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Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of Glasgow <u>http://eprints.gla.ac.uk</u> **Community development: A value-driven affair** - Dr Louise Sheridan - University of Glasgow

Abstract

The article focuses on community development as a value-driven process. The foundational belief is that communities are powerful and are agents of positive change. Through self-direction, or with the support of community workers, communities can achieve positive outcomes in the pursuit of social justice for all. The article explores how a range of theories and approaches from Paulo Freire (1996; 2000), Cooperrider et al. (2008) and Saul Alinksy (1971) among others - are useful in bringing values to life in day-to-day practice and exemplifies good practice that aims to achieve positive outcomes within communities. Value-driven community development involves communities moving beyond having the ability to act, to acting with others to challenge injustice and inequality within society. The article suggests that understanding the dynamics of power is at the heart of value-driven community development practice and discusses ideas from Ledwith (2020), Gaventa (2006) and others. In bringing values to life in day-to-day practice, communities are enabled and supported to exercise power as individuals, and power with others through collective action, for positive social change.

Introduction

Community development values are, or should be, the lifeblood of any form of community work. This article underlines the importance of understanding community development as a value-driven process. The starting premise is that communities are powerful and are agents of positive change. Through self-direction, or with the support of community workers/activists, communities can achieve positive outcomes in the pursuit of social justice for all. A range of ideas and approaches are explored, such as the importance of pedagogical space from Freire (1996; 2000); Cooperrider et al.'s approach to appreciative inquiry that starts with people's gifts (or assets) as opposed to what they lack; and Saul Alinksy's (1971) emphasis on people working together with others in a strategic and organised way. These ideas are shown to be useful in bringing values to life in day-to-

day practice and exemplify good practice that aims to achieve positive outcomes within communities. Value-driven community development involves communities moving beyond having the ability to act, to acting with others to challenge injustice and inequality within society. Understanding the dynamics of power is at the heart of value-driven community development practice and is considered briefly. For example, Ledwith (2020) emphasises the need for people to understand the structures of power within the contexts in which they live. Gaventa (2006), and others, reinforce the complex nature of power and recognise various ways in which power is exercised. In bringing values to life in day-today practice, communities are enabled and supported to exercise power as individuals. and power with others through collective action, for positive social change. There is not one universal view of community development. Somerville (2011) notes examples of work that is done to, or for, communities under the banner of community development but this article highlights the importance of involving people, working *with* them for change. The process is not quick, patience is needed (Sheridan and Martin, 2012) but also a critical perspective and a willingness to challenge are vital. Sheridan, Martin, McDonald and Gormally (2019, cited in Sheridan et al., 2019) developed the community development jigsaw (Figure 1) to capture the necessary elements, in their view, to community development that works with communities and not for them.

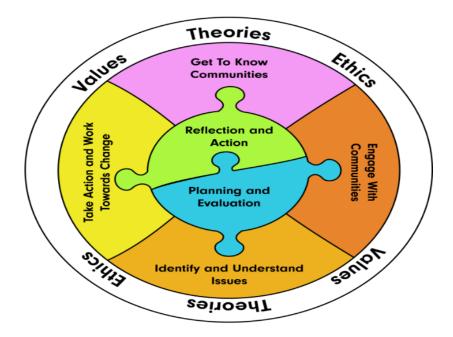


Figure 1 – Community Development Jigsaw

There is no claim that this is a new approach to community development; the community development jigsaw (CD Jigsaw) simply captures the various parts of a community development process that locates communities at the heart of the process. This article highlights the importance of values as part of the jigsaw, as the beginning, the middle and the end of the process.

Values, values Everywhere

It is easy to find lists of community development values. *The National Occupational Standards for Community Development* (LLUK, 2009) list the following key values: Equality and anti-discrimination; Social justice; Collective action; Community empowerment and Working and learning together. The Community Learning and Development Standards Council for Scotland (2020) cite a slightly different version, listing: self-determination; inclusion; empowerment; working collaboratively; and

