

A P U B L I C A T I O N O F
T H E O R S O C I E T Y

ORINSIGHT

SPECIAL ISSUE: Take Part: Active Learning for Active Citizenship
UK National Framework

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- Take Part: Active Learning for Active Citizenship Contributing to Community O.R. Reflections and Practices
- Active learning for active citizenship: The policy context
- Active Learning for Active Citizenship: An Overview
- Key characteristics of informal education practice in relation to ALAC/Take Part
- Participatory Approaches Evaluating Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC)
- The Take Part Learning Framework and Networks



THE OR SOCIETY

A JOURNAL OF THE
OPERATIONAL RESEARCH SOCIETY

OR Insight

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OR Insight is distributed free to members of the Operational Research Society. Back numbers are available to members at £2.50 per issue, and to non-members at £17.50 per issue or to institutions at £70.00 per volume (including postage and package). Enquiries relating to subscriptions, orders for back issues or changes of address, and requests for permission to copy or reprint material, should be addressed to the Publishing Office.

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Printed in the United Kingdom, International Standard Serial Number ISSN 0953-5543

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OR Insight

Volume 20, Issue 2

April - June 2007

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Editorial

Zoraida Mendiwelo Bendek
Editor

**Special Issue for
 Take Part Active Learning for Active
 Citizenship
 UK National Framework**

New government initiatives such as the Active Learning for Active Citizenship programme (ALAC), initiated at the Home Office's Civil Renewal Unit in 2004 and continued by the Empowerment Division of the Department for Communities and Local Government, are enabling an increasing role for active citizenship in community empowerment. This programme recognised and made evident approaches to learn actively in communities, and its experiences produced the "Take Part National Framework for Active Learning for Active Citizenship". This framework offers an approach to give content to processes for community empowerment

The papers in this special edition of the OR Insight offer a conceptual discussion of active citizenship as well as implementation case studies about informal adult active learning in communities.

The first paper by *Rebecca Herron* and *Zoraida Mendiwelo-Bendek*, from Lincoln University, explores links between the ALAC Programme/ Take Part approach and the concerns and interests of the 'community operational research' community.

The second paper by *Charles Woodd*, the civil servant directly responsible for the ALAC programme and team leader in the Community Empowerment Division, Department for Communities and Local Government, sets the policy context in which ALAC and Take Part were developed. He outlines their history providing valuable insight into how the programme has come to take its current form and some indications about likely future directions.

The third paper by *Val Woodward*, ALAC's National Coordinator and author of the original report published by the Home Office in 2004, and currently Head of Community Development at the University of Central England, gives the detailed background of the programme and why it is important an active process of learning and citizenship to empower community development.

The fourth paper by *Carol Packman*, coordinator of the Greater Manchester Take Part hub and Director of the Community Audit and Evaluation Centre at Manchester Metropolitan University, draws the role of informal education in Active Learning for Active Citizenship and works throughout its key characteristics. She also looks at the role of facilitators in this process and how it plays a role in producing social capital.

The fifth paper by *Marj Mayo*, ALAC's National Evaluator, and Professor in Community Development at Goldsmiths College, University of London, looks at the role of participatory evaluation in empowering communities. She explores 'Social Capital' in terms of the promotion of community cohesion and social solidarity, within and between communities.

The last paper by *Ted Hartley* and *Zoraida Mendiwelo-Bendek*, coordinators of the South Yorkshire and East Midlands hubs respectively, looks at the role of networks in building and implementing the *Take Part National Framework*, in particular the role of 'hubs' in producing empowered communities with the capacity to create social capital.

Acknowledgments: This issue of the OR Insight would not have been possible without the collaboration and work of all the members of Take Part.

Take Part: Active Learning for Active Citizenship Contributing to Community O.R. Reflections and Practices

Rebecca Herron & Zoraida Mendiwelso Bendek

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Abstract

The Operational Research Society has had a longstanding interest in developing approaches to engage a wide variety of society stakeholders in meaningful ways. Community O.R. researchers have engaged in research that aims to engage communities in problem-solving processes in order to improve the organisation of our society. Despite this, many research and practice-based questions remain: What are the *approaches* that support communities to become and remain actively engaged in local and national decision making processes? What are the criteria of *informal learning* that underpin these approaches and how does this engagement as decision-makers *empower* groups, individual and organisations to shape & reshape the society we live in? Is 'empowerment' in these situations an empty word or something that can be seen happening in practice? This introduction takes a look at the *Take Part National Framework* for active learning for active citizenship, of which The Lincolnshire Citizenship Network / CORU has been part of and reflects on some of the lessons learnt from our participation.

Introduction

Whilst not yet at the general level of panic there has been increasing concern over recent decades over the general lack of participation in our public domain, (i.e. processes and institutions) - particularly amongst new generations (NCVO, 2005). This has manifested itself in a concerted attempt to renew the institutions and processes of civil society and indeed wider democracy. The main concern remains how to increase participation in decision making, and to

empower a generation prepared to engage with public and private institutions in order to counter social injustices and to strengthen and improve our civil society.

"Active citizens are not born that way. They are made. For many, the experience of frustration when society fails to meet our expectation is a catalyst for social action, but we need to develop understanding and learn new skills if our commitment to action is to be effective. For society to work well we need more people to be active citizens who have a say in the decisions that affect their lives" (Mactaggart, 2004)

The new millennium has seen an expansion of citizenship education in the UK, extending it from an existing curriculum in Primary and Secondary schools, to a *Take Part National Framework* (Take Part, 2006) for informal adult education in active citizenship. This framework is based within the ALAC Programme (Active Learning for Active Citizenship) - part of the *Together We Can* action plan. ALAC was a pilot project funded by the Government Civil Renewal Unit (at the Home Office) now the *Community Empowerment Division* of the Department for Communities and Local Government. This programme brought together a wide range of people providing active learning experiences in support of building and strengthening civil society (Mayo & Rooke, 2006).

This pilot project has developed into a national network supporting development of additional active citizenship activities. Take Part's success to-date has been to make evident many of the

different approaches that enable informal (adult) education in support of active citizenship and in defining a National Framework that can help others from other disciplines engage with this agenda (Take Part, 2006).

The main idea behind ALAC was to promote spaces for active learning opportunities in *active learning for active citizenship* (Woodward 2004). The focus was on active learning, i.e. how do providers encourage this through a process of learning, reflection and personal and organisational development? Inevitably this process involves issues of power – how is this manifest and how can individuals and communities be part of decision making in a modern democracy? Take Part has encouraged bottom-up transformation through civil and civic engagements as a means of creating better recognition and understanding of power relations and increased autonomy.

The seven hubs promoting the ALAC programme have shared experiences, practices and models of the learning processes over the past two years. The evaluation of these hubs has been an important mechanism in the production of the National Framework (Mayo & Rooke, 2006). The development of relationships between hub coordinators and participants has facilitated the creation, in 2006, of the national network. This provides a natural form to maintain the process of updating and implementing the national framework, and reinforcing mutual belief that informal learning processes are vital to improving society's capacity to engage with its citizens.

Why should *Take Part* interest the O.R. community?

The experience of participating in the programme as one of the hubs has been a rich one. We want to highlight that there are issues embedded in this programme likely to be of specific interest to the Community Operational Research community; for example issues of empowerment and participation, of social capital, self-organisation, informal learning,

problem solving and community engagement in decision-making.

In this introduction we offer some of our initial reflections on aspects of these topics.

Decision Making / Problem Resolution

The Take Part active learning for active citizenship is not explicitly about problem solving, it *is* however about empowering people through active informal learning processes to be able to take part in our civil and civic society. As such it is explicitly about improving people's capacity to take part in decision-making and conversely the capacity of civil organisations (National and local government, public sector organisations and NGOs) to be able to interact with their citizens, (i.e. to be *able* to respond when citizens 'find their voice')

Decision-making in this context is not something that can be formally taught or exhaustively captured in a written curriculum. There are at least two related reasons for this. Decision-making in practice is a very complex process and even those employed full-time in civic bodies cannot formalise all aspects of it. Secondly, the landscape or environment we make our societal decisions against is rapidly changing. If we accept these two points then we see that formal learning (e.g. of parliamentary, local authority and other structures and processes) is only part of the necessary capacity that has to be built. We also have to construct and maintain *dialogue* between citizens and government at all structural levels (from the local to the national).

In terms of thinking about decision-making methods and approaches, this realisation alters the nature of the methods that we are developing. Rather than focussing on one-off engagements that explore 'issues' and 'decisions' we have been constructing opportunities for ongoing conversations between citizens that allow them to interact and shape decision-making. In our case we refer to these as 'constructed conversations' (Take Part East Midlands, 2006).

This process of dialogue and reflection also allows the organisations and groups involved time in which to make structural and organisational adjustments – something that takes time and cannot be achieved in ‘brief encounters’ between citizens and government. “If we are to have a healthy democracy we need to support each other in identifying the issues that concern us, and develop the confidence and skills to make a difference to the world around us”, (Mactaggart, 2004).

Furthermore, whilst not an explicit goal of Take Part, the question of ‘problem resolving’ arises because it has proved to be a natural language that participants in the *Take Part* programme use to initiate and order some of their activities.

For example, within the Lincolnshire hub we found the identification of problems that needed resolving (particularly relating to social justice) to be a powerful driver to want to become active citizens, or to want to be involved in the hub *supporting others to become active citizens*. Examples include:

- Problems for new arrival communities (migrant workers) – e.g. employment conditions, housing, finance, access to services, health and education
- Problems for young people trying to engage in community decision making – e.g. difficulties in communication between generations and beyond school structures
- Problems for mental health users and carers engaging in the improvement of services – e.g. problems of maintaining effective communication channels
- Problems for the community and voluntary sector in tackling social justice issues – e.g. problems of engagement and participation

As part of the ALAC programme we have therefore found ourselves using many existing techniques and approaches to scoping problems, identifying stakeholders and creating new commitments. These examples have included

many variations of workshops, cognitive mapping and iterative interviewing techniques.

In a similar way that the decision making processes have to be seen not as a one-off intervention but as an ongoing sequence of interactions and informal learning so the formulation of problems and identification of actions and interactions has been a constructed process over several years. This ‘constructed conversation’ approach to problem solving has the advantage of drawing in resources over time as issues are identified as important to developing the Take Part approach.

Engaging Communities / Social Networks.

Active learning for active citizenship hubs have found dialogue within community networks to be important. The co-construction of the agenda for active citizenship work has created an environment where organisations (and individuals within these organisations) want to engage *because* it supports their aims and values in a co-operative manner.

