Taking Part? Research Cluster Report

Intergenerational learning and social solidarity
The MISSH Group case study

Researcher: Dr. Jane Watts

2013

Acknowledgements

Index

1. Summary

This research report draws on the experience of a group which was working to build social solidarity by working across generations. In the context of current government policy and the Prime Minister's stated aim of creating a 'big society,' it was timely to consider the role played by intergenerational practice in the development of active citizenship.

The research project aimed to explore how community based research can support a community group to carry out and use research as part of the process of achieving its objectives. The results include this case study of the link between active citizenship learning and intergenerational learning.

During the process of the research a neighbourhood based group was encouraged to see how their activities generated evidence from which they could both develop new plans and evaluate their work, so as to demonstrate to themselves and others what impact their work was having.

The resulting co-production of a workshop run by the group considered future plans and also looked at how such evidence could be collected and used by the group on an ongoing basis.

The report concludes that multigenerational activity can support active citizenship and neighbourhood change and that research can form an important plank in its development if carefully carried out.

2. Introduction

A: 'We both live in the neighbourhood and we are members of a group that we have set up following courses with the Learning Communities Team and support from Neighbourhood Partnerships. Life was quite dull and boring before all of this started, but we had a lot more free time!'

B: 'The house was a bit tidier, and I had time to cut the grass…'

A: 'Now [...] my daughter thinks one of my jobs is going to meetings!'

B: 'My son did a project on "How to Change my Community" and told the school about what we have been doing and they didn't believe him! So a lot has happened in the last 2 years since we did the first course.'

A: 'It all started with the "My Life in [...]" course. We were given cameras to take pictures of things in our area that we thought needed to be improved and we made these into digital stories. It was a Family Learning course so our children got involved as well.'

The extracts above are from a presentation made by members of the group at the heart of this report, which focuses on the difficulties new, small community groups can face when trying to understand the 'difference' they are making in their community. The report draws on the experience of a community group which was working to build social solidarity and make changes in its neighbourhood through working across generations and my partnership with them as a researcher and community educator, working with the University of Lincoln. The aim of the joint research project was to enable the group to assess its impact and to investigate together how to develop more effective activities for local change. The report considers to what extent the group could use its findings to develop better practice in intergenerational community activism. The research project aimed to explore how community based research can support a community group to carry out and use research as part of the process of achieving its objectives. The results include this case study of the link between active citizenship learning and intergenerational learning.

In the context of current government policy and the Prime Minister's stated aim of creating a 'big society' it was timely to consider the role played by intergenerational practice in the development of active citizenship and neighbourhood based community development. The university research with the group, through Taking Part, was intended to support the group to understand and use the evidence they generated to evaluate their work and enable them to grow into a force for change locally.

There are three themes at play in this chapter; intergenerational learning, active learning for active citizenship and its role in developing active citizens, and participatory research in community development settings. These three themes are explored against a backdrop of the current policy context. A brief introduction to these themes is below, preceded by a short explanation of how this research came about.

2.1 Background to the research

Taking Part is the ESRC research cluster which is developing high quality research and a critical mass around active citizenship and community empowerment with the Third Sector. It is a partnership between researchers from the University of Lincoln, Goldsmiths University of London and Manchester Metropolitan University funded by the Economic and Social Research Centre (ESRC) in partnership with The Office for Civil Society[1] and the Barrow Cadbury Trust.

The Taking Part research cluster is part of a larger national programme developing Third Sector research. The cluster is one of the national clusters linked with the National Centre for Third Sector Research. The cluster builds upon the research expertise of the three universities and the track record of the local, regional and national third sector organisations and higher education institutions concerned with strengthening civil society: promoting active citizenship, equalities and community engagement and empowerment, issues of central importance to the Third Sector, as well as to the public and private sectors.

Previous research within the partner agencies focused upon facilitating user and community audit and voice in service planning and service delivery, across statutory, private and Third Sector organisations, The cluster has a particular emphasis upon enabling the voices of the most disadvantaged groups to be heard effectively, as part of wider agendas for social change, social solidarity and social justice.

The Taking Part research cluster underpins a portfolio of research and research-related activities over at least a 5-year period. The cluster supports postgraduate students through their PhD studies; employees Knowledge Transfer Associates and supports staff placements and smaller-scale research activities. It also promotes publication and dissemination of research findings to a variety of audiences.

