CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

SOCIAL JUSTICE DISSENT

IDEOLOGY EQUALITY DIALOGUE

DEMOCRACY CRITICAL CREATIVITY

POLITICS & POLICY LIBERATION AUTONOMY

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community Engagement: A Critical Guide for Practitioners

Mae Shaw and Jim Crowther

Acknowledgments

Contents

1

Introduction

The motivation for this critical guide to community engagement comes primarily from our experience over many years as teachers on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes of community education. These programmes have historically been validated both by the university and the appropriate professional body, so they are firmly located at the interface between academic and vocational standards; between theory and practice. We have found that these different, sometimes contradictory, demands create a productive dynamic which has been at the core of our teaching, our writing and our relationships with the broader field of practice. We consider that an engagement with significant theoretical frameworks, an awareness of important historical traditions and an empathetic identification with the social reality of marginalized groups are all necessary in order to practise critical community engagement.

One way in which we sometimes characterise this dynamic relationship is through the notion of 'theorising practice'. Except in the most instrumental of cases, practitioners don't put theory into practice in any straightforward way. They put themselves into practice! This suggests a need to think critically and carefully about what role community engagement fulfils in particular times and places.

It also means that practitioners need to develop the confidence, skills and knowledge to apply that understanding in practice. The role of practitioners in seeking to make creative and critical connections – between personal experience and political structures; macro-level decisions and micro-level consequences; the potential for personal agency within constraints of power – should be a core feature of professional practice as well as of academic study. The following chapters have been designed to work as one-off, freestanding sessions, or as a relatively coherent educational programme. It goes without saying that they should be modified to suit particular situations as required. They are intended to open up discussion rather than to stifle or close it down. In some cases further efforts will be required by practitioners to make them accessible and relevant to specific circumstances or groups. Above all, they are intended to develop clarity about, and consistency between, educational values, purposes and roles.

Finally, at the heart of this project is the idea of the practitioner as an active educational agent, rather than simply as an agent of policy. This position necessarily creates tensions and dilemmas that need to be confronted, and some of these are presented here. In particular, it requires practitioners to engage strategically and creatively with the politics of policy, whilst also attempting to enlarge the democratic spaces available to communities. We hope this critical guide will enable people to do this more systematically and more collectively.

Mae Shaw, University of Edinburgh
Jim Crowther, University of Edinburgh
(jim.crowther@ed.ac.uk)
May 2017

Chapter 1: Thinking politically

Introduction

Community engagement is generally assumed to operate for the good of various kinds of communities, but it's not as straightforward as that. Thinking politically about community engagement means delving beneath the surface claims it makes for itself to ask questions about what it's really *for*. What is its purpose? This means looking at how it's funded, for what and why? Who is considered to be 'the community' and who is not? Who benefits and who loses out? Engagement on whose terms? How can communities operate within these circumstances to shift the balance of power in their favour? These are all questions that raise political issues.

The contradictions of practice

Community Engagement occurs at the interface between the state and civil society; at the point where representative and participatory democracy meet. This can cause tensions for practitioners when policy priorities appear to determine both how, and on what issues, practitioners can engage with communities. This sometimes contradictory position is represented here.

Practitioners are caught in the middle of having to manage these different and sometimes competing demands (see chapter 5). Policy frameworks (local, national or international) can either enable or impede real democratic participation. At the same time, when policy is challenged by the democratic demands of communities, mutually beneficial change can occur.

This terrain should be seen as an 'incubator for politics': the site in which grievances are generated and opposition organised; where local activists and politicians develop; where struggles for social justice grow and recede, and where inter-communal conflicts can erupt and be resolved.

Demands of Policy

Community Engagement Practitioner

Demands of Communities

Task Bearing in mind the competing demands described above, consider the following statements and tick either 'agree' or 'disagree' for each statement. Do this individually, then in pairs or small groups, noting any areas of disagreement. Are any of these in tension with or in contradiction to each other? How would you change or qualify any of the statements? How would you grade them in importance to you?

Community engagement is about				
working with the community	AGREE		DISAGREE	
being involved in an educational process	AGREE		DISAGREE	
solving local problems	AGREE		DISAGREE	
helping people do more for themselves	AGREE		DISAGREE	
community participation	AGREE		DISAGREE	
community empowerment	AGREE		DISAGREE	
social change	AGREE		DISAGREE	
creating access to resources	AGREE		DISAGREE	
responding to local needs	AGREE		DISAGREE	
developing employability skills	AGREE		DISAGREE	
responding to policy	AGREE		DISAGREE	
improving social mobility	AGREE		DISAGREE	

Ideologies in context

Community engagement is always contextual: it happens in particular places at particular times, in particular circumstances. That means it has to be related to the bigger picture, and especially to ideologies that may be at work at any given time.

Any short or single-sentence definition of ideology is impossible, but there are some features all ideologies share:

- A worldview, including what constitutes human nature, the purpose of political activity and the nature of economic activity
- A critique of existing socio-economic systems
- A vision of the future – the ideal society which its followers should strive to achieve
- A strategy and set of methods which should be used to achieve the ideal society.

Ideological framing involves shaping the terms of political and social debate by defining the problem, the causes and the solutions. Different stories (or narratives) can be told about the same set of facts ie What is the problem? Who is to blame? How can positive change be effected? All modern ideologies also have a view about the role of the individual, the state, the market, the family (see chapter 6).

Ideologies create different stories (or narratives) which can be told about the same set of facts, or emphasise a different set of facts which are deemed more significant. Ideologies can also lead to 'blind spots': things that are left out of the picture because they are assumed to be beyond question. For example, hostile attacks on people in receipt of public welfare benefits, commonly but not exclusively linked to versions of Neoliberalism and Conservatism, will rarely point to the way in which corporate and fiscal welfare policies provide much greater benefits for the well off. These different types of state support are effectively excluded from public debate and decision-making. Similarly, different ways of ideologically framing economic migration and refugees – both negative and positive – have an influence on policy responses.
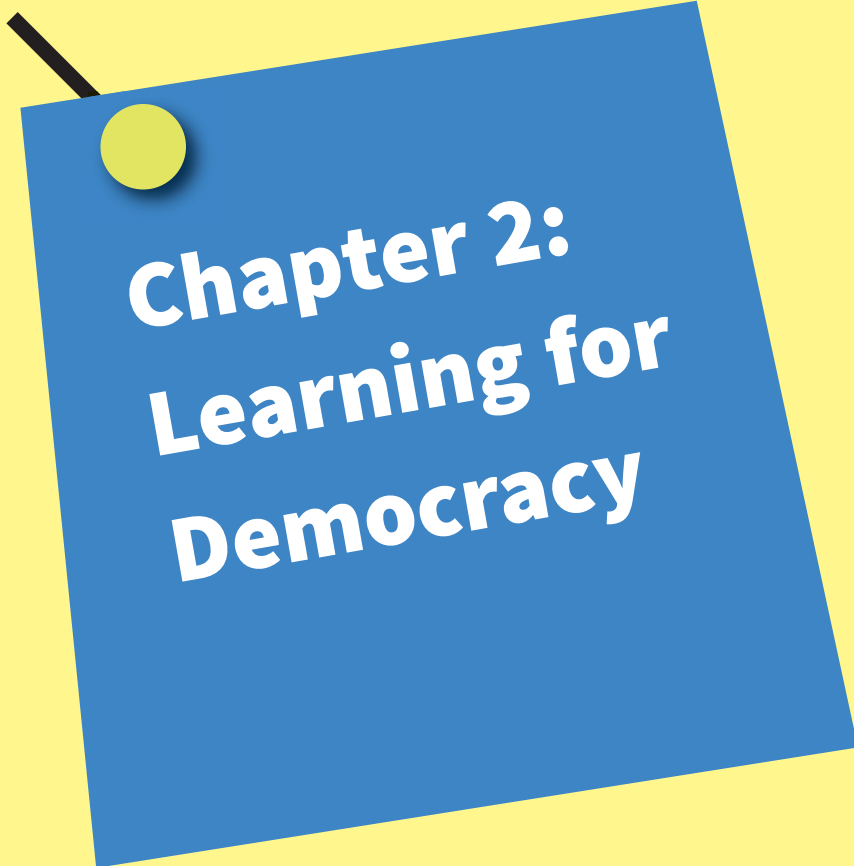
Task In small groups discuss what you consider to be the relevant contextual features that shape what practitioners do with individuals or groups now? These can be at a local micro level (eg. High incidence of drug-use, benefits claimants or refugees; availability of communal facilities; funding priorities) or national, global macro level (eg. Particular policies; political parties; key political events; issues such as climate change or inequality; international relations which produce local consequences). List these on flip charts.

Task Individually, and then in small groups, give a score of 1-5 to each in terms of how they actually influence your work (1 being most significant). Then do the same task in terms of what you think *should* influence your work. Discuss any differences between your scores.

Task Taking into account your discussions from the previous tasks, consider your response to the following case study on extending local participation:

You are working with a community group who are keen to discuss the current 'community engagement' initiative; to assess the extent to which the model offers 'meaningful' participation. In preparation for the session, you think that drawing up a number of key questions, or key themes, would provide a useful framework for a critical discussion that takes context and competing ideological interests into account. What would your key questions or themes be?

