups of Muslims who claim to follow the Islamic message and have presented this to the world through their acts, their own perceptions of Islam. This has contorted and obscured the nature of Islam, the root of the word Islam being *salama* meaning to be at peace and to be safe (Lane, 1984: Vol 1, p1412). However, those who look into the teachings of the religion with an open heart will find clarity, inviting peace and justice and harmony.

In this article I want to look at a few of the traditional understandings of one of the greatest aspects of the Islamic message, the ennobling of good character embodied in the personage of the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (Peace be upon him) of whom God clearly states in the Quran "*indeed your character is of a vast ethos*" (Quran, 2003: 68:4). I want to show how these teaching speak to us as informal educators in contemporary society.

I will be using and referring to traditional Islamic teachings and agreed upon sources after the Quran and Sunnah. I will present not just classical understanding but also an agreed perspective of Muslim scholastic thought, following a traditional and orthodox view of Islam. I will also offer a

contemporary understanding of youth work, and a consideration of current thoughts on practice values and informal education. Although the contemporary models of youth work in their many styles and forms of delivery have much to offer in their different approaches, I feel there is a level of underlying concern as to the integrity of many of the current models that appear to be based on, and regulated by, the norms of consumer society. Youth work therefore risks losing its faith, in a deep metaphorical sense. This being the case, I hope the models derived from Islamic teachings might be helpful in the enhancement of current practice.

There is no literature directly correlating to contemporary youth work in Islam but there is a broad moral, ethical, spiritual and educational framework that can be employed in both Muslim and non-Muslim contexts. It has to be remembered that Islam is holistic in character: life is not separated exclusively into particular areas. Ideas of education, politics and diet for example are considered in the greater context of faith – everything is an expression of, and connected to, the whole. But that does not mean that the field of youth and community work cannot apply Islamic precepts. In fact such an exercise promises a different perspective on youth work, something that most youth workers might agree is helpful and facilitative of new insights and interpretations to many of the prevalent models which are secular or influenced by Christian thought. Indeed, aspects of the Islamic perspectives drawn from Quran, Hadith or Prophetic traditions and Islamic thought, can spread understanding, equanimity and harmony in human social interaction.

Enhancing youth work practice through the concepts of Islamic morality and education

Throughout world history, across cultures and faiths, people have seen the building of moral character and

righteous conduct. Generations of philosophers over thousands of years have sought to establish the nature of ethical behaviour. Within this there has been an enduring belief that education will motivate and promote 'the good' and work to inculcate high moral standards in the human character. While atheists and agnostics have ascribed moral laws and ethical behaviour to intelligent human construction, most civilisations throughout the ages have at the centre of their social systems a belief in a supreme being or beings, a creator, God or gods and most would profess and argue that the foundations of moral law have been laid down by religious doctrine with divine authority and as such infinite wisdom. This has historically been transmitted and developed via intermediaries such as Prophets, or as the manifestation of God as an embodiment of Christ or Avatars.

Muslims believe that moral laws and guidelines have been sent by God through the essential message of Islam and that there is no one who knows more about the affairs of the creation than our creator. God says in the Quran "*In the Law of Equality there is Life to you, O people of understanding*" (Quran, 2003: 02:179). This verse makes clear the divine nature of the Law and how it is fundamental to life. Muslims do not doubt that there is similar guidance in other revealed scriptures of other faiths, but we take the Quran's law as being primary guiding principles. In its commands and prohibitions and the carrying out of our personal and social affairs amongst humanity, we will find guidance for both physical and spiritual life if we deliberate deep enough, using the faculty of the intellect, which includes mind and heart. So I would like to begin by looking at what can be considered the beginning: "In the name of God the Most Merciful, The Most Compassionate" (Quran, 2003: 01:01).

The Muslim in his/her daily life repeatedly utters the above words at the beginning of the day, when waking, eating, going out, buying, selling and generally embarking on or

starting something. God has also initiated each chapter of the Quran with these words such is the indication of the great weight they hold in the Islamic tradition and way of life.

The words in Arabic *Ar Rahmaan* (The Most Merciful) *Ar Raheem* (The Most Compassionate) are the superlative of the word *rahma* or mercy, which are two attributes of God. Humans, it seems by necessity, want to imitate Godlike attributes, even if they only believe in a notion of god as metaphor. 'Power', 'authority', 'domination', 'knowledge' all seem to be desirable to us in one way or another. However, as a whole we seem to pay little heed to those attributes that seem to imply meekness in one's character especially in this age of rampant individualism (here understood to be "*the negation of any principle higher than individuality*" (Guenon, 1999:71)). But attributes like love, mercy, compassion and honesty offer a sense of contentment and fulfilment that cannot be found in material wealth alone: they are probably harder to acquire than wealth, because they often entail some measure of sacrifice, tolerance, acceptance and/or a level of self restraint and selflessness. They are also the product of self-reflection and consideration for others.

Yet as human beings, we seem to have a basic need to embrace and be embraced by these attributes. As youth workers we need to express these deeply human qualities if we are to be successful in our role as educators of, and carers for, young people. In fact, if you think about it, it would be hard to get anywhere with young people unless we were able to articulate these attributes effectively. I think it is more than a statement of faith to argue that the showing of care (for instance) to another has the potential to draw out care in those cared for. On a bland psychological level we do tend to mirror behaviour in relationships, so why not project our 'better self'?

The engendering of these qualities exalts the status of our being and, in reciprocation, that of others. This thus leads

me to one of the most fundamental aspects of the Prophet Muhammad about whom God said in the Quran "*We did not send you except as a Mercy to the whole of Creation*" (Quran: 2003: 21:107) and He, The Prophet said about himself that, "*I was not sent except that I may perfect good character*" (Malik, 1991: 382).

Islam's stance on moral teachings is an integral part of the Islamic tradition, one of the most salient attributes of the Prophet Muhammad contextualised in the Quran. As God says in another verse "*That indeed your character is of a great moral ethos*" (Quran, 2003: 68:4). His teachings, through his deeds, words and actions reflect and have much to teach us about the deep spiritual nature of individuals and their interactions amongst humanity.

Hamza Yusuf, an eminent American Muslim scholar, says that "*The Prophet's words are as vital and relevant today as they were 1,400 years ago when they were first spoken. Whether you are a Muslim, a practitioner of another faith, or even someone who has no religious belief, these sayings have much to teach us. Sayings such as "A kind word is charity" and "Love for humanity what you love for yourself", speaks to us regardless of our personal creed; they speak to our shared essential nature*" (Yusuf, 2004: 6).

Communion

Human beings, through history, have found comfort, security, solace and sanctity through communion and familiarity. Communion requires a level of affection, acceptance, understanding, appreciation and sometimes tolerance. Communion offers an effect of intimacy that invites us to be open and share our thoughts and feelings in a sincere and giving manner, "*Familiarisation is a key ingredient in the cultivation of love. It is difficult to love someone you do not know*" (Shakir, cited in Waley, 2007: 21).

The word 'love' has many meanings that imply different levels of affection. The love we have for a parent is different to the love we have for a friend or a spouse.

Sometimes we say we love some material things, but this is not the level of love I might have for my child. But in our work we express the ethos of communion as care. The young people we work with share their time with us; they speak to us and to a greater or lesser extent let us into their lives. Often they find comfort and a sense of security in our very presence, coming by choice. This is an expression of a high level of confidence in us and it seems important to take the time and the effort to really understand and explore such a belief in us and return to them a reciprocal level of belief in them. In the contemporary era it is not unusual to hear those we work with and amongst referred to as 'customers' and/or 'clients'; it is as if we are there to sell something to them, or to 'fix' their lives. It is usual to hear young people defined as, or as having, some kind of problem or deficiency, but does this view really say more about our deficiencies?

It seems to me that if we are unable to offer tangible expressions of care to young people (as people) we provoke the wall of apathy (the great secret weapon/ defence of youth) that many of us are so often confronted with. It is often claimed that youth workers are 'role models' and/or 'examples' to young people. This may or may not be true, but if we appear to young people as holding their contributions cheap, if we do not attend to them with a sense that we understand the honour that they give us by coming to us, we cannot really be surprised if they hold us and others in contempt or at least at arm's length. The using of young people as a means to an end, to meet targets, seems almost inherent in modern youth work. But although we have to use the tools we are given, and to some extent who pays the piper calls the tune, is it not our skill to humanise these instruments, to inject the life of communion into what we do?