The Take Part approach to active citizenship learning has been developed over a number of years through two programmes; firstly the Active Learning for Active Citizenship projects and secondly the Take Part series of learning partnerships. The Take Part Network exists to take this work forward. The Network aims to promote learning which enables citizens and communities to engage fully in civic and civil activity.

2.2 Intergenerational learning and practice

Alan Hatton Yeo of the Beth Johnson Foundation (BJF) defines the aims of intergenerational practice as bringing 'people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities, which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contribute to building more cohesive communities' (Thomas, 2009)

---

[1] Formerly Office of the Third Sector

Intergenerational learning is well known and well developed but sometimes tends to focus upon grandparents helping their grandchildren to read or young people teaching their grandparents or other older people to use IT, rather than necessarily promoting active citizenship and social solidarity. Nor is it necessarily founded on the sense of mutualism BJF suggests as being good practice (Thomas, 2009). More recent projects, such as some promoted under the recent initiatives such as the Transformation Fund and the Adult and Community Learning Fund[2] for informal and community adult learning, have extended the scope of intergenerational learning, while commentators and supporters are moving towards the notion of 'multigenerational learning' as being a more nuanced tool to address issues such as lack of cohesion, diminishing aspirations and low levels of citizen engagement[3].

Intergenerational learning needs also to be considered in the context of the considerably developed practice of family learning. Family learning refers to approaches that 'engage children and their parents and carers or grandparents in learning and involve explicit learning outcomes for adults and children' (NIACE, 2009). This learning is often badged as supporting children to learn through the engagement of family members but is also seen as a good route for attracting those adults into learning for themselves - all of the learning being of benefit to the whole family and, it is claimed, the wider community though evidence of the latter is not well documented.

There is considerable European interest in intergenerational learning and in many countries there is a more established practice, though the European network is co-ordinated by a UK based organisation.[4] The link to active citizenship is acknowledged through a series of European funded programmes.

Intergenerational projects abound, many of them run by community organisations or others who do not necessarily have the resources / skills to support the gathering of evidence and impact. In particular some organisations may do intergenerational work in the margins of their more usual activity. Even those whose work is intentional and funded may find themselves in constant search of funding and the need of these organisations to demonstrate impact is significant as this will be required for future funders.

2.3 Active citizenship

Tam (2010) refers to the importance of everyone developing citizenship skills and becoming active citizens; in particular, he stresses the importance of not just individuals in their communities becoming empowered as citizens but that institutions, their staff and policy and decision makers also need to acquire better skills for involvement. This is not just a one-way street where disempowered and disadvantaged individuals and groups are expected to equip themselves to become active and engaged whereas those they might seek to influence are not required to take action. All will need to make changes to enable a fully active citizenry.

Active citizenship is used here to define activity which supports people to engage more fully with their communities and to participate fully in civil and civic activity in whatever field from formal engagement as an elected representative, to voluntary and charitable activity and movements for social change. Ochum et al (2005) suggested a matrix of activity ranging from individual to collective action from the informal to the formal with different people engaging in different ways at different times and possibly in several ways simultaneously. There is no implied sense of progression, though taking up something

---

[2] See www.niace.org.uk

[3] Leicester Lifelong Learning Centre Seminar with Alan Hatton-Yeo, November 2011.

[4] The European Network for Intergenerational Learning (ENIL) aims to foster new ideas and developments in intergenerational learning. It offers practitioners, policy makers, organisations and individuals across Europe a platform and channels for the ongoing exchange of expertise, good practice, news, research and developments in the field. (www.enilnet.eu)

formal, such as standing for election, may well occur later in an individual's engagement, whereas other more formal activities such as becoming a school governor, occur at a relevant point in the life course.

2.4 The project research aim and methodology

The research questions were:

- How does a fledgling group show evidence of impact?
- What impact evaluation methods can be introduced to a relatively new group?
- How can an understanding of some basic research support a community group of this kind?
- How could the group show evidence of the relationship between intergenerational learning and active citizenship learning?
- What scope is there for future development of an articulation between intergenerational learning and active citizenship learning?