Chapter 2: Learning for Democracy

Introduction

Democracy in general is highly valued, but the experience of it often falls short of the ideal. We normally associate democracy with competitive elections for political parties at a national or local level, which could be seen as a 'thin' version of representative democracy, in which people are politically passive unless choosing a party to elect and represent them every so often.

Democracy is also a concept that is concerned with political equality in our lives at home, in the community, at work, in society and globally. This 'thicker' participatory form of democracy provides the opportunity to explore political equality in the fuller sense of shaping and influencing the decisions that affect all of our lives most of the time. It also helps us to think critically about community engagement.

Education for citizenship or Learning for Democracy?

It should be kept in mind that 'education for citizenship' and 'learning for democracy', whilst they overlap, are very different in terms of purpose and curriculum.

Education for citizenship is primarily concerned with rights and responsibilities, procedures and participation, in representative democratic processes and institutions. Its frame of reference tends to be the formal rights ascribed (or denied) to those eligible to vote in the context of liberal representative democracy. The problem for this version of democracy is often seen in terms of protecting democratic institutions from 'too much participation', so that they can get on with their legitimate business.

Learning for democracy is concerned with extending how citizens can actively shape the type of society they want to live in – as compared with the society they currently live in – and how deepening democracy through active participation is a resource for moving towards a more democratic future. Learning for democracy involves exploring what democracy means and what kinds of democracy we can develop in the future.

Democracy occurs in definite places which set boundaries; for example, a nation state. However, globalisation also involves powerful multinational and transnational organisations, such as Apple and Google, which can use their position to avoid or negotiate such things as taxation demanded by nation-states. They might also threaten to move their operations to another country in order to influence national policies in their favour. The power of the nation-state is undermined and reduced in this respect. Politicians can also, of course, manipulate aspects of globalisation, such as the free movement of people, by winning support for policies that tend to attack social groups with little political power or voice. Donald Trump's blaming of Muslims and Mexicans for the problem of low wages and insecurity in the US are cases in point. This kind of manipulative demagoguery is often labelled populist. 'Populism' refers to people acting irrationally rather than critically. However, not all populist responses are irrational. The anger directed towards political parties and institutions might also be a rational response to conventional democratic processes which have failed to protect people's interests. People can learn to do democracy better by deepening and extending its impact on their lives.

The ten propositions presented are intended to help us to think about what democracy means, and the tensions it produces. The ten proposals are intended to help identify potential areas for extending democracy in people's everyday lives.

Task Select the three propositions which you regard as most important and justify your choice. In what ways might these propositions be in tension with each other? Are there more important propositions which have been left out?

Ten Propositions. Democracy is about:
Freedom Human flourishing is achieved through freedom to act individually and collectively, only constrained by due consideration for others.
Equality All people are of the same moral worth and are obliged to mind the equality of others.
Justice Justice and democracy are interdependent; an unequal society is an undemocratic society and an undemocratic society breeds injustice.
Solidarity Shared aims and values arise from the pursuit of common purposes and mutually supportive ways of living.
Diversity Dialogue between different cultures and identities can enrich society and help to build a common culture.
Accountability The state is accountable to its citizens for providing the policy frameworks within which judgements about the common good are made and contested. Those who hold power are answerable to the people.
Dialogue Democracy requires dialogue and the possibility of dissent. This means learning to argue, express beliefs, deliberate and come to collective decisions concerning what constitutes the good society.
Responsibility Consistency and coherence between private and public behaviour are essential to the quality of democratic life.
Engagement Democracy is something to be negotiated from below rather than handed down from above. Citizens require the opportunity to talk back to the state.
Sustainability A commitment to the environment, the planet and future generations requires opposition to those forces which are wasteful and destructive.

The following ten proposals relate to actions that practitioners might need to take in extending and deepening democracy in the context of their work.

Task Taking the 10 proposals presented ascribe a value to each between 1 and 5 where 1 is a low score and 5 is a high score. Where do you score high and where do you score low? Why? What would you want to add and why?

We need to act 'as if' we live in a democracy even when it seems to fall short of that aspiration. Community engagement is often trapped by funding and policy expectations which pay little attention to democratic experiences in communities and fail to value genuine democratic life. It is only in identifying the problems and their consequences, collectively, that we can begin to develop a different narrative of community engagement. This might mean making small differences which lead, eventually, to differences which have a longer-term and wider impact. Action taken individually and collectively can make a difference. Even if we cannot predict the outcome with any certainty, the effort is still worth it!

Ten proposals. Learning for democracy means:

Taking sides Educational workers are not merely enablers or facilitators. The claim to neutrality reinforces and legitimises existing power relations. Practitioners need to be clear what they stand for – and against.

Acting in solidarity with communities and social movements Practitioners should proactively seek opportunities to engage in a critical and committed way with communities and social movements for progressive social change.

Taking risks Critical and creative learning is necessarily unpredictable and open ended. Exploring official problem definitions and challenging taken-for-granted ways of thinking can be a liberating process.

Developing political literacy Politics needs to be made more educational and education made more political. Learning to analyse, argue, cooperate, and take action on issues that matter requires a systematic educational process.

Working at the grassroots Democracy lives through ordinary people's actions; it does not depend on state sanction. Practitioners should be in everyday contact with people on their own ground and on their own terms.

Listening to dissenting voices Community engagement is a process of creating spaces in which different interests are expressed and voices heard. Dissent should be valued rather than suppressed.

Cultivating awkwardness Democracy is not necessarily best served by the conformist citizen. This means that the educational task is to create situations in which people can confront their circumstances, reflect critically on their experience and take action.

Educating for social change Collective action can bring about progressive change. Learning for democracy can contribute to this process by linking personal experience with wider political explanations and processes.

Exploring alternatives Learning for democracy can provide people with the opportunity to see that the status quo is not inevitable - that 'another world is possible'.

Exposing the power of language The words used to describe the world influence how people think and act. Learning for democracy involves exploring how language frames attitudes, beliefs and values.

11

Chapter 3: Identifying the Educator's role

Introduction

Good educational work will always involve making connections between context, purpose and practice. A useful way of doing this is to think about how work can be located in a way that helps to clarify essential aspects of what workers do and why they do it. This chapter is intended to enable practitioners to locate their work within different models and traditions, and to reflect upon pedagogical purpose and educational role in the contemporary context.

Educational work with communities inevitably involves making choices which are political, in the sense that they build on an analysis of the nature of society, its social divisions and the possibilities for challenging and changing these. In the following framework, we identify four broad pedagogical models which have been historically influential and which are intended to help clarify a range of practices in the contemporary context.

Pedagogical Purposes

This table represents pedagogical purposes in four broad ways: *Activism, Participation, Liberation* and *Democratisation*. Although these models are not in any practical sense mutually exclusive, each of them tends to address a distinct constituency of who to work with, along with a specific level of focus and content, with particular roles for the educator and types of action that follow.

Pedagogical purpose	Constituency	Focus/Content	Role of Educator	Types of action
Activism	Political and community activists	Political analysis; Linking local (micro) experience with national/global (macro) structures and processes	Creating public space for discussion; Providing counter information; Promoting debate and analysis	Building critical alliances within and beyond the locality; Broadening issues; Campaigning; Direct action
Participation	The community	Public education; Local experience and knowledge; Group formation; Skills development; Access to other providers	Networker; Guidance provider; Resource finder; Teacher	Building new local, democratic, informed institutional structures; Celebrating community identity
Liberation	Marginalised and disempowered groups	Structure, culture and identity and the relationships between them; Linking biography and history so that personal experience is situated and politicised	Consciousness-raising; Confidence-building; Connecting personal and political dimensions; Developing an analysis of cultural and political forms of power; Producing 'really useful knowledge'[1]	Experimenting with alternative forms of organization; Creating leadership roles for the powerless; Campaigning
Democratisation	Marginalised and vulnerable individuals and groups	Strategic engagement with participatory and representative forms of democracy at a range of appropriate levels; Advocating a democratic culture in private and public domains	Building grassroots relationships in communities; Redefining 'social problems' with local people; Building curriculum from the experience of contradictions	Reasserting public interest and public spaces; Claiming legitimacy in invited and claimed spaces; Selecting appropriate scales of action; Making strategic alliances; Producing counter-hegemonic resources

[1] The term 'really useful knowledge' is explained in Chapter 8.

Activism:

The activism paradigm is primarily associated with the work of Keith Jackson and others who were involved in the Community Development Project (CDP) in the late 1960s and 1970s. The main aim was to make education more relevant to working class men and women in places where they lived and/or worked. Social class rather than community was a central organising focus for education and action. Jackson (1980)[2] argued that the most effective way to do this was to work with those individuals and groups who were already active in their community around social and/or political issues. An example of this would be social housing policy at a national level which would also have a direct impact on rent levels or the quality of public housing stock. The focus was on making the link between local experience and wider structures of power; in particular, the way in which the state impacts on lives and experiences at the local level, with very personal consequences for individuals. The practitioner's role was therefore to create the educational conditions within which activists could discuss and analyse their experiences, individually and collectively, as a critical stage towards mobilizing for purposeful action.

