Community Learning & Development Managers

SCOTLAND

A SOCIAL PRACTICE MODEL FOR ADULT LEARNING:

WITHIN A COMMUNITY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

A Social Practice Model for Adult Learning: within a Community Learning and Development Context

Context

This paper is drawn from the work undertaken on Social Practice in Community Based Adult Learning 2011 which was adopted by Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland soon after it was published.[1] It aims to update this work to incorporate all aspects of Adult Learning; within a Community Learning and Development context.

The Strategic Guidance for Community Planning Partnerships [2] states that Community Learning and Development's (CLD's) specific focus should be:

Improved life chances for people of all ages, including young people in particular, through learning, personal development and active citizenship

Stronger, more resilient, supportive, influential and inclusive communities.

CLD should empower people, individually and collectively, **to make positive changes in their lives and their communities, through learning**. The principles that underpin CLD practice are:

- *empowerment* - increasing the ability of individuals and groups to influence matters affecting them and their communities;
- *participation* - supporting people to take part in decision-making;
- *inclusion, equality of opportunity and anti-discrimination* - recognising some people need additional support to overcome the barriers they face;
- *self-determination* - supporting the right of people to make their own choices; and
- *partnership* - ensuring resources, varied skills and capabilities are used effectively.

This position was strengthened in September 2013, when The Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013[3] placed the responsibility on Local Authorities to publish 3 year plans ,which amongst other things should specify

" *how the education authority will co-ordinate its provision of community learning and development with other persons that provide community learning and development*"

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[1] Social Practice in Community Based Adult Learning, Education Scotland 2014

[2] Strategic Guidance for Community Planning Partnerships: Community Learning and Development, Scottish Government 2012

[3] The requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013, Scottish Government 2013

Within this context there are a number of organisations both voluntary and statutory who provide learning and personal development opportunities for adults. These are delivered in and with communities providing life wide and lifelong learning delivery outcomes through areas such as:

- Adult literacies
- English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)
- Volunteer development
- Family learning
- Learning for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the community, for example, people with disabilities, care leavers, offenders, older people
- Learning support and guidance in the community
- Employability
- Citizenship
- Capacity building
- Health and development education.

It is recognised that Adult Learning is delivered across a wide range of community based settings including geographic communities and communities of interest or shared characteristics.   There is a wide variety of target groups/individuals based on need and context with practice influenced by a range of theories and models.

This paper aims to set out thinking on the core principals of a Social Practice model in Adult Learning within a CLD context. It is not intended to set this as the definitive model but identify key features of the model as it relates to Adult Learning in and with communities.

The Social Practice model background

The Social Practice model is evident in a variety of adult learning delivery in Scotland. This model has a strong basis in social/ethnographic research and is built on the understanding that learning is embedded within a social and cultural context. Rarely does Adult Learning occur " in splendid isolation from the world in which the learner lives, but that it is intimately related to that world as affected by it"[4].

It recognises that the social and cultural context shapes the learning and that Social Practice is not fixed learning; which is institutional determined. The learning is fluid, diverse and transformed by the different people who engage in it. There is an understanding of the many life events and life triggers which shape learning, and an acknowledgement that these life events and areas of life such as Personal, Family, Working and Community each bring their own different requirements and discourses. It acknowledges Adult learners are already operating within these different dimensions of life and bring with them learning strategies, skills and assets to be built upon.

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[4] Jarvis, P. Adult Learning in the Social Context

It is widely regarded as an approach which responds to learner's goals and aspirations and one which, within a CLD context, is most likely to leave a lasting positive impact on learners. The model can be used within most adult learning contexts, but is strongly linked to the principles that underpin CLD practice. It acknowledges the power dimensions[5] and different discourses,[6] attitudes and values which influence learning. It requires the practitioner to understand the different meanings and constructs of the life events and areas of life in which the learner is operating. This makes it an essential component in the strategies to tackle disadvantage and inequality.

The social practices approach is one which -

- Recognises, values and validates the range of experiences and skills that people bring to any learning

- Starts from people's strengths and aspirations, not their weaknesses, or perceived 'needs'

- Recognises and builds on the ways that people learn

- Provides learning that develops from, and is embedded in, contexts which are relevant to the learner

- Recognises the different values, emotions and perspectives that are embedded in learning

- Is open about the power dimensions of learning and enable learners to exercise power themselves

- Develops learner's critical capacities

- Develops learner's abilities to use their learning in other contexts.

Recognising Social Practices in adult learning provision

Adult learning in CLD is geared to the learner's goals and aspirations and as such, provision can be expected to vary considerably from learner to learner or group to group. There are, however, seven key features it is felt that should be evident in any provision based on a Social Practice model. In the following section these key features are described and further developed by describing the characteristics of each feature. Although the features have a sequential feel to them, it is recognised that some characteristics, e.g. the developing relationship between learner and provider or guidance approaches can develop or be required at any time during the learning.

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[5] [Understanding power for social charge](#)

[6] [Gee and Green: Discourse Analysis, Learning and Social Practice](#)

Key Feature 1 – The learning practitioner/agency has an up to date understanding of the social, cultural, economic and policy context of the (potential) learners that are being targeted for engagement.

Characterised by:-

- The learning practitioner/agency having a comprehensive knowledge of the social [7]and economic profile of a geographic area or section of the population, e.g. the industrial/commercial history; transport issues; health profiles; educational attainment; employment rates; housing conditions and the relationships between local groups and individuals and an understanding of the strengths and assets [8]of the community.

