

'The Analysis and Evaluation of a Development and Learning Project'
A Group of Young People living in a small South Wales Valley Village

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Revisiting the Community

The core group lived in an ex-coal mining community, a 'collapsed industrial area' (Phillips and Skinner, 1994). Seven young people were involved from the outset of the project -four male and three female, the average age 14, the youngest 11, the eldest 16. Six out of the seven young people lived on a housing estate known locally as 'the site'. I have described those involved from the beginning as members of the 'core' group. The ward in which they live is ranked 12th within the County Borough on indicators of multiple deprivation.

In addition to the core group who took part in the community profile stage, the group has increased in number to around 30. This increase in numbers has given more food for thought in analysing how the group dynamic has altered. The work of Vernell (1994: 7) proved useful in relation to my understanding of group size, timing, location, belonging, and communication. Working consistently with the whole group was a challenge, as the majority did not go through the initial group work. This disparity has meant that individuals have begun the journey to critical consciousness (Freire, in Heaney: no date) at different times. This has a negative effect on the development of 'group consciousness, which involves the development of an awareness of how political structures affect both individual and group experiences' (Gutierrez, in Dalrymple and Burke: 55).

A group of young men aged 19-21 years maintained sporadic but increasing contact throughout the project. This 10 year age gap between the youngest and oldest members is a characteristic of work in rural areas (Phillips and Skinner, 1994). The group were involved with other agencies including:

- Education Psychology
- Youth Offending Team
- Education Welfare Service
- Flexible Curriculum Projects

Throughout this project I endeavoured to adopt an anti-oppressive approach with the group; described by Dalrymple and Burke as being about 'minimizing the power differentials in society'. The authors' then quote Phillipson who states that such practice 'works with a model of empowerment and liberation and requires a fundamental rethinking of values, institutions and relationships'.

Development and Learning Needs

Assessing need is a complex process. Needs have been defined as 'the basic requirements necessary to sustain human life (Jary and Jary: 407). The idea that the fabric of individual lives can be simply analysed and thus give rise to an understanding of an individuals development needs relies, among other things, on making judgements. In order to make informed judgements, the practitioner should spend time with subjects, and in the context of this study, in the community, building up a holistic picture of individual lives.

Part one of the research involved a mixture of street work, participant observation, group work, semi structured interviews and desk based research to see the community in context, to 'tune in'. In an attempt to deconstruct and then rebuild a picture of the development needs of the group I also carried out a number of interviews with 3 'local educators' (Smith, 2000: 2) who had previously worked with group members.

I see the process of the current intervention very much as action research, 'the application of fact finding to practical problem solving in a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it, involving the collaboration and co-operation of researchers, practitioners, and laymen' (Burns, 1990: 252).

Identified Needs

Initially, it was identified that in order for the group to open up and begin to move toward a sense of conscientisation any intervention should seek to enable individuals to become aware of the structures and mechanisms which contribute to their oppression, as Freire would say, 'to read the world'.

Throughout their lives, group members have taken, or perhaps been given, few opportunities to achieve. How individuals accept recognition of achievement has proved problematic. We secured some funding to take the group 10 pin bowling. I ensured that the player with the highest score would get a certificate and bag of goodies including a CD and mobile phone talk time (the group cannot afford the new top-ups at £10, rather than £5 each). The oldest male in the group at 18years. scored most points and took some persuasion, but eventually accepted the certificate and posed for a photograph. As we were leaving the centre he 'kicked off' (the term the group use when someone becomes angry, and unreasonable, normally associated with violent or destructive language and behaviour). In an attempt to deconstruct this episode we spoke about the incident later in the week; it became apparent that he was unfamiliar with the feelings associated with this public recognition he 'was shamed' and reacted in one of the few ways he was comfortable with. In order to continue to grow, to develop, future interventions should allow every opportunity to achieve but in a manner that is appropriate and non-threatening.

Developing Provision through Praxis

Smith (2000: 162ff) suggests praxis consists of 'reflection and action, practical reasoning, and well-being'. I attempted to absorb these principles into my work with the group. The group were receptive to this approach. The quotes below illustrate the openness.

- People have been treating us differently as we move along through our project (Jenna, 15).
- I have learnt how to work together without rowing and arguing (Leah, 13)
- My behaviour has changed because we have places 2 go like club, meetings, etc (Sian, 14)

These comments highlight that members of the group are becoming more self-aware. They are also beginning to think of themselves as part of the community, realising that it is possible to disagree with others constructively.