Participation:

This model is associated primarily with Tom Lovett's work in Liverpool (1976)[3]. He was concerned to develop a broad and comprehensive curriculum of community education which would engage 'non-participants' in learning and, where necessary, community and cultural action. To make community education meaningful, the experience of working class men and women had to be firmly grounded in an analysis of how social, cultural, economic and political inequalities silence and dis-empower such communities. Simply providing educational opportunities framed through a middle class value system would be inadequate. Traditional educational resources outside the community therefore had to be guided and built around local life rather than the other way round. For example, the rich culture of working class life became the resource for a local education programme that was linked to a series of study groups. Lovett placed himself, as the educator, at the centre of a network of community groups and interests. This approach aimed to ensure that people in working class communities were able to experience education that more closely fitted their lives, interests, concerns and aspirations.

Liberation:

Paulo Freire (1972)[4] has provided inspiration for the development of a radical and democratic education following his work in Brazil in the 1960s. His arguments and analysis inspired the Adult Learning Project (ALP) in Scotland, which provided a model to adopt and adapt the ideas of Freire for post-literacy work in the inner-city of Edinburgh. A major strength of ALP's work was the ability to demonstrate, through practice, the applicability of Freire's ideas about the importance of

---

[2] Jackson, K. (1980) 'Some fallacies in community education and their consequences in working-class areas', in Fletcher, C. and Thompson, N. (eds) *Issues in Community Education,* Falmer Press.
[3] Lovett, T. (1976) *Adult Education, Community Development and the Working Class*, Ward Lock Educational.
[4] Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin Books.

education as a dialogical process which enabled students to develop a critical appreciation of society and how to act back on it.

Community investigations with local people were used to generate themes, 'codified' in visual representations, as the building blocks of study. The curriculum thus generated enabled people to learn from their own lives, but in a more critical way.   Outside expertise was sometimes brought in to help the process. Understanding derived through a critical process of analysis would lead to action, which in turn would lead to reflection and further action. Jane Thompson (1980)[5] was also an inspirational figure in terms of developing a liberatory approach to educational engagement with working class women. The *Second Chance to Learn* project at Southampton University was based on a rigorous educational analysis of the realities of the inequality, discrimination and oppression working-class women experienced in a patriarchal and capitalist society.

Democratisation:

This model draws attention to the multiple and overlapping experiences of inequality, exploitation and oppression that structures and shapes the experience of a wide range of powerless individuals and groups. A critical task in making community life more democratic is to explore the relationship between 'private troubles' and 'public issues' and what this distinction means for democracy. For instance, poor local amenities create private troubles for individuals, but the withdrawal of services are also an outcome of the systematic undermining of the public sector in favour of market processes and values.   The depoliticisation of public life in general means that consideration of *political* purpose in *professional* practice is rare.

However, since power is at the centre of all educational work, there is no politics-free option. Political questions include: who defines what counts as legitimate knowledge and what does not? who has access to various kinds of knowledge and on what basis, who has not, and who benefits? In this process, starting from an analysis of educational purpose is an important means of reviving and re-legitimising the role of critique in defining professional identity. Although spaces for open-ended collective work may be more difficult to find, continuing to practise in a way that shows why real community engagement matters remains an urgent priority.

Task Consider which model/s is most appealing to you. Are there any models or aspects of any models you disagree with? What might be their gaps or limitations? What would you want to change or add? In your experience, are all these models possible to follow in your practice?

Is any explicitly or implicitly encouraged or discouraged?

[5] Thompson, J. (1980) 'Adult education and the women's movement', in Lovett, T. (ed) *Radical approaches to adult education, Routledge.*

Chapter 4: Making Educational Relationships

Introduction

In thinking about educational relationships, it may be useful to consider community engagement as a continuum. In other words, educational work can start from what people may want or need to know, but it can also start from what people may want to *do*. Similarly, personal development and collective action are obviously interconnected in the sense that taking collective action often leads to personal development, whilst personal change (or the limitations of it) can light the spark for acting collectively with others.

Figure 1 below identifies four versions of personal agency (ie capacity to act) which may help to think about how educational relationships can be built.

Recognising the necessity for collective change	**Taking collective action**
Recognising the necessity for personal change	**Feeling personally disengaged or passive**

Task Using this figure, locate your existing educational relationships with individuals and groups, and their origins. Chart any movement back or forth between the quadrants. Is there anything missing from the figure? Consider further opportunities for collective learning and/or action.

To conceive of engagement as a linear process that moves from the individual to the collective, as is sometimes assumed, may limit our view and obscure the variety of motivations and impulses that can generate interest:

- In some instances the necessity for collective change may be obvious at a political level, whilst the personal implications are less so.
- Becoming involved in collective campaigns that are not ultimately 'successful' may generate disillusionment and inaction.
- Policy initiatives targeted at personal disengagement or passivity that advocate behavioural change or control (eg employability, or healthy eating) can potentially provide the impetus, legitimacy and resources for educational work with broader objectives.
- Taking control of some personal aspects of life can be sufficient to significantly change some people's circumstances for the better and they retreat from community activity temporarily or altogether.
- Recognition that personal change will not be enough to make the structural changes required may be frustrated in the absence of wider opportunities for collective action.

What is important is that all of these stages should be considered as legitimate starting points for practitioners.

Establishing educational purposes, aims and objectives

Why? Some good reasons:

- If you do not set your own purposes, aims and objectives, they will be set for you by the priorities of policy and/or management systems;
- They are linked to how problems are defined or perceived;
- They provide a measure of personal and public accountability for your actions;
- They encourage a systematic approach to being competent, committed and creative.

Starting from principles: some distinctions

Educational purposes:

These are statements of principle which enable you to answer the following questions: What is educational engagement in this context *for?* What purpose does it, or should it, fulfil? Why does this project exist?

The following list may help you to think about educational work as a spectrum, and to prioritise different dimensions at different stages. Some purposes may come to the fore at particular times. Try to relate these purposes to concrete situations so that they do not become 'professed virtues' at odds with real practice.

- Personal development
- Skills development
- Political development
- Responding to policy initiatives
- Giving voice to marginalised groups
- Collectivising experience
- Increasing independence/autonomy

Task Rank these purposes in terms of importance to your work now: from 1-5 where 1 is low and 5 is high. This process may help you to be more explicit about what you are trying to do, and to build arguments about the importance of particular kinds of purpose.

Educational aims:

These are broad statements of what you are trying to achieve. These may differ according to the priorities of the employing agency. In some cases, educational aims may be in contention. For example, where the stated aim of the agency or relevant policy is to alter the behaviour of communities so that they take more personal responsibility for matters which are largely or completely beyond their control, then developing a critical educational curriculum may require a more creative and strategic approach.

Some examples of educational aims:

- Reduced powerlessness of particular groups.
- Increased critical understanding of the current policy context and how it affects particular groups.
- Increased capacity for analysis of the potential for different kinds of change in particular contexts.
- Increased understanding of the ways and means of power.
- Increased capacity in relating personal experience to public issues and vice versa.

Task What are the broad aims which inform your work? Are there competing aims? How can these be reconciled or negotiated? Try to produce a list of aims which are both principled and realistic.

Educational objectives:

These need to be more specific and detailed if they are to be helpful in practice. They will involve specific statements of what you want a particular piece of work to achieve in a specific period, related to overall purposes and aims. You will also need to build in an evaluation system ie how can you test whether you are meeting your objectives? This requires some creative thinking, rather than relying simply on data, or managerial outcomes.

Example objective:
Over the next six months to increase the knowledge of 12 people in a women's health group about health inequalities in Scotland (or elsewhere) and to develop skills in identifying issues which affect them.

Assessing what is realistically achievable, taking into account a range of factors:

- Make up of the group
- Personal circumstances of members
- Relevant experience of members
- Time available to members
- Reasons for attending group
- Level of interest
- Your relationship with them

There may be some tensions here in relation to what different people want to do, or are in a position to do, along with personalities who may be more or less dominant. There may also be competing agendas at play that will need to be negotiated. This will take honest and open discussion, but may also need some planned intervention by the practitioner to encourage more confident members to hang back at times, whilst encouraging and enabling those less confident to express themselves.

Indicators of success: How will you know you are achieving your objectives?

This is where you can test whether your objectives are clear and realistic. They may need to be revised in light of your assessment of what is reasonable for a specific group of people, or as things change and people leave or join the group, or if something unexpected happens. Some flexibility is always necessary.

Sample indicators
Group or members of group display some or all of the following characteristics:

- Increased knowledge demonstrated through discussion with each other and elsewhere.
- The ability to question media and political representations of policy and of their own experience individually or in groups.
- The ability to make connections with wider political and economic developments individually or in group settings.
- The capacity to challenge power holders at different levels on a range of issues.
- The willingness to express informed opinions, make arguments and convey these to others.
- The willingness to make connections with other similar groups or campaigns.