- The learning practitioner/agency having a clear and explicit understanding of the strategic, policy and operational planning context that they are operating within. This will include their own organisation's strategic priorities, the Single [9]Outcome Agreement, Community Planning Partnership [10]plans   and those of other services, agencies, partnerships and community organisations operating in the area or with the target grouping. This will also include the resources and potential resources that are or could be available in the area or target group.

- Learning opportunities are open and inclusive, demonstrating an understanding of excluded or vulnerable.

Key feature 2 – A professionally managed and sustainable relationship exists between practitioner and the learner(s).

Characterised by:-

- The practitioner/agency being positively viewed by the individual or community that is being engaged. This may be as a result of a variety of 'engagement activities' over a period of time. Some activities may be built around learning opportunities at an introductory level designed to provide a 'platform of confidence' that other learning can be built upon. Other activities may be based around practical involvement in services, events or campaigns that develop confidence and belonging.

- A developing sense of honesty and trust between learner(s) and learning practitioner, which reflects the voluntary nature of the learner(s) involvement.

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[7] Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation: Scottish Government

[8] Asset based Approaches: Scottish Community Development Centre

[9] Single Outcome Agreements: Scottish Government

[10] Community Planning in Scotland

- Practice that is bound by and committed to CLD code of ethics [11]

- A consensual sharing of appropriate relevant information between the learner, the learning practitioner and any other appropriate person or agency.

- The learner <u>and</u> practitioner having a clear understanding of the role of the learning practitioner. This would include the limits or boundaries to that role.

- Transparency in the interactions and discussions between learner and provider.

- A recognition of the power-differentials inherent in relationship between learner and practitioner, and the implementation of strategies that encourage the learner to challenge the status quo and take increasing control over their own learning.

- A recognition of the diverse range of values and opinions that learners and practitioners might have and the use of appropriate challenge and/or support interventions.

Key feature 3 – Learner(s) and the practitioner have a shared understanding of the changes that are being sought (in the learner's life or in the life of a group or community)

Characterised by:-

- A shared understanding of the learner's previous experiences and achievements, both in their experiences of learning and also of making changes in their life/lives.

- An understanding that the changes discussed might, themselves, change in the future.

- A shared understanding of the motivation to make the changes and the role of learning in helping the changes to happen.

- An understanding that the changes that the learner(s) achieve can have positive and negative impacts on the people around them.

- A shared understanding of the forces and/or structures that exist which can support, influence or prevent the desired changes from occurring.

- The learner(s) feeling responsible for, and retaining ownership of, the changes being sought.

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[11] CLD Standards Council Code of Ethics

Key feature 4 – The learner(s) and the practitioner develop a shared understanding of the learning goals, the learning methods/approaches and timescales that are most appropriate to support the desired changes.[12]

Characterised by:-

- A transparent dialogue and process of agreeing learning goals and what success might look like and how it will be measured.

- A negotiated and agreed plan of learning.

- Negotiation and agreement on the most appropriate learning methods, frequency of learning sessions, etc which are designed to minimise/remove any barriers to learning.

- Guidance being integral to the learning journey[13]

- Accreditation being offered where appropriate

Key feature 5 – High quality learning is delivered.[14]

Characterised by:-

- Clearly planned learning sessions that address the learning goals of the learner(s).

- The flexibility to adjust or tailor a learning session (sometimes at short notice) in order to respond to individual or group needs.

- Effective use of learning environments and resources

- Effective learning approaches that reflect the goals and aspirations of the learner(s), including the effective use of unplanned learning opportunities.

- Assessment being integral to the planned learning

- Reflection [15] - practice is reflective, with skills being developed by learner and worker.

- Positive and proactive practitioner-support that assists the learner(s) to reflect on the new skills and knowledge that have been acquired.

- The learner taking increasing responsibility for their own learning

- Learner achievements being recorded and reflected upon by the learner and celebrated.

- A consolidating sense of trust and openness between learner(s) and learning provider/agency

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[12] An adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum Framework for Scotland - Scottish Government

[13] National Guidance Research Forum

[14] How Good is our Community Learning and Development 2 (Key Area 5) - Education Scotland

[15] Reflective Practice in Adult Education: Eric Digest

Key feature 6 – The impact of the learning experience on the learner is measured, reflected upon and evaluated.

Characterised by:-

- The learner(s) being supported to reflect on any changes within themselves that have come about as a consequence of their learning experience. This may include the views of others in a group, the practitioner or other people who have observed change in the learner. This would also incorporate any impacts that the learner(s) may have had on other people.

- Systems and processes being in place which measure the learner(s) development as "successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors."[16]

- Systems and processes being in place which record the learner(s) descriptions of an increased sense of feeling "safe, nurtured, healthy, achieving, active, respected & responsible and included."[17]

Feature 7 – Effective guidance and support for progression. [18]

- The effective use of an appropriate range of guidance activities.

- The learner(s) being supported to consider his/her/their options. This will contain elements of challenge and/or encouragement as appropriate.

- The learner(s) being supported to take informed decisions on progressing to new opportunities, engaging in further learning or simply exiting from learning.

- The learning practitioner giving appropriate support to aid the learner's transition to chosen opportunities.

- The learner is enabled to come back to the learning practitioner for further impartial advice or guidance if needed.

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[16] The Four Capacities - Curriculum for Excellence: Education Scotland

[17] Wellbeing Wheel - GIRFECT - Scottish Government

[18] National Institute of Adult Continuing Education