Initially, it was apparent that almost all the group would ultimately benefit from increased emotional intelligence (Handy, 1997: 212). During one session a discussion centred on why they kept attending 'meetings every Sunday'. We discussed what we did in the sessions, drawing, thinking, laughing, discussing, making decisions. Smith (2000: 49) says local educators 'create or foster environments in which people can reflect on the way in which they talk to each other'. An interesting point was made by a young woman relatively new to the group. 'We do things', said Kirsty. 'We've done more in four months than 'they' (the local youth forum) have done in four years'. We then discussed how important the 'meetings' were to the group and how, as individuals and as a group they thrived on this discussion, and 'doing things'. We came to the conclusion that the 'meetings' were like a coffee morning; a coffee morning open to men and women and one which gets things done.

The group have been actively involved in planning provision for themselves and their peers. The Splash scheme at Christmas was the first where none of the group have been sent home from trips or excluded from activities, it was the first they had been actively involved in putting together. To my mind, the falling number of incidents occurring during the holiday schemes (table 2) was an illustration of enhanced emotional intelligence, exhibited through improved behaviour. The fact that none of the core group were involved in any notable incidents during the February scheme is a significant marker as they were all involved, but none 'kicked off'.

Table 1. Notable Incidents during Holiday Schemes

Holiday Scheme	Number of Incidents	Core Group Involved in Incident?
Autumn	19	Yes
Christmas	17	Yes
February	2	No

Learners Evaluation

I have become aware that all the parties I have involved in the intervention, according to Popple (1995) the 'adult educators', 'youth workers' and

'community workers' have been on a learning journey throughout the intervention. I have attempted to view the whole system as a 'learning community' and have tried to discuss and to refer back to colleagues and learners whenever practicable.

I became increasingly aware that, as Smith (2000: 69) says 'personal agendas of educators can easily have a controlling influence over key aspects of the encounter'. Having said this, as part of the evaluation, I revisited the practitioners I interviewed during the profiling stage and carried out follow up interviews in an attempt to pursue some sort of objectivity. From a 'solidarity perspective' (Sarantakos, 1997: 20), colleagues' thoughts converged with those of my own, in this way the intervention could be said to be objective. I have attempted to weave in comments from the evaluations right through this paper.

'The power is definitely shifting, but where do they (the group) go from here? Is it becoming part of the establishment?'
Community Development Worker.

Some young men made progress too. I came across a group of them at 9.00pm one evening playing soccer under the streetlights. I stopped the car to talk when most of them ran over to the car, 'where are our football nets (I'd worked with the local councillor to get the nets a few months before), go and get them for us now', this was turning into a confrontation, I was put on the spot, I didn't want to disappoint them as our relationship was finely balanced at this point. Mike, the oldest within the group intervened, don't be so ****ing daft, boys, it's dark, we can have the nets again, when it's light'. The atmosphere was immediately defused. This was a significant point for Mike, he had used his influence with and within the group to deflect their attention and, perhaps more importantly, to defer gratification for himself too. I thanked Mike for his intervention a couple of days later and reinforced how important it was as an intervention. Mike is a leader in the group, it took a lot of courage to speak up and go out on a limb as he did. Intervention from another member of the group might not have had the same outcome.

The community profile proved a useful tool to communicate the needs of the group to decision makers, with the purpose of expanding suitable provision and ways of working.

One Community Educator said 'Young people are the route of all issues, at the moment they have very limited options, they need things to do'.

On evaluation of the programme of work, some comments were:

- 'My behaviour has changed because we have places to go like youth club and meetings' (Sian, 14)
- 'We are getting more things for us and other people' (Ally, 16)
- '6 out of Seven is really good and we are really going somewhere with this' (Lisa, 13)

Table 2. Tally chart of Young People's Evaluation of Activities

Activity	Rating					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
Bowling	3					3
Youth Council	1					1
Public meeting in the community centre	3	1	3			7
Communities First Trust Fund	6	1				7
Committee Skills Training	7					7
Communities First Meeting	1	4	1			6
Talking with Community Council	3	3				6
Talking about the village (in the beginning)	4	2				6
Talking about Babysitting skills	4	3				7
Going to Motorvation						
Meetings about Power Station	3	1	1			5
Talking with Police about Youth Shelter	5		1			6
Talking about Splash	5	1	1			7
6 out of Seven Meetings	7					7
Totals	57	17	8	1	1	

Thinking about how to quantify and define the benefits of the programme is a real challenge. Numbers are just one aspect of the evaluation process, Smith (85) would argue that numbers are an inferior point of reference, indeed 'here, it is the debate that is important'.