Educational Resources: What will you bring to the process?

You will need to think about potential resources, both external and internal, which can be drawn upon to address your objectives. Here are some examples:

Focus	Resources
Knowledge of statistics:	Policy documents, commentaries, newspapers, online sources, guest speakers, meeting other similar groups, contact with relevant campaigns.
Recognising historical patterns of change:	Time-line of significant policy/political changes and major events; analysis of change factors and agents; intergenerational debate; critical commentaries.
Ideological analysis:	Alternative accounts from political commenters or intellectual allies.
Personal experience:	Personal stories, case studies and comparisons; campaign materials; creative explorations (See chapter 10).

Some important distinctions:

There are different kinds of objectives that should not get muddled up:

Strategic objectives: related to policy, and appropriate for funding purposes or management systems, and for ensuring space is retained for setting educational objectives – developed by practitioner.

Educational objectives: related to critical engagement with policy and appropriate to educational purposes – developed by practitioner.

Learning objectives: related to what participants want to learn/explore/research and appropriate to personal, social and or political purposes – developed through dialogue and negotiation between group and practitioner

You may have to be strategic in setting objectives for funding purposes or to conform to policy frameworks, but these kinds of objectives on their own are not useful to guide educational work. Similarly, what participants want to learn may be different to what the practitioner thinks they might want to learn if they knew more about it, or had the choice. One particularly important reason for making these distinctions is so that where practitioners become compromised by their position, communities can retain some

degree of autonomy.

There are also obvious limits to simply asking people what they want as the basis for educational programmes. For one thing, they may respond on the basis of what they think might be available or expected rather than make demands; on the other hand, they may be completely unrealistic about what can be achieved without a good working knowledge of the wider policy context and the political options available. Practitioners need to be prepared to make skilled and informed judgements about how to draw on and extend the range of local knowledge.

Task Try to identify examples of strategic objectives, educational objectives and learning objectives in your own work, and the connections between them.

Chapter 5: Engaging with Communities

Introduction

Community engagement has become increasingly attractive to a range of institutions and interests for a number of reasons, but it is also an important process for local democracy. This chapter is intended to explore what the purposes of community engagement strategies may be at any given time, what risks they pose for communities, and what communities might gain from the process.

What does community engagement mean?

There are broadly two different ways of thinking about community engagement that may help groups to consider their response:

1. Community Engagement as a democratic process: as a right

In this model, democratic accountability is extended when community engagement becomes a process in which there is negotiation between different parties about political priorities; in which, for example, governments and local authorities provide leadership through policy frameworks, but also respond to and represent community interests which may go beyond, or even against the formal terms of engagement; through which local communities feel they have some real power and leverage, and through which they can express differences of opinion.

2. Community Engagement as a managerial procedure: as a responsibility

In this model, real democratic accountability is stifled by the imposition of top down policy priorities which are more concerned with managing accountability upwards than downwards; in which engagement is restricted to deciding on detail rather than substance; in which legitimate interests and concerns of people in communities are suppressed; in which community groups find themselves drawn into partnerships in which their influence is not clear, and in which key decisions have already been taken.

Task Consider models 1 and 2 in relation to the potential costs and benefits for communities in becoming involved in community engagement strategies?

The following checklist might be useful to this process:

- Whose agenda dominates?
- Is the language used understandable to ordinary people?
- Do timescales allow for real engagement?
- Is engagement framed in a way that takes account of the bigger picture? (see Chapter 6)
- Is there evidence that community engagement benefits communities? Eg. What have been the costs and benefits of previous similar initiatives on people's lives and on their community activism?
- How open is the agenda to issues arising from the experience of people in communities rather than those imposed from above?
- How are problems defined? What values do they imply, and who gets the blame?
- What happens when there are disagreements?
- What happens if the community says no?

Spaces for democratic engagement

There are various spaces of engagement for communities to consider (see power cube, chapter 7):

Community engagement in the invited spaces of policy: a one-way model

Invited spaces of policy are those offered and controlled by policymakers.

Task Below is a list of reasons given for community engagement that have prevailed over time within the invited spaces of policy. Try and place your experience of engagement within them. You may choose more than one. Are there any other reasons missing from the list? Discuss the implications for community groups.

Reasons
- Improving decision-making at policy level
- Improving service delivery
- Providing a cheap alternative to public services
- Endorsing existing policy
- Co-opting or managing local politics
- Making communities responsible for finding their own solutions

Community engagement in the created spaces of politics: a two-way model

Created spaces are those people claim for themselves, and in which they learn to become political.

In this model, the role of the educational practitioner is to foster a political approach to engagement, involving critique, analysis and creative and committed action. People get involved in community action for a range of reasons (see Chapter 4), so it may not be possible or desirable to define a standardised educational process, but there are some elements of educational work that it might be possible to include in your practice.

Task Consider the following elements of an educational process and consider how they might improve the experience of community engagement:
- Identifying and confronting power
- Formulating collective demands
- Negotiating difference within and between groups
- Stimulating imagination and creativity
- Reasserting the possibilities for collective action
- Building solidarity

Combining both models of engagement?

Community groups are generally involved in both processes. It is in the relationship between them that groups can sometimes negotiate concessions, and shifts of power. This table represents different ways of addressing community engagement both within and from outside formal engagement strategies.
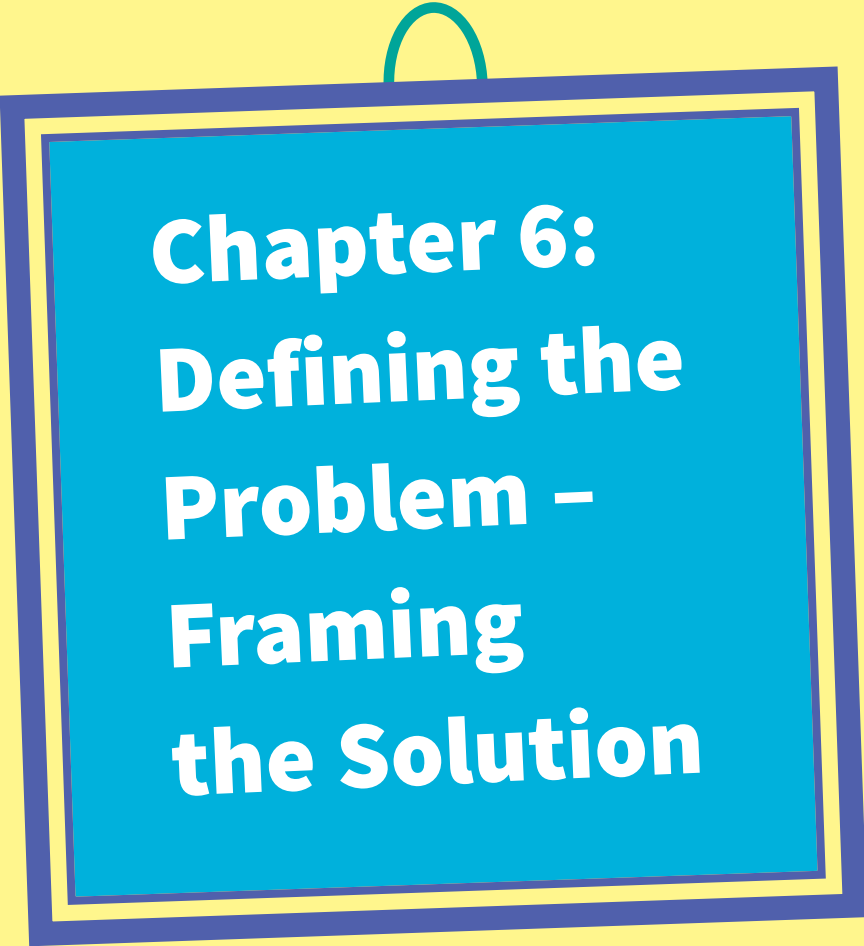
Strategic participation is primarily concerned with influencing existing political structures and processes from the inside, by trying to make invited spaces more democratic and representative.

Strategic non-participation is primarily concerned with influencing existing political structures and processes from the outside by creating independent political spaces.

Task List those features of your context which might inhibit or enable strategic participation and non-participation eg conditions of employment, employing agency, job description, management culture, collegial and community relationships, other.

Strategic participation: the invited spaces of policy	Strategic non-participation: the demanded (independent) spaces of politics
Making structures work more democratically and effectively	Strengthening democratic processes outside governance structures and mechanisms
Holding politicians and institutions to account for their decisions	Promoting and encouraging community engagement based on local issues/interests (raised in invited spaces as appropriate) – time-limited and specific
Ensuring democratic processes have grassroots support and maintaining contact with local groups	Challenging the limited way in which democracy is framed in policy and practice
Challenging manipulative or tokenistic forms	Making demands on the state to resist the market eg campaigning
Building capacity to challenge problem definitions and express alternatives	Providing counter-information
Sustaining a core representative group; supporting group and individual interactions with officials; preventing burn-out	Providing a convivial forum for making relationships, building collective support, solidarity and identity
Testing the claims and limits of what is on offer and bringing the voice of communities closer to policymakers and vice versa	Developing and articulating alternative points of view where and when appropriate

How might these two models help organisations to think through their relationship to the state?

