

Community Education - Keynote Address

1. Community education embraces the Process of making possible, and encouraging, the expression of educational needs by the less well educated part of society as well as those who are better "educationally experienced".

This means informing and appraising sections of the community - particularly those who have not previously envisaged that educational institutions and agencies have relevant resources and skills to offer them - of the potential aid they can receive.

2. In this way community education is an "agent for change". Whereas schools and youth services make a contribution to developing skills for the next generation, to bring about change here and now, the emphasis needs to be on parents and other adults and the communities in which they live.

Community education - and hence community development - focuses increasingly on adult and youth and community groups developing "awareness" and the necessary democratic and social skills to take successful action on their own behalf. The adult/community/ youth centre (or college) is a central vehicle through which this can happen. It is what the community education, leisure, youth or adult centre (-or school for that matter) does - not what it is -that makes it a community education resource.

One of the essential pre-requisites of community education must be to develop in the community those organisational and social skills that will lead to the more effective control and development of all areas of social change and an improvement in the quality of life of those living in the community.

4. Community education, in its widest form, needs to draw upon all the educational resources of the area, to involve the community in its organisation and management and to provide for all ages.
5. The initiatives taken in South Glamorgan to develop a community education ethos and strategy - and eventually a policy - is to my mind timely and appropriate. Across the country the non-vocational education sector is often organised into discrete compartments - adult education, provision for youth, community or leisure - with minimal opportunities to create an inter-face between them. This has given rise to less than effective use of resources, the duplication of effort, often cumbersome and time-expensive administrative systems, inflexibility and the irrational deployment of facilities and resources. Sadly, too, there has been the emergence of a certain degree of professional "preciousness" as a result. It has also often resulted in unclear or disjointed career structures with discrete training programmes and staff development.

6. In South Glamorgan there is a firm platform - and no little experience - on which to build a cohesive community education policy. It has the experience gained from its 3-pronged full-time provision - youth, adult and community - and there exists the "physical plant" on which to build further community based education provision. There is now an opportunity to graft on to the vision of the past a carefully thought out community education philosophy and strategy which maximises upon the resources which are available and identifies a coordinated and corporate approach to the future.

7. It is pleasing that the LEA is involving the professional workers in the early planning and consultative stages; it provides a stimulating challenge for those working in the field and one which, I am sure, you and your colleagues are ready and willing to accept. There will be some anxiety in terms of professional roles - change is not always "comfortable" - but there will also be an opportunity to secure professional development. It will be important to ensure that the future is not unduly fettered by past practices; "new" approaches need not be frustrated by unnecessary adherence to previous traditions. That is not to say that "change" should be rapid, or that "the baby is thrown out with the water". Essentially change comes about through effective consultation - building upon existing provision rather than replacing it. In this way what exists can be a "spring-board" for future development rather than a "sofa". I say this because there is a danger that community education becomes an empty formula allowing the emergence of a "new professionalism" - a "specialism" within existing systems rather than a real challenge to current priorities, structures and institutions. There is little merit in extending education provision simply to pick up or involve an additional tiny minority of those who get little or nothing out of their experience of school education - except, perhaps, a sense of failure - if meanwhile a little changed system turns out another but older generation with similar attitudes!

8. It is almost certainly unrealistic to seek more resources for community education or, for example, to extend youth, community or adult education budgets, without first seeing how existing resources can be used more flexibly and to the greater advantage of those we seek to attract.

9. Over the years there has been some "name changing" and "window dressing" in the adult education, youth service and other sectors of informal education which has often concealed a lack of change - rather than a re-shaping of structures - and little re-thinking of basic philosophies, aims, priorities and practice. Re-naming adult education, the youth service and community services "community education" will result in little development unless those working in the service know, and have wide contact with, the educational needs of their particular community, have a clear understanding of what they seek to achieve and the vision to adapt to new ways of meeting the needs of those they serve. The "providers" will need to be confident, professional in their approach, louder in voicing the philosophy they wish to promote to those who make the decisions and control the resources, and

more articulate in expressing their aspirations. Often our service has lacked a "professional" approach with the result that good practice goes unrecognised and un-assessed.

10. On the other side of the coin there is another potential danger. Reactions against the constraints of existing practices, administrative parameters or institutions, can lead to community education workers becoming "structureless" and vague in their roles with the result that they are ill-placed to meet community learning needs through the existing common core youth, community or adult education provision; this may be highly specific, practical and appropriate (eg learning to read, learning a language, mastering a skill, providing opportunities for social education, community organisations to meet etc) and demands continuation. What is needed are new and more flexible structures which preserve and build upon what already exists, rather than the absence of structure or the total dismantling of current practices.
11. Lastly, there is a third danger - that "means" will occur much faster than "ends". In any examination of community education there are twin themes which can be pursued; one labelled "means" - or how do we do it? - and the other labelled "ends" -or what is it? There can be a feeling that some of the currently practical "means" preclude, by their nature, the realisation of the "ends". For example, "ends" has something to do with enabling people to have some measure of control over the affairs and services which affect their lives; this may preclude the kind of "means" which have allowed the professional workers to proclaim and perpetuate their own approaches which, sometimes, disable individuals from participation in the decision-making processes essential to the growth of real community education. It will be necessary for you to consider whether community education is the closer linking of leisure provision, adult education, the youth service, licensed bars, libraries, squash courts, etc - or whether it is something else.
12. What is apparent is that the development of, for example, adult Education with a community education approach will require :
 - less of an administrative pre-occupation by workers;
 - a more flexible approach to the use of resources?
 - consideration of locally administered "block grants" to centres or areas (with, perhaps, 80% guaranteed in succeeding years and 20% approved for innovatory development);
 - variable lengths of courses, sessions;
 - administrative systems varied to suit areas;