The very fact that out of the 7 young people involved in the formal evaluation rated the Sunday sessions highly illustrates how they feel about the sessions. Other highly rated activities were:

- Committee skills training (delivered very well by peer education)
- Completing the Communities First trust fund application as a group

There would seem to be a link between the rating of the activity and the amount of action that has resulted. Public meetings were exciting at the time but little action has resulted. Communities First meetings are felt to be important but the committee are still discussing the legal status of the partnership. Talking about Splash got a high rating with the group and it was something that the entire group were involved with.

Young People Improve their Profile

In the last 7 Sunday sessions, the group has been attended by:

- Community Council members
- Local Youth Forum members
- Communities First Co-ordinator
- South Wales Police Youth Liaison Officer

Originally, one community educator was keen to say that 'the needs of the community are not currently being met'. Peer education has been used with the group and was rated very positively. Community Council and other decision makers have attended Sunday meetings and are now actively involving young people, and are prepared to involve the group in shaping provision to meet real needs.

The formal evaluation showed the following response to the question: Do you think the village has changed over the last few months? Responses were:

- The village has changed we are not hanging around the streets we have been keeping ourselves to ourselves (Bella, 18)
- They including us in things (Lisa, 13)
- Not so many bad things are happening in the village (Sian, 14)

In one session we discussed whether it would be good to do projects together with parents. The very fact that Ally had mentioned this and the group discussed it seriously shows a significant amount of selflessness and maturity that was absent at the outset of the project. By definition the issues associated with disaffection and anti social behaviour can extend throughout nuclear families (Kolvin et. al. 1990). There is also evidence to suggest that 'improved parental relationships can have a critical impact on anti-social behaviour' (Coleman and Hendry: 1999).

When asked the question 'Have you noticed any changes in your behaviour', responses were mixed.

- Yes, like working together without rowing (Lisa, 13)
- My behaviour has changed but not enough but I think I can handle more situations (Billie, 15)
- I think I have calmed down a bit (Clare, 14)
- My behaviour has changed because we have somewhere to go (Emma, 16)

Values and Practices of Employing Agency

Initially, I began the intervention both as a focus for the community profile and in the hope that maybe I could work with the group to raise awareness of their needs and the role organisations should play in meeting these needs. Young people within the community were continuing to be oppressed, not being given opportunities because of where they lived. I spoke the matter through with my family and decided to work voluntarily with the group. This was such

a liberating experience and one which has since provided so much scope and additional food for thought.

However, the work has been widely recognised and judged successful. There is a drive to bring the work under the auspices of the maintained youth service and present it as a pilot study for work in other Communities First areas. I have yet to discuss this possibility with the group. I imagine at first they may be ambivalent about this change but if I am unable to support them in something, for example, their campaign about the power station, then I imagine this will become an issue for them.

Learning Programme & Evaluation

The community profile was used to identify development and learning needs of a specific group of young people. It has also been utilised to:

- Raise awareness amongst organisations of the needs of group members
- Propose a partnership approach to future work
- Provide an impetus for local practitioners to organise into a local 'youth providers forum'
- Provide evidence to back up a number of funding bids (see Appendix 2, support for a successful £86000 bid for a multi use games area for the village)

All the 30 young people involved in the project have become more active in the community.

'They called their own meeting after the public meeting about the power station didn't they, it was great, in the bar, they wanted answers, they didn't want to make rash decisions'
Community Development Worker

The programme primarily used group work, according to Hanmer and Statham (1988: 130) 'a primary method of overcoming the disparity in power', discussion, workshop based training, action in the community and simulated work based training. Relationships have been tested and strengthened. The core work continued, regular as clockwork, not missing one Sunday.

At the outset of the programme the group discussed how we would know if the project was working. We developed a model which would help us evaluate the process and the outcomes of the project. I then developed a questionnaire which we use to evaluate every 8 weeks. In addition to this we carried out impromptu exercises to assess satisfaction with the project.

A kind of cultural circle has developed in our Sunday meetings, but not practicing literacy, the subject matter continues to develop and to foster an understanding of power differentials within the community. All the learning activities have been voluntary in nature and no incentives have been provided to encourage young people to take part.

In the coming months we plan to provide childcare costs to enable some of the young people to take part in activities on Wednesday evenings while their mothers are at the local women's darts league. At this stage the group consider it culturally unacceptable to expect the person in the father role in the household to take up sole childcare responsibilities.

Table 3 contains a list of the more structured elements of the learning programme. I have continued below to discuss in a little more detail some of the main elements of the programme.