The methodological aim was take a community-based approach to research and learning and to engage in a partnership with an organisation which promoted intergenerational learning and active citizenship and to investigate jointly how best to support this partner's capacity to see and collect evidence of its impact and increase its knowledge. The approach was rooted in active learning for active citizenship, with its focus on participatory research, empowering people to take part and take action, and its clarity about influencing local change. Participatory research is embedded in community development practice and is key to the development of active learning for active citizenship (Ledwith, 2009, Annette and Mayo, 2010, Ledwith and Springett, 2010). The case study below was developed using the principles of experiential learning and was intended to support the group to draw learning from their experiences and activities, reflecting on them and to use their learning to meet the needs of their community more effectively. To make a real difference, group members needed to understand what impact they had, and how or why this came about. In other words, they needed to continue to think critically and to develop some 'really useful knowledge' with which to bring about changes (Thompson, 1997).

Working with the partner, we would look together for the community group's impact on community empowerment or neighbourhood change and identify methods they could use during and after the current research project to identify this impact. It was intended to support the partner organisation to identify and evidence the ways in which its learning contributes to the development of active citizens - and, if necessary, to support them to recognise active citizenship learning within their practices. Through this research it was hoped to be able to articulate the relationship between intergenerational learning and active citizenship learning showing the potential for further development. Finally, it was intended to produce a report outlining the findings and case study.

It should be noted that the MISSH group members did not see themselves as either active citizens or as a particularly 'intergenerational' group. As part of the process of this research, the group came to see how they could describe themselves as active citizens. Their children and other young people in the community were involved because that reflected the actuality of the group members' lives. Much of what they were doing was not intentional in the sense of developing themselves as active citizens or as an intergenerational group. What they wanted to do was to improve their community in whatever small or large ways they can and the findings should be read in this light.

2.5 The MISSH case study research methods

The timeline for this research case study was January - June 2012 and took the following format:

1. Background and context development and desk research
2. First face to face meeting between group and researcher

3. Interview with key practitioner
4. Email exchanges between group and researcher to plan details of workshop
5. Workshop with group
6. Report / notes of workshop sent to group so that they could put results immediately into practice

The methods used were selected to underpin the aim of co-production of knowledge and evidence of impact and therefore were participative and led, as far as possible, by the partner organisation, facilitated by me, as researcher, and supported for reasons of both good practice and sustainability by the usual supporters of the community group. The methods were rooted in community development practice.

Group selection was based on information available through contacts. It proved to be quite difficult to find an independent group which was combining an active citizenship with an intergenerational approach in a genuinely mutual way. As mentioned above, there are many intergenerational projects but they are often driven through schools, colleges or other educational institutions or large voluntary sector bodies which encourage intergenerational 'volunteering' by young people - such as young people supporting older people by visiting them or teaching them IT - or less often by older people - such as mentoring for homework or career progression. I was looking for groups engaging in activity which was more mutual in its approach and which engaged all generations in improving their communities. The criteria were that the group should be engaged in experiential and informal learning based in active learning for active citizenship approaches. Several groups in the East Midlands which had wanted to take part, suffered funding cuts and had either closed down, or had stopped work on the relevant project in the meantime. Therefore other avenues were followed and some potential groups were identified through contacts at the City of Bristol Learning Communities (adult and community learning service). Finally a group declared that it would be interested in taking part and the partnership between me as researcher and the MISSH group began, with the contact supported by a staff member from Learning Communities.

Background information was sent to me by the group and their Learning Communities development worker in advance, including the notes for some presentations the community group had made and a draft article which had been written by community learning staff.

During March 2012 I visited the group, was presented with work that had been done by the group and established a method for joint working. It is illustrative to note that: 'the meeting started in the Children's Centre, but *we had to transfer to a group member's sitting room as the childcare centre bookings were confused and the room was needed by the school. On the way the group wanted to show me the field where they held the festival, the site where the proposed community centre could be located - subject to funding and planning permission - and the woods etc - the field used to be a park - 'before it burned down'. It's a lovely green wild area - but used for rubbish dumping and also for drinking etc. The Well is also broken but is still there - towards the bottom. There is a new project to support the conservation/ecology of the woods and the Learning Communities worker is hoping for input from the worker on that project to support this group in some way.'* [5]

At the first meeting with the group I was able to take some time to review with them the evaluation methods and potential data the group already had. While this was limited it was greater than the group members understood at the outset. My first meeting with the MISSH group as Taking Part researcher was also used to start planning the joint workshop. A draft programme for the workshop and a list of invitees were agreed and some tasks allocated. Other tasks were developed and agreed via email after the group had a chance to meet and do more planning. It was clear that it would be important to use the event to tell the story so far, to learn more about evaluation and impact research and to pave the way for some forward planning by finding frameworks through which to do this. The discussion about invitees provoked some interesting reflections about who to invite and who not; some group members

---

[5] From research notebook

felt some of the intermediaries they worked with were too dominating and should not be involved, but did want others to participate and so decided to invite a selection of professionals / intermediaries.