Engaging members of the general public in active citizenship learning can require different approaches and additional lessons have been learnt. In our experience much of this engagement has been achieved using a hub-and-spoke model of social networks. That is, in the East Midlands we have worked closely with a ‘project managers’ group who have then created projects of active citizenship with their networks around issues of importance to them.

As part of this engagement process, care must be given to find delivery models that support learner’s needs. In our work with new arrival communities for instance, the community quickly identified that a core learning need for them was overcoming language barriers and receiving basic “how to?” training (e.g. how to access services and understand their rights and responsibilities). As a result informal active citizenship learning opportunities were created around the activities of a language tutor. New

participants then joined the group as it developed, using the social networks of the learners themselves.

As a lesson about engagement in decision-making processes this serves as a useful example—one of the key lessons learnt is that the interaction must be mutually beneficial in which ever timeframe participants are able to work in. e.g. some policy development work can be seen to be beneficial in the medium term, but participants may not be able to work for the medium term as they have pressing short term needs. By identifying and supporting short-term needs (e.g. Language training) whilst providing opportunities through these classes to explore medium term needs (e.g. citizenship empowerment) and to foster active citizenship experiences, (e.g. the development of community radio programmes), we have been able to sustain these learning activities – and indeed the demand for them is growing.

Creating models for communication

All of the hubs have been involved in creating models for improved communication that support a wide range of active learning experiences for active citizenship with adults. Opportunities for conversation have been created *between* hub participants, with hub facilitators and trainers on a one-to-one basis, in small and large groups and during visits and lobbying, conferences and workshops. In this process we enter into a continuing learning cycle of ‘observation and action’ that enables us to develop the local and national agenda for active citizenship and achieve improvements in our capacity to interact and make better decisions. Creating a model for communication also gives us the overall structure to incorporate more ‘static interventions’, e.g. existing workshop technologies etc. It is no longer of central importance that we undertook workshop ‘method x’, what is now of importance is that an ongoing conversation was developed (using for example an appropriate workshop). i.e. *The focus is on the conversation over time* rather than any particular single interaction.

Addressing Power Inequalities:

As much existing research has already highlighted, the issue of power inequalities needs to be considered at each turn. The issue is not simply about *The Establishment* having power and the individual being empowered to interact with it. All participants have power in different forms and non-participants also exert power over the development of active citizenship. Whilst it is very important to remember general points of good practice (e.g. to consider individual roles, language and literacy levels, familiarity with the topic, organisational language used, identification of missing stakeholders etc.) it is also essential to get involved in the local contextual information about what power is needed to influence a situation. Again, this appears to be only possible through a sustained engagement in dialogue between parties within the project.

These processes include formal and semi-formal classroom experiences, facilitated workshops, and reflective learning opportunities. They engage ‘hard-to-reach’ groups including public sector decision-makers. They seek to provide facilitated space for conversation and debate aimed at constructing new ways of acting and interacting or improving the use of old ways if they are still found to be empowering.

Further Reading:

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Active learning for active citizenship: The policy context

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Abstract

In this paper the UK civil servant directly responsible for managing the action research programme Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC), sets out in brief the policy context within which the programme developed. He explains how concepts of active citizenship and community development were brought together in the early 21st century by the British Government, in a programme of 'civil renewal'. As this has spread across Government as a commitment to 'community empowerment', the role of learning in building the capacity of both citizens and communities, and also public servants, has become increasingly recognized. Action research proved a very cost effective way of informing the development of a new approach to this kind of learning for adults.

Introduction

In the last half century, the political recognition given to concepts of citizenship and community in Britain has varied significantly. Official acceptance of the role that community development can play in building participation and strengthening communities seemed to reach a peak in the 1970s, with the establishment of the Home Office Community Development Project in a number of deprived communities. However perhaps the state was not ready for the political challenge that the projects brought, and they were abruptly discontinued. In the 80s, the pendulum swung fully in the opposite direction as political developments were centred on

individuals and families pursuing their own interests in the context of the market.

When the present government came to power in 1997, David Blunkett reasserted the concept of active citizenship, but set it in the context of 'civic republicanism', a political theory dating back to ancient Athens, and developed in the Italian city states of the Renaissance, and subsequently by others such as the American President Thomas Jefferson, and by John Dewey and L T Hobhouse in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Central to this tradition is the idea that the freedom of citizens can only be truly realized if they are enabled to participate constructively in the decisions which shape their lives. David Blunkett started, as Secretary of State for Education and Skills, by introducing citizenship education into secondary schools, as a mandatory part of the National Curriculum. This was soon followed by pilot projects in citizenship education for 16-19 year olds in a range of settings from colleges to youth clubs and work places.

Civil Renewal

It was when David Blunkett moved to become Home Secretary that his ideas found a broader practical expression, which he christened 'civil renewal' for want of a better description. As he wrote in June 2003, 'we must aim to build strong, empowered and active communities'¹. In December 2003, he amplified this commitment in the following way:

“Civil renewal can only be attained through communities of different shapes and sizes, of interest as well as geography, becoming engaged in defining and solving the problems they face. To bring this about, there are three crucial ingredients:

- **Active citizenship:** citizens should be given more opportunities and support to become actively involved in defining and tackling the problems of their communities and improving their quality of life.
- **Strengthened communities:** communities should be helped to form and sustain their own organizations, bringing people together to deal with their common concerns.
- **Partnership in meeting public needs:** public bodies, within the established democratic framework, should involve citizens and communities more effectively in improving the planning and delivery of public services.”ⁱⁱ

None of these elements were new as strands of public policy, in themselves. Active citizenship in its more limited and philanthropic form of volunteering had a long and honourable tradition. In more recent years, the role of individuals as social entrepreneurs had been given much greater prominence, for instance in the Policy Action Team 16 reportⁱⁱⁱ which contributed to the development of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal in 2000^{iv}.

Meanwhile after the debacle over the Home Office Community Development Project in the 70s, community development continued to be practised in local communities up and down the country. Here and there it benefited from considerable investment from local authorities and other public bodies, though with very little explicit political recognition at national level of its effectiveness, or even of its existence as a coherent method of working.

Partnerships had for a while been an essential ingredient in regeneration, a trend which culminated in the idea of the Local Strategic Partnership, a partnership of partnerships, bringing together public, private, voluntary and community sector representatives at local authority level, which was established as a centrepiece of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.

What was new in the brief given to the Civil Renewal Unit in the Home Office, set up in 2003 to carry David Blunkett’s civil renewal policy forward, was the aspiration that the three strands could be woven together in a single coherent Government policy. It was not an easy task, but eventually it found expression in the deceptively simple concept or ‘brand’ of ‘Together We Can – people and government working together to make life better’.

Together We Can became the cross-government umbrella for a number of significant developments. The most comprehensive was the Together We Can action plan, published in June 2005^v, which brought together in one government document 65 policies, programmes and initiatives from 12 different government departments, which collectively illustrated the government’s commitment to empower citizens to work with public bodies to set and achieve common goals across a wide range of policy areas. A review of progress was published in June 2006^{vi}, in which 12 government ministers expressed their belief in the efficacy of the ‘Together We Can’ approach in their sphere of influence.

Implicit in the Together We Can approach was the recognition that it was necessary both to create opportunities for greater engagement, and also to build capacity, both in citizens and communities, and in public bodies, so that those opportunities could be fully exploited. One would not be successful without the other. Two major policy developments in particular addressed these dimensions of the Together We Can approach.

In December 2004, the Civil Renewal Unit published *Firm Foundations: the government's framework for community capacity building*^{vii}, based on the results of a lengthy and wide-ranging consultation process. *Firm Foundations* set out an agenda for action to strengthen the resources and opportunities available for capacity building. One of the four priorities for action it identified was to ensure the availability of a 'menu of learning opportunities', both for citizens and communities and for public bodies.

The other part of the government's local vision review of local government policy, focused on neighbourhoods, and examined ways in which power and responsibility could be devolved to people in neighbourhoods through policy or legislative reform. Throughout 2005, a cross-sector Neighbourhood Projects Board led by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister considered such topics as community management and ownership of assets (that is, land and buildings), devolved budgets, promoting and strengthening parish councils, and bottom-up mechanisms for triggering action by local authorities. The process was given a further fillip when, in May 2006, the functions of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister were integrated with the former Home Office responsibilities for civil renewal, community cohesion and race equality (as well as women equality issues from DTI) into a new Department for Communities and Local Government.

Community Empowerment

The new Department had as its first major task the publication of a Local Government White Paper, which took as one of its primary aims 'to give local people and local communities more influence and power to improve their lives'. The White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities*^{viii}, which was published in October 2006, explained why after a period when 'the improvements in our public services have been driven largely from the centre', the government believed the time was right to show 'confidence in local government, local communities and other local public service providers by giving them more

freedom and powers to bring about the changes they want to see'. Chapter 2 of the White Paper *Responsive Services and Empowered Communities* translated the work of the Neighbourhood Projects Board into practical policy proposals.

By this stage, in early 2007, the term 'civil renewal' was gradually giving way to 'community empowerment' in central government parlance. Though partly just a matter of terminology, the use of empowerment for the first time acknowledged that government was officially in the business of sharing or devolving power, or, as some would have it, enabling people more effectively to exercise the power they already possessed. The size of the task was clearly illustrated by the results even of the most recent Citizenship Survey (2005), which showed that 61% of people in England and Wales felt they could not influence decisions affecting their local area, and 79% felt they could not influence decisions affecting national affairs^{ix}. Government at the highest level recognised that taking steps to counteract the widespread sense of powerlessness was crucial to building a better society.

Summarising the position we have reached in spring 2007, there is a strong and explicit shift in government policy which recognises the importance and effectiveness of a devolution of power from central to local government, and from local government to communities. This policy commitment is being translated into practical opportunities for the exercise of devolved power particularly through the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill^x, currently in Parliament. At the same time, there is also a growing, but still much less widespread realization that real empowerment requires culture change in institutions and confidence building in individuals to ensure that the opportunities are taken advantage of. This is the challenge for the next period.

ALAC Programme and Take Part Framework

It is against this backdrop of evolving public policy that the Active Learning for Active Citizenship programme was developed and implemented. Chronologically, it flowed from David Blunkett's original initiative to introduce citizenship education in schools, under the mentorship of Professor Bernard Crick, and the logical consequence of wanting to offer increased and more accessible comparable opportunities to adults to learn the knowledge and skills for active citizenship. It grew from consultative work led by the Home Office in 2003, formulated into a two-year pilot programme which commenced in April 2004. So the ALAC programme's development was in parallel with, but yet totally complementary to, the evolution of the civil renewal agenda and the Together We Can campaign, of which it became an active part.