The two models are clearly interconnected, so should not be regarded as if there are simple choices to be made. For example, dissatisfaction with community engagement in the Invited Spaces of policy can lead to the demand for some autonomy. Gaining support for local issues and interests can bring more influence in existing structures. In any case, practitioners are mostly employed around policy initiatives and structures, so opting out is not an option. Community groups do not have the same limitations, and can retain autonomy in spite of community engagement structures (see Chapter 4 in relation to different kinds of objectives).

Chapter 6: Defining the Problem – Framing the Solution

Introduction

Although practitioners aspire to work with communities to identify their needs, concerns and problems, the reality is that needs and problems have usually already been defined elsewhere. The question is where, by whom and with what effects?

Social problems are not fixed or inevitable. Problem definition is a process of image-making or 'framing', to do with attributing cause, blame and responsibility. Definitions reflect wider social, political and economic concerns. This means that problems are portrayed, by politicians and other powerful interests, in ways calculated to gain support for their side (see Chapter 1).

The way in which social problems are framed (defined in particular terms) determines, to a large extent, their potential solutions:

- If 'the problem' is framed in terms of personal behaviour, the solution is behavioural change;
- If it is framed in terms of the way that institutions respond to need, the solution is institutional change;
- If it is framed in terms of structural inequality (the way in which some groups always have unequal access to power and resources), the solution is wider economic and political change.

This is also important for the way in which the general public think about certain problems, for if they are not presented with alternative views, they may come to accept the dominant one without question. In the process, those people identified as 'problems' can also come to see themselves negatively, making them even more powerless (see Chapter 9).

Framing problems and responses

Framing problems in particular ways means that some factors, which might be very relevant to why something is seen or presented as a problem, are deliberately left out of the picture. For example, if the wider context in which anti-social behaviour occurs is excluded from 'the frame', then we are unlikely to consider that when we respond to media reports. Similarly, if 'resilience' is presented as a natural and unproblematic good, then we are unlikely to question why it has become so fashionable now. By framing social problems in particular ways, governments are able to formulate the boundaries of response and at the same time to influence the ways in which people make sense of their own lives.

Discourse and common sense

Discourse is the term used to describe a set of assumptions which underpin the way social problems are discussed, and create what we come to think of as 'common sense' – beyond dispute (see Chapter 9). Those with power to shape what is regarded as common sense through such discourses also have the power to position people within them eg the 'strivers' and the 'skivers' of welfare policy. Those with least power, therefore, are often denied the opportunity to shape those discourses which affect them the most. For example, the now outmoded discourse of 'unemployment' had personal, institutional and political implications: it allowed for discussion about the level and type of personal skills required, levels of public subsidies and benefits, and the wider vagaries of the job market, whereas the current discourse of 'employability' suggests that the

28

personal dimension is sufficient. In other words, both the problem and the solution lie with the individual, who has to make him/herself employable. This dominant discourse has filtered into educational practice in ways that direct learning towards attaining those skills deemed necessary to be 'job ready' and to seek work, irrespective of the job market, government action, or wider economic conditions.

In reality, most problems have personal, institutional and political dimensions, but if policy frameworks limit discussion to the micro (small-scale) level of personal experience this makes macro (large-scale) analysis difficult because it is put beyond consideration. Most importantly, once a discourse has been established and entered into the public consciousness, it is very difficult to shift or challenge, since people begin to accept it, often without even recognising they are doing so. A potentially significant role for educational practice then is to work with people to begin to reframe in *political terms* those issues that are currently presented as social problems: to talk and think about problems as if they are political issues and not just personal characteristics.

Task Ask yourself and others, what you think are the common-sense assumptions about particular kinds of groups (or people like you)? What are those assumptions based on?

Task Take an issue which is of concern or in the news. Try and represent it visually or in words and then, literally, frame it (draw a frame around it). Display the framed versions of the problem together for discussion. What dimensions of the problem are in the frame? Which ones are absent? What does this tell you about the way in which you have framed the problem?

Task Take an influential policy document and identify commonly used words such as engagement, positive destinations, wellbeing, resilience. Consider whether these are clear and positive, or whether they could have negative meanings.

Open and closed social problems

Social problems can be open or closed. Open social problems occur when two or more interested groups are competing for the right to define the problem. Closed social problems occur when political debate no longer occurs (or is ruled out) and only one definition prevails. There is of course some flexibility between open and closed social problems. What has been closed can be opened up. An example might be the way in which disabled people have transformed public debate, and their own experience, by insisting that they are not 'tragic but brave' social problems, as previously defined. They have opened up the issue to raise questions about the disabling society.

Similarly, open social problems can be closed down. An example might be the way in which ill-health has become widely accepted as an outcome of biology (physical make-up), pathology (some abnormal response) or lifestyle choice, irrespective of the wider social conditions in which it is produced. Likewise, public debate about inequality and redistribution, particularly the state's legitimate role in providing public services, has now been stifled by the way that 'dependency on the state' has become represented as a personal failing. The task here is to engage with groups as active social and political agents who have something to say rather than simply as passive objects of policy, who just accept what they're told.

Public and private dimensions

There is always a dynamic between what is understood as private and what is regarded as public. For example, new 'public issues' are discovered as groups gain opportunities to collectively voice their personal experience, eg. of domestic violence or sexuality or disability. Conversely, issues such as poverty, health or housing can be turned back into 'private troubles' if people begin to see it as their responsibility to make their own private arrangements in place of what was once thought of, and funded, as a public service.

This means that there is a critical role for practitioners in ensuring that what are presented as 'private troubles' for those who are most removed from power are also kept alive as 'public issues'. This may involve enabling people to develop their analytical skills so that they can come up with a shared understanding of the causes of the problems they experience. There can also be a moment of recognition - when what people think, experience and see around them seems to contradict how such things are presented in policy (and in the media). The demonization of benefits claimants or single parents or refugees might be a case in point. This can be the beginning of politicisation (see Chapter 1). Practitioners can provide the opportunities for people to think for themselves by thinking together; providing them with the means to question negative images and supporting their self-organisation.

Seeing the bigger picture

This way of understanding social problems suggests that we need to frame them in a more comprehensive way. Taking into account three factors helps us to do this. These can be represented as follows:

Context (public)

Problem (private)

Cause
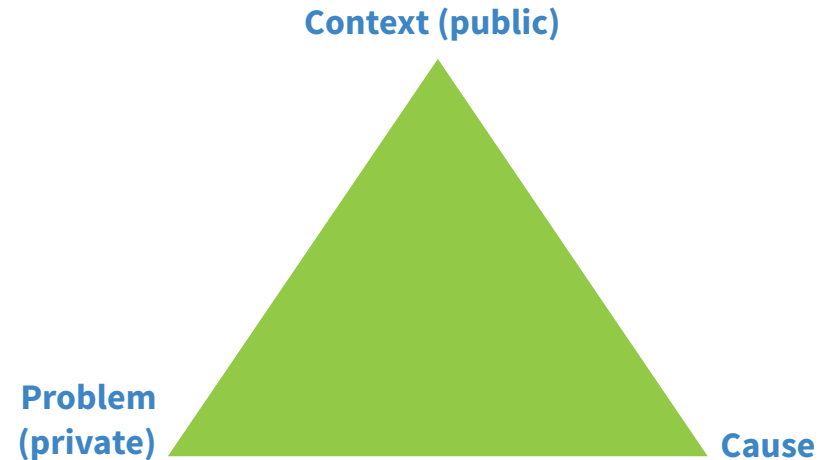
Task Consider the balance between these dimensions as reflected in your own experience of practice. Identify a social issue or problem and show why it is necessary to take into account all three dimensions in understanding it and acting for change.

Chapter 7: Finding Spaces for Educational Work

Introduction

Priorities for educational work around community engagement may seem to be a foregone conclusion, since institutional and funding frameworks have become so directly tied to policy, and included in various professional documents. This chapter is intended to look beyond those strategic objectives that practitioners may have to employ in order to ensure survival in the current context (See chapter 4), and to consider how to find spaces for educational work which engages with policy but is not wholly defined by its logic. As a starting point, being clear about educational objectives will help with this process.

Exposing contradictions, tensions and dilemmas

The educational challenge is threefold:

1. How to address the policy context in ways which expose its contradictions, tensions and dilemmas.
2. How to make connections between macro structures and processes and the micro experience of people in communities.
3. How to work with communities to take advantage of their status in current policy in ways which give them increased power and influence in a range of participatory spaces.

> **Task** Draw up a list of potential issues that have emerged in policy and in practice. Try to be as specific as possible and discuss them in relation to this threefold challenge.

For example:

Capacity building for resilience has been identified as a key strategic priority to be addressed by your project/team.

- You have been told of a woman who has been sanctioned twice for late arrival at the benefits office and is relying on friends and foodbanks to feed herself and her 4 children.