Visits were also made to key sites for the group's work and to the locations of its activities, which included meeting some of those who work closely with the group such as the co-ordinator of the children's centre where the group was based and school staff. A date was set for a workshop, to be led by the group and held for the group and for those it chose to invite. The community learning worker was interviewed early in the process to establish the background to the work from her perspective. A very brief encounter with the head of the learning service whose work and ethos had driven much of the approach taken was also useful in establishing background, context and the theoretical basis for some of the work.

A practitioner interview was carried out with the key Learning Communities worker and an informal discussion was also held with the Head of Service.

The jointly produced research, evaluation and planning workshop was held successfully at the end of April 2012, based partly in the Children's Centre and partly in the School due to the School needing a room at the same time.

The overall research, and in particular the workshop and activities surrounding it, had several aims: to help the group to learn from its experience and build research capacity; to establish ways of evaluating impact of the group's activities and to help the group learn new ways of using the information gained to plan more effectively for the future, creating new learning based on evidence.

3. Findings

3.1 The group and its context

The local context

St Anne's Park in Bristol is an area that the group described as disadvantaged. In local government terms St Anne's Park is in Brislington - one of the largest suburbs of the City of Bristol and split into two wards of Brislington East and West.

The neighbourhood has a poor level of resources. There are few community facilities or even shops. There is no pub on the estate which was built on covenanted land. The housing stock and infrastructure are generally poor, though some houses and gardens were well maintained by residents. Access to employment is poor and the area has less than adequate public transport links.

The MISSH group met at the St Anne's Park Children's Centre, attached to St Anne's Park Primary School - a small primary school with a nursery, infants and junior schools and less than 200 children. The Junior School was moving to a nearby site in January 2013, taking over the only other community facility nearby and on an adjoining estate which was currently run by the Youth Service as a (youth and community centre). The Children's Centre also faced an uncertain future as it was being turned into a Community Interest Company (CiC) with less funding than at present; this presented a considerable threat to the group as this had been the only place where they had gained support. However, the CiC needed to show local groups and individuals in membership, so now also 'needed' the group in a new way. The School also claimed to support the group and made rooms available and showed support through community staff. The group was less positive about this support - see below. The Youth Service facility which was due to close in September 2012 was not generally used by the group's members due to historic boundary / territory issues - though all tried to make light of this and it was

acknowledged that this would seem different once it became part of the school with which they were all very familiar.

The park of the neighbourhood's name is part of a natural wood and park and has a holy well. These have reputedly suffered from neglect, vandalism and poor decision making at local government level but have also benefited from a number of projects focusing on the archaeology and the environment / conservation. The St Anne's area has a long history with a significant ancient well with royal and spiritual connections including documentary evidence of a visit by Henry VII. These historical elements have, to their surprise, proved important for the MISSH group's development and choice of activities.

Brislington Community Partnership is a regeneration-focused body in the locality. It has, over the years, contributed to the various schemes which have come and gone - such as community plans and area plans. It will now contribute to the new neighbourhood action plans as they come on stream. It supports and hosts a number of groups but has few resources. The MISSH group has some limited support from this source in terms of community development and banking facilities.