There was a fundamental reason why it fitted so well with the emerging civil renewal policy agenda. Active Learning for Active Citizenship started with the individual citizen and their learning needs, but it recognized from the outset that that learning only made sense if it was conducted in a way that enabled the individual citizen to learn in a group, relate their learning to the context of their community, and use it to influence public decisions which affected them. So to an extent, the scope of ALAC encompassed the three interlinked features of civil renewal – active citizenship, strong communities, and partnership with public bodies.

The detail of the ALAC programme is described in the following articles. What I want to do in this introduction is highlight three significant and quite unusual features of this government-funded programme.

First it was decided from the start that it should be an action research programme, necessarily therefore funded over a limited time-span. For us this meant building in a real-time evaluation

process from which we could learn as we went along. So, as Marj Mayo explains, the evaluation would not be an independent, totally external assessment as to whether the programme met its goals, but an integral part of the programme itself, working in dialogue with those taking part to reflect on and learn from experience and feed that learning back into the evolution of the programme. In practical terms, for instance, this meant that the evaluators were important members of the ALAC Steering Group, participating actively in the oversight of the programme's development.

Secondly, the programme was constructed as a shared exercise between government and its partners from the voluntary and community sector, educational institutions and, to a lesser extent, local authorities. The seven participating learning hubs were all located within the voluntary and community sector, though with active local participation from universities, from one or two local authorities and even in one case from a not-for-profit consultancy. However the Programme Manager was seconded to work from within the host unit in government, the Civil Renewal Unit (CRU), and the Steering Group was convened and serviced directly by civil servants within the CRU. This enhanced the possibility of the learning from the programme being rapidly internalized within at least that part of government which was in a strong position to apply it and disseminate it more widely. The Steering Group itself, composed of individuals drawn from the voluntary and community sector, the universities, government departments, the evaluators and the hubs, provided a very valuable forum in which to reflect on the development of the programme, the lessons that were emerging, and how they could best be used to contribute to wider policy development.

Thirdly, this process of sharing and reflection was taken a step further through a series of conferences, organized during the life of the programme. They offered the opportunity for those involved in ALAC in different ways both to

meet together, and to meet with others with an interest in citizenship learning for adults, to compare experiences and share their learning. Many who attended found the conferences valuable and enlightening, but there was always a tension between meeting the legitimate needs of those involved in the programme, both as facilitators and as participants, who wanted more opportunities to share, and the equally valid needs of others with comparable experience share from outside the ALAC programme itself.

Funding for the ALAC action-research programme came to an end in April 2006, and the final evaluation report was published shortly after. However, it became clear that resources were needed to complete the task of codifying the lessons from the programme, and begin the process of disseminating them to a wider audience in a form that could provide the basis for the development of new learning opportunities. Through an intensely participative process, those lessons were shaped into a national Learning Framework, which, to mark this next stage of development, was renamed the Take Part Framework^{xi}. In parallel, the hubs reconstituted themselves as the Take Part Network. The Framework and the Network are now building blocks, and significant ones at that, to be used in the implementation of the new commitment to community empowerment.

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- ^{iv} *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal: National Strategy Action Plan*, Social Exclusion Unit 2001
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^{xi} See www.takepart.org

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Active Learning for Active Citizenship: An Overview

Val Woodward

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Abstract

The project *Active Learning for Active Citizenship* formed part of recent civil renewal policy and contributed to the development of ideas along with action on the ground. Whilst that practice will be explored in other chapters, this chapter will examine the underlying principles. It is written by the author of the original report submitted to the Home Office in 2004, who subsequently helped initiate work across England forming *Active Learning for Active Citizenship*. It was seen as crucial that both learning and citizenship be active, following on from praxis related to empowering community development.

The Hubs

Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC) formed part of the central Government civil renewal initiative 'Together We Can'. Active citizenship is about people realising and employing democratic power and active learning is about how people are encouraged to do that. Seven learning hubs were established in the community and voluntary sector as part of the national *Active Learning for Active Citizenship* programme. The hubs are to be found in the Black Country, Greater Manchester, South Yorkshire, Lincoln, the South-West, Tees Valley and London. A hub consists of a central focus with satellites and therefore each hub has a core with workers who led local developments in partnership with other voluntary and statutory groups in their locality.

The ALAC hubs were recommended, as spaces promoting active learning opportunities, in 'Active Learning for Active Citizenship' published by the Civil Renewal Unit at the Home Office (Woodward, 2004). The hubs were

designed to indicate effective ways that a major expansion in citizenship learning opportunities for adults could be stimulated and supported by government. So as to maximise learning outcomes, each hub was very different, utilising different methods with different groups. A wide variety of possible ways forward were consequently exposed. Each hub was localised, contextually rooted, small in scale, flexible, culturally sensitive, democratic and participatory. Each embraced community development ideas through a variety of methods and settings and was chosen because good practice was already evident. Each initiated new work, on top of what they were already doing. As outlined in the *ALAC* report (Woodward, 2004:6), 'the first hubs will be "trailblazers" to allow the voluntary and community sector to firm up on what they can do and wish to do, but also for the Government to ascertain the best form of sustained support and involvement'.

Democratic Citizenship

At the hubs, community groups have developed learning opportunities for participants to enter an empowering process specifically targeted at increasing democratic citizenship and the capacity within everyone to actively participate in democracy. As stated by the European Commission 'democracies have to create the conditions for an active exercise of citizenship' (European Commission, 2001:7). Likewise David Blunkett, who supported the ALAC project, commented 'democracy is not just an association of individuals determined to protect the private sphere, but a realm of active freedom in which citizens come together to shape the world around them' (Blunkett, 2003).

An opportunity, not a solution

Despite the emphasis on sustainability, the funding for *Active Learning for Active Citizenship* was short term because it was aimed primarily at providing lessons for future action. Short term funding is a major weakness amongst government funded programmes, but participants optimistically embraced this opportunity to contribute to reflections about longer-term good policy and practice development, maximising more immediate personal and community learning at the same time. Participants in the hubs are seeking ways to continue their learning and action now that the *ALAC* programme has finished and have set up a network named *Take Part*. Indeed, the then Junior Minister at the Home Office, Hazel Blears, acknowledged that capacity building could not be achieved overnight and that it takes commitment, time and energy by individuals on the ground as well as real investment (DfES/Home Office seminar, June 2005).

Evaluation and Continual Learning

Evaluation of learning outcomes arising from the *ALAC* programme was consequently crucial. Learning outcomes were captured through an evaluation process carried out by an external team with a remit to:

- Facilitate self-assessment within each pilot learning hub
- Facilitate the sharing of learning between the hubs
- Consolidate the lessons learnt from the programme as a whole, so as to facilitate agreement on the terms for a framework for expansion at the end of the programme.

Participants accordingly formed the core of the programme's learning outcomes. While the *ALAC* programme comprised a form of action research designed to inform Government policy, it crucially created valuable and valued learning outcomes for individuals and their communities. As a research project *ALAC* clearly met the condition laid out by the Joseph Rowntree

Foundation (1997:1) that 'people are central to the research and are involved in, and empowered by, the experience'. But *ALAC* as a project also created the conditions for more than this, through the provision of high quality, educational opportunities for participants.

A Government Policy

Indeed, as a people centred policy and programme of action, *ALAC* followed a Government recognition that,

'there has been too much emphasis on regenerating the physical environment (rather) than on changing the prospects of people who live there' (SEU, 1998:39),

The Civil Renewal Unit at the Home Office had a vision of a society in which citizens are inspired to make a positive difference to their communities. While the programme arose from ministerial directives to expand the education for citizenship already being provided in English schools, *ALAC* was designed around broader ways of approaching this issue. The programme consequently took on board much of the criticism targeted at such policies and recognised that failing to recognise a legitimate diversity of ways of thinking, being and doing can lead to subtle, but powerful blocking of dynamic alternatives (Frazer, 1999). Also, bureaucratic inertia can often stifle political willingness to engage in risky programmes. The programme was therefore a massive risk for political decision-makers, yet was generally embraced with welcoming support.

Government working in partnership with the voluntary and community sector

ALAC formed a key strand in the '*Together we Can*' government initiative, emphasising that no one sector can create sustainable change by themselves. The steering group for the *ALAC* programme reflected this by comprising members from a broad range of governmental and community sector groups with a direct interest and expertise in both active learning and active citizenship. They acted as a sounding board, reflecting on action and offering advice

and help with continual policy and practice development. As recommended in the 2004 ALAC report, 'the framework steering group was led by the voluntary and community sector and supported by the Home Office's Civil Renewal Unit'.

While many groups seek only funding from the state, ALAC sought a democratic and reflexive relationship. Government does not form fixed entities nor represent a unified or coherent set of interests. Instead Government consists of constantly shifting personnel, relationships, power foci and structures. While this makes negotiations very tricky it opens up democratic possibilities for change once the shifting sands are better understood. Likewise the voluntary and community sector is amorphous and seemingly divided (Craig and Taylor, 2002). Gary Craig a leading community-oriented academic, has claimed,

'despite the dangers that VCOs (Voluntary and Community Organisations) might be drawn into a government agenda, the distinction between "insider" and "outsider" strategies is in reality rather more complex and dynamic than at first appears' (Craig et al, 2004: 223).

Community Development

Community development has long been practised around ideas that bottom up transformation creates a potential to alter power relations (Crowther et al, 2001; Mayo, 1997; Taylor, 1993:56). Such changes in power relations is not brought about by instant policy solutions, but rather through a process of participants reflecting upon the world in order to understand what should change and ways to initiate such change. Such work has been strongly influenced by Paolo Freire who wrote (cited in Shor, 1993:25)

'You must be convinced that the fundamental effort of education is to help with the liberation of people, never their domestication. You must be convinced that when people reflect on their domination, they begin a first step in changing their

relationship with the world'

Community development as a change process therefore involves empowering education that expands and strengthens the democratic process.

To do this, participants need to increase their autonomy and localised social capital, better understanding opportunities and barriers to action and change. Participants enter an educational process that creates benefits for themselves at the same time as individually and collectively challenging taken-for-granted aspects of their lives and working to alter inequalities in power. Power relations form part of everyday life and are constantly shifting as people negotiate their way through the world and firm up identities and the communities they relate to, as a result there are opportunities for people to learn how to practice such negotiations as increasingly autonomous individuals within communities. While changing power inequalities is not easy, community development works on the premise that people can act creatively for reasons that make sense to them and contribute to a long term process of empowerment, connecting their everyday lives to political change processes. Empowering community work practice is hence seen as intervention that leads to individuals acting collectively to bring about change.