- A local skatepark project has had its funding cut, despite enthusiastic involvement over 6 months by local young people.
- The local newspaper has run a story about the threat of immigrants to local employment.
- Oxfam has released a report detailing the extent of inequality more generally and seeking localised responses.
- There is a campaign against cuts in an adjacent community.
- The local surgery has identified a number of young mothers they regard as 'at risk' of isolation.
- You have noticed the installation of a large fence around a local community facility which is likely to deter young people from using it.
- There is no open forum for people to come together in a convivial and open-ended way.

Engaging politically with communities

The point here is to suggest that work priorities need to extend beyond the demands of policy alone. They need to make connections between day-to-day experience, strong local feelings, neglected or invisible issues, the state and composition of community groups, the physical environment, external resources, opponents and allies, wider social forces and so on. Although practitioners are often operating to pre-set agendas, they can nonetheless seek out practice (policy led or not) which offers some potential for the following:

- Connecting micro and macro; cause and effect
- Making useful historical comparison

33

- Collectivising issues and taking action
- Turning private troubles into public issues
- Working with groups to identify and speak about their contradictory or negative experience of policy
- Ensuring relevance to people's experience
- Broadening issues to generate alliances and build solidarity

Task Consider your range of work and identify possibilities for addressing any of these goals. Brainstorm about potential issues in your area.

Task Identify important public issues which are not taken into account in your work and consider ways in which these could be incorporated into some aspects of your current work.

Power and influence in a variety of democratic participatory spaces

There are a number of potential spaces for community groups to operate. The Power Cube was devised by John Gaventa (2006)[6] to help people analyse relationships between levels, spaces and forms of power. It presents a dynamic understanding of how power operates, how different interests can be marginalised from decision-making, and the strategies needed to increase inclusion.

Spaces of power

Provided or closed spaces are those which are controlled by an elite group like a government or local authority body – in which communities are often expected or required to participate in order to receive funding, but over which they have little influence.

Invited spaces are those in which communities are invited to participate in terms already established elsewhere. These are often subject to external pressures, or they are an attempt to increase legitimacy by asking particular 'stakeholders' to endorse their opinions or policies.

Claimed spaces are those people create for themselves. They provide the less powerful with a chance to develop their own agendas and to create solidarity without control from power-holders.

[6.]Gaventa, J (2006) *Finding the Spaces for Change. A Power Analysis* in IDS Bulletin 37 (6) find out more about the powercube at http://www.powercube.net

Forms of power

Visible power is the conventional way of understanding power – negotiated through formal rules, structures, and institutions. For example, formal engagement strategies may come into this category.
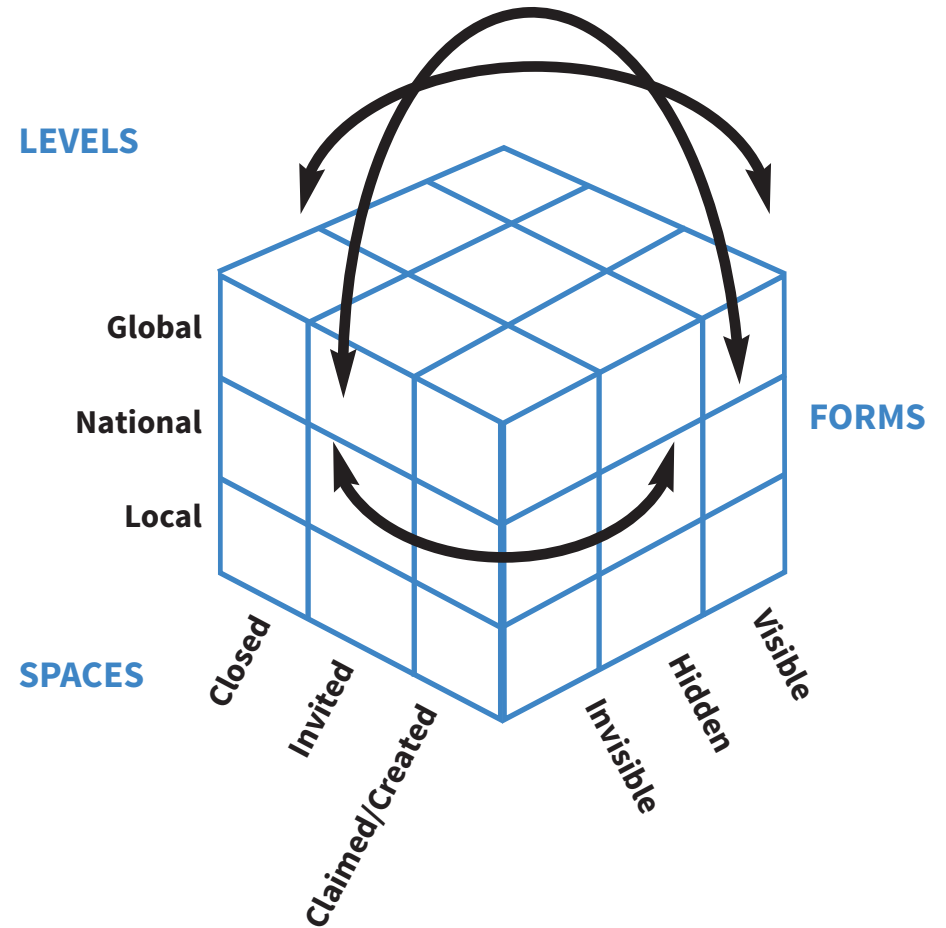
Hidden power focuses on the way powerful people and institutions maintain their influence over the process by allowing certain interests in and keeping others out.

Invisible power operates by influencing how individuals think of their place in society and explains why many people don't even think of questioning existing power relations (See Chapter 9).

The Power Cube emphasises the importance of understanding interaction between levels of power and places of engagement. It helps us to understand how global forces can be both enhancing and marginalising of communities depending on the circumstances. The local is intimately embedded in national and global places, and the global has local consequences.

Task Using the power cube, try to locate your current work in terms of levels and forms.

Figure1 The 'power cube': the levels, spaces and forms of power

LEVELS

Global

National

Local

FORMS

SPACES

Closed

Invited

Claimed/Created

Invisible

Hidden

Visible

The important thing about this model of power is that it shows how different spaces can interact in ways that reinforce or challenge each other. For example, if agendas and interests established in provided spaces exclude any other way of seeing things, this can make people feel there is little they can do to change things, so they make no demands. On the other hand, these limitations can themselves become a focus for dissatisfaction, highlighting exclusion and identifying campaigning issues. In other words, political spaces can be closed down by the strength of powerful interests and perceived powerlessness, and opened up again by collectivised dissatisfactions (see Chapter 6).

Chapter 8: Generating Curriculum from and for Action

Introduction

A curriculum for community engagement can start with any experiences people in communities have in common. What is important is the process of identifying how power shapes experience and how its impact on attitudes, values and behaviours can be made visible to those people affected by it. Power that is visible can then be the focus of change efforts to reduce its impact. The learning process can become the basis for action, individually or collectively, to make progressive change. Learning from experience can also be complemented and extended by learning from action. Reflection on a course of action, what helped and hindered it, can lead to further understanding and the capacity of communities to act in the future (see Chapter 4).

In creating a curriculum for study and action we can make a helpful distinction between 'useful knowledge' and 'really useful knowledge'. This distinction has historical roots in the tradition of radical adult education: useful knowledge was associated with provided education which had pragmatic value for individuals. For instance it offered knowledge and skills helpful for everyday life such as reading a paper, completing a job application or CV, booking a train ticket and so on. Really useful knowledge on the other hand had a collective focus and was concerned with developing the knowledge to help powerless groups to more fully understand their collective circumstances. It continues to offer an analysis of the causes of contemporary conditions and guidance on how to act to change them.

Context is important because different groups can experience social injustices for different reasons. What knowledge is considered to be really useful by one group may not be considered so by others. It has therefore to be related to the conditions of life of the community, group, or area where it applies.

Figure 1: Useful knowledge and really useful knowledge	
Useful Knowledge	**Really Useful Knowledge**
Introduces instrumental knowledge and skills to 'top up' individual capacities and deficits	Introduces critical knowledge which helps understanding of collective experiences
If it takes account of power at all, it does so only at the level of individual achievements	Reveals the pervasive role of power in everyday life at the level of individual and collective experience
Focuses on individual skills, attitudes and behaviours	Focuses on the possibility of collective action to further social justice experience
Aspires to achieve pragmatic adjustments that enable individuals and groups to adapt to new circumstances	Aspires to achieve 'radical practicality' ie to make changes which alter power relations and can be achieved through collective effort

The importance of the above distinction is that really useful knowledge is relational: it starts from the experiences of injustice of powerless groups in opposition to the knowledge claimed by dominant groups. Therefore, educational work involves developing and strengthening suppressed knowledges rather than passing on dominant versions (see Chapter 6).

Really useful knowledge for social justice

Educational work in communities should enable workers to help groups address the real sources of their problems, that is, it should enhance the agency of the community rather than hamper their capacity to act collectively. But we can anticipate that in any community deprived of wealth and resources there will be a range of groups with different social justice issues to address.