Table 3. Learning Programme

Learning Activity	Group Size	Learning Objective
		Young People -
Youth Council	2	representing their peers
Public meeting in community centre	6	taking part in their community
Communities First Trust Fund	20	and youth workers agreeing learning and fun programme
Committee Skills Training	12	being open to taking part in formal training
Communities First Meeting	6	representing their peers and expressing views in a formal committee meeting
Talking with Community Council	15	working together with adult decision makers to develop solutions together
Talking about the village (in the beginning)	6	begin to discuss pros and cons about their community
Talking about Babysitting skills	12	and youth workers discuss the need to know more about laws relating to babysitting
Going to Motor project (Accredited via Open College Network)	15	becoming aware of health and safety elements of welding & mechanics
Meetings about Power Station	12	take part in a vibrant public meeting and call their own meeting to question the independent chairman of the panel of company officers and directors.
Talking with Police about Youth Shelter	14	have their say on provision for them within the community. Discuss policing and youth provision within the village
Talking about Splash	16	plan, monitor and evaluate a week long programme of activities.
Sunday Meetings	30	associate, discuss their position within the community and seek solutions to their development needs.

- *Motor project*

Some within the group have committed low-level criminal acts. The group's average age is 14 years. To provide a response to this development need, after discussion with the group I made contact with a project and arranged funding for the young men in the group to take part in a mechanics and welding programme. This project attracted 15 and retained 14 of the young men most likely to be involved in 'low level criminal activity' as highlighted in the original profile. This environment is that of a garage workshop. There is a great deal of evidence to show that employment is among the most powerful of all options in combating antisocial behaviour (Lipsey, 1995). Members of the group acknowledge increased confidence, I see this is a direct result of the 'affirmation, which must be given to those undervalued by society' (Clarke, 1996: 7) provided by the workers and young people involved in the intervention.

Attracting funding, one of 8 'key skills' (Clarke, 1996: 8) was dependent on the learners undertaking an accredited programme of learning, however, there is a potential dichotomy here. From a Freirian perspective, it could be argued that this is de-liberating to the learner, Shor (1993: 28) quotes Freire and Faundez 'any educational practice based on standardisation, on what is laid down in advance, on routines in which everything is predetermined, is bureaucratizing and anti-democratic'. However, the Motor project uses informal education and is well versed in working with challenging young people.

Others within group have, in the past exhibited antisocial behaviour; the first evaluation contained the following comments to the question 'have you noticed any changes in your behaviour or how you handle situations?'

- I think I have calmed down a bit (Clare, 14)
- My behaviour has changed but not enough but I think I can handle more situations (Billie, 15).
- Yes, I have carme down now because if I reak thing we definitely wont have anything in Seven Sisters (Ally, 16)

Rutter et al. (1998) state, 'acknowledging the heterogeneity of antisocial behaviour has obvious consequences for the way it is studied and dealt with'. The varied programme of activity at table 3 has responded well to the complexity of issues around antisocial behaviour.

- **Communities First**

The aim of Communities First is to enable a ‘comprehensive approach to area-based regeneration which will apply to many of Wales’ most deprived communities’ (Communities Directorate: no date).

This project has provided one means for young people who wouldn’t normally become involved in such activities the opportunity to have their say. The results of this are obvious; young people feel confident about their involvement in meetings with adults, some comments included:

- Committee skills training was brilliant, I really enjoyed that, and meetings about the power station and Sunday meetings are really good and we are really going somewhere with this. (Lisa, 13)
- I’ve come to think about there is going to be more for myself and others (Billie, 15)
- I have learned how to talk in a meeting and to have more confidence and how to communicate with other people (Billie, 18)

- **Sunday meetings**

In the evaluation exercise, the question was asked: What do you think you’ve learned or gained?

- I have learned to communicate with other people my age (Billie, 18)
- I have learned how to talk in a meeting and to have more confidence and how to communicate with other people (Emma, 16)
- I think I’ve learned to communicate better with people and gained more respect for people (Clare, 14)
- I have learned to work together without rowing and arguing (Lisa, 13)

These comments add weight to the notion that the learning programme as a whole and the Sunday sessions in particular have contributed to the establishment of a learning community through the group acknowledging and expressing strengthening their sense of ‘security, significance and solidarity’ (Clarke, 1996: 1).

In terms of evaluation, I like the models put forward by Kirkpatrick and Stufflebeam, inasmuch as they both consider the context of the activity and its effect on the community. I feel that using Kirkpatrick’s hierarchy (Brookfield, 1994: 270) this intervention has definitely achieved on three, if not four levels.