- variable fees for courses and tutors; (You are on the way in this respect but has there been a rationally determined policy?)
- student participation - in management;
 - in curriculum;
 - in course content;
- a different approach to programmes/curriculum (with change!)
 - innovation;
 - mixed rather than discrete subjects;
 - "all you want to know about . . . ??"
 - extended men's Craft etc;
 - workshops, "drop-in" facilities, specialist centres, eg for the arts such as Hanover Hall;
- greater experimentation - and the "freedom" to experiment!
 - "resource people" rather than tutors;
 - 1 tutor to 2/3 classes? groups?
 - more discussion based groups related to community Issues and "problems";
 - greater inter-face between classes, market Place;

AND EFFECTIVE SYSTEMS FOR PROFESSIONAL MONITORING, REPORTING, CONSULTATION AND EVALUATION - WITH EFFECTIVE INFORMATION, ADVICE AND COUNSELLING SERVICES.

13. The development of community education will also require:

- A CLOSER COLLABORATION BETWEEN AGENCIES, ORGANISATIONS, PROVIDERS (VOLUNTARY AND STATUTORY) which, for example:

- seeks to rationalise structures;
- identifies a clear definition of roles for each, leading to carefully devised job descriptions for those who deliver the services at grass roots;
- and, above all, it will require those involved in community education knowing what_it_is;
- what the policies are;
- what expectations are placed upon them by employers;
- what resources are available to them and how they can be used;

AND - wide opportunities for staff_development and training.

Community Education requires a TEAM APPROACH involving all in its conception and implementation - Including the Community -

- and for each member of the team to know how they fit into the team and what their part in it is?

"UNITED WE STAND - DIVIDED WE FALL"

14. in looking at adult education provision in a number of adult education settings, HMI reports indicate that in Wales:
- the vast majority of the provision is made in the EVENINGS - and usually between 1±9 pm;
 - an average of around 5% only of the communities are attracted;
 - there is only limited day-time provision - and mostly in women's craft subjects;
 - virtually all is single subject based - few examples of mixed courses;
 - most are in 10/12 session blocks;
 - most is governed by inflexible administrative systems;
 - most require minimum enrolments with little account paid to minority interests; there are examples of a "centre average";
 - most classes are discrete - little "centre" based activity between classes;
 - few have democratic systems for student participation in decision making;
 - programmes in centres are remarkably similar irrespective of the areas served;
 - there is limited provision in many cases for "special needs groups" and, in some centres, none at all;
 - there is little apparent correlation between programmes and perceived community needs;
 - there is limited innovation, experimentation, initiative;
 - not always are external sources of funding capitalised upon;
 - many of the students have attended the classes for years;
 - "new" students represent between 10% and 20% of the total;
 - the majority of classes are for women only;
 - many students (as many as 10% in some centres) are aged;
 - most are from the ranks of the educationally competent etc etc.
15. The above facts and figures are given in order for us to consider the current response to community education. Of course

there are other initiatives (eg to unemployment, welfare rights etc) but how far does this core provision reflect what community education should comprise?

Should community education be concerned with?

- unemployment ;
- homelessness ;
- crime;
- alcoholism and substance abuse;
- family breakdown;
- homosexuality; heterosexuality;
- the current lack of personal worth felt by so many adults and young people;
- basic education needs in the widest sense;
- moral dilemmas; technological/biological developments;
- nuclear disarmament;
- conservation;
- multi-racial society;
- handicap; etc etc.

16. I believe that if we are to address the issues affecting today's society and, through community education, to provide an adequate response, we need to be aware of the magnitude of the problems which face those living in the community. Statistics relating to 16 year old school leavers in 1984/85 give some indication of what needs to be addressed:

- 60% have no real job (70% in places);
- 30% will have up to 5 different occupations - 9/10 different jobs in their lives;
- 20% will leave home before they are 19;
- 38% - 50% will come from a broken home;
- 3% will have no home;
- 8% will have a hardship of some kind;
- 51% will probably marry twice!
- 8% will have homosexual tendencies;

- 4% will have or have had some kind of sexually transmitted disease;
 - 8% will be educationally backward;
 - 10% will be convicted of an offence before they are 14;
- (and 33% will have blue eyes!!)