promotion of learning as a lifelong activity. Both sets of values underline the need for people to come together, to act together and to learn, which is undeniable. Community development activities are a form of lifelong learning and, reflecting Freire's (2000) assertion that all forms of education are political, the community development exchange (CDX) (c.2015) include political awareness as a key value. CDX refer to values as commitments, which reinforces the notion that bringing values to life in everyday practice requires dedication and thought. Whether working through parts of the CD Jigsaw, or applying Freire's (2000) concept of dialogue, which involves critical discussion, awareness and action, commitment should be made to ensuring that practice is guided by values. If political awareness is a key value in practice, practical arrangements and activities should enable the development of critical consciousness. For example, efforts should not simply lead a group to the realisation that people who are asylum seekers are treated unfairly, but rather, they should lead to uncovering policies, procedures and dayto-day practice in everyday institutions that directly impact the lived experiences of people who are seeking asylum. A commitment to political awareness, social justice, empowerment means practical efforts and the provision of learning opportunities that lead to critical consciousness, as well as the confidence and desire for people to work together to create positive change that improve daily life for many and not just a few. Freire's vision of education is, without question, political - it is about education that enables changes that are right for communities and are socially just.

The Importance of Ethics

Every aspect of community development practice, each piece of the CD Jigsaw, is grounded in ethics. Ethics permeate at multiple levels and in multiple ways. Ethics shape personal beliefs, influence everyday actions, and define roles that are undertaken (Banks, 2016). It is about doing the 'right' things and doing things in the 'right' way, which involves taking a value-driven approach in all aspects of practice. Freire (2004) believed that universal ethics should underpin transformative practice – practice that strives for justice and positive change. For Freire, universal ethics 'values the exercise of will, of decision, of resistance, of choice' (p.24). The link between ethics and resistance is commonly understood within community development; Weinberg and Banks (2019, p.365) conclude

that ethical practice must imbue social and political resistance as an act of moral duty to those affected by structural inequalities. Having a moral duty to others, in a caring, nurturing and empowering way aligns to the 'ethics of human solidarity' (Freire, 1998:116). Solidarity, in this sense, is more than being considerate and thoughtful to others. People's potential, and ability, to act must also acknowledged. The concept of alfirmo (Sheridan, 2018) is relevant here. Whilst developed in the context of youth participation practice, alfirmo is relevant in any community contact. Alfirmo means is to convey positive and optimistic regard about people with whom you work; to nurture and care for them and to provide the necessary support to help them achieve their goals. An ethic of care and love is implicit within alfirmo.

The CLD Standards Council for Scotland (2013) capture the essential ingredients of an ethical approach to working with communities in their Code of Ethics. This is explicit in outlining the requirements for all those who are working with people within communities, whether that be professionals or volunteers. This includes: the need to protect people from harm and to ensure their wellbeing; self-awareness as professionals to ensure that individual values do not negatively impact others; and the importance of clear parameters in which to operate. In a study that looked at the experiences of people involved in youth participation practice; young people identified clear boundaries as essential. Something as simple as all participants, including workers, setting a group agreement helps to ensure a value-driven experience. A clear group agreement, to which all subscribe, helps to embed the values of working and learning together; participation; equality and diversity; and anti-oppression within day-to-day experiences. Rather than a tokenistic act at the beginning of a group's life, the group agreement must be continually enforced, which is an ethical act that aims to protect people. Small and simple acts, such as ensuring a positive and safe space in which people come together, can promote trust and solidarity. This reflects the 'engage with communities' part of the CD jigsaw. This, in turn, can lead to collective action that challenges injustice, which connects to the 'take action and work towards change' piece of the community development jigsaw. Freire outlined seven principles that underpin transformational practice, with the first one being 'the importance of pedagogical space' (1996, p.129). Creating positive and nurturing space enables meaningful dialogue, in which the root causes of structural problems are examined, that leads to action. This is not a simple task; action that strives for positive social change takes effort, time and must follow a process of investigation, in which communities identify and understand issues. As Weinberg and Banks (2019) note, there is a moral imperative to uncover and resist negative connotations of power. Therefore, power analysis is vital.

Whose Got the Power?