Kind regard for others

The Islamic ideal is that when we meet others we should make the effort to draw affirmative regard from our first

impressions (if you like, in the words of Johnny Mercer and Harold Arlen, as sung by Bing Crosby, we should 'accentuate the positive'). This should be even more the case when we meet people that others have undermined or criticised (we focus on giving the benefit of the doubt). The 'physics' of this response is quite simple; it seems likely that if we give up on others they will give up on us and themselves. According to Islam, fostering a bad opinion of people just for the sake of it is considered a malady of the heart; "*people are innocent until shown guilty*" (Yusuf, 2004: 95). Even when someone is found guilty we should extend active forms of mercy, lending them a helping hand as Ibn Hazm says "*It is the height of injustice to deny a habitual wrongdoer the opportunity of doing an occasional good deed*" (Laylah, 1990: 137).

Islam teaches that when the self is moved to criticise others, one should look instead as if in a mirror not to see other people's faults, but to see reflections of our own shortcomings. Human beings that are liable and easily susceptible to injustice and inequity, should not look in disdain at others.

Youth workers and the literature surrounding the profession often depict the young person as problematic, and yet when we look back on our own youth we may realise that our behaviour and attitudes might have been similar to what we now regard as 'difficult'. It seems that as adults we develop a kind of hypocritical amnesia that forgets it is usual for the young not to be able, or to refuse, to conform to what might be seen as the norms of 'adult society'. Young people, more often than not, seem to need to learn by their own experience and not the warnings, counsel or advice of the older and self proclaimed wiser adults. Again, is it not part of the skill set of youth workers that we are able to embrace and even celebrate this propensity?

Few (even the young) might disagree that we live in a society wherein we believe we can provide 'quick fix'

solutions and put in place tough measures to prevent young people from making what we, as adults, determine to be errors and mistake. This (actually quite ineffectively) seeks to prevent young people treading similar learning routes that most of us have trodden until we come to understand that we do not learn by our mistakes or even other people's blunders. In fact it is much more usual to make the same mistakes over and over again until a crisis causes us to change. It is only after that point that we look back and realise we only understood situations by going through them ourselves and often we don't understand the first time round. It is that understanding that we might see as an example of our practising the mercy of God on ourselves. That we can go back, that we and others can rectify our behaviour based on our understandings is living the love of God. We tend to learn lessons out of grief, fault, sorrow and crisis. As such they are not evils to avoid, but part of the course of most lives; experiences that can teach us that we are not perfect and so needing to "*look elsewhere for peace and perfection*" (Eaton, 2006: 37). If we believe it is possible to achieve the impossible: that on the strength of advice and warnings from youth workers we would never make a mistake or reach a crisis point, we would either be mad or be setting ourselves up as gods, which of course is the most foolish of blasphemies. 'No one is perfect' only God is perfect, therefore we must live and work with the situation that has been part of life for millennia; young people (all people) learn by walking the dangerous, risky, mistake strewn, error ridden path of life that in the end is the only road to enlightenment and joy.

From an Islamic perspective there is a time for condemnation and punishment, but mercy, by far and away, is always the prevailing factor, outweighing demands for retaliation and justice; forgiveness overrides the urge for retribution. In the Quran God has given rights to Justice as He says a "*tooth for tooth, and wounds equal for equal. But if any one remits the retaliation by way of charity, it is an act of atonement for himself*" (Quran, 2003: 5:45) meaning that the

charity of forgiveness is a higher station and spiritual path to take, and remember that today's saint may become tomorrow's sinner and vice versa. Many external factors threaten the human condition. The odds may be against us, especially those of us who may need to experience life and view the lives of others before they can begin to understand the nature of their reality. But one of the greatest truths of our existence, one that causes us perhaps suitable humility before God, is the realisation that none of us will fully understand the nature of existence in our life times and that the best informed of us will, compared to the wisdom of God, know very little at all, relatively not much more than the least informed.

A profound lesson of living is that we need each other and it is in our best interests as individuals, groups, communities and society to strive to live in harmony and work to begin to see past our differences, shortcomings and biases. We need both to be educated and to educate; education cannot by definition be a 'one way' process (else it is merely instruction or worse, brain washing). In Islam we believe that God has created us as inherently good and the "*sound heart is understood to be free of character defects and spiritual blemishes*" (Yusuf, 2004: 1). That being the case, is it too much to ask or expect that we as youth workers try to resist seeing young people as 'problems', 'difficult' or by the light of some deficit model? Can we see them as the glorious creations of God, and in their ultimate and awe inspiring potential? I think we should be able at least to try to find and tread this path of rectitude naturally by listening to our hearts as well as those of others.

Conclusion

The above is not really advice or a means to 'develop relationships' with young people or people generally. Nor is it meant to be a means just to build 'meaningful associations' in the dealings of our social affairs. I have been writing about models of qualities we should pursue and aspire to perfect within our own selves. I firmly believe we need to practice what we preach, and apply similar standard for ourselves and others. Doing otherwise defeats the object of honesty, integrity and trust that we claim to build and spread amongst our fellow beings.

The conduct of our character and the way we carry out our affairs rather than advice, warnings and endless questioning are the vehicles of change we have at our command. Imam Ghazzali says the person seeking to be helpful cannot achieve this unless the "*model himself is reliable, because the person with bad morals cannot be a good influence*" (Usmani, 1999: 9).

It may be we (and not the young person labeled 'trouble making' or 'problem') who are suffering from a lack of morality in refusing to consider that young people are faced with a profusion of competing moral codes and that it isn't necessarily a fact that a young person, having made mistakes, should be judged by their error. Indeed, if we talk to them we will likely find that they have many moral codes of conduct that regulate relationships between themselves and the adults in their lives. Some, perhaps many, of these codes are at odds with more traditional values and morality but an effort needs to be made for some sort of reconciliation between ourselves. We may be called upon to define a new way of being, introducing different sides to the human character that can encompass what the person we are working with and for believes is 'right' and the rules, regulations, child protection and safety procedures, society demands we follow. Once more, I believe this to be part of our necessary skill set, premised on professional judgement.

In such a complex society, in which the acts of people are defined by organisational parameters, who do we hold responsible? They the organisations act, "*but they cannot be loved or blamed or touched*" (Eaton, 2006: 24). So are we to conform and almost became mechanical in our outward actions following rigid rules? When it can definitely be said that structures are in place for our safety and well being, what is the cost of this? Is there a loss of our humanity, integrity, intimacy and our natural disposition to think, act and care? We do need to honour others, without that we will get no regard from, and likely not get too far with, those we work for. In honouring others we honour ourselves. The fulcrum of this is our own truthfulness, honesty and capacity for mercy. Appreciating and valuing others helps us avoid harming our own hearts and souls.

We made the choice to work as youth workers or informal educators to take up this sacred trust and our choices and influence on others will spread out, as rings spread from the stones tossed into a pool. The young people and people around us will undergo some changes as we change.

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Beneath the thunder

Geoff Phillips

Preface

Over the past number of weeks it has been my privilege to enter a world I would not otherwise have been in. I have met some very interesting people. These people I have found to be creative, enthusiastic, talented and welcoming, yet appear to feel marginalized, unwanted and misunderstood by broader society. They are a group of men, who form a local Protestant Flute Band and provide the foundations for this academic study. Before I approached this group I believed it necessary to firstly earn the right to do so. In this same spirit therefore, I believe it only right and proper that the reader too seeks an understanding of 'community' and in particular the political, historical and cultural context in which this group exist, prior to gaining access to any insights or conclusions reached, following my encounter. All of this, I present in the pages that follow.

Introduction

People often talk about how they 'live' in a community, or 'belong' to a community, or 'work' in a community. I refer to the community in which I grew up as a 'close knit' community, and have had conversations with people who say we have lost a 'sense' of community. These comments pass without question, as if what 'community' actually means goes without saying. Before this study can proceed, I feel I need to be clear on what I mean when using the term 'community'. After posing this very question to a range of community workers, the following definition is

what resulted from my enquiry, and is what I will use to define community in this piece:

'Community, is a group of individuals who share a 'connectedness', either through physical environment, common interests, traditions, struggles and/or values and beliefs.'

The 'community' I have identified on this basis, are what I would describe as a 'community of interest'. This common interest incorporates cultural traditions and music. In this study I will attempt to build a profile of this community outlining my methodology in approaching this task. It is my hope and intention that through this exploration, a discussion of the value and purpose of community education for these members can also be generated.

Methodology

We [Community educators] are involved in a very purposeful activity, trying to use the delicate and subtle conduits of human relationships to achieve ends……is this morally acceptable?' (ICE204 Unit2.4:p1)

As I considered how to approach this community, I asked myself, 'what gives me the right to get alongside a group I would not normally associate with – and how will they feel about it? I concluded that I *didn't* have the 'right', and perhaps needed to earn it, so in my endeavors to 'profile' this community I decided not to contact them initially, but rather do some background research. My hope was that by genuinely taking an interest and doing this work beforehand, they may feel more open to the idea of allowing me access to their group.

