Title: *Changing course: but in what direction?*

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This paper is the product of the initial stage of research into Drumchapel *CommUniversity*, which is a partnership set up to address high unemployment and low educational attainment within the designated Social Inclusion area of Drumchapel. The pilot project is an attempt to put the rhetoric of current policy on social inclusion and lifelong learning into practice.

The partnership is, as suggested by the conjoint title, a collaboration between a Higher Education institution (University of Glasgow) and the Drumchapel Social Inclusion Partnership and Community Forum Directors. It funds and operates a work-based training programme for community work trainees for what is often termed learning and earning and is intended to

> '...raise the capacity of local people to work in the local area and assist with the positive development of Drumchapel.' (Drumchapel Community Forum 2002:1)

The CommUniversity also provides non-accredited community based courses, such as the Department of Adult & Continuing Education's ACTIVATE. These courses are seen as a way of encouraging local people to become active citizens and to participate in the building of social capital, by expanding

' existing community education, training and employment opportunities', in order to '…contribute to the development of a lifelong learning strategy' (…) 'The CommUniversity not only seeks to enhance and expand capacity building training locally to promote a culture of lifelong learning but will also enhance the capacity and profile of local agencies and organisations'. (DCF 2002:1)

Since 1997 the dominant policy ideas of the present Government have been around social inclusion and lifelong learning. These ideas strongly influence the work of this project, as do the contested concepts of active citizenship, building community capacity and social capital. From this ideological standpoint critical questions arise and challenges are posed for the CommUniversity.

For example how can the CommUniversity best 'enhance the capacity and profile of local agencies and organisations' (DCF 2002:1) and what exactly do the stakeholders mean by this. How can the project identify new issues and interests and develop active citizens through 'the process of community development focused education' (DCF 2002:1) I will suggest that in order to build community capacity and social capital, the key stakeholders must expand the area of civic activity to include not only vocational training programmes such as the CommUniversity but must encourage new forms of activity and association and stimulate more innovative collective action. In order to address their aims the project must create new opportunities, for not only those who are already active, but for others who are operating out with the traditional decision-making bodies or have not participated in any aspect of the community before.

Let us look more closely at the study. The material generated came from respondents in the focus groups interviewed and ranged from the present trainees participating in the CommUniversity, to the Social Inclusion Partnership manager and placement providers. The study also included, support workers, staff of the Support Unit, and 4 Members of the Board. Their responsibilities included the allocation and overseeing of the funding, the administration and management of the project, the linking of the partners and other aspects of the Community Forum's remit, and devising a marketing strategy, and of course providing support for the trainees on the programme.

This study is very much in its early stages in terms of being able to identify the successes but it can identify the opportunities for improvement. The respondents' initial experiences of the CommUniversity have so far been positive and reflect the potential originally identified in the funding proposal. At this stage, practically everyone felt that the CommUniversity had 'got off to a good start', that it was 'making good progress' and that it had so far been a positive experience that had 'added value' to the work of the Support Unit and Community Forum.

In the original proposal the CommUniversity claims to strive 'to promote a culture of lifelong learning' (DCF 2002:1) by providing vocational training and increasing the employment opportunities of the trainees who complete and pass the course. This in turn hopefully will be part of a 'cascade' initiative where the skills, knowledge and experience gained in placement will be shared, transferred and developed with others they in turn work with. Not only do the stakeholders hope that more people get involved in activities and services within the community but that they will become active citizens who will take part in the democratic processes and structures of their community.

When considering the term active citizenship, the respondents offered the following interpretations,

- being active in community life, taking part in activities within the community
- participation in civic society i.e. becoming involved in the democratic processes of this country, shaping policy, and being part of *real* participation in decision-making, making an identifiable contribution and a difference
- taking responsibility for issues in your life and community, managing your own affairs, developing a sense of ownership of your own community
- equipping people with skills and knowledge of their rights, standing up for weaker people in the community, being empowered to develop collective action

These responses suggest the term is ambiguous and can be interpreted widely and considered 'as wide as it is long'. Stuart (2000:30) while reflecting on the term refers to Johnston (1999) who claims that there are different models of active citizenship and that there is a need to

> '…recognise learning for different aspects of citizenship; inclusive citizenship, pluralistic citizenship, reflexive citizenship and active citizenship'.

In the strategy paper *Supporting Active Communities in Scotland* (SE 2000) the Scottish Executive see active citizenship as clearly being about changing volunteering and community action and the strategy included the following objectives for volunteering and community action
- to bring about more positive attitudes at all levels towards it
- to locate volunteering and community action at the heart of policy
- to broaden the range of people involved
- to increase the number of people involved

But Field (2001:24) suggests that this ambiguity and confusion in the meaning of the terms means that

> 'the limits of adult learning for active citizenship are no longer clear' as
> ' active citizenship must now encompass choices and strategies in respect of areas of life that were once deemed on the margins of political action…and must be tackled in ways that bring in a much wider range of policy actors than was in the case in the past'.