Understanding the dynamics of power is intrinsic in all aspects of community development but particularly relevant in the process of getting to know the community. It would be easy to get lost in the abundance of literature on perspectives on power, particularly as it is a contested concept (Lukes, 2005). Some theorists provide helpful insights on understanding how power is applied in practical ways, both to the detriment and benefit of communities. Ideas from Margaret Ledwith (2020), Stephen Lukes (2005), John Gaventa (2009), among others, shed light on key aspects of power analysis. Ledwith, for example, underlines the importance of 'understanding the structures of power that reach into people's personal lives to determine their life chances' (2020, p.13). It is therefore vital to understand how people use power in various ways but also to understand the nature of power within systems, processes, and structures, which entails understanding dominant ideologies that translate to daily experiences of inequality and struggle In Lukes (1974) earlier account, he gave a narrow view of power that focused on how power is used by some over others, as a form of dominance. He later broadened his perspective, suggesting that 'power...is a dispositional concept...Thus power refers to an ability or capacity of an agent or agents, which they may or may not exercise' (Lukes, 2005, p.106). While the broader perspective from Lukes is useful, his earlier discussions of three dimensions of power (decision-making, secretive agenda-setting or manipulation) are still helpful in contemporary community development practice. In an ideal world, people would not be treated unfairly but it is evident that Lukes' third-dimension of power is discernible in contemporary society across the globe. This dimension of power is akin to Gramsci's (1971) definition of hegemony, which is when the ruling class (in most cases) maintain their dominance through ideas that are unquestioned and therefore become the norm. The notion of hegemony is reflected by Gaventa (2006, p.29) who referred to invisible power as 'the most insidious of the three dimensions of power, invisible power shapes

the psychological and ideological boundaries of participation'. Community development practitioners often encounter people who believe that they have no power to change situations that negatively impact lives. It is therefore vital that they have the knowledge, tools and ability to discern when forms of power are being exercised, implicitly or explicitly, with negative impact is vital. Building on Lukes' work, Gaventa (2006) developed the powercube, which is an approach to undertaking power analysis. The powercube provides a framework to understand different levels of power (local, national and global); the forms of power (visible, hidden and invisible); and the spaces in which power operates (closed, invited and claimed/created). The powercube provides a basis for action that aims to transform situations, which connects to the 'take action and work towards change' piece of the CD jigsaw. Gaventa's reference to created spaces in which people can exercise power forms the basis for much community development practice. Practitioners are skilled in listening to people, gathering views and opinions and identifying issues. However, they must also help communities to understand the nature of issues, that is, the root cause of situations that prevent people from thriving, or even surviving. Power analysis is essential to understand what happens in closed spaces, how invisible power works to exclude rather than include people, as well as how to create and claim spaces in which to exercise collective power.

Finding the Power Within

Community development must create and develop the opportunities for collective empowerment. However, the stark reality for some people is that they feel powerless. As discussed earlier, critical theory provides a theoretical lens with which to view society. Kincheloe and McLaren (2002:89) refer to a common thread in multiple understandings of critical theory, which is that critical theory offers a 'discourse of possibility'. The need to challenge injustice and inequality is a vital aspect of any conception of critical theory. Synonymous with inequality, dehumanisation reflects feelings of alienation, isolation and exclusion (Freire, 1985). Freire (2000, p.47) described the notion of being fully human or 'the quest for human completion' to counter such negative feelings and experiences. The process of becoming fully human involves 'being recognised as a member of society, with rights and the ability to act and change things' (Sheridan, 2018, p.21). Current statistics

in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2020) confirm that multiple and enduring deprivation continues to affect people in their day-to-day lives; many people are far from human completion. Anderson et al. (2016:199) suggest that 'grit' and 'hope' are integral to community development that strives for social justice. Grit refers to 'persistent and sustained effort to achieve goals' (Sheridan, 2018, p.20) and hope reflects the belief that change is possible because people have the power to bring about positive change.

The CD process harnesses and encourages hope in people but may involve helping them move beyond simply having the capability, or ableness, to act (Morriss, 2006), to having the ability to act, and therefore acting. The complexities and differences between ableness and ability are beyond the scope of this article but are described by Dowding (2008). In a practice context, community workers must spend time getting to know the community and, through meaningful engagement with them, will learn about people strengths. Community workers should also learn about the barriers people face that may prevent them from acting. While community development centres around building relationships and collectives, it also involves getting to know individuals – including their strengths. Dowding notes, 'strangely, perhaps, individual power is not so often viewed as the central concept in discussions of social justice' (2008, p.238). Harnessing individual power, and channelling this as part of a collective process is vital in efforts to achieve social justice.