It is also significant that alcoholism amongst men has doubled in the last 3 years and trebled amongst women.

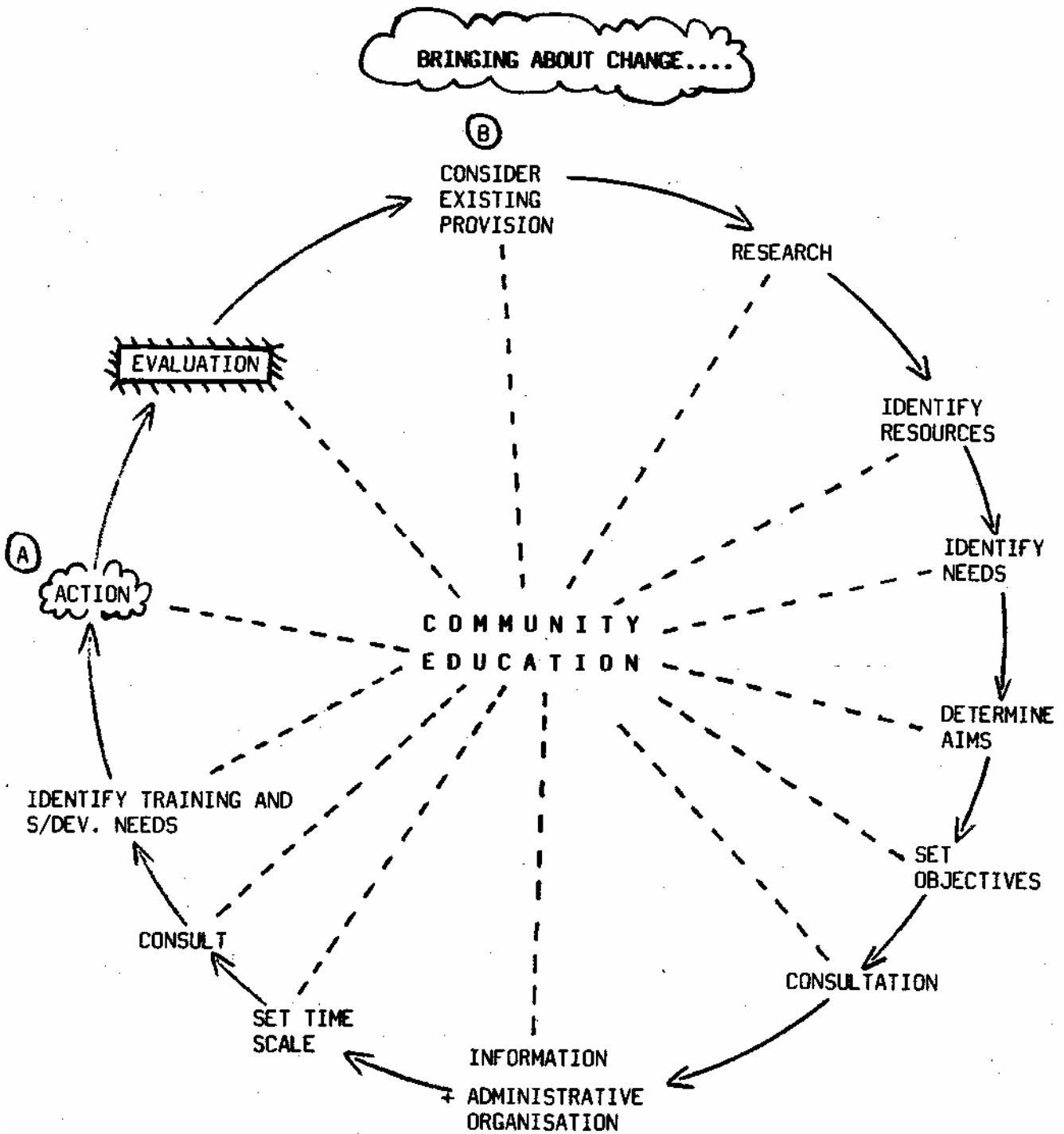
17. These are community problems, social problems. No one agency can dismiss them as the responsibility of someone else.

If we are to approach "community education" realistically we need to take on board the realities of life in the communities which we serve. Different communities face different issues - but all will have some concern for all issues. This requires a strategy which aims to bring about change. The following 'cycle' may suggest how this can be approached.

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(OHP)



(Many people concerned with bringing about change enter the cycle at 'A' when entry at 'B' is more appropriate.)

(OHP)

BRINGING ABOUT 'CHANGE'

= IT IS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL

- to determine needs, to identify a "professional" response" to those needs, to put forward a clear strategy and well presented argument.

= IT IS FOR THE ADMINISTRATION

- to consider the case, identify level of resources and to present to "committee" in line with priorities.

The professional must not abdicate from making a sound professional case for change where he sees it necessary on the grounds that he does not anticipate support or resources.

COMMUNITY EDUCATORS ARE OFTEN "IRRITANTS" - AND WILL BE IN A POLITICAL ARENA AT TIMES