He also claims that

> '…the new role of knowledge has encouraged policy makers to pay less regard to the formal and specialised institutions of adult education…and must be encouraged in – a variety of times, places and ways throughout and across the lifespan'. Field (2001:24)

Similarly policy analysis and critique is obscured when addressing building capacity and social capital as again the meanings are unclear and this makes it difficult for practitioners to firstly establish meaning and then put it into practice.

The CommUniversity also made a commitment 'to enhance and expand capacity building'. (DCF 2002:1) In defining building community capacity, respondents described it as,
- working towards increasing active citizenship as defined above, creating opportunities for dialogue with the wider community, adding to the sum of the potential of the community,
- developing abilities, increasing knowledge and enhancing the skills of local people to work in own area and bring about change

- identifying individual needs, prioritising need and planning accordingly to meet these needs, sharing resources, being aware of different issues, 'getting round the gatekeepers'.

The CommUniversity saw another of its objectives as to 'enhance the capacity and profile of local agencies and organisations' and this is often seen as an important part of building networks and working relationships or social capital. In the case of the respondents it was seen as the following,

- the cumulative value of participation, outputs and outcomes, and voluntary effort,
- inter-relationships in communities, networks, e.g. bringing people at different levels together, co-operation between individuals or groups to achieve common goals,
- building on a 'bank' of energies, skills e.g. time bank projects, accessing and knowing the 'capital' to use to best effect,
- community ability to address own issues through accessing adequate resources

But with this problem of lack of agreement on meaning there are serious implications. If we, who are steeped in the jargon, are unsure of what we understand the terms to mean, then how can we expect those less familiar with them or be attracted to being more active. Blaxter and Hughes (2000:91) suggest that this obscurity can mean our gaze is directed towards all the more positive features of the terms and that we become less critical or able to critique policy due to this lack of clarity. For example, the characteristics of the horizontal relations within social capital such as trust, reciprocity, support and mutuality are promoted and emphasised in policy documents but so much so that we become blinkered to the continuing inequality of the hierarchical structure and vertical relationships.

We are drawn towards the aforementioned worthy aims which seek to present the concept in a palatable way and which appeal to our most basic human emotional instincts. In doing so we can fail to concentrate on the more negative aspects of capacity building and social capital and be more reluctant to challenge, or even recognise, the inequalities and differences in power that remain within these relations and partnerships.

Blaxter and Hughes (2000:91) also suggest that these vertical ties are
> '…embedded within matrices of power, struggle and resistance through which people come to know their place and their possibilities.'

They go on to claim,
> 'By providing solutions without even asking they also evidence more fully their low regard for the worth of those people whose voices are silenced in discourses of social capital and whom social capital purports to liberate.'

The key concepts of power and participation as related to the overarching themes were also the focus of discussion within the study and again respondents were optimistic about change and an increase in the levels of participation. But they were clear about what should be in place to enable people to be empowered e.g. dialogical ways of working in groups etc. There was an acknowledgement that although it was desirable to have equal partnership that *'some partners were more equal than others'*. It was agreed that there had to be a convincing of people to '*share power'* and to capitalise on the *'leader'* qualities that already exist in the community.

So it is worth being reminded that the concept of power can be expressed positively or negatively, or manifested in economic, social, political, or cultural terms. It can be seen as 'a

paradigmatic one' (Thompson 1998:42) and can be assessed from either a structural position which believes 'power is concentrated in certain areas of the social structure' or from a post-structural position where it is seen as 'dispersed and as a feature of all social relations' (Thompson 1998: 50-51.) This latter paradigm emphasises the importance of language 'where meanings are shaped and contested, identities formed and challenged' (Thompson 1998:52). while in contrast Price (1996:43) tells us that Marxists see power as

'…a repressive, top-down form manifest through politico-economic relations'.
She goes on to explain that Foucault (1980:89) sees it as a productive force, which is

'…a network between whose threads people circulate' (1980:98).
Finally in reference to the Gramscian concept of hegemonic power which is based on ideological persuasion, Ledwith (1997:43) points out that

'Maintaining power by persuading society that dominant thinking is truth works in a much more complicated way than simply one dominant group coercing another, subordinate, group, and for this reason it is important to develop *critical dialogue* around the experience of power and control'.

In terms of participation, there was an element of cynicism about some of the existing political structures with 'its tiers of representation' and 'ability (of local members) to be more active just before elections'. However some constructive suggestions were made around new and innovative ways of attracting people to the process and pulling them in to participate e.g. 'new mediums of technology', the use of the participatory research appraisal model, voting and ballots on issues using the local newspaper, use of email etc. The trainees were particularly keen to put into practice the methods learned at University that had worked for them e.g. popular education methods, the use of drama and critical inquiry and 'fun activities' which *'*started where people were at*'*.