Hunjan and Pettitt (2011, p.10) suggest the enactment of power involves the 'ability of people to strengthen and mobilise to challenge inequalities and demand rights', again connecting to the notion of becoming fully human (Freire, 2000). In this view, power is something that is exercised by individuals or groups as individual or collective agency. Concepts of power will be further explored in the next section. Enabling people within communities to exercise the power they hold within themselves as a collective is at the heart of community development. This is reflected in the 'take action and work towards change' part of the community development jigsaw, but also connects with the value of 'working and learning together' and others (Source for Values). This article will discuss some practical approaches and methods that support and encourage communities to work together, as well as approaches to overcome associated challenges of working with

groups. The premise, for now, is that supporting communities to develop as collectives is a positive and worthwhile endeavour that leads to the exercise of collective agency.

As Candipan (2019, p.966) notes, the benefits of supporting and enabling a group of individuals to build bonds and develop cohesion are innumerable; benefits include "emotional energy" and collective effervescence'. These positive emotions can result in people feeling able and motivated to act together, which is collective agency. Referring to a group of people who were contesting the negative use of space in their community in Los Angeles, Candipan describes the politicisation of the group and collective critical consciousness that resulted in acts of resistance against urban inequality that followed from efforts to build collective identity and feeling of solidarity. As community workers, it is important to focus energy on the initial stages of developing the group as this will lead to people feeling able to exercise their power within themselves to act collectively. This helps to bring the values of 'working and learning together' (Citation for NOS), or 'working asfe space for groups, those individuals who may not feel empowered or able to exercise personal agency yet, can still be part of collective efforts and the exercise of collective agency.

These efforts are also underpinned by the value of empowerment. The CLD Standards Council for Scotland (2020) defines empowerment as 'increasing the ability of individuals and groups to influence issues that affect them and their communities through individual and/ or collective action.' It is worth noting that empowerment is not only a value but a process, as well as an outcome too. In the seventeenth century, empowerment related to the notion of giving power to a person or people and this idea prevails (Fitzsimons, 2011), which is indicative of empowerment as a process. Rather than a process that involves bestowing power as a gift, Wallerstein and Bernstein (1994:142) describe empowerment as 'a social action process that promotes the participation of people, organisations, and communities in gaining control over their lives in their community and larger society'. The process must embody values at every turn, encouraging 'self-determination' and ensuring 'inclusion' (CLD Standards Council, 2020). This, in turn, results in empowerment as an outcome – in people feeling powerful, included and connected.

Political Imperatives – Moving Beyond Rhetoric

Community development practice is not only supported by theoretical ideas, practical approaches and methods; it is also guided, and governed by a range of policies and laws. The list is not exhaustive but includes: Working and learning together to build stronger communities (Scottish Executive, 2003), which made the link between community planning partnerships and community learning and development. The aim of the guidance was to focus on ways to strengthen communities; the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, connected to community development, provides a statutory framework for community planning in Scotland. The legislation aims to ensure that communities have active and meaningful involvement in decisions about public services that affect them. It also requires that organisations work in partnership to provide public services; and the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2019, which further asserts the need for community involvement in decision-making processes connected to the provision of public services. In addition, the Act includes the provision for community organisations to acquire land or property. It is beyond the scope, here, to consider the contents of these policies and acts. However, the essential point to be made is that community development practitioners and volunteers must be familiar with key policies and legislation.

This is reminiscent of Alinsky's (1971) fourth Tactical Rule, which suggests that those who set the rules must be held to account. However, to hold people to account, it is vital to know and understand the rules in the first place. This reflects the value of working and learning together, as set out in the Community Development National Occupational Standards (Citation for NOS), which underlines the necessity to understand social, political and economic contexts in which communities exist. Whatever the legislation or policy, community development practitioners must support communities to critically engage in the process, not simply to accept situations, but to question answers. Community development practitioners, and communities, must believe in the possibility of change and strive to make that change happen. While the intentions conveyed within policy and legislation are honourable and right, in practice, there is often a disconnect between rhetoric and reality. There are many reasons for this, including a lack of awareness about the legal requirements to involve communities, a reluctance by some to

concede power to communities. Taking a value-driven approach to CD provides the means to enact policy and to hold policy makers to account. It could be suggested that this article is another example of rhetoric about what makes good community development practice but the following section describes some of the methods and approaches that help to turn thoughts, such as 'this is not fair' or 'we will never be able to change things', into reality.