Historical Background

There is a 'marching culture' in N. Ireland, within the Protestant community dating back to the 1800's. On various calendar dates throughout the year it is traditional

that Orange Lodges accompanied by marching bands, 'walk'. These 'Lodges' originated back in the 1700's at a time when the Lutheran reformation was creating belated ripples throughout Britain. Protestant farmers in Mid-Ulster, perceiving a threat from a group calling themselves 'Roman Catholic Defenders', set up the first Orange Lodge, in an attempt to meet together in secret to preserve and defend their faith. Similar Lodges soon sprouted up across the province, with many still in existence to this day.

These traditional marches go to and from church services, at other times to a field where a rally is held, and a number of speakers take to the stage and give their assessment of the 'state of affairs' and 'affairs of the state' within the country. It is fair to say that these addresses are both religious and political. The biggest and most high profile march takes place on the twelfth of July, and is a public holiday in the province. It is seen as a Protestant celebration, and commemorates the 'Battle of the Boyne', in the year 1690, when Prince William of Orange defeated the forces of James II.

More recently over the past fifteen years – and fuelled by a changing demography resulting in further 'ghettoing' of Protestant and Catholic areas – these marches have become increasingly contentious, as people living within what are now predominantly, 'Catholic areas' where the marches had traditionally passed close to or went through, have objected strongly to this imposition. For flute bands across N. Ireland, attendance at these marches and preparation for these walks are a big part of band life.

The Flute Band

At this stage all I knew about this particular 'Community' was their name. This led me to the band's web page, where there was a video link and I immediately got to hear the band play during a local march recorded the previous year. I browsed through some of the messages that had

been left on their blog. This gave me an insight into the political views and attitudes of some members that made up the band. This quick search also threw up an important piece of information. I discovered that the band practices in a local housing estate. Looking at the estate's community forum website, I was pleased to find that it included an article about the band's history. From this short write-up I learned when the band had formed, marches they had participated in, their achievements in band competitions, size of membership and the number of drums and flutes they owned.

Local Press and Community Art

After identifying the estate in which this community met, I decided to visit the area and see what images were representative of it. Similar images I have inset below:

There were a considerable number of what I would describe as 'politically charged' murals on gable walls that tied in with the political views I had read on the bands webpage and added to my overall profile of the physical environment this group lived in. After paying a visit to the local newspaper offices, I was granted access to their archives. I searched through the papers corresponding with popular marching dates, however I could find no references to the band included in any editions, not even a photograph, which surprised me given their recent achievements.

Community Context

> *'The practice of [community] exclusion causes a response in those excluded; they exclude the included.' (Ice 204 Unit 1.2:p1)*

In considering what reasons there could be for this lack of press coverage I decided to use a different approach. I felt that in profiling this community, it would perhaps be useful to research in what wider community context the group existed. No community exists in a vacuum:

> *'…you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families.' (Thatcher:1987)*

The Thatcherite notion of there being no such thing as society, just individuals and families is balanced by the concept of 'no man is an island'. Exploring what external forces were affecting this community should help build a better informed profile. Retracing my steps from the internet to the local paper I uncovered some key issues affecting the housing estate in which they met. There were many newspaper articles commentating on the estate's recent 'trouble' in that there had been riots following police searches in some of the homes. The police place the

responsibility for these riots firmly at the door of the illegal organisation known as the Ulster Defense Association, (U.D.A.) The U.D.A. emerged in the early 1970's in opposition to the push for a united Ireland by the republican movement, and in response to the set up of anti-British paramilitary groups such as the Irish Republican Army. The U.D.A. are a loyalist paramilitary organisation and have been responsible for many Catholic deaths in N. Ireland, more recently they have been embroiled in disagreements with the other main loyalist group the Ulster Volunteer Force. The 'U.D.A.' through community representatives say the police invoked the unrest through their insensitivity and heavy handedness. This violence had repercussions across N. Ireland, as funding to deprived Protestant areas was suspended by the Minister for Regional Development.

Getting Alongside

Having discovered as much as I could about this community and the wider context in which they existed, I decided it was time to approach them in person. I contacted the estate's community forum via their website, explaining who I was and asked if I could meet someone from the flute band. They told me they would speak to the band leader and get back to me. To my surprise they got back to me within the hour, telling me that the band leader would meet me the following week during band practice. I agreed, and began working on a set of questions I wanted to ask.

I met the flute band leader and managed to speak briefly to several other band members also. I started the meeting by introducing myself, highlighting what I had learned about them so far. The discussion that followed was open and insightful, giving me a real sense of what this community was all about. It became clear very early however, that I was getting alongside two organisations. Following the

nature of a 'disclosure', which I had not foreseen at the beginning of the study, I have chosen to change the names of the people I spoke to, and not reveal the name of the group with whom this study is based. Below is a summarised recording of my encounter, with questions in relation to band activity only:

The person I was to meet I will call Bill. I arrived a few minutes early and stood outside a community centre waiting. There were around forty men standing about in groups of between two and eight talking together. The groups included a diverse range of individuals, from older teenagers in baseball caps to men twice their age and more. I was aware that I was the only person standing alone, and I felt some of the men were becoming aware of my presence too. I asked the person standing nearest me if Bill had arrived yet, he told me Bill would be here soon. Not long after, Bill pulled up and got out of a car. He called someone aside, and they walked in deep discussion out of earshot from the main group. When this conversation ended, he called another member away and another discussion ensued. As I waited I began to go over the questions I wanted to ask in my mind. I had written them down on a page in my pocket, but I decided then that I wanted the 'interview' we were to have to feel more like a conversation. Bill finished talking and headed towards the centre's open door, only then did all the other groups move, following him inside. It was clear that Bill was the leader of this group. He asked if I was Geoff, shook my hand and directed me towards the kitchen suggesting I make myself a cup of tea as he had a quick meeting upstairs to attend first.

As I made the tea I heard some of the band members begin to play in the other room. I listened for around 20 minutes. At one point, as I read a poster with Churchill's famous words 'age shall not weary them…' the sound of the flutes and beating of the drums made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. After I finished my tea, and there seemed no sign of Bill, I asked the band if they would mind me sitting in with them, they welcomed me in. I was impressed with their ability to play together at what to me seemed a very high standard, and the fact that many members had the ability to play both flute and drum, and would swap instruments between songs. I joined the band

outside for a smoke break. I asked how long they'd been members and why they'd got involved. Most had been there a couple of years, Jim said he just joined for the 'craic'. They talked about the marching season, and the prospect of getting new uniforms this year. They evaluated how their practice had just sounded and identified some improvements they wanted to make. Jim asked if I wanted to join, I got the sense that I would be welcome, but told him I was just here to meet Bill. We went back inside and the band struck up again. Shortly after this, a large group of men descended the stairs and filed into the room. Bill popped his head round the door and invited me to sit with him at a table in the next room, then we began to talk.

'This is a U.D.A. band, the majority of members are U.D.A. too, so… what do you want to know?' (Bill)

Bill's opening statement was sharp and to the point, I nodded gesturing that I was not entirely surprised, however I was surprised that he shared this information with me so readily. It was clear that band membership was not just about the love of music, but served to express a much deeper political and cultural identity.

'There was a feeling in the estate that we needed to show we were here, and the band gives people a chance to express their Protestant heritage and identity.' (Bill)

This aligns to the concept of attachment or belonging as having some sort of symbolic connotation whereby people's perceptions of the meaning of community are symbolically linked. Cohen, (1985:118), relates this to the manifestation of cultural vitality when he states:

> *'People construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning and a referent of their identity'.*

However it would be wrong to undermine the importance placed on the quality of the music being played.

"Band members need to go to practice once a week, I had to exclude about a dozen members not so long ago because they were just not putting the effort in…' (Bill)

It seemed that the commitment and devotion given to the quality of sound, served to reflect a commitment and devotion to the political and cultural identity of members, to those on the outside. This is achieved through the playing of military songs, hymns and traditional tunes whilst parading publicly in uniform and in formation. I believe the significance of a military undertone to 'marching' for these men, cannot be overstated. After the disclosure from the group leader, that the majority of flute band members were also members of the U.D.A., I could see how the opportunities given through band activity for this expression were important to these individuals. Protestant communities and Catholic ones too, are currently going through a transition process, moving away from violence towards a more normalised co-existence. In the past, the conflicts between these segregated communities provided some activists with 'Community actions' to perform in a way which, regardless of legality and however sinister, almost formed a glue, giving a sense of identity and purpose for some. Now that the nature of these struggles is changing in a new political climate perhaps their sense of identity feels under threat.