So participation as active citizenship can be understood to range from taking part in community activities to decision making about local resources and facilities. For some the model of community planning creates a sense that people really are involved, are participating in the social fabric of the community, have a say in their community, have access to influencing these services, and in doing so are really part of the democratic processes. But for others there is merely an illusion, which does not reflect their experience, and there is little evidence of change in the actual levels or patterns of participation.

Participation brings other problems, as it can also be challenging and problematic for workers and agencies and as Beresford and Croft (1993:20) point out,

'Citizen involvement faces agencies and their workers with a difficult question. Is it something they really want' and '…it may mean empowering people to do things with which agencies and workers don't agree.'

And finally as Stuart (2000:30) quotes Field (1999:11)

'…we have a huge normative assumption that participation is a Good Thing'.
So the humanistic and benevolent qualities of sharing and caring are masked by the relationships of power within participation.

So what can the University learn from the CommUniversity experience so far and what is the specific role of the University in this partnership for the future? Hammond (2000:123) suggests in discussing community-based adult education,

'As well as furthering research and teaching, the university should play its part in promoting a healthy democracy, a democracy in which citizens take the initiative and create good lives for themselves and their communities.'

The part of the University must be to provide opportunities for trainees to take part in a critical and problematising educational process and to promote the application of the reflection and action cycle (praxis). For people to become more active we need to provide space for them to identify the contradictions of our society, which are rooted in their experiences, and this approach must be applied long after they leave the grounds of the University campus. It is also up to the University as Stuart (2000:33) claims

> '...to allow active participation from a wide range of communities and individuals who will help to redefine the parameters of higher education itself... a new form of democratic learning'.

Meanwhile the Support Unit consider setting up a training Trust, which would stand-alone from the Community Forum and be more strategic in its scope and remit. There was resounding agreement from respondents that the CommUniversity should continue and develop into a more sustainable model that would include funding for students to complete all three years if they wished. But the method of teaching and learning and the content of these courses is as important and will make all the difference to the outcomes; especially in terms of influencing the quantity of people who get involved and the quality of the work they undertake in the future.

The social planning and partnership model seems as if it is here to stay for some time so there needs to be an honest debate about the hidden inequality and assumed shared status of the partners who are seen to be equal, but it is clear to many that some are more equal than others. Community forums are just one form of decentralising government. According to Elrick (1999:14) their role is defined as

- raising issues and concerns
- participating in other decentralised structures to influence area priorities and decisions
- providing forums for consultation
- acting as a sounding board for all the council on the council's plans and policy.

But alternatively Player (1997:46) suggests that

> 'The competitiveness of the localism which characterises the Partnership process is part of the hegemonic restructuring of welfare within a 'free market' system.'

He goes on to claim,

> '...the term 'partnership' has already acquired euphoric connotations evoking uncritical feelings of warmth and belonging.' p.47

and that the partnership process

> '...suffers from a weakness that is intrinsic in pluralism itself' and
> '...fails to explain the structural origins of power' and is one which 'conceals conflict'.p.54

As Collins and Lister (1997:27) suggest there is a critical irony for those who wish to revive radical community work.

> 'It is much harder to carry out practices which seek to challenge dominant power when that power increases its ascendancy' which 'makes the carrying out of those practices all the more vital'.

The CommUniversity is a project in which all of the stakeholders will eventually gain some direct benefit from its success in various ways both individually and collectively, so there is a

strong sense of ownership, investment and commitment. At this point in time the benefit spans over a small group i.e. the trainees, Board members, workers, tutors and funders. The later stage of research will hopefully establish if there has been a quantifiable and qualitative change that has spread further afield to affect many others in Drumchapel in a positive way and that is the intent of all the stakeholders.

The CommUniversity is currently undergoing a feasibility study, which will hopefully identify ways of sustaining the project financially. The project already shows signs of being able to demonstrate the possibility of affecting potential and capacity, but the challenge is to realise the vision of change from a local person's perspective. The future activists or 'active citizens' also need to be able to constructively challenge the existing political processes as well as form new associations and social movements.

The ultimate challenge for the CommUniversity is establish how best to *'promote lifelong learning'* which still includes vocational opportunities for the individual, while changing the landscape of participation to include not only consultation and planning but real structural social change. As Ledwith (1997:17) suggests,

> 'Our vision must be grounded in a possibility which translates into a form of praxis for sustainable transformative change'.

This depends on the willingness of the partners to open more than just the gates of the academy, but create opportunities for new debates and ways of knowing and acting both in the academy and the community. If they achieve this they will have demonstrated an ability to promote and sustain real democratic processes within the community and political structure of Drumchapel.

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