Civil Society and Communities

Civil society forms spaces where citizens can articulate political activity located in their realities rather than those of the elite. Communities therefore form a sector where people can formulate their own strategies for change. However, civil society is instrumental to democratising the state rather than a democratic end in itself. Government tends to look for quick and easy answers to problems because of the way it is currently structured and may consequently be seen to oversimplify the role civil society can play in democracy. Communities should not be seen as easy add -ins to bolster macro plans of action but rather as a counter to top down, worn out, ways of working.

Civil society, as with any other group contributing to governance including the bureaucracy of Government, should consequently be examined for the ways in which it structures and delimits our political imaginations along with creative possibilities that may be open but hidden. *ALAC* projects were encouraged to do this as were government bodies and other agencies that engaged with the project through the steering group, a series of *ALAC* seminars or events and contributions to other practice, policy and academic papers at national and international conferences.

Inequalities in Power

Indeed, the optimism underpinning *ALAC* projects does not ignore, or even underestimate, barriers associated with power inequalities. *ALAC* recognised that citizens do not start from a level playing field. There is differential access to economic, social, political and cultural aspects of life. Learning therefore cannot be isolated from relations of power. There are power inequalities within any encounter between groups and within relationships between individuals and the world around them. Yet inequalities are so well hidden within the common-sense rationality of our world that they can be, and frequently are, dismissed and ignored, thus perpetuating power inequalities. Indeed, gender, race and other aspects of marginalisation are too often disregarded within policies on citizenship (Elliott, 2000; Kymlicka and Norman, 2000; Lister, 1998; Parekh, 2000).

The Active Citizenship surveys of 2003 and 2004 (Prime et al) indicate that although residents in the most deprived areas of the UK are less likely to formally volunteer, they do engage with and participate in their communities in substantial ways. Participants in the *ALAC* programme were accordingly encouraged to better understand how they already resist oppressive forces that surround them in their everyday lives, however badly their contributions are recognised by mainstream society. *ALAC* sought to encourage participants to better recognise and understand power

differentials, exposing hidden inequalities and entering what Pierre Bourdieu calls 'the field' of social struggle 'with the baggage of their stock of accumulated capitals and strengths and weaknesses associated with their habitus' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:101). Recognising inequalities as social and political constructions rather than as personal weaknesses is essential for people to positively engage in a vigorous democracy.

Political Mistrust

ALAC hence started with the premise that engaging with society in mainstream ways is not always the best way to engage. There is currently little support for democracy as perceived in everyday lives despite a support for democracy as a principle (Dalton, 2004; Hall, 2002). As noted by the Electoral Commission and Hansard (2005: 24), 'few feel they have any opportunities for influence'. 'Everywhere it seems, the public feels the government is falling short of our expectations' (Dalton, 2004: 128). Citizens are distrustful of politicians, sceptical about democratic institutions and disillusioned about how the democratic process functions.

However,

'Just because people feel powerless and don't get involved, it doesn't mean that they are apathetic about public problems. In fact most people will say they would like to play a role in the decisions affecting their communities, if only they felt that their views would really count' (CRU, 2005:5).

Despite numerous attempts, governments across the globe are not successfully reducing distrust of politics and politicians. Lessons from *ALAC* clearly point to the need for sustained long-term, small-scale work, building community capacity, rather than the continual seeking of instant solutions.

Changing Political Culture

Acquiring skills to join in the world, or counteracting personal deficits, is not enough to promote active learning for active citizenship

and indeed may even obscure and exacerbate issues of inequality. Knowledge is needed to make judgements, but underlying this, individuals and communities need an understanding of possibilities and restrictions in the world in which they live. As Rennie Johnston has claimed, this must involve both contextual analysis through helping adults to develop a clear critical awareness of the socio-economic forces that affect our lives and personal change which is concerned with individual and collective self-confidence, personal empowerment and awareness of new options (1992: 69). Educational programmes designed primarily to improve individuals skills at joining in the world as it exists will bring individual short-term gain but little, if any, collective long-term change and gain. At the same time, understanding why so many expectations can not be met by those in positions of power could be seen to either stifle or encourage political change, either reducing motivation to get involved because nothing is possible, or as premised within ALAC, increase motivation by examining the reality of why so little change occurs and understanding better ways to overcome the myriad of complex barriers involved in change.

As David Held has said (1999:295), ‘a political imagination for alternative arrangements is essential if the tarnished image of politics is to be eradicated’. Learning within ALAC accordingly tackled deep and complex power relationships and ways to change them, reflecting Chantal Mouffe’s idea that,

‘,,what a project of radical and plural democracy needs is not a sexually differentiated model of citizenship in which the specific tasks of both men and women would be valued equally, but a truly different conception of what it is to be a citizen and to act as a member of a democratic political community (Mouffe, 1992: 539).

Gender inequalities formed one of many strands of work across ALAC. As Peter Hall has noted (1999:437), ‘social capital has been sustained in Britain largely by virtue of the increasing

participation of women in the community’. Yet their voice remains relatively powerless, because the reality of lives and experiences are hidden and invalidated within mainstream discourse. ALAC therefore included work with marginalised groups, including women, to bring about change by exploring all aspects of inequalities.

Management and Professional Intervention

So as to maximise the variety of positive challenges to accepted ways of doing things; work at the hubs was directed by local co-ordinators, rather than through top down management by the national co-ordinator. The national co-ordinator was seconded from a University on a part-time basis working within the Civil Renewal Unit at the Home Office and aimed to support rather than directly administer or control day-to-day work. This reflected the reality of scarcity of time available for national management, but more importantly the need for trust to be displayed by Government that working together with the community sector should involve localised and autonomous management within a framework of shared aims and values.

Maximising autonomy within each project added to maximising learning outcomes at the same time as valuing the professional expertise, integrity and passion of staff. Too often the mainstream of the policy and academic worlds fail to engage with passion (Hooks, 1994; Truman, et al., 2000) and diversity is quashed so as to produce gains that can be claimed centrally. Good practice does not need to be uniform. Indeed, a healthier and more vibrant democracy is stimulated by diversity and difference, even though as Sir Bernard Crick, a member of the ALAC steering group points out, this inevitably leads to conflicts of interests (Crick, 2000).

ALAC was designed to encourage greater awareness and autonomy amongst creative, critical, reflective citizens. This involves professional intervention facilitating active

reflection on and about participants' lives and the worlds they live in. There are so many barriers to active citizenship, and inequalities are so well hidden, professional intervention is needed to ease participants' learning and nurture their confidence to act. Professionals create opportunities for participants to see positive ways forward. This is an active process exploring differing realities through dialogue, rather than participants being passive recipients of abstract wisdom and consequently needs educators who clearly adopt a community development approach.

A Different Approach?

Empowerment is not something that is done to participants, rather it is a more subtle process whereby people come to recognise their own situation and develop the motivation and strength to do something about it. Professionals accordingly set up spaces and opportunities where people can reconsider taken-for-granted assumptions, about how the world works whether it be about the subtleties of gender inequalities (Rose, 1997), or food production as just two possible examples. ALAC was designed to enable participants to question mainstream ways of seeing the world and challenge

‘power saturated discourses that monitor and normalise our sense of who we are and what is possible’ (Lather, 1991:142).

Such an exercise is unlikely to immediately overturn grievances but may enable participants to better understand more subtle ways to creatively fight against seemingly inevitable forces.

Empowerment processes cannot eliminate unequal power relations, only make their exercise more visible and subsequently open to democratic processes of change. Active learning for active citizenship embraces reflection on ways to act in our worlds and become actively engaged in the well being of our communities, whether those communities are local or global. Through *ALAC* the Government accordingly committed itself to work together with the community and voluntary sector building social

capital and increasing community capacity to lead change mechanisms to improve participant's lives and the world they live in.

ALAC has not produced quick fix answers, instead re-iterating the need for prolonged and intensive activity centred on people's realities and understandings. The programme relied on the motivation and commitment of all involved, whether participants or professionals. Reflective discussion during the programme, along with the evaluation, shows that everyone involved put a lot in to this programme but also got a lot out of it. *Active Learning for Active Citizenship* provides signposts for ways to generate sustained change and contributes to the aim of the final report of the Citizenship Advisory Group, set up by the then new Labour Government in Britain in 1997, to effect ‘no less than a change in the political culture of this country’ (DfEE, 1998: para 1.5).

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Key characteristics of informal education practice in relation to ALAC/Take Part

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Abstract

This article draws on the experience of informal educators working with a variety of community based groups as part of the Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC) pilot and identifies three key characteristics of informal education. It makes a case for the role of the facilitator in enabling education and empowerment and contributing to the development of capital, particularly that of social capital making a case for the ongoing role of informal educators in the context of current social policy initiatives.

The Characteristics of Informal Education

What characterises informal education is the commitment and practice of dialogical education based on high levels of active participation of the learner, with a distinctive role for the worker as facilitator and enabler. In addition, the contribution of informal education to the production of human, social and state capital has been a key theme emerging from the work of the Home Office ALAC pilot.

In 1990 Jeffs and Smith stated that informal education was an 'emerging practice which crosses traditional demarcation lines'. They argued for the recognition of it as being a type of education that could take place in a range of settings and that had particular characteristics. These characteristics have been summarised by Banks (1999) as being that

'the process is based on **dialogue**, it works with cultural forms that are familiar to

participants, participation is **voluntary**, it takes place in a variety of settings, it has **educational** goals., and makes use of **experiential** as well as assimilative patterns of learning' (1999:7)

These characteristics draw very heavily on the key elements of the Freirian educative process, with the key components of **dialogue, praxis, consientisation, experience, and problems posing**. Added to these characteristics are a set of core values, respect for basic human and individual rights, respect for difference, a commitment to empowerment and participatory democracy, collective action and voluntary (consenting) participation (Banks 1999).

Through the work of the ALAC project I have drawn out what I have found to be the key requirements for informal educators in relation to those with whom we work whether as colleagues, 'educands', or participants. These can be summarised into three characteristics, of making space, enabling voluntary, self directed and self help activities and using an inclusive critical perspective.

Making Space for association and critical dialogue

One of the defining characteristics of informal educators is the ability and aim to facilitate the making of 'space', for critical dialogue, which enables political agency and voice (Batsleer and Humphries 2000) to be possible. To provide the opportunity for those with whom we work to

discuss their experiences of their world and the world. This process of educational enquiry can be undertaken with groups or organisations, and at a participant or worker and interagency level. The relevance and importance of this concept emerged through the national Hub meetings for the ALAC pilot. Discussions between the core pilot programmes agreed that although they were delivering very different types of activities, one of the shared methodologies was the commitment to enabling critical dialogue within groups. In the ALAC pilots this was being carried out with a range of different groups focusing on differing themes. For example, with women developing the ability to speak out and engage in decision making structures in the West Midlands, community groups debating local issues and agreeing priorities for action in Manchester, or the establishment of 'constructive conversations' between migrant workers, employers and service providers in the agricultural areas of Lincolnshire.