I see parallels here in what Smith, (2001:3) points out about Cohen's argument that community involves two related suggestions that the members of a group have something in common with each other and the thing held in common distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other possible groups. "Community thus, implies both similarity and difference. It is a relational idea: The opposition of one community to others or to other social entities". (op.cit)

Bill went on to speak about the Arts Council's perceived biased funding criteria, where quite substantial sums of money were being made available to bands, but only to those who removed certain flags and symbols deemed offensive or provocative. As Bill spoke it became apparent to me that this community felt unwanted, threatened and

under enormous pressure to change if not disappear altogether by outsiders and particularly those in power, as we see from his remarks below:

'They're trying to eradicate our history and our identity. Every time you read the paper it's about contentious marches and potential trouble. Don't get me wrong, I admit years ago, when I was in a band in Belfast we loved to march past Catholic areas and 'get on their wick' but today when we go out it's really just about showing our culture and sounding good, not about antagonising people' (Bill).

However, it cannot be overlooked that "popular music in N.I. can be heard as a marker of sectarian identity. Most familiar and most controversial, perhaps are the Loyalist Marching Flute Bands which accompany the Orange Parades. These protestant bands known locally as 'Blood and Thunder' or 'Kick the Pope' bands, have a limited repertoire". (Radford, 2003)

When I asked Bill about how he thought the band was viewed by outsiders he became very animated in his response.

'Do I think our band gets a good press? Definitely not! No orange lodge in the district will ask us to walk with them…unless they're stuck. Take a couple of years ago, a local Orange Lodge contacted me to ask if we'd accompany them on the march. I said ok, but only if they let us do it the next year too, they went back on their word, and demanded we remove the U.D.A. flags and in their words 'offensive emblems' that weren't a problem the year before.' (Bill)

Bill explained what he felt the benefits of flute bands were to the community:

'The band does strengthen family bonds between fathers, sons and brothers… I think it's always been like that in bands. It also gives people a strong sense of community spirit, of being part of something. The band also gives people a sense of pride and achievement, when we're marching and sounding good.' (Bill)

I agreed these were positive aspects to flute bands that sadly seemed to get overlooked largely by the press. At this stage I became aware that the other band members

had not struck a note since we began talking, and I suspected they were probably waiting for Bill to join them, so I thanked him again for his time, shook hands, and I left. Following this first hand experience, and using my background research I felt I now had the basis of a reasonably accurate profile, from which conclusions regarding what I believe community education may look like for this group can be drawn.

This group are at first glance a 'community of interest', however I believe underlying this they are also a community of 'struggle'. The flute band activity seems to be one of the only avenues left to them for the expression of their identity with all the symbolism, values and beliefs that epitomize Loyalism in Ulster. In this respect, Flute Bands may be replacing paramilitary organisations. My own observations allude to this and Bill, as a primary source, talks of the male members of such a community embracing the camaraderie offered with membership. Impressionable young men in a new political dispensation, speak of freedom, excitement and pride, with disregard for the intimidation and sectarianism referred to by Radford, (2003).

In this environment it is difficult to see how these individuals, many of whom joining the flute band in their youth, could develop political views other than those concurrent with that of Loyalism. This of course could be said of us all, and echoes Freire's (1996) notion of conditioning and how our freedom is limited by the context of reality which I see in the community I am writing about, and whose socialisation may be rooted in Durkin's (in Hewstone, Stroeke & Stephenson, 1996) concept of 'moulding'.

> *'Individuals actually strive to develop a social identity, based on membership of certain groups, which eventually become an important aspect of the individuals self concept.' (Cairns, 1987:104)*

The Flute Band – and Community Education

It is hard to know where to begin, when considering the value or purpose in community education for this group. They are very talented men, and based on my brief encounter, also intelligent men. I think, given that they feel like a community resisting external pressure to change, the drive behind any educational programme must come from within the band themselves, otherwise it may be seen only as another external pressure aimed at altering who they are.

> *'The official forms of order can seem anomic to those who are systematically treated as non-persons, since, as they pursue their lives, they have no stake in the society for whose maintenance that order exists'. (Marsh, Rosser & Harrè: 1978:2)*

After meeting these men it is my guess that the stronger the push for change from external forces on this community is, the stronger the resistance to this change will be. I suspect this would be true of most communities. So where would informal education hold relevance for this group? There may be some value in exploring with them issues around 'identity'. Perhaps also a piece of learning around developing a comprehension of the social and political forces that 'make us who we are', but I suspect the *most* valuable piece of education for this group would be in letting them be the ones who do the educating. Within this group of men is a wealth of musical talent and potential, but perhaps more importantly, there is also a wealth of political and cultural knowledge yet untapped. For a community so used to being unappreciated, hearing only external messages demanding change and implying disdain, how liberating, challenging and ultimately 'educational' it would be for them to be 'heard', to feel valued and if not agreed with, at least to some degree 'understood' by those on the outside. This process may take the form of music or cultural awareness workshops, with groups who are

alien to their culture. Whatever form it would take, what is becoming clearer to me is that 'community education' is perhaps less about educators *bringing* skills or knowledge, and more about them seeking ways of 'unlocking' it. I approached this group of men as a student of community education, how ironic to conclude that perhaps communities have more to teach me than I them.

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'Building Bridges'

Claire Naylor

The following article explores my experience taking part in something which I deemed to be socially useful. I share with you my thinking and learning and some of the questions which arose for me whist completing this task.

I live and have grown up in a small market town next to rural areas and farmland. As a predominately white town it has never been diverse or had much awareness of other cultures. When I was growing up I had quite close association with the few gay and Black people in the area and I remember distinctly how isolated they used to feel growing up here. I have travelled a lot around this country to large and small towns and in most places I am aware of a gay pub or somewhere for the gay community to go. This has highlighted to me how little my town has changed over the years as there are still no places like this. When I recently saw an advertisement on the front page of my local Newspaper for a gay night it jumped out at me in surprise. Ironically, and for me not surprisingly, this was positioned next to an article about a local woman standing proudly in support of the BNP party. Having lived in the town for 28 years never had I seen or heard of such an event in the area. There was some hearsay about various local pubs being gay in the past, however, this was only ever rumoured and there was certainly no advertising or gay flags hanging outside of these premises.

Thinking of all this made me think of the character, Atticus Finch from the book, 'To Kill a Mockingbird' by Harper Lee, which I had read as a teenager. I remembered how Atticus stood up against the grain of his community in support of the Black Man, Tom Robinson, wrongly accused of rape. This made me think that perhaps, as a

member of the community, I needed to take responsibility and do my part to move this town forward on issues of equality. This is why I decided it would be socially useful that I got involved and supported my towns first Gay night, as a heterosexual woman, to help widen some of the attitudes in the area.

The night the pub had chosen was a Tuesday or "Tuesgay" as the night was themed, and with this being mid week in a quiet town I was concerned it wouldn't take off. I considered ringing round friends to get a crowd of people to help fill the pub. I felt that perhaps success would encourage further ideas, projects or movements. I believe having a gay night in a town like this would allow the community to understand and learn about diversity. This would then lead to a more inclusive society, contributing to a safer and more diverse world. I believe in equality for all and therefore it is important for the gay people in the area to have somewhere they could meet, find role models and identify with other gay people, feeling safe from prejudice.

I attended two gay nights both of which for a small town on a Tuesday night was busier than the average week night. I asked the staff questions and also offered to assist them with any help they needed. However, they were not keen to advertise further until they had monitored its success. This in itself concerned me as surely how could it gain its success without advertising? Disappointingly the pub that was hosting the gay night changed hands, so after my second visit they stopped the night when the pub re-opened. I went into the pub to ask why this was the case and the manager explained to me, "We cancelled gay night because we don't have a population of gay people". This frustrated me, especially as he did admit that the pub had still been busier than it would have been on a usual night in the week. I also wondered how anyone would know if this area had a gay scene if we didn't have these nights and give them time to get off the ground. I also considered that maybe if we had a gay scene they could be repressed living

in a town with these attitudes and values and therefore not attend a night like this.

My frustrations sparked discussions with lots of different people at my local pub, my friends and with my parents. I learned a lot from these discussions as well as having my suspicions affirmed that not everyone found the support of a local gay night socially useful. One opinion against the gay night was that they believed it would separate the community instead of integrate it, by having their own night and being treated differently. I disagreed with this opinion as we are not yet in a town that accepts gay people and are willing to be integrated. Until this ideal is reached then I believe nights like these and separate "support" services would be necessary to give gay people safe places to go and meet others similar to them.

> "Without positive, separate provision, it is obvious that, far from having the opportunity to measure themselves against others, young gay people can often only measure themselves against popular prejudice and against insulting models set up by the mass media" (ibid., p.8. Cited in Kent-Baguley, P. 1990:115)

However, I understood what these people were saying and even though I didn't agree, it made sense to me how they could think that way.