Making it Happen – Working on the 'Puzzle'

The CD Jigsaw captures different elements, or pieces of the puzzle, such as getting to know and engaging with the community and not one approach, or method is right. Practitioners are fortunate to have a plethora of methods and approaches at their disposal. Community mapping is an excellent way to work with communities, getting to know them and the spaces in which they live (National Community Mapping Institute, 2020). Psychogeography (Coverley, 2012) provides an interesting approach to considering how physical space in a community influences how people feel in that space – restricted or free, for example. Gilchrist (2019) highlights the importance of networking and building networks, which is part of engaging with communities. Again, the need to take a value-driven approach to this cannot be overstated. Building and maintaining relationships is a vital part of community development and reflects the values of working and learning together or working collaboratively. Establishing rapport and building trust is also important, which means active listening, avoiding judgement or being dismissive.

The point of this section is not to explore, in-depth, the many methods and approaches available to community workers and activists. Instead, it is to reinforce that, whatever the chosen method/s, values must guide the way. A successful practitioner may identify many issues or themes that are important to communities, using Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider et al., 2008) for example – a process that focusses on the dreams and desires of communities, and not on the problems, and designs a pathway to achieve success. It is worth noting the term 'issue' is used within the CD Jigsaw in its widest sense, to mean important topics as well as problems. They may also use Freire's (2000) process of de/codification, starting with a photograph or a poem that is familiar with a group and eliciting ideas about why things are the way they are. The approach or method

to engage or identify and understand issues is less relevant. The ways in which the approach or method is applied are important. Taking an arbitrary approach to the various stages of AI would do more harm than good. A community development practitioner/activist must think about the people involved, must show care and consideration for people's needs within the process, must challenge discriminatory language and ideas and must listen to people's opinions - that is a value-driven approach to working with groups.

Community workers, paid or unpaid, know that working with groups can bring joy and angst. It is commonly accepted by practitioners that conflict, in many forms, is a natural part of group work (Tuckman and Jensen, 1977) although this does not ease the challenge. Taking a value-driven approach to working with groups would involve setting a group agreement, terms of operation or good old-fashioned ground rules. Rather than being a tokenistic, quickly forgotten activity, a commitment to the values of working and learning together and equality and anti-discrimination involves meaningful and ongoing engagement with a group agreement. There is almost no point of setting an agreement with a group if it is not used to guide and curate the group experience. Groups need, and value, the security of knowing that they are operating within a safe space (Sheridan, 2018), which connects to one of Freire's (1996) principles for transformative education the importance of pedagogical space. Creating a safe and enriching space is vital for any form of community work and bringing community development values to life is part of this. The space does not have to be fixed. Community work happens in community halls, in community rooms in supermarkets, in youth clubs in integration projects or on the street. The 'space' is embodied by the community worker/activist; values emanate from people. This notion has never been more important, in times of remote working and online youth and community work due to Covid19 pandemic (Hunter, 2020).

Conclusion

It was never going to be possible to explore the multitude of community development tools and methods that are available to those working and volunteering in communities. The article mentioned, very briefly, just some examples that are useful in taking a valuedriven approach to community development that involves working with communities and not for communities. The importance of working *with* communities and not *for* communities is underpinned by an ethical approach that values people's selfdetermination and conveys a strong sense of belief in people's potential. A critical approach to community development must be based on dialogue (Freire, 2000), which not only develops critical consciousness but involves action. Communities do not exist in a vacuum therefore it is necessary for them to identify the power structures that have an impact on people's day-to-day lives (Ledwith, 2020) and then act to change unequal and unjust structures and policies. Community workers/activists play a crucial role in supporting communities to realise their goals, by working in an empowering way. The process of de/codification from Paulo Freire (2000) was highlighted as one example of how to identify and understand issues, a part of the CD Jigsaw, as well as Cooperrider et al.'s (2008) Appreciative Inquiry that takes a positive starting point and helps communities' dreams become a reality. The key message of this article is that, whatever approach, method, part of the CD Jigsaw, community development values must guide the way.

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