Through the national hub meetings it became apparent that even though the Hub coordinators for each area were from very different backgrounds - some academic, most community and voluntary sector, or training - we were using a shared terminology and shared principles and methodology was emerging.

It was agreed that the concept and requirement of SPACE would be highlighted. The word being used to signify the opportunities that were required at all levels to enable reflective educational practice, but in addition to encapsulate the key element of our work Social Political and Active Citizenship Education (source, Ted Hartley, South Yorkshire Workers Education Association, ALAC Hub meeting 2005).

A report from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations 'Civil Renewal and Active Citizenship' (Jochum, Pratten and Wilding, 2005) also recognises the importance of space in civil renewal,

'for argument and deliberation, in which

citizens can express their different viewpoints and negotiate a sense of the common interest, ... Key here is civil society as a space in which citizens can debate what the 'good society' means- how social, economic and political progress can be defined. It is also as space in which people come together voluntarily, in other words the space in which voluntary association and voluntary action occur' (Jochum, Pratten, Wilding, 2005:7/8).

However critical reflection in isolation is not sufficient, as Edwards (2005) identified, association and membership of dynamic communities are important contributing factors to enable consentisation, praxis and action, the making and enabling of space for these interactions is therefore essential.

However the making of space in itself is not sufficient for informal education to take place, it is also crucial that participants have control, agency and self determination over their space, both in relation to the content of the dialogue that take place and to their voluntary engagement.

Voluntary and self directed active engagement, citizen control

Voluntary engagement refers to the participant's free choice to undertake activities, and ideally their control over the choice of activities. Voluntary engagement also refers to the ability of the informal educator to act independently and to have agency within organisational contexts.

Voluntary involvement also includes the ability of citizens to choose and undertake activities in a process of self help, and community action. This requires that the participants should undertake action based on self identified needs and issues, a process of problem posing, and that they identify what action needs to be taken. The activity is not undertaken as problem solving. This distinction has been important in the debates within the ALAC pilots and the role that the Home Office sees for active citizens.

Although having a commitment to community engagement the Home Office approach can be seen to be primarily one for assisting the government in solving problems such as 'developing our approach to build a safe, just and tolerant society ... helping to build active, cohesive and empowered communities' (Home Office, 2005b:3).

The element of action or active engagement has been crucial to the work of the ALAC pilot and can be seen as a defining characteristic of informal education, as opposed to formal education which often takes a directed, didactic and non-experiential approach to education (Jeffs and Smith 1990). The work of the Greater Manchester Hub particularly uses a Freirian approach that not only links education to experience but also uses experience and action to generate learning. The requirement for active engagement was also identified in the report of a European four country exploration of *Democratic Citizenship through Non-formal Education* (Forrester 2004). 'All four sites recognised the importance of being active in shaping understandings and practices of citizenship rather than being passive consumers of democratic products' (2004:26).

The self-directed nature of participation, as well as requiring that participants chose to take part requires that participants should also have control over the content and outcomes of the activity and educational process. This principle was central to the work of the ALAC pilot, who although initially working to a draft national curriculum for active citizenship laid down by the then Home Secretary David Blunkett (see Woodward 2004), the ALAC pilot, found the concept of a national curriculum for ALAC was restrictive and controlling (reminiscent of the core curriculum debates of the 1980s), counter to the ethos of ALAC, and unable to meet the individual needs and interests of the diverse groups we are working with. The ALAC hubs therefore argued for and then drew up a 'learning framework' that can be locally interpreted and negotiated by the participants (see [www. Take Part](http://www.TakePart.org)).

The third characteristic of the informal educator is that of holding and applying an ideological or critical perspective (Guba 1990).

Using a Critical Perspective

Informal education has a commitment to social justice and inclusion, and has as a key element in its intervention a consideration of power relations and empowerment. This can be traced historically. During the post Second World War welfare boom (1945 onwards), welfare services were provided holistically as a universal right reducing some of the role of the community and voluntary sector to provide welfare. During the Conservative era of the 1970s and 1980s welfare was delivered on a purely utilitarian basis to enable the maintenance of the market economy. Current discourses with regard to social policy have taken the Third Way approach, combining the role of the state and the market in relation to the meeting of needs. This continuation of Thatcherite market approaches has resulted in a targeted approach to the provision of services, primarily based on perceived needs and representations of particular recipient groups for example young people (Griffin, 2004). This has led to the perpetuation of exclusion for some groups who become isolated as the recipients of intervention, and the resentment of those groups who are not included in targeted programmes.

The critical perspective takes a structural analysis to causes of inequality and injustice, not one primarily based on the deficits of the individual. It therefore necessitates an approach where whole communities act in inclusive ways, which serve to bridge as opposed to bond and isolate others (Putnam, 2000). The role of the informal educator is key to enabling critical intelligence which will make a difference (Mayo and Thompson, 1995) both for workers and those with whom they work. Critical professionals therefore have a key role in enabling explorations of power, and any subsequent change, similar to Freire's (1972) notion of dialogue, conscientisation, praxis and transformation.

A critical perspective with a commitment to anti-discriminatory and inclusive practice necessitates reflexive practice on behalf of the informal educator, and action to challenge discrimination and reduce exclusion. The worker's role is to enable the identification of areas of exclusion and oppressions and facilitate action to be taken. As educators our role is therefore to enable self help for those with whom we work; difference and particular requirements are recognised, and action take on a rights based approach (Crimmens and Wales, 1999). This means that we may work as allies with individuals and groups where we do not share their experience but may share their perspective, and challenge and engage in critical dialogue with those whose perspective we do not share. In the case of the work of the ALAC pilot, although some specific groups of people, and particular issues were identified e.g. issues for migrant workers, and disabled service users, the nature of the work was holistic and self determined by many of the groups involved. For example, a School of Participation in Longsight Manchester worked together to develop greater local networking; a team of volunteers from a Healthy Living Network carried out an evaluation of the work of their team and the impact of the Network on local groups.

Informal Education and Citizen Engagement

As identified above informal education has distinctive characteristic elements with a clear enabling role for the worker. Informal educators therefore can have a key role in facilitating the work of volunteers, and active citizens. To enable this process it is important that the informal educator is aware of the contribution that this educational process is making to the participants, their communities, and democratic systems, what Putnam terms different types of capital. Putnam in his book 'Bowling Alone, the Collapse and Revival of American Community' (2000) discusses the process of the 'reweaving of the fabric of our communities' and identifies three categories of capital involved in modern societies: physical capital which refers to physical

objects; human capital which refers to properties of individuals; and social capital which refers to 'connections among individuals, social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' (2000:19). He argues that social capital and the elements involved in it has value in the same way that human and physical capital contribute towards productivity.

Much of the English governments focus on volunteering has been of the human capital type, attempting to enhance individual's employment potential, developing the 'tools and training that enhance individual productivity' (Putnam,2000:18). In addition many of the government programmes has been focussing on the contribution of citizens to civic society, and democratic processes. This was not identified by Putnam, and I have therefore added a category of state capital to recognise the type of voluntary activity which is primarily to engage volunteers and citizens in the work of the state.

The report of the European work into the 'non-formal education processes that underpin democratic activity' (Forrester, 2004:5) supports the three characteristics I have identified, as being key elements in the facilitation of democratic activity. Although focusing primarily on developing civic engagement, their participatory research with groups in Ireland, Spain, Bulgaria, and Romania identify key features. Firstly, the requirement for membership and forms of social participation, secondly, control and autonomy over their lives for example the ability to chose between different courses of action (capacities for action), and lastly they identify citizenship themes similar to those that I have grouped under 'using a critical and inclusive perspective'. In their case these included ' a commitment to human rights for all, commitment to equality and equity in a world of difference, belief in the importance of democratic principles as well as the importance of civil action' (2004:30/31). Importantly the reports findings identifies that the education would not have taken place without the facilitation of a worker, Forrester states that

‘citizenship activity and learning is unlikely to happen spontaneously’ (2004:34).

Mayo, also sees a key role for the worker

‘the oppressed and exploited ... need educators committed to processes of dialogue, between theoretical learning and experiential learning, between theory and reflective practice. And they need a critical understanding of the inter-relationships between ideological struggles, and material, economic, social, political and cultural struggles for transformation’ (1997:30).

Although I would dispute her statement that it is only the oppressed and exploited that require this critical engagement, her approach and the examples given in her work share much in common with the informal education approach.

Education is therefore an important prerequisite for citizenship. A liberal approach would be based upon the rights of individual citizens, and would encourage individual volunteering and as a result primarily develop human capital. Critical, collective education, however, such as that of the ALAC pilot has an important role in the enabling of social capital, a prerequisite of community engagement, citizenship and civil and civic engagement.

Not only is the type of education influential in the type of citizenship action and capital produced, conversely different types of capital are recognised as having differing impacts on education. Putnam stated that social capital enhanced education, ‘social connectedness boosts educational attainment’ (2000:306).

Informal Education in Practice, the Hattersley Neighbourhood Partnership Audit

In 2006, the Hattersley Neighbourhood Partnership community development worker, through conversations with representatives of local community groups, identified the need to evaluate the impact of the work of the Partnership and to make suggestions for the future, after the work of the Partnership had ended in 2007. A group of 8 women, all

volunteers with local groups and living within the area volunteered to become involved in what was to become an audit and evaluation of 31 local groups. They became a team who met on a regular monthly basis to decide how best to undertake the work, and who with. Although the work of the team was focussed on the audit, the meetings became a **space** to discuss many related local and national issues, including the reputation of the estate (the previous home of Myra Hindley), the role of volunteers, tenant management, national Government Policy and how to influence it, and how to organise and run events. The specific work of the audit focussed on different research approaches, ethics, accountability, how to report back, the importance of participation and inclusion, and analysing data. The role of the informal educator (me!) was to work with the community development worker, and the group to facilitate the process of learning, and support the team to undertake the work. **Space** was created for the team to discuss and debate issues, and to make decisions. The participants **volunteered** to take part in a process which was based on their **direct experience and needs**, and which they hoped would have benefit to themselves and their community and groups. The informal educator was able to enable the team to draw on their local knowledge, networks and skills, so building their confidence and capacity to undertake work in the future. **Critical engagement** was apparent at a number of levels. Discussions about who should be involved and how, enabled the team to identify individuals who might not be served by groups; this resulted in the undertaking of interviews with a sample of 40 individuals who did not attend groups. Issues of power and participation were discussed in relation to the work of the Partnership, and in relation to Government initiatives, such as Tenant Management in which several of the group were becoming nationally involved. An illustration of informal education was apparent when the team, divided into pairs, were undertaking the collation of their questionnaire data. One answer was rather unclear, through a system of coding the team member who entered

the answer was identifiable, and was able to clarify the answer made. Through this process the group were able to identify the possible power that an external researcher would have exerted if they had interpreted this answer.