Suddenly I realised that I was letting my frustration, passion, values and beliefs stop me from doing the real work that would be socially useful: talking and communicating within my community to exchange views and understand each other better. These people would perhaps never have attended this gay night because of their views and therefore would not have had the opportunity to have their opinions challenged or to challenge others. It's only through patience, understanding and respect of others' thoughts and feelings that we can perhaps come to a shared vision of the world and therefore move towards a more inclusive society. I was also aware that I had made

judgements and assumptions about my community. This is something we aspire never to do when working with young people. This can cause aggression and divide people, therefore divide communities, so perhaps by making these assumptions and judgements myself I could be contributing to the problem rather than being effective.

Another opinion I was faced with was whether as a heterosexual woman I should be supporting the event by attending at all. This I was quite surprised at as I had never thought of this as being an issue. This then also challenged some of the other views I had heard as well as my own. With regard to heterosexual people attending gay nights they said, "Doesn't that defeat the object?" Through discussion and reflection I once again understood another way of looking and thinking about this that I hadn't considered before. Perhaps, even by well meaning heterosexual people attending a gay night in support it can change the dynamics of the evening. Could it then become an unsafe environment for gay people, without the authentic role models and people to identify with? Doesn't it then become like any other night, running the risk of judgement and prejudice which could stop gay people wanting to attend? How do you determine which heterosexuals might be "gay friendly" and where do you draw the line? All of this I was trying to get away from but was I doing the opposite by attending as a heterosexual? This all gave me food for thought along with the following quote:

> "It requires for its completion one further step, which is to say the continuing effort for honesty on the part of homosexuals themselves. This is not easily summed up in the crude phrase "coming out"; but it finds expression in the many ways in which gay men and lesbians talk, engage, explain, confront and seek out the other. Politics cannot substitute for this; heterosexuals cannot provide it. And while it is not in some sense fair that homosexuals have to

initiate the dialogue, it is a fact of life. Silence, if it
does not equal death, equals the living equivalent"
(Sullivan, A. 1995:186)

As heterosexuals maybe we can only go so far with politics
and support for gay rights. Perhaps a lot of the work for
progression has to be from the gay community themselves
in communicating with people and pushing for the support
and services they want and need. When you look at the
history of recognised gay areas such as Manchester,
London and Brighton it has been the strong movement
and voice of the gay community that started the
development in these areas. Marches such as Gay Pride
and Mardi Gras were started by the gay community. It is
only now these festivals are established that more and
more heterosexual people are attending these events.
Some could argue that this takes away from the idea of
"gay" pride or in another view could be contributing to the
further development of integration. In this way maybe we
need to allow the gay community the time and space to
speak for themselves and have their own exclusive gay
nights before they will feel safe enough to integrate with
the wider community.

I certainly don't regret supporting the gay night and it is a
real shame it didn't carry on. I think it would have been
good for the town and its people to have a night like this to
expand diversity and give the gay community somewhere
to go of their own. However, in hindsight, perhaps I
would support it differently. Rather than attending the
night, maybe I could take action and organise a night for
myself rather than relying on the locals and expecting them
to have the same values and beliefs as me. Reflecting back
on my experience I realised that attending the gay night
was not going to create the impact I wanted. It may have
been useful for the gay community of my town but I
doubted whether it would have been particularly useful to
the wider community. What surprised me most during this
was that I discovered the part which was socially useful

ended up not to be me attending the gay night or supporting it. It was getting involved in my community in talking to people. The discussions we had were very powerful, informally educating one another. I believe we all went away from these discussions thinking differently and had our views challenged. I learned that unless we continually reach out in this way we will never move forward as one.

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Community Education – A redundant paradigm?

Zoey Williams

In this chapter I will explore the notion of community education, its impact and how it relates to a particular social grouping, the New Muslims Sisters Circle.

What is Community?

'An ideal community' might be understood as a group of people who share and/or are working towards common interests/goals; it would be close knit and supportive, offering unity, safety and a sense of belonging and identity. It might also provide opportunities for people to learn and share ideas, opinions, views, experiences and form relationships.

However, the term community is very broad and it has to be questionable if the 'ideal community' (as above) exists anywhere outside the professional imagination. This is not the only problem with the idea. Labelling a group as a community can lead to 'us and them' divisions. The more dense a community is (the more tightly its connections are) the harder it is to get into or out of. As such outside influences are minimised while, at the same time, the outside sees those 'inside' as relatively remote and essentially different. Hence less permeable community becomes comparatively isolated and a site of segregation.

The more porous the boundaries of community the more imprecise the label of community becomes. When people have a plethora of connections with a range of groups or sub groups, more or less interrelated it becomes problematic to see individuals as representative of a single

community. Perhaps this is why there is no clear definition of what a community actually is.

What is Education?

Education might be defined as drawing out, or facilitating realisation of self-potential and latent talents of an individual. It has been understood as an application of pedagogy (a body of theoretical and applied research related to teaching and learning that also relates to a number of other disciplines). As such education might be seen as a tool used to help uncover and realise ones own skills and abilities and recognise ones potential through exploring the possibilities using a range of methods and mediums. However the concept of education and how the notion is used in our society appears to be somewhat contradictory.

From a Froebellian perspective the purpose of education is to encourage and guide humans as conscious, thinking and perceiving beings in such a way that they become an unpolluted and perfect representation of the 'divine law' through personal preference. As such, education demonstrates the means and meaning of fulfilling that aim.

Froebel argues that without education we are lost souls who need someone or something to steer us in the right direction in order for us to be able to think, understand make decisions and achieve. The idea that education will enable us to choose to become pure and perfect representations of divine law suggests that not only do we need to become 'model citizens' who follow rules and obey but that we need to be 'saved' in some way.

Throughout schooling we are taught to follow instructions and rules and are rewarded for being good students, the alternative is to be punished for failing to conform. This suggests that the purpose of education is to instil structure, control, discipline and to teach us about consequences rather than to think, question, achieve our potential, allow

space to explore ideas, promote individuality or freedom of choice.

However if everybody stuck to the rules and followed the same paths and lines of thought without questioning and/or trying things out scientific advances in medicine and technology (for example) would have at least been slowed.

The national curriculum in the UK is limited in coverage in terms of teaching things that are useful in the world outside of education. Our institutions often deploy outdated methods of teaching and education appears to be more and more geared to passing exams. It is clear to see that it is not suitable for all as there are so many failing or dropping out of education. Despite this there is a high emphasis on the attainment of qualifications and continuing education and training into adulthood.

With training programmes such as 'Skill me Up' and 'Entry to Employment' it is apparent that there is an overt connection between education and employment making it clear what the purpose of education is for most young people. And whilst education may help individuals progress into better paid jobs and gain status, it is in fact geared to making people more 'useful' in terms of advancing commercial enterprise and keeping the UK competitive (with the likes of China and India) as a site for the maintenance of capitalism. The overriding rationale of education in Britain is to produce a comparatively cheap, comparatively flexible workforce to supply the means to generate profit for an economic elite investment cadre and as such is not about socialising knowledge or working for the greater good for all. It is an integral part of a greater economic system tied to rules, structure, order and control. It is manipulative as it encourages collusion with ideas, opinions and values and conformity whilst largely maintaining a guise of a benign process of betterment. Being linked to employment it is a mechanism to make money.

In the book Principles and Practice of Informal Education-Learning Through Life Alison Gilchrist argues that:

> *Informal educators can help people to develop and value their social networks, thereby making a contribution to the development of 'community'. This enhances individual well-being, social cohesion (not conformity) and creates a collective capacity to organise and manage shared resources. (Alison Gilchrist 2001:116)*

This seems to be arguing that without community educators people will not recognise the opportunities and organisations that are 'out there' or contribute to wider society and therefore their development and well-being will be hindered as they are lacking in some way. I feel that this assumes that the role of informal educators is similar to that of a broker as they have the knowledge and networks, and communities rely on them to direct them as they do not have the capability to do this themselves. It seems that community educators are also there to help people to become well-rounded and redress the inabilities of communities thus 'empowering' (giving power to) them.

Gilchrist goes on to reiterate this assumption:

> *As individuals their lack of understanding, lack of influence and lack of resources may leave them feeling powerless. Informal educators can help people to overcome this sense of apparent apathy. (Alison Gilchrist 2001:111)*

Another assumption is that communities need to be educated (they are relatively ignorant) as they are in 'need' and are not equal to others. The professional 'community educators' are called in to solve their problems and educate them as they have the answers.

> *The professional commitment of informal educators to promoting equality and empowerment for disadvantaged groups means that we need to find ways of combating inequalities and prejudice and restoring an equitable flow of information and resources. (Alison Gilchrist 2001:110)*

On the surface community educators are there to enhance communities and aid them in development. But Gilchrist (typical of much of the literature surrounding community education) demonstrates the underlying assumptions behind the notion of community education.