Table 4. Kirkpatrick’s Hierarchy of Evaluation Applied to the project

Level of Evaluation	The Project
4. <i>Results</i> (Community Impact)	Community changes its opinions of young people, young people’s opinion of the community changes, facilities

3. <i>Behaviour</i> (Transferable Skills)	expand and improve within the community
2. <i>Learning</i>	Young people's behaviour improves, evidenced via holiday scheme incidents and during regular contact
1. <i>Reaction</i>	Young people regularly demonstrate increased skills, knowledge and attitudes
	Young people are satisfied with the programme, they see results and keep turning up

A modified version of the CIPP model (ibid: 270) might prove interesting but would require more resources and would take time than is unavailable at the moment. I endeavoured to keep a few core principles close at hand when evaluating the work, these are:

- Be open and flexible in gathering and thinking about information
- Try to become one step removed for the purposes of evaluation
- Use what is learned and make sure people know it is being used
- Reflect and evaluate as much as practicable
- Use others to keep grounded and pursue reality

Project Implementation & Outcomes

One outcome from the project has been an improvement in the profile locally of young people. They have been busy, been seen at public meetings talking about their work, their training and what they have been doing to raise funds for themselves and other young people. One incident gave me great satisfaction when, after a number of young women from the group had been out knocking on doors in sub zero conditions to drum up support for a struggle to oppose plans for a power station 2km from the village. The action group fighting the power station put out posters announcing their meetings and emblazoned on the poster the phrase 'YOUNGSTERS MORE THAN WELCOME'. While the focal task has been the general learning programme, a major plank of my approach has been 'the influencing of values and beliefs.. as a major concern' (Clark, 1996: 5). The extent to which the project have influenced the beliefs and values of the group is of course open to interpretation. Youth workers can plainly see from observation that behaviours have altered, but causality of any change in values and beliefs is far more difficult to assign.

My Intervention

I endeavoured to be reflective throughout the intervention, working from a standpoint of being 'open to public scrutiny' (Dalrymple and Burke, 2001: 148).

After working with the group for six weeks I became heavily involved and worked with group members on different projects probably four evenings per week in addition to the Sunday sessions. I continued with this level of

intervention for the next two months. I have reflected on this commitment with my family and we have come to an understanding that I will limit my commitment to one evening per week plus the Sunday sessions. I am currently in the process of reducing my personal contact with the group.

Describe and Critically Appraise the intervention as a piece of AOP

I feel that the intervention has brought the group members to a stage where they have far greater appreciation of other's points of view. This was illustrated when a young woman with learning difficulties came to a 'Sunday meeting'. This young woman exhibited some unusual behaviour during the session which went seemingly unnoticed within the group.

The practitioner must be cognisant of the reality of oppression, how it affects different groups and how it contributes to the maintenance of the status quo. Oppression exists at every level of society; it is there, every day, all around. Oppression cannot be challenged if it goes unrecognised. As Community Educators we should support the people we work with to recognise and challenge the oppression which is undoubtedly a factor in all our lives. We have a duty to support learners in the pursuit of social justice as a key aspect of our own anti oppressive practice. To do this we must appreciate self as a social construct; we cannot exist completely without society.

It was apparent to me at the outset of the project that within the wider community, women are treated in some respects as inferior to men. I set out from day one of the intervention to work with the young women to build their confidence to challenge this discrimination. This approach has paid dividends, one of the youth workers made a comment;

'The boys are getting scared (of the role of the girls in the group), they're stepping back, there's no limelight left for them'.
Andrea, youth worker.

It has become apparent that the young women are altering their behaviour and becoming more mature in their sexual relationships. Attitudes to contraception and their previous exploitation have changed completely. This has allowed the young women to take more control of their relationships with others.

I interviewed my youth work colleagues together. However, I feel that some of our discussions, as well as providing us with an opportunity for reflection, became a little self-congratulatory. However, I was aware of this at the time and attempted to keep opportunities for this to a minimum.

An Identification of My Own Learning from Analysis of the Project in light of the Literature

This work has reinforced my commitment to anti oppressive practice. I feel I have worked in a manner which has allowed young people who are undoubtedly oppressed to have the opportunity to take part in a project which used methods totally new to them. I feel that my intervention has enabled members of the group to realise that change is possible, but that it lies in their

own heads and their own hands. To quote Freire (1972) in Dalrymple and Burke (1995: 15) 'In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation they must perceive the reality of oppression, not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limited situation which they can transform'.

I came at this intervention with the view that the community would be resistant to change and discriminatory. That is not to say that some group members are not discriminated against by some members of the wider community. However, on the whole, and I've spoken to some adults who have had confrontations with group members, they have been keen on developing provision for the young people of the village.

As a practitioner I have gradually learned to trust the people I work with more. Allowing others responsibility will ensure that all parties grow from the experience. I feel that all the colleagues I have interviewed have been honestly and pleasantly surprised at the results of the intervention.

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