The team have been involved in the ALAC work at a regional level by participating in hub events, and presenting their work at a work shop of the regional launch of the ALAC learning Framework in November 2006. At a national level they have taken part in national ALAC events, and have built their confidence to participate in other consultation events held by the Dept. of Communities and Local Government, directly contributing to civic engagement and state capital. At a community and civil society level they have engendered social capital by influenced the future design of support and funding to local groups. As a result of the work one of the participants will be entering the Dip.HE in Youth and Community work at MMU.

Summary

This article has identified the key characteristics of the informal education approach used by the ALAC facilitators. As shown in the example above informal education can make an important contribution to human and social and state capital, and what Mayo (1997) terms transformation.

The key elements are that those involved are actively participating and that they engage in the process of learning within groups. Wenger (2006) refers to this as a 'social theory of learning', within these groups, participants engage in processes which enable the development of the individual (human capital, or the process of 'learning as becoming'), drawn on the communities within which they engage ('learning as belonging'), and learning from experience and practice. The work of the ALAC hubs have identified that in addition to the three processes identified by Wenger that the educators have been involved in facilitating the fourth area or characteristic of informal

education that of using a critical perspective.

Facilitated informal education has been shown here to be important for the fostering of learning environments, and so the development of the potential of empowering education. This article has made the case for the continuing role of informal educators, to develop critical thinking and human, social as well as state capital, essential elements to complement and counter current government social policy initiatives such as Together We Can and Take Part the successor to the ALAC pilot. The role of the informal educator in creating space, for self determined and inclusive work with groups will enable the continued development of vibrant, active and challenging citizens and communities.

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Participatory Approaches Evaluating Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC)

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Abstract

ALAC was based upon a community development approach. Given ALAC's participatory principles the evaluation was designed to be similarly participatory. Together with the hubs the aim was to share critically reflexive self-evaluations, developing shared learning on an on-going basis. There was, of course, regular monitoring, documenting the outcomes for the 270 participants involved. But the key challenges were to reflect upon the wider impacts upon individuals and families, in terms of their empowerment, together with their impact in turn, as active citizens participating in service planning and delivery issues. Most importantly, the evaluation process involved the use of participative tools to reflect upon ALAC's impact, in terms of the promotion of community cohesion and social solidarity, within and between communities, linking the local with the global within an overall framework of values emphasising equalities and the pursuit of social justice.

The background

As other contributions to this Special Issue demonstrate, ALAC started from the principles that active learning for active citizenship should build upon existing models of good practice across the voluntary and community sectors, working in partnership with different forms of public provision. The hubs were to be located 'where it is known that community based groups in partnership with others are able and willing to initiate new work on active learning for active

citizenship'. (Woodward, 2004.6). Active learning for active citizenship for adults should be firmly rooted within civil society itself, it was argued, rather than being simply provided for citizens, as public policy should deem fit. And there was commitment, right from the outset, to addressing issues of sustainability, active learning for active citizenship being conceptualised as an on-going process of learning and reflection, within and between partners within civil society and between civil society and the state. The hubs would 'embrace projects working towards extending democratic activities within civil society as well as offering educational and partnership opportunities for government agencies' (Woodward, 2004. 11). ALAC started by recognising and valuing local expertise, knowledge and experience and building upon these, developing partnerships for the longer term. This was a community development-based approach, working towards empowerment, supporting organisations and groups within communities, and pursuing agendas for equalities and social justice.

This implied that **the learning process itself should be participatory and empowering.** Citizenship education was to start from local people's own perceptions of their issues and their learning priorities, negotiated in dialogue rather than imposed or parachuted in from outside. In common with the Neighbourhood Learning Centres to be developed by the DfES, the hubs were to be local people's provision – *their* provision, based in accessible premises, with a variety of

programmes and activities tailored to local people's interests, driven by the priorities and aspirations of the learners themselves. In summary, then, learner participation was to be central at every stage in the process.

Whilst the forms and levels of ALAC provision have varied enormously, in practice, these were rooted in a number of shared principles and approaches. Starting from people's own priorities and needs, ALAC emphasised the importance of experiential learning, processes of critical reflection and dialogue rooted in people's own experiences, both individually and collectively, through collective action. This approach to learning draws upon the methods and approaches developed by the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire (Freire, 1972) facilitating the development of critical consciousness and understanding, through cycles of action, reflection and then further action, informed by these processes of reflection. In this model of learning, defined in terms of collective and critical reflection and dialogue, learners and learning providers learn together. Freire's ideas have, of course, been central to debates on adult learning and the development of critical consciousness, as these have been developed and applied in Britain, and in popular education and social movements globally (Merrifield, 2000).

To summarise then, ALAC was based upon a community development approach. The emphasis was upon working democratically and learning collectively, though organisations and groups in communities. ALAC focused upon community empowerment, through learning, enabling organisations and groups to enhance the effectiveness of their strategies for social change. Through increasing their knowledge and their critical understanding of power structures and decision-making processes, ALAC participants would be empowered to intervene, and where necessary work towards changing these, in the pursuit of the values of equalities and social justice.

Given the participatory principles underpinning ALAC, the evaluation process was designed to be similarly participatory. The external evaluation team, based at the Centre for Urban and Community Research at Goldsmiths, University of London, worked in collaboration with the ALAC hubs and their participants and with the ALAC Steering Committee. The evaluation process was carried out as a continuing process of sharing the learning and critically reflecting upon experiences, together, through a series of visits, workshops, seminars and conferences. This was intended to facilitate the consolidation of lessons learnt from these varying experiences, to inform the policy-making process. As the Interim Evaluation Report pointed out 'The approach is participative in accordance with the participative approach to Active Learning for Active Citizenship overall. Together with the hubs, the aim is to share critically reflexive self-evaluations, developing shared learning between the hubs on an on-going basis' (ALAC, 2005). The evaluation process itself became a valuable part of the learning, and the hubs themselves very much appreciated the opportunities to share these reflections, exploring common themes as well as differences of experience. It was particularly relevant that ALAC participants shared in these reflections and actively contributed to the final evaluation workshop.

Going beyond formal monitoring procedures

As a publicly funded programme, ALAC hubs were, of course, required to complete regular monitoring returns, with details of the courses and learning provision that they have offered, the number of learners and their learning outcomes. In summary, these outcomes included the achievements of over one thousand, three hundred learners who participated in ALAC programmes. Of these:

- **270 participants gained accreditation and went on to further and higher education**
- **292 participants attained**

accreditation and

- **22 participants were on the way to achieving this**
- **161 participants had significantly improved their employment prospects**

Most importantly, ALAC, participants have gone on to become more active in their communities, and in public life more generally, as school governors, as local representatives, members of service user forums and as organisers in the community sector.

Whilst these statistics provide the raw data for monitoring and evaluation, however, they are, inevitably, less adequate in more qualitative terms. This summary simply sets the context for the discussion of the more qualitative accounts that illustrate the key findings, providing evidence to support the conclusions and policy recommendations.

Addressing the challenges of more participatory approaches to evaluation

Monitoring and evaluating individual learning outcomes posed no particular problems for the hubs, given the range of their experiences, including experiences of accounting for learning and teaching programmes funded by Learning and Skills Councils and by the Higher Education Funding Council. The hubs had experience, for example, of recording the learning aims and learning outcomes of each learning session on particular courses, with portfolios of evidence to document the progress of each individual learner. These records provided more detail, adding to the monitoring procedures that were formally required for the hubs' regular returns to the Civil Renewal Unit at the Home Office (Subsequently moved to the Department of Communities and Local Government).

Participatory monitoring and evaluation tools were also used and learners kept logs and diaries, in many cases, recording their learning and these provided further evidence. The hubs were, in

addition, experienced in tracking each individual learner's subsequent progression. Written records were supplemented in many cases with other forms of recording, including the use of photographs and video tapes, recording learning events as well as including learners' reflections on these. The impact of ALAC programmes on individual citizens was relatively unproblematic to evaluate, then, taking account of the wider multiplier impacts as well as those that had been planned and anticipated, impacts in terms of individual learners' subsequent progression routes and impacts in terms, for example, of the encouragement given to their families and friends, as the following example illustrates.

Impacts on individuals and their families in the West Midlands/ Black Country:

The impact of the work of the West Midlands hub on the lives of individual women, their families and communities has been impressive. This was, at least in part, attributed to the careful consideration that had been given to addressing the barriers facing participants,

The first residential was a big concern for me. (It was) the first time I had ever left my family overnight and in a strange place on my own. I had to do a lot of preparation – a lot of practical organising; food, school clothes, washing etc. I then threw myself into it and thought ‘if the worst comes to the worst I can always leave and go home!’! But it was great – and it changed our family relationships in ways I didn't think about (before)– my husband spent time with the kids on his own, took them out for a meal – never done that before – changed his relationship the kids – closer. They can't wait for me to go on the next one and go to Brussels for 2 nights. They keep reminding me to sort out the passport and all that'.

Women discussed the ways in which they had become more assertive at home ‘taking on being bullied by my son’ for example. By providing a safe and reflexive space, women were able to learn from each other, increasing their understandings of difference and diversity.

On an individual level, participants from the West Midlands hub have gone on to be more ambitious regarding their job prospects, reassessing their skills, going on to further learning, and being more active citizens in a range of ways: - by supporting others, being more active in faith based activities, becoming representatives, volunteers, community organisers and influencing service provision.

As a group, hub participants have also gone on to develop IMPACT PLUS. This is a space where women can reflect on their active citizenship in their communities and continue the hub’s work by training as trainers. In this way, citizenship themed courses and workshops can continue to be provided to women and Black and Minority Ethnic communities in the West Midlands.