What is Community Education?

According to The White Paper on Adult Education published by the DES in 2000 there are two forms of community education. Firstly it is understood 'as an extension of the service provided by second and third-level education institutions into the wider community'. This view could be seen to incorporate almost all adult learning opportunities provided by the formal education sector at community level – it is education in the community but not of the community.

The other perspective has it that community education, in an ideological sense is "a process of communal education towards empowerment, both at an individual and a collective level... it is as an interactive, challenging process, not only in terms of its content but also in terms of its methodologies and decision making processes" (DES 2000)

So, on one hand community education is bringing the educational system out into the community but not educating the whole community. There seems to be a focus on adult learning but what about programmes like the Summer Uni which provides tutor lead accredited courses for young people during the summer holidays? Isn't this also formally educating the community to some extent?

On the other hand it is argued that community education is for 'empowerment', which seems to assume that there was a lack of power within the community to begin with. No evidence for this supposition is given or implied. Community education is apparently delivered less formally

both on an individual and group basis and is interactive and challenging which suggests dialogue and opportunities to explore possibilities.

These are two very different ideas about one topic from one document but this is indicative of the confusion and uncertainty surrounding community education. It appears that no one knows with any appreciable degree of certainty what it actually is. This being the case how then can we claim to be doing it (in a definite way)?

Impacts of the term 'Community Education'

While there is no clear or agreed definition of what community education might be or what it does, the term community education exists and a number of people and organisations claim to be carrying out community education and calling themselves 'Community Educators'. So what is the role of these 'community educators' and how does this impact on the community?

A community education officer works to promote and facilitate access to a wide range of voluntary educational activities by all members of the community, regardless of age. … The aim is to enable individuals and communities to take control of their learning and to help break down barriers; the role is, therefore, closely linked to current widening participation and lifelong learning initiatives. (Prospects 2006)

However, it appears that the notions and assumptions of community education undermine the intelligence of the social collectives that are labelled as particular 'communities' as the underlying aims of the proposal of community education presumes that its target group (the community) has a power deficit and in some cases is deprived of the privileges of other (unspecified) communities. There is also the point that the will to extend 'education' must be based on the postulation that

those who are the target of education are in some (unspecified) respect, ignorant.

Like aid extended by western nations to non-industrialised regions, community education can also be used as a tool or weapon to keep control of or divide a group of people. Aid is promised, given, or withdrawn as a reward, punishment, or encouragement to pursue specific policy courses. It also creates an environment that shapes the norms, outlook, and expectations of the actors in the relationship. (Severine M Rugumamu 1997: 11)

At the same time, the 'community educator' is often sent into a community in order to change it to meet standards (extended in policy) set by interests external to that community, such as national or local government. There may be little or no knowledge or consideration of the needs or culture of that community (indeed some communities are not considered to have any specific culture), while 'change' is used like a battle cry, it seems this is more about altering particular behaviours to correspond to a sort of 'ideologically correct community' that is apparently more like some (unspecified) model. This is partly enacted by the setting of 'common targets' in community education. It seems that the aim is to undermine the potential for the generation and maintenance of unique collective social identities.

For all this, outside influences may not be necessarily beneficial to targeted areas as external interests can underestimate the needs and in some cases a population can become worse off as a result of outside intervention.

> *Over the last thirty years, African countries have experimented with various development policies, strategies and ideologies that were developed outside the continent with little success. (Severine M Rugumamu 1997: xi)*
>
> *Despite massive infusions of financial and technical assistance from the North, the economic, social and environmental condition of most of the South, and particularly in Sub-*

Saharan Africa are dramatically worse than they were 30 years ago. (ibid. 1997:2)

In place of a robust economy and improved standards of living, foreign aid has resulted in unprecedented economic stagnation and waste, a crippling debt crisis, human rights abuse, and has encouraged extensive foreign interventions in the national economic policy management. (ibid. 1997:1)

What appears to be happening is that one model is being applied to several areas which fail to take into account the fact that what works for one area or social setting may not be suitable for another.

This raises a number of questions. For instance:

- if we value difference and identity why then do we go into particular areas that are in many ways unique, organic social spaces with the view of changing them and making them more like others?

- should we not look to learn from the various cultural structures that arise within our society rather than attempt to crassly change them to conform to some 'grand pattern'?

- if we are setting up professional intervention for the greater good of a particular district or distinctive group shouldn't we be starting with what the individuals, groups and families want or need rather than seeking to apply what often are generic policy agendas?

If we value independence, if we are disturbed by the growing conformity of knowledge, of values, of attitudes, which our present system induces, then we may wish to set up conditions of learning which make for uniqueness, for self-direction, and for self-initiated learning. (Carl Rogers)

When working with others over a period of time in a professional client relationship, patterns of behaviour tend to form and in some cases the client becomes dependant on the professional.

Slowly but inexorably, foreign aid became a habit-forming
drug which eroded self-confidence and national dignity.
(Severine M Rugumamu 1997:6)

What happens when the contract ends, funding runs out or the professional is placed somewhere else? How then can those professionally and/or officially counted within the 'community' (those that have been 'treated') respond? The collective has been 'cordoned off' and has learnt to some extent to rely on its label, the 'entity' that is allocated resources, but the labelling force (the conduit of categorisation) has abandoned them.

Community Education and the New Muslims Sisters Circle

The impact of community education is hard to measure. This said, there is a plethora of anecdotal evidence for its success. However most of this has been orchestrated by those with a vested interest in developing a positive picture, community educators themselves and/or academics involved in the qualification of community educators or related disciplines. This being correct the case for community education can hardly be secure and as such must be questioned as a destination for resources and scarce funding.

During my research with the New Muslims Sisters Circle I found that the members of this group come together from across London. They meet once a week attending the women only circles where they listen to lectures, take part in discussions and question and answer sessions lead by an Imam. Members of the group also tend to spend time socialising with each other and take part in open days, events and gatherings for Eid etc. They use a crèche facility run by volunteers as many of the members have young children who also attend the group.

In terms of the ethnicity the members identified themselves as being White, Mixed, Asian, Black, British,

Bangladeshi etc. The majority of this group are in employment however some are unemployed or caring for their family. There is also one member who is unable to work as she is disabled.

The members travel to the group from across the London Boroughs such as Tower Hamlets, Newham, Barking and Dagenham, Hackney, Camden and Hammersmith and Fulham with the majority living in Tower Hamlets. When I met with them many had joined within the last 12 months, although others had been involved for up to 12 years. The majority of the members found out about the group through other members with others finding out via the Internet, friends or through attending open days at the Mosque. When asked why they attend the group there was a range of responses which included to learn about my religion, to become closer to God, friendship/sisterhood, to have contact with other Muslims as they do not live near to their family or their family are non-Muslims, to share and gain knowledge (as this is part of their duty as a Muslim) to socialise and to get out of the house.

To seek knowledge is a sacred duty; it is obligatory on every Muslim, male and female. The first word revealed of the Qur'an was "Iqra" READ! Seek knowledge! Educate yourselves! Be educated. (Muhammed A. Hafeez)

The members tend to view the Mosque as a resource, advice and community centre as well as a place of worship. Of course the Mosque is not the only place where they might access education. The group members lead separate lives and will have a range of experiences, come from different places and encounter various people they may learn from. They are of course touched by the mass media (television, the internet, newspapers), they read the Qur'an and complementary books, attended seminars, meet with friends and family or are part of secular educational institutions.

So how does this relate to community education? From a religious perspective it could be argued that community

education started with a divine message giving guidance from God through the prophets (peace be upon them) and that they were the first religious community educators or community leaders. Their main tasks were to relay the message, confirm the messages from the prophets (peace be upon them) that came before them and spread the words of God (laws, morals and manners, ways to worship etc) and to be role models by practising what they preached.

They also shared their knowledge and wisdom and gave guidance and advice thus educating people. Their messages and teachings are still evident today with many remembering the examples of the prophets (peace be upon them) and turning to the holy books for guidance.

From an Islamic point of view it is believed that all the prophets (peace be upon them) were sent with the same underlying message to worship and serve one God and to live by his laws rather than laws made by humanity and that without seeking knowledge and understanding of Islam it is impossible to class oneself as a Muslim.

> *The first and most crucial obligation on us is to acquire knowledge and secondly to practice and preach this knowledge. No man becomes truly a Muslim without knowing the meaning of Islam, because he becomes a Muslim not through birth but through knowledge. Unless we come to know the basic and necessary teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (S) how can we believe in him, have faith in him, act according to what he taught? It is impossible for us to be a Muslim, and at the same time live in a state of ignorance. (Muhammed A. Hafeez)*

In the present day one could argue that the role of community education in terms of this group is not only to educate those in the community but to branch outside of the community to spread the messages and break down barriers and prejudice through Islam Awareness.