We can think about three types of social justice issues:

- *Distributive issues*: that is the lack of *material resources* which hamper people from participating in the everyday life of society. This may be caused by low pay, lack of amenities, substandard (or lack of) housing, lack of services, welfare changes and so on;

- *Recognition issues*: that is the denial of *status and understanding* of groups because of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, religion and other means of discriminating against people;

- *Representation:* that is the denial of the capacity of certain groups to *express their experiences* and concerns because they are systematically excluded or ignored. Such groups can be ignored as having nothing to offer and no valid experience to speak from.

Knowledge is power

The slogan 'knowledge is power' is a useful reminder that successful forms of resistance have to build credible cases which promote strong counter-arguments to undermine dominant arguments.

Task Drawing on the potential sources below, try to identify different sources of knowledge that can help groups and communities speak with an authoritative voice.

- Listening to individuals working and living in the area: holding public meetings, talking to people, undertaking local surveys
- Making contact with the local press, councillors and other political representatives
- Identifying organisations and agencies which have expertise that can be used by the community to develop counter-information
- Making contact with other communities who experience similar circumstances and problems
- Locating and recording visual sources of information such as billboards, graffiti, environmental waste, broken windows
- Internet searches to seek out published material, newspaper accounts and knowledgeable individuals and groups
- Social media groups and contacts can provide different formats for knowledge presentation
- Identify academics who have written on the subject and who might be sympathetic

The role of the educator in the process of analysing material is to organize it in a way which is manageable, systematic and purposeful for the group. How this can be achieved will depend on the group, their level of experience and interest. Breaking down information into manageable size chunks which highlight potential themes, claims, misrepresentations and so on is a key educational role.

39

Different types of assumptions

There are deeply embedded assumptions in the ways in which we think about the world. They are often hidden but powerful in shaping action.

Framing assumptions: these are the broad assumptions that often structure public discourse (See Chapters 6 and 9).

Prescriptive assumptions: these involve claims which assume what should happen or what types of knowledge are legitimate. For example, women are often assumed to be carers; therefore it is assumed they will want to learn more about childcare

Predictive assumptions: these involve a claim about cause and effect. For example, if people are given too generous benefit allowances they will lack the incentive to find work.

The role of assumptions in public discourse is to tell a particular story or narrative which cannot be questioned. Sometimes they exist through misinformation, and these can be challenged through counter information. But assumptions can have a visceral as well as an intellectual quality. Some issues inspire a gut reaction because of how they are presented. Such issues include things like immigration or benefits. These are more difficult to challenge because they usually work at a level which may feel simply instinctive to people. Educational work seeks to explore how we learn these 'instinctive' or visceral responses, and what power relationships are behind them.

Task Try to think of examples of each of the kinds of assumptions outlined. Which of these do you think have a visceral quality ie they are experienced at a gut level. Why do you think this is?

Task In your context, what type of problems are addressed in policy and how might they provide the material for developing an alternative explanation of the problem and what can be done?

Action Plan

These tasks are the first steps in the process, but something needs to be done if things are to change. What kinds of action might be taken?

Task Who will do what and when? All successful action requires a degree of organization and accountability to the group. Drawing up a list of activities, actions and timescales for carrying things through is an essential part of organization. Action without organization will fail.

Levels of action

- Individual: eg consumer boycotts, raising issues with political representatives
- Community: eg public meetings, local publicity displays, marches, plays and performances, displays of information in specific locations
- Local state: eg petition local authorities, contact councillors, deputations to councils
- Above the local state: eg make use of media sources to amplify issues and concerns, lobby political parties and individuals, contact sympathetic journalists
- Beyond the national state: eg making contact with international organisations, communities in other places, labour organisations with an international remit

Task Consider these different levels of action in relation to different aspects of your work, and the balance between them.

Communications plan

An essential aspect of gaining support and building alliances will involve a communications campaign.

Task Assess the following outlets for their possible use by groups in particular situations.

- Targeting groups e.g. a professional group.
- Public meetings
- Use of social media
- Use of mainstream media
- Using creative activities: banners, posters, plays, songs etc (see Chapter 10)
- Producing leaflets and reports
- Putting on public displays in selected locations

Evaluation: (See chapter 4) how successful has the action been? What has been achieved and how? Does the action need escalating or enhancing in some way? If so how might it be done?

41

Chapter 9: Critical Discourse Analysis[7]

Introduction

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) has been largely academically developed and can seem hard to apply in educational practice. However, it is worth persevering with. CDA has its roots in the development of theory about how language and power connect through 'textual' messages to shape our thinking and behaviour, often without our conscious awareness. It can be a really useful tool if adapted and applied by practitioners working with a variety of different groups in communities.

In the current communication age, the significance of 'textual' messages which we are continually bombarded with, has multiplied. Yet our capacity to decode these messages is often assumed rather than explored educationally. The power of these forms of communication is that they can influence our outlook precisely because we give them little thought (see chapter 6). In this chapter we provide a basic framework for decoding texts, which can be developed in a variety of different ways.

What do we mean by text?

By text we mean the following types of communication media which includes visual and iconic messages as well as written forms. In many cases they combine across different media:

- Advertising
- Newspapers
- Television broadcasts
- Posters
- Images
- Written texts
- Television shows: 'soaps' and comedy in particular
- Radio shows
- Speeches
- Sporting events
- Websites
- Social media

The focus of CDA might, for example, be particular issues identified by participants or those that are current such as refugees, migration, austerity, etc.

Framework for decoding texts

Below is a three-stage process of decoding texts and their interconnections:

Stage one is a descriptive one whereby groups are asked to identify the components of the textual message. A simple question can be 'what do you see/ read in the text?' In complex multi-media texts this can be difficult to answer because words, images, clothes, colours, and symbols might be significant ways in which people understand meanings but may not stand out, at first, as part of the message being conveyed. The important thing is to consider all the components of the message as far as possible.

Stage two involves making sense of what is being conveyed in the text by participants making sense of the gestures, expressions, body language, feelings and mood which is conveyed in the text. Participants can be asked 'what does it mean to you?' This open question enables the group to interpret the text in light of their own experience and to hear alternative interpretations of the same message.

Further probing questions could include interpretation of 'who is the text aimed at?' 'How are people described/named?' 'What actions do people take?'

Stage three involves explaining the meaning of the text in terms of the wider social context and inequalities of power. A simple question like 'what is the message about?' 'Why was it produced?' 'What values and beliefs are behind the text?' can reveal the interests which might be shaping it, and the social order which is shaping those interests. The analysis can then penetrate into the ideologies implicit in the text (See Chapter 1), the assumptions made, and how the message reinforces existing relations of power and inequality, or how they might help to challenge them.

Various different questions can open up these issues:

- Who put the message together and why?
- Is it a positive or negative message about people?
- What might be the reaction of the public to the message of the communication? What might be the reaction of the people who are the objects of the message?

Another important way of making sense of the text is to think about any metaphors it conveys. For example, a common metaphor used in texts about welfare recipients is to represent them as lazy and unwilling to help themselves – visually they might be pictured as over weight, sitting and watching television. In this way the representation of *particular* people on welfare as scroungers, as the undeserving poor, reinforces a negative interpretation of what *all* people on welfare are like.

The process can move between the different stages of the decoding as participants reinterpret the significance of the text in light of the discussion. It can also lead to different types of activities from this process of critical reading: for example, research activity to find out more about the 'subjects' of the message. Decoding a text depicting homeless people as making a 'lifestyle' choice can involve speaking first hand to homeless people about their experiences as well as researching evidence about the degree of homelessness amongst different groups of people and why it exists. There are also an increasing number of television programmes about people as 'benefit cheats' or what is sometimes called 'poverty porn', as poor people are focussed upon as objects of contempt and scorn. Clips from television programmes such as 'Benefit Street' can provide ample textual examples for this type of analysis. A simple google search for 'benefit cheats' will generate numerous newspaper stereotypes of people on benefits who are implicitly or, at times explicitly, depicted as representative of people in receipt of welfare.