Tracking the wider impacts

The wider multiplier effects on communities and on public policy and service delivery were more problematic to monitor and evaluate, however, and there were fewer models upon which to build. This indicates a wider challenge for evaluation studies more generally, rather than representing a challenge that was in any way specific to ALAC. It was for this reason that the Evaluation Team worked with the hubs to develop the ALAC Evaluation Framework. This was devised to collect more qualitative data through particular case studies, selected to illustrate the range of ALAC hubs’ initiatives and approaches with diverse groups, organisations and communities. Once drafted, the Evaluation Framework was road tested with participants from different hubs, who came together for a day event in Sheffield to share their perspectives on ALAC’s impact on them and their families, and to track the wider ripple

effects on service planning, service delivery and policy. Using participatory methods, this day event also focused upon the most problematic aspects of the evaluation, the wider impacts in terms of social solidarity and community cohesion.

In addition, the Evaluation Team worked with the hubs to develop ways of triangulating the evidence about the wider impacts of learning programmes. For example, evidence would be sought from service providers and other relevant professionals and policy makers, to explore their views. Were individual citizens speaking up more effectively in their view, were user for a becoming more effective, and were services being planned and delivered in more appropriate ways as a result? The following example illustrates this aspect of ALAC’s outcomes in more detail.

Training professionals to work in partnership with service users and their carers

Working across statutory boundaries and bringing about a change in user involvement culture has been the hallmark of the ALAC South West’s ‘Speaking Up’ project. This innovative partnership between Devon Social Services, Health authorities and the voluntary sector (Exeter Council for Voluntary Service and their partners) has been instrumental in improving the practice and broadening the scope of user involvement.

The involvement of carers to train public sector staff provides an illustration in point. A need was identified within Devon Social Services to provide learning and development opportunities for public sector staff to help them understand carers’ issues. It was also felt that this training would be more effective if carers delivered it, and that the voluntary sector was best placed to act as broker to train and support the carers who elected to take part.

The ALAC-funded development worker based at Exeter Council for Voluntary Service worked with a generic group of carers who were

enthusiastic about the opportunity offered to them to begin to improve the relationship between carers and public sector staff in Devon. With support and guidance, the carers themselves designed the training package, and other carers who were unable to attend the training sessions made a 'talking heads' film. The impact that this training had on the public sector staff was reflected in the extremely positive training evaluation feedback, and the carers' effectiveness and motivation in making their voice heard in such an innovative way encouraged them to continue with further consultation and involvement activities. This learning and development programme has brought together not only different social service departments, but also health staff, thus introducing a more fully joined-up approach to the future design and development of services to carers.

As the Interim Report pointed out more generally, however, although there were encouraging signs that health and social service providers, for example, were valuing users and carers' enhanced capacities to participate, this did not, of itself, in any way guarantee that these voices would be effectively heard. This remained to be seen. Since that report was produced in April 2005, there was further evidence to demonstrate that citizens can indeed make a difference in particular instances. The extent to which this is the case, however, remains a question for the longer term. As the Power Commission (JRFC, 2006) has so forcefully pointed out, there is evidence that the causes of citizen disengagement include a widespread lack of conviction that getting involved does actually make a difference. If active citizenship is to be promoted successfully on a national scale, this is an issue for policy-makers and service providers to address.

Exploring the wider impacts

Similarly, the Evaluation Teams worked with the hubs, sharing reflections on ways of evaluating the impact in terms of strengthening civil society, more generally, promoting greater mutual

understanding, community cohesion and social solidarity. Like the related concept, 'social capital', the concept of 'community cohesion' has been contested, from differing perspectives. Community cohesion agendas have been criticised, for example, for fitting into wider approaches that imply that there are, or at least could be, unitary communities, without taking sufficient account of diversity and difference, including differences based upon structural inequalities. Government discourses in these fields, it has been argued in addition, open the way for increasing surveillance, with tendencies towards a new moral authoritarianism (Baron, 2004).

The hubs shared reflections on these issues and debates, just as they shared reflections on the nature and relevance of related debates on the notion of social capital. Social capital has been criticised on a number of similar grounds, for lacking conceptual rigour (Foley and Edwards, 1999, Fine, 2000) and for serving as an instrument of top-down policy. Social capital, as this has been conceptualised by Coleman and Putnam, has been promoted as a way of providing unthreatening solutions, it has been argued, tackling problems of deprivation and social cohesion without addressing underlying structural inequalities in terms of class, race or gender (Baron, 2000). Bourdieu's concept of social capital, in contrast, focuses upon the ways in which those with the most social capital to start with, use this to re-enforce their existing social advantages, thereby reproducing social inequalities more generally (Bourdieu, 1986). Either way then, the notion of social capital would seem potentially problematic if not actually damaging, in the context of social justice agendas.

Whilst both sets of criticisms have relevance, it has been argued, social capital can be relevant in alternative ways, however (Bruegel, 2005). These alternative approaches were identified as having particular relevance for ALAC. Solidaristic networks can provide the basis for disadvantaged and oppressed groups to challenge inequalities,

and these networks can provide resources for the benefit of wider communities. Bruegel uses a case study of women's community action via New Deal for Communities in East Manchester, for example, illustrating the ways in which women challenged a particular planning issue, enabling the space in question to be used to provide facilities for the whole community, including local youth (Bruegel, 2005). Given that the notions of social capital and community cohesion have both been so contested, then, the evaluation of ALAC's impact needed to be approached with some caution, bearing these critical debates in mind.

Community cohesion and social solidarity have emerged as key issues within ALAC in a number of differing ways. The following example from South Yorkshire provides an illustration in point. Because of its location, in a building shared with other community organisations, the South Yorkshire hub was able to maximise partnership working with the Northern Refugee Centre, in particular. In addition to running ESOL courses with a strong 'citizenship' flavour, it was supporting a new Somali group: Sheffield Link Action, as well as working closely with two Sheffield neighbourhood groups, one based in a New Deal for Communities (NDC) area, and the other drawing on members from a local mosque. The NDC group had already taken part in a WEA 'globalisation' course but wanted to continue to meet with a more practical orientation. The hub encouraged research into the impact of a proposed supermarket in the area, which led to a wider discussion of food production chains and food miles. The group went on to consider international migration patterns, refugees and asylum issues and as a result, some members became ESOL volunteers with a local support group.

Overall, then, the hub was concerned to undertake a range of activities and to evaluate their effectiveness and value for both the participants and their communities, with particular emphasis upon promoting social solidarity within and between communities in

the context of globalisation. As it has already been pointed out, however, there are challenges inherent in evaluating the long-term impact of programmes to promote increased social solidarity, challenges that are in no way confined to ALAC. Meeting these challenges remains a continuing task of considerable importance, given the crucial nature of the issues involved in the current context, both locally and globally.

It was particularly important to take account of a wide range of perspectives here, and to draw out the implications from ALAC's experiences and reflections on these experiences, linking local issues and interests into the wider global picture. The views of umbrella organisations and federations of voluntary and community organisations were sought, for example, to explore these differing perspectives. Here too, this approach was road tested via a half-day workshop with refugee and other community based organisations in South Yorkshire. As it has already been pointed out, this direct involvement of ALAC participants was a key feature of the evaluation at every stage, from developing evaluation mechanisms to contributing to the final evaluation workshop.

What next?

Together these examples illustrate the range of perspectives that have been taken into account, developing strategies to monitor and evaluate the impact of ALAC initiatives, on individual citizens and on voluntary and community sector organisations and groups, strengthening citizen participation and promoting community cohesion. Sharing their reflections on their experiences, the hubs collectively came to the view that these wider perspectives were key. ALAC was, they concluded, far more than the sum of its parts. There had been particular added value in sharing experiences reflexively, setting these within the wider framework, nationally and indeed internationally. Having so valued these opportunities to work together as part of a national programme, the hubs decided to continue this, for the longer term, through the establishment of a continuing network:

- To continue to share experiences and best practice
- To promote ALAC's messages, to share best practice, developed regionally, between regions, nationally and internationally.
- To provide training and support for the benefit of providers as well as learners
- And to continue to press for the public policies and the accompanying resources required for the promotion of Active Learning for Active Citizenship.

Rather than posing one approach to active learning for active citizenship against another the hubs identified this as a journey, an on-going process, moving from individuals' interests and concerns to wider perspectives, linking the local with the global within an overall framework of values emphasising equalities and the pursuit of social justice agendas. The learning from these experiences can now be shared through the recently established network 'Take Part' and through the Learning Framework (Take Part, 2006) that was published and disseminated more widely as a resource for all those concerned with community-based active learning for active citizenship (REF). As the Evaluation Report's final recommendations concluded, however, this would require continuing commitment backed by the provision of resources, if the lessons from ALAC were to be taken forward on a sustainable basis for the longer term.

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The Take Part Learning Framework and Networks

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Take Part Network

Abstract

Networking is at the core of the Take Part learning framework and its principles inspired the Active Learning for Active Citizenship programme (ALAC). ALAC was organised as a set of regional hubs, which were constituted by local groups working on issues of active learning in civil society. Dialogue, reflection and networking were inherent in these hubs' activities at all levels of the programme. This paper elaborates the role of networking in Take Part, in particular, its contribution to increase social capital and community empowerment.

Networking as a human practice

Networks are very old forms of human practice, from tribes to the origins of modern cities, however today they are adopting new forms, enabled by new information and communication technologies. Networks are everywhere; it is difficult to imagine collective action without networking activities. They play a significant role in building relationships that affect debates, decisions and actions, and have the potential to generate knowledge, understanding and action in democratic process. Networks have inherent flexibility and adaptability in order to survive in a fast-changing environment, and are attractive tools to produce social outcomes in community based processes (Castells 2001 p.2).

To think about networks is to think about processes. It is to answer questions like: how do networks emerge? What is their structure? How do they evolve? These answers should give us the opportunity to further understand issues like

participatory democracy. As we move from link to link in networks we have the potential to see society as a complex social network (Barabási 2002 p.7).

Networks can be constructed as interconnected nodes or hubs. An essential property of social networks is connectivity underpinned by effective communications and distributed structures, which allow members to shape a sense of purpose and collective identity (Barabási 2002 p.56). In social networks it is also pertinent to understand the expectations and values generated in the multiple cross-cutting sets of relations sustained by the dynamics within the network settings. In particular it is important to observe the relationship between social networks and collective action (Tindall 2007 p. 160).

Using these basic ideas about networks, this paper explores the networking processes producing and implementing the 'Take Part' learning framework in relation to, firstly, spaces to build new identities and tackle community issues; secondly, spaces for lifelong learning in a mobile society, and thirdly, spaces to build social capital and community empowerment.

Take Part as Networking

Citizenship, in its connotation of belonging, creates spaces for interaction and consequently develops relationships, associations and collective actions. It is in these spaces that social networks create different organisational forms. The initial conditions of the Take Part learning

framework were provided by the Active Learning for Active Citizenship programme (ALAC). ALAC's initial report ((Woodward, 2004) set out seven regional hubs aiming to recognise good practices around the country. The hubs were determined by the existing community based work localised in local and regional areas, which gave several contexts, focuses, approaches and methodologies for these networking. The hubs dynamics have enabled action and interaction by hub coordinators, programme participants and local people. ALAC's emphasis was on active learning involving people to improve knowledge, understanding and practices for active citizenship.