In the contemporary period there are clear indications of misunderstanding, myth and distortion surrounding the religion and traditions of Islam. Much of this misapprehension comes from people who are not representative of Muslims, or by way of politicians or the media representations that are often harmfully distorted. *Research into one week's news coverage showed that 91 percent of articles in national newspapers about Muslims were negative.* (24dash.com 2007)

The authority given to the media is a potent tool to influence society in general. It might be argued that it can educate but it is sometimes hard not to see much of what is produced as 'news' being more than clumsy propaganda. It is not unusual for depictions of what is sometimes called 'Islamist activity' to be anything but a warped and partial reflection of what is really going on. Exaggeration and bias proliferate, propagating what collectively is an outlandish mythology about the nature of Islam and Muslim populations.

This insensitive manipulation of the public mind can and does cause chaos, confusion, while at the same time spreading the seeds of prejudice and division within society. This is really an effort to promote fear to generate sensationalism that is used as a foreground for the main purpose of much of the media; to incline people to think that they need things that they don't in order that they go out and spend money to bolster the profits of commercial enterprise (which sometimes have direct financial links with the very sections of the media that generate emotive and barely rational 'news').

In this sense the media is perhaps the most prevalent and intrusive source of community education. It has the means to reach out to people all over the world and persuade them to think and act in certain ways and does much to determine how we see each other.

This great force of mis-education divides local, national and global society and because of the way it interprets

events many now view Islam as a threat and Muslims as extremists or terrorists. This is a problem particularly when there are some whose only knowledge of Islam is based on the negative stereotypes in the media.

> *It is the west's obsession with Islam, and the tendency to look at Islam "through the lens of terror or security", that worries Prof Akbar most. "That creates alarm, resistance and further distortion," he said. (Anthea Lipsett 2007)*

With this in mind perhaps a major role for those working as educators within Muslim social contexts is to educate Muslims to become stronger role models in order to show that this negative view is just fabrication. We need to increase our faith and seek to educate wider society by portraying the truth to redress this balance within society.

From an Islamic perspective

> *There is no place in Islam dividing the society in the name of majority and minority community. Islam also prohibits the dividing of the community into different groups on the basis of creed, colour, sect and language. Islam is totally against racism and sectarianism. (Martin Forest)*

In other words Islam encourages unity and aims towards having one Ummah where everyone is under one umbrella.

Conclusion

It seems that if community education has a use it is to question differences and as such become a force that unites people in their potential for solidarity; we all share the same basic needs. For this to happen the educator needs to have sound knowledge and understanding of the community plus the social context of their practice but also a lasting commitment to its development and growth. But at the same time the educator by necessity has to be

prepared to learn from those they work with, allow the role of educator to move and follow the gravity of awareness. This will help minimise the risk of misrepresentation and mis-education.

The notion of and assumptions that seem inherent in community education seem to insult the intelligence of the people labelled as community members, viewing them as lacking or being deprived. Far from empowering a given population defined as community this would seem more disempowering than anything else. But this makes it clear that the label of community is a means of categorising, separating and targeting members of society. In the professional sphere the whole notion of community education is based on a deficit model which suggests that the role of a community educator is to be or act like saviours (latter day missionaries reminiscent of colonial times). The literature surrounding the notion often appears to suggest that the professional has a monopoly on awareness, knowledge and power (without anything close to an awareness of what constitutes 'power' in the informal social setting). 'Community' seems to be shorthand for 'a group of victims' or 'non-conformists' which needs 'educators' in order to function. This is not a healthy perception as it cannot promote sustainable or beneficial relationships as firstly it creates dependency which can lead to communities becoming manipulated and controlled and secondly robs local populations of a sense of their own influence, which is the means to taking authority over their context and lives. For professionals to set themselves up as the controllers of people's destiny is close to a blasphemy in any religion but it is equally an affront to any humanitarian response to those with which we share our being.

In community education practice there is usually a set agenda, it includes targeting and labelling people as 'community members'. This is carried out in order to make some form of desired change in line with policy

objectives (it would be hard for any community educator to counter organisational objectives, generally drawn from state policies, for any length of time). This preset agenda, although ostensibly produced alongside the 'community' is always delimited by outside influences (it results in a choice of similar alternatives rather than a reflection of a purely locally generated schema) and by necessity (of funding and legislation) a means to meet aims and/or targets arising out of organisational objectives that themselves are the progeny of policy engendered at a national and sometimes international level. Yes, consultations are invariably part of the preamble to provision. But is it usual that the needs or wants expressed in these consultations that even have a chance of contradicting the wider political motives of local or national government will be addressed? Professionals and their employers (the bodies that pay them) have their own agendas and need to meet objectives and targets. This might involve (as in the African and Asian contexts) that 'aid' is provided but (as in the African and Asian contexts) this does not automatically mean that those getting the aid will ultimately benefit.

With no clear explanation of what community education actually means or does, together with the inherent problems measuring whether a community has been educated how can we persist, with any confidence, with pursuing the notion of community education? If we are asked to just believe in it without any solid evidence of its applicability or credibility can it be any more than a somewhat shallow faith (a myth). If it is not that, it is merely a transparent tool of the state which is committed first and foremost to the growth of commercialism.

Myths are things that never happened but always are (Herodotus (484 BC).

If community education can be salvaged it might be as a definitely locally based practice that is formulated and lead by people that inhabit that area, using their knowledge and understanding of it. For it to be authentically educative

this activity cannot be controlled by state funded (directly or indirectly) organisations, nor can it be controlled by professionals that in reality are no more than largely covert agents set to achieve policy targets under the guise of benign actors on a stage that they, their employers or the academics who trained them define as 'community'. If we can reinvent education as a shared social pursuit in something like this spirit it will unavoidably be better equipped to address issues both from within and about the local social realm.

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Lifelong Education: Eighty years on

Jon Jolly

> Much adult education will never know itself as such,
> … It will go on in clubs, churches, cinemas,
> theatres, concert rooms, trade unions, political
> societies, and in the homes of the people where
> there are books, newspapers, music, wireless sets,
> workshops, gardens and groups of friends. (Yeaxlee
> 1929: 155)

So wrote Basil Yeaxlee in his path-breaking exploration of
lifelong education. Eighty years on, do his words still hold
meaning and articulate the essence of adult education, or
do they require changing to make them useful? To
effectively answer these questions, this article will study the
relevance of Yeaxlee's statement in light of the
developments in the field of adult education.

Although the majority of Yeaxlee's statement focuses on
the setting of adult education, that is, the places where it
occurs, in order to understand and critique what he is
describing we first need to identify what he means by the
term 'adult education'. Initially the phrase seems pretty
self-explanatory as both words are familiar within the
English language, yet it quickly becomes clear that 'adult
education' can be rather difficult to define as there are
many interpretations and uses of the term that imply
different emphases within the educational field.

As a youth worker, I am accustomed to referring to anyone
over the age of eighteen as an adult because this is the legal
age of responsibility in the UK. However it is possible to
get married and have children before that age and many
would argue that these two activities carry more 'adult'

responsibilities than those available at eighteen, for example, voting or purchasing alcohol and cigarettes. We can also note that other countries and cultures have different ideas about when an individual becomes an adult. Indeed many of these traditions are currently in a state of flux due to 'simultaneous changes in technology, economics, culture, politics, demographics, the environment, and education' (Lloyd 2005:17). This evidence suggests that 'adulthood' is more than just an age-related status.

> *The idea of 'adult' is not, therefore, connected to age, but is related to what generally happens as we grow older… Adulthood may thus be considered as a state of being that both accords rights to individuals and simultaneously confers duties or responsibilities upon them. (Tight 2002:15)*

According to Tight, being an adult is more about a combination of responsibilities and individual rights rather than a particular age or 'stage' in life. Patterson also agrees with this definition and describes the term adult as 'an ethical status resting on the presumption of various moral and personal qualities' (Paterson 1979:31).

Although these definitions gives us a better understanding of what Yeaxlee meant by 'adult' in his statement, I can't help but think that the definition is too complex and exclusive to fully embrace the concept of what he and others envisioned adult education to be. Eduard Lindeman in an influential exploration that Yeaxlee was to draw upon argued that, 'Adult education more accurately defined begins where vocational education leaves off. Its purpose is to put meaning into the whole of life' (Lindeman 1926:5). Lindeman believed:

> *The whole of life is learning, therefore education can have no endings. This new venture is called adult education not because it is confined to adults but because adulthood, maturity, defines its limits...*

However, using the terms 'adulthood' and adult was and remains problematic. The vagueness of the notions and their capacity to be used to serve very different political ends has opened them up to considerable critique (YMCA 2007:5).