The above three stages can be represented diagrammatically as follows:

Doing Critical Discourse Analysis:Three stages

social context

interaction

text

• description

• interpretation

• explanation

44
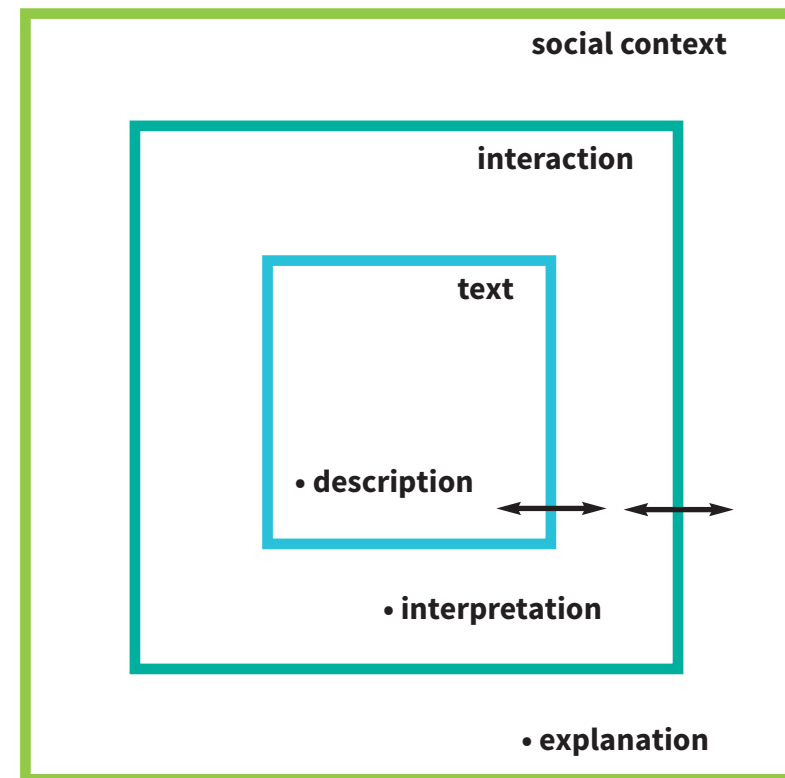
Taking action

CDA can also lead to action, as participants think about the consequences of the message and what they might do to counteract negative messages which depict people unfairly. This might involve creating a counter-representation, which more closely responds to the reality of people's lives; for example, creating a poster, picture, image, banner or audio-visual message which is more sympathetic and provides a different way of decoding the message and analysing its causes. This might be displayed in public places or be used to organise a meeting to raise awareness of the issues involved.

Task Design a session on a theme you have selected. Identify a suitable text and then work through the three stages yourself by showing how you would respond to the description, interpretation and analysis of the text. What kind of action do you think might be possible as a consequence?

Chapter 10: Making Critical and Creative Connections

Introduction

This chapter considers ways of making educational work in and with communities more imaginative and arts work more purposeful. This can involve working collaboratively with arts workers and artists on particular projects of mutual interest, where such an option is available, or it can simply mean seeking out ways of becoming more creative in daily practice oneself. Educational workers who are interested in extending the potential of community engagement should always be trying to find ways to enhance people's potential for democratic agency by helping to release or resource their capacity to be active and creative themselves. The expectation to 'be creative' can be intimidating and off-putting for those who do not regard themselves as 'arty'. A willingness to experiment, to emulate, to borrow and adapt other people's ideas in order to open up creative environments for education is a more realistic proposition for many people.

The art of translation: some themes

Educational work with communities is an ideal position in which to practise the art of translation between different levels, experiences and understandings of social reality. Here are some of the themes which could be addressed:

- **Personal and Political:** to show how personal experience is shaped by politics, and how it can be politicized.

- **Strange and familiar:** to show how what is taken for granted can be opened up and what is regarded as too difficult to understand can sometimes be simplified.

- **Particular and universal:** to show how what is thought of as particular to one person can be more commonly experienced, and to identify with people and issues in other situations, times and places than our own.

- **Micro and macro:** to show how what might be experienced as personal or local problems have their origins in much bigger structures and processes.

- **Past and present:** to show how history relates to the present and what can be learned from previous struggles in other times and places.

- **Individual and social:** to show how society is made by people and vice versa.

Task Can you think of other themes which are not covered here?

Task Think of an encounter with the arts in general in the last weeks or months which connects with any or all of these themes. It could be a film, a book, a picture, a photograph, a scene from a TV programme, a piece of music………

Lighting the fuse of imagination

It may be useful to think of the ways in which these themes can be applied to how and what people need to learn in order for them to take an interest in critical community engagement. Most importantly, people need to be able to imagine democracy if they are to engage with it, defend it or struggle over it – to develop a democratic disposition – to see how things could be different (see Chapter 2). This kind of disposition can be catalyzed by three types of imagination which interact and overlap:

Sociological imagination: the capacity to see oneself in society; to grasp the connections and distinctions between our own personal experience and relationships on the one hand, and the wider context or structure of social and institutional relations, on the other.

Narrative imagination: the capacity to locate one's own biography within the story (and the marginalized stories) of history.

Reflexive imagination: the capacity to see oneself, one's identity and traditions, as simultaneously part of both the problem and the possibility of democratic life.
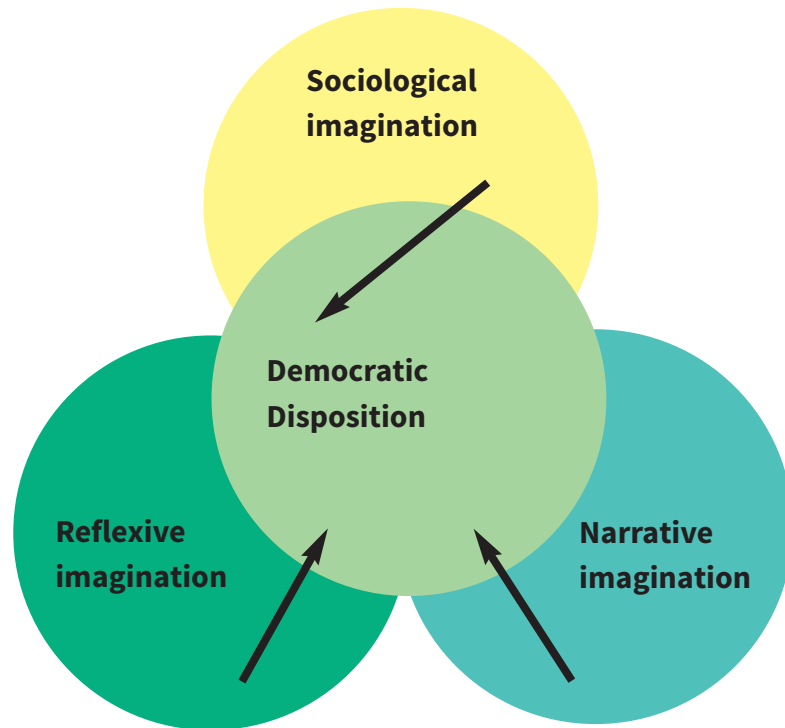
Task Identify an issue of concern, and discuss each of these types of imagination in turn as they relate to each member of the group, to see how they help to illuminate it.

Engaging Heart, Mind and Soul

Using our imaginations takes us out of ourselves and exposes us to other worlds, beyond ourselves. It draws potentially upon our emotional, spiritual and intellectual capacities. Using creative means and methods can assist people to explore their hopes and fears; make them sad, happy or angry. It can move people as well as make them think and when people are moved, they may be more likely to act. Maxine Green puts it very well:

> All depends upon a breaking free, a leap and then a question … the educative task is to create situations in which people are moved to begin to ask, in all the tones of voice there are, 'why'? (Greene, 1995)[8]

Task Take a situation about which there is some concern or interest, or some expectation of response, describe the main features in a paragraph or so (there are two examples provided), and explore how it can be tackled using some or all of the activities identified on page 50. Adapt to suit people's interests or talents. Once people have completed the tasks, each group performs or presents their work for wider discussion. There is generally much laughter during the preparation and presentation of the tasks!

[8]Greene, M (1995) *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, The Arts and Social Change,* San Francisco: Jossey Bass

48

Example 1

Background: The local Friends of the Park group have been trying to encourage different groups to use the park and to show respect for the different uses eg for dog walkers to clear up after their dogs and for young people to leave the play equipment intact so that they can be played with by younger children. They also want to raise awareness about the potential of the space. In addition to awareness-raising, they would like to find new members for the group. As a group they meet every two weeks and have started to express frustration at going over the same issues with little progress being made.

Task To get the ball rolling, you suggest people express their views using the activities suggested on the next page.

Example 2

Background: The local arts centre runs sessions for a number of age groups covering a number of arts disciplines. Historically these are not very well attended, particularly by the upper range of young people. Some funding has been secured to run workshops over the summer for young people aged 8-14 years.

Task The management of the centre is keen to find ways of providing sessions that spark the interest of the young people and encourage them to participate in other projects throughout the rest of the year. You are keen to encourage them to express their thoughts and ideas before starting the programme.

Activities: (two or three people to each)

- Compose a song of two or three verses to the tune of 'She'll be coming round the mountain when she comes' to describe/comment on the situation.

- Write a poem, completing each line as follows:

  I see …..

  I hear …..

  I smell …..

  I feel …..

  I think …..

  I say …..

- Write a limerick of four lines beginning with a first line such as 'I like a walk in the middle of the day' (for example 1) or 'I know what I like, don't you?' (for example 2) for a placard or banner.

- Draw a cartoon strip of about 4 frames depicting the situation for a newsletter following the meeting.

- Devise a comedy sketch depicting the problem and potential solution/s (other people can be used as actors!).

- Devise a human statue to represent some aspect of the issue.

- Devise a movement piece to represent some aspect of the issue.

- Make a graffiti backdrop to represent some aspect of the issue.

- Make a short video/interview to represent some aspect of the issue.

- Make a short dramatic scene to represent some aspect of the issue.

The most important thing about making creative and critical connections is that doing something together which is both fun and requires collective discipline not only extends people's repertoire of potential tactics for action, but also creates solidarity in the process.

Design Fiona Menzies