ALAC was looking for people doing things interacting with others, reflecting and adopting a critical perspective of community processes. These processes imply to learn actively in dialogues at the experiential level. Thus the ALAC participants quickly began to learn more about themselves, from each other and from experience elsewhere. This brought about a natural way of networking activities for the learners, tutors and for the hub coordinators. These activities are constrained by the values and principles of the Take Part learning framework.

The hub coordinators were responsible for building a national framework from their individual geographical reality. For this they held, and are still holding, regular conversations, workshops, discussions, conferences in a great variety of approaches. This provides a natural platform to update regional activities, reinforcing mutual beliefs, methodologies and approaches for informal and active learning processes in communities, to improve knowledge, understanding and practices in civil and civic engagement.

As essential characteristic of the network structure is that the hubs have autonomy building their own spaces. Originally, the ALAC hubs were seven, but each of these hubs were

free to initiate local, sub-regional and regional connections to further in communities of all kinds awareness-raising processes and the Take Part framework in general. ALAC hubs were set up with a clear autonomy and in exercising this autonomy they have created different models of communication to share the learning processes at all levels. These are models and processes that are enriching with great variety the national approach. But this variety is framed by Take Part core values: *social justice, co-operation, participation and equality with diversity* which are transmitted aligned with the following learning principles: *Learner centred, active and reflective learning experience and essentially community based* (Take Part National Framework 2006). Focus on collective action that has been made explicit and formally embraced by the constituent elements of the Take Part initiative from the very beginning.

Network theory gives an exceptional role to hubs (Barabási 2002 p.63). Hubs are special elements; they dominate the structure of all networks. Hubs create short paths between the components or nodes constituting communities at all the structural levels of society. ALAC created hubs to make *visible* community based activities in active learning for active citizenship. The hubs shared, and continue to share, experiences and methodologies in delivering learning to adults in different parts of the country. Their role was to break institutional barriers, take opportunities in national events and evolve values and expectations about adult learning, as a process of continuous change. Hubs enjoy a spontaneity and freedom of action that is more difficult to witness in more established institutions. The learning process was an important outcome which was enabled and canalised by the hubs structure. A steering committee was set up and the hubs' coordinators started a process of sharing expectations and achievements. Very soon it identified the geographical and methodological diversity that could enrich the Take Part learning framework. This diversity was maintained and celebrated at the various events that were organised in different parts of the country by its members.

Spaces to build new identities and tackle community issues

Identity is one of the essential elements of the citizenship dimension (Heater 99). It is a citizenship in which the construction of identity is directed towards constructing meaning in community spaces (Mendiweso-Bendek 2002). Identity is recognised, defined, described in the dialogical nature of the human condition, where we recognise ourselves and others in permanent process of dialog (Taylor, 1989, second chapter).

The Take Part learning framework offers a series of experiences in which individuals in active learning processes, interacting, reflecting, debating with others, recognise themselves and others. These experiences create new collective identities, orientated by the purposes of networks, forums, groups etc. For example in two hubs, learners in mental health forums have adopted an active role and developed new identities *as members contributing to a collective purpose*. They were working to build their confidence and to improve their skills and competences to have effective participation in forums organised together by local carers and users (see South West and East Midlands hubs in the Take Part Framework).

Participative processes forged identities and understandings for the learners and the organisations involved. These processes were brought about through work in safe spaces. Hub activities in different locations generated a realisation that safe spaces were needed wherein learners, activists and tutors can also raise and address difficult identity issues like religion, migration, gender. Most of the hubs were in similar situations with different realities and groups, and became apparent that a similar space and process were needed at the national level, where the hubs could get together on a regular footing to discuss practice and problems (issues- approaches) amongst themselves, and develop their collective identity.

Space for lifelong learning in a mobile society

Adama Ouane, director of UNESCO's Institute for lifelong learning claims:

“The goal of any lifelong learning is to achieve the effective exercise to achieve quality and empowering education. The UNESCO's four pillars of lifelong learning: “learning to be, learning to do, learning to know and learning to live together are more important than ever”. (Ouane 2006 p.1)

Take Part activities have engaged with policy developments like the current policy of the UK government towards lifelong learning which revolved around a very specific skills axes and were, in their original conception, of little practical use for cultivating and supporting the development of citizenship learning. This situation became a campaigning point for the regions and the national network from an early point in its development and pressure was placed on the steering committee to discuss and develop strategies which might improve the prospect for improving the national and local positions.

Training for long life learning is a continuously developing area within Take Part. The Manchester Hub is producing learning material for training trainers; the North West Hub has been piloting training work for trainers in relation to active learning for active citizenship issues; the East Midlands Hub has set up a training programme in participatory evaluation and the Black Country Hub has a programme for engaging women in the processes of democracy and empowerment. As one hub's experience matures then the experience is shared and other parts of the network can set up events in their localities using the material produced in different parts of the country.

Part of the Take Part experience has involved creating spaces to explore and develop knowledge and initiatives related to migration. Within localities several informal mini networks have been set up to promote active learning for active citizenship; these have grown from a

natural need for mutual support amongst project workers and agencies active in communities. Other networks are springing up around related issues, often engaging with new and urgent issues, well in advance of government concerns. One such space is the citizenship work around migrants.

Adama Ouane also says:

“In the context of trans-cultural mobility migrants and the host community have to confront themselves with several different ‘others’ even if there is a constant process of being reconstructed and reconstituted, by the scope, intensity and frequency of the encounter with others, to assimilate, to integrate and to adapt” (Ouane, A. 2006 p.3).

This area is fraught with confusion and potential conflict. People are not really aware about the legal entitlements of EU citizens to work in any other member state, local and nation leaders, and media, mix up migrant and immigrant issues as though they meant the same thing; it is difficult to find forums for discussing and debating this issue properly, whilst, understandably, money is rushing forward in uncoordinated ways to deal with the threat of exploitation, criminal activity, extreme pressure on local schools and health services as well as growing strains on local community cohesion and manifestations of xenophobia and extreme right wing political agitation. Take Part has identified a role within the new networks that are emerging: information, research, the provision of education and learning spaces, mini projects and facilitation between providers, trades unions, projects and those at the centre is already a growing feature of the Take Part work in some areas.

Working with migrants and their host communities often leads to combined work with refugees and asylum seekers. These are all ‘hot’ subjects, politically speaking, and ones which do need dealing with in measured and professional ways to avoid larger problems later. Take Part has been able to work with groups around intercultural themes, enabling cultural

exchanges to take place and for better understanding to grow. Similarly, practical developments, such as working with local groups to build and manage websites and local radio programmes have helped to keep refugee and migrant communities in touch with the rest of their diaspora. Similarly once information about this sort of work is disseminated people from the host communities want to learn more about what is going on, and many people want to inquire more deeply into these programmes that are currently provided for them. This in itself leads to wider networking for Take Part. European associations are well established and they do influence policy making as a consequence of their stability and integrity. The Take Part network is in a process to engage itself with these wider networks so as to secure access to good practice, successful initiative, policy improvements and richer approaches to learning than those currently on offer in England alone. Notable amongst the European networks are the EAEA (the European association for the education of adults, SOLIDAR which campaigns around labour issues and human rights and NECE (networking European Citizenship education) a highly developed network centred on the Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung (BPB) in Berlin.

A contribution to Social Capital

Networks are one of the contributors to society’s social capital (Halpern 2005 p. 26). Take Part is aware of the inequalities in the social structure and works to remove barriers created by existing power structures. Learning play essential role in strengthening the civil society. Organised communities within civil society are to large degree self organised, but do need external support for their consolidation, and there is evidence that those communities that have more resources and organisation obtain more from the state and private enterprises. It follows that it is necessary to help those who have less resources to improve their skill and competences (Walzer 2002 p.42).

The inherent flexibility and adaptability of the networks can add value to the processes of social development and increase the chances of reaching the dispossessed and excluded, improving local organisations that make a valuable contribution to a growing social capital and cohesion.

“We live in globalising world. That means that all of us, consciously or not, depend on each other....Living in a globalising world means being aware of the pain, misery and suffering of countless people whom we will never meet in person” (Bauman 2001).

Although the concept of social capital is often quick silver in character there are many concrete examples documented in the active learning for active citizenship process that demonstrate real advances locally in terms of social capital. Take Part can point to successful work with women which has led to stronger local communities, greater civic and civil engagement and more confidence, knowledge and skills available for local use. Also, its work with migrant workers has enabled them to make a contribution to their communities through the development of networks and a better understanding within the host communities of the need, benefit and value of work migration. Diverse groups of immigrants and refugees are able to support each other and contribute locally to communities by volunteering in local schemes; people with disabilities have been able to develop new skills and make a strong contribution to improving local services. The Take Part approach helps to connect principles and values with experiential learning activities designed by and with community groups from their own experiences and expectations.

Conclusion

The UK annual Citizenship Survey of 2005 (2006) has shown us that only 49% of the population feels that they exercise any control or influence over local democratic processes. Thus there has never been a greater need for active citizenship, and since the complexities are so much greater so there is the need to create space

and time for doing and learning; for active learning. The Take Part Network is promoting a national Learning Framework which offers advice, models of good practice, proven approaches, support and training for those agencies and organisations wishing to promote a healthier democracy in their localities.

The Take Part Network is currently exercising its campaigning role in raising awareness of the issues and problems and urging major funding councils, principally the learning and skills council (LSC), to identify ways and means to support work in adult learning.

It is increasingly clear that justice in a modern democracy depends not only on its “Basic structure but also on the qualities and the attitudes of its citizens: for example, their sense of identity, their ability to tolerate and work together with others who are different from themselves, their desire to participate in the political process in order to promote the public good and hold political authorities accountable” (Kymlicka, W.: 2002)

Active citizenship is the very core of community empowerment. Empowerment is a process underpinned by people’s learning. The learning process of being active citizens is produced in our moment -to- moment activities transcending espoused theories. It is not enough to give people information they also need instruments for action in their operational domain (Espejo 2000). Active citizenship implies a dialogical process where we recognise the others; where we move from the I to the We. Active learning assumes an experiential process which is collective in nature. The Take Part learning framework for active learning for active citizenship, with its underlying values and commitments, is a vehicle to strength democracy, creating spaces for learning and networking activities as essential spaces to recognise ourselves and the ‘others’ and being effective in building the public domain.

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