I once worked with a centre-based youth club attached to a local school. The worker-in-charge shared his office with the adult education department who were wholly concerned with running evening classes in the school for adults in the community. All the classes were geared towards gaining grades and qualifications with no obvious concern for giving 'meaning to the whole of life' or even learning for simple enjoyment. My observation was that they wanted to bring the enrolled adults up to a certain standard or skill set. This example of formal and institutional adult education seems to be very different to the concept proposed by Yeaxlee and his contemporaries summarised here:

> *First, lifelong education is seen as building upon and affecting all existing educational providers... Second, it extends beyond the formal educational providers to encompass all agencies, groups and individuals involved in any kind of learning activity... Third, it rests on the belief that individuals are, or can become, self-directing, and that they will see the value in engaging in lifelong education. (Tight 2002: 40-41)*

It has been noted that 'there has been a tendency to substitute the term adult learning for adult education in a lot of the literature' (Courtney 1979:19) and 'there has been a shift in much of the literature and policy discussions from lifelong education to lifelong learning' (YMCA 2007:5). Indeed, Yeaxlee himself uses the term 'adult education' (Yeaxlee 1929:155) to describe non-formal learning within the wider context of a book entitled *Lifelong Education*! Therefore, the first thing we must do in rewriting Yeaxlee's quote is to replace the term 'adult education' with 'lifelong learning'. As we have seen it can be difficult to define who is or isn't an adult, while the

word 'education' often implies a more formal institutional approach to learning. 'Lifelong' is a more inclusive term that can involve everyone whether old or young, while 'learning' is a much less threatening and far more personal experience.

Yeaxlee also states that much adult education (we can here substitute the term lifelong learning) will never know itself as such. But the question remains: does lifelong learning recognise itself as learning and is this important? Certainly there are times when learning is deliberate and recognised as when 'the adults concerned are seeking to acquire knowledge and skills' (Brookfield 1983:15) such as the adult education class described above, however we can recognise examples from our practice where learning has occurred incidentally, and facilitated an unconscious change in behaviour and attitude.

I remember taking a group on a High Ropes course where part of the challenge was to make a leap of faith off a high platform onto a trapeze hanging about 3 feet away. The group were hard work and a young man called Sam was the worst for teasing and laughing at those who found the task difficult. It wasn't until he tried to do it himself that he realised quite how scary it was. When he got to the top, he stopped and looked pretty shaky and we then spent about 10 minutes trying to encourage him to go for it. When he finally did it and got back down, he actually apologised to the others he'd made fun of!

In this example the change in Sam's attitude was not from any particular 'lesson' or teaching, but from an experience that challenged his thinking. 'The resource of highest value in adult education is the learner's experience... all genuine education will keep doing and thinking together' (Lindeman 1926:6-7). To this day Sam does not recognise his experience as learning although he has applied the lesson to his life as 'concrete experience' (Kolb 1984:21) and actually now encourages others when taking part in similar activities. Although this example focuses on

internal change, learning is 'a process by which behaviour changes as a result of experience' (Maples and Webster 1980, quoted in Merriam and Caffarella 1991:124).

This style of experiential learning (Brookfield 1983:16) is in direct contrast to education where information is to be memorised and then regurgitated on demand. The concept of 'banking education' (Freire 1972:46) describes the attitude of educators who aim to deposit sections of ready-made knowledge into learners. The problem with this approach is that the knowledge is accepted and recited without any critical thought. Freire's observation here does open up discussion on the nature of learning and the various learning theories that have been proposed to explain how learning is done. Although we do not have the space to fully explore the impact of these theories upon Yeaxlee's statement, it is worth mentioning that 'we need to be wary of adopting any all-embracing theory of learning that implies exclusivity' (Rogers 2002:8).

How we view ourselves as learners is also important to the argument as it informs this idea of unconscious learning that Yeaxlee suggests. The idea of a learner being an autonomous, independent self is 'So deeply entrenched in the ethos of adult education as to be thought "obvious" or "self evident" and to thus be beyond question' (Candy 1987:161). Although this sense of autonomy and self-awareness seems like a noble step towards empowerment, it is also argued that it may be an unhelpful assumption and that other concepts of 'self' could better articulate the task of adult education (Usher 1994:3-13). Yet regardless of these various learning theories and concepts of self, through examples like the High Ropes course, we can see that lifelong learning does not have to be a self-conscious activity. If we come to this conclusion, then we can agree with the part of Yeaxlee's statement that 'much adult education will never know itself as such'.

The remaining part of the original quote refers to the various settings in which adult education takes place, and is

possibly the least difficult to interpret as the locations are familiar; clubs, churches, cinemas, theatres, concert rooms, trade unions, political societies, homes and groups of friends. Although all of the these locations do still exist in the early 21st century, there has been a large cultural shift within the last thirty years towards postmodernism and universal subjectivity where 'people as individuals may have lost a string sense of identity in the face of flux and disarray in social roles and in political and cultural values' (YMCA 2007:7). Although the term is difficult to describe (Burke 2000), in postmodernism 'identity is not unitary or essential, it is fluid or shifting, fed by multiple sources and taking multiple forms' (Kumar 1997:98).

Due to this change in our culture and its impact on how individuals view themselves and the world around them, personal interaction and participation is becoming less common. The concept of social capital where 'those tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit' (Hanifan 1916:130) is harder to see in people's lives. In fact, many people now do not participate significantly in social activity – 'virtually all leisure activities that involve doing something with someone else, from playing volleyball to playing chamber music, are declining' (Smith 2007).

This state of affairs is quite disconcerting. If participation in social and leisure activities is decreasing then so also are opportunities for interacting with others which we know to be important to us as humans. 'Social connections are also important for the rules of conduct that they sustain. Networks involve (almost by definition) mutual obligations; they are not interesting as mere "contacts"' (Putnam 2000). However, although many of the traditional forms of social interaction are disappearing or becoming less common, there are many new and innovative ways of learning from one another. The impact of technological

progress has been astounding and items we now take for granted as a medium for exchanging information were not in use when Yeaxlee wrote his statement: television, computers, the internet, email, mobile telephones and text messaging are examples. The growth of broadband internet and social networking websites such as *MySpace* or *Facebook* are testimony to the fact that people are communicating and absorbing information at a faster pace than ever before and 'while growth is slowing at most top Internet sites, it is skyrocketing at sites focused on social networking, blogging and local information' (Walker 2006:D01).

Technology now changes so fast that even recent advances become obsolete to parts of the population. Teenagers are now shunning email – a relatively recent form of communication – in favour of more immediate and personal responses such as text messaging or instant messaging clients. "Everyone sends e-mails because you have to e-mail your instructors, you have to e-mail your grandma, that's the way the world works," he said. But, he added, "it's sort of an old fogey way of communicating." (quoted by Ostricher, 2007)

There are many concerns that have been written about the postmodern, cynical and socially isolated generations that extend beyond the scope of this article. Here we must remain focused on Yeaxlee's statement. In rewriting the settings where lifelong learning can occur, we should update some of the specific locations such as concert rooms and trade unions to a more generic description that reflects the subjectivity of postmodernism. It would then be possible to give some specific examples of mediums that could be used for learning just as Yeaxlee did, but instead of wireless sets and gardens, we could perhaps chose to incorporate some of the technological aspects of social communication mentioned above.

So what can we conclude about the original quote made by Yeaxlee in 1929? Does it stand up to criticism 80 years

after it was originally written? We have looked into definitions of adult education and lifelong learning opting to use the latter as it seems clear that Yeaxlee had a broader agenda in mind than simply educating those over eighteen. We have briefly examined experiential learning, theories of learning, and concepts of self, and as such we may have polarised or characterised some of the arguments where they are in fact far more complex and intricate. However, although we find that society and culture has changed to a more individualistic and subjective nature, the idea that lifelong learning will continue in a variety of settings, is still true today and supports the statement that Yeaxlee was making. We have also argued that some of the settings Yeaxlee described may have changed, and so in light of these discoveries, if we were to rewrite the statement for today's audience it could read:

> *Much lifelong learning will never recognise itself as educational… It will go on through social activity, anywhere that people interact, and through various media including the internet, television, radio, music and newspapers.*

Although these changes may alter the charm and optimism that comes across from the original, in essence they are only surface modifications that may translate better in the early 21st century. It seems that Yeaxlee was entirely accurate with his observations that much of this kind of informal learning will never recognise itself and will continue throughout an individual's lifetime. The statement made eighty years ago is still relevant today because adult education is an 'organised and sustained instruction designed to communicate a combination of knowledge, skills and understanding valuable for all the activities of life' (UNESCO quoted by Jarvis 1990:105).

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