3.2 The group

The MISSH group came about incidentally through a community learning initiative, organised by Learning Communities, the local authority adult and community learning service[6]. The Learning Communities' practitioner I interviewed said:

'In 2009, we set out to pilot a new community development course in St Anne's Park, part of Brislington that is sandwiched between a railway line and the river. Because St Anne's Park is cut off from the rest of the city, it is a deprived area that has received very limited input and funding initiatives. The central hub is the local school and children's centre. Statistics from the latest Quality of Life Report show that in 2010 there was a low proportion (15%) of people who felt they could influence decision making (compared with a city average of 23% and a core cities average of 30%). 'My Life in St Anne's Park' was a new course and a shot in the dark. It was difficult at first to engage parents, as they were nervous and unsure about getting involved. The additional lure of a free digital camera on completion of the course was just strong enough to engage six families – 6 sets of parents/carers and children. After the first couple of sessions, despite the shaky start, it is fair to say that these six were hooked![7]'

The key support to the group came from their contact with Learning Communities. At this stage the group was still embryonic, but had achieved several important outcomes; it ran the first ever St Anne's Day Festival in 2011 and was scheduled to run another one, complementing with other local events, to celebrate St Anne's Day in July 2012[8].

Prior to this piece of work, a further important achievement had been to hold a series of events to disseminate their findings from a project to understand the area including presentations to the local MP and to local Councillors and others. More details of these will be discussed later in these findings.

---

[6] It is worth noting that the initial courses were able to be as learner driven as they were and to take the focus they did as they were funded through Adult Learning Safeguarded budget (ASL), now called Community Learning, and therefore not subject to the requirements of generating qualifications or following a standard curriculum of mainstream adult learning funding.

[7] From an unpublished article by Victoria Appleton and Jane Taylor, Learning Communities, City of Bristol.

[8] The day was successfully held in July 2012.

The group had a long term aim which was to gain the funding for a purpose built community centre in the area but they acknowledged that, in the current economic climate, it would be some time into the future before they could realistically start raising funds for this aim.

In terms of composition the group was made up entirely of women, all living very locally and the majority having a relationship with the school through their children or grandchildren. One group member I met did not have any children. At least two group members are from the same family. There were fluctuating numbers in the group but there appeared to be a core of around 6 residents. There are other people who the group 'includes' at times and not at others; these are both women and men who work in the area and whose role includes supporting or contributing to the group's activities. Other local residents and members of other groups were also involved in activities from time to time.

The group had varied experiences of education and employment, but at the time of the research the majority was not currently in paid work, for a variety of reasons. Some were in a position to be seeking work and two attributed their recent success in finding work to having taken part in the courses the group has done[9]. The skill levels in the group varied and the group tended to 'play to each individual's strengths'.

3.3 What the group has done – the group's story

The first time that some group members came together was to participate in a course. In discussion one member said, with a laugh *'It was all [community learning worker]'s fault! It was about two and a half year's ago.'*

The first course, run by Learning Communities, and based on identified local interest/need, was on digital photography and was called 'My Life In St Anne's Park' (see above). The course was structured as a basic family learning programme with two hours per session. Children attended with their parent/carer for the second hour and adults were on their own for the first hour. Part of the aim of family learning was to build confidence and engage community with school. In this case this was especially vital as the school was the only community facility on the estate.

The 'hook' for the course was that each group member got a camera at the end and was run at a time when funding was perhaps more generous for community programmes than now. One group member said that she only came onto the course to get a camera having been persuaded to come along by her sister; the sister in question did not really become a member of the group. On this initial course, a few people started and dropped out, new members joined and a settled group eventually emerged after the course relented.

On this course, the community tutor took them through a range of things to do with the digital camera and the local area. The starting point was to take photos of likes and dislikes about the area. The group found there were more dislikes - identified by them and by their children. The photographs of dislikes mainly consisted of rubbish and broken buildings. The 'likes' included the shops and the woods but - and there were big buts - all these also needed improvement. As the course continued the group's photographs were formed into a digital storyboard.

According to the course tutor, she introduced key questions concerning life in the area such as transport, crime, and places to socialise and play to stimulate debate. The issues stirred up a lot of discussion and it was then that the families went out to take photographs to illustrate their concerns. Over the weeks these photographs were honed down to describe a single topic for each parent and child. Places to play for the children and a space for people of all ages to socialise and learn were major issues. After 10 weeks, each family had produced a digital story with powerful messages to send out to

---

[9] Group presentation.

policy makers, organisations and the local community. The resulting meetings and presentations started to attract people and organisations with skills and funding to help the parents and children to make change. In the words of one of the parents: "The amazing thing about getting involved with community change is that when you know the right people suggestions can actually start to become reality!" The Council's Youth and Play Team and Neighbourhood Partnership Team became strongly involved in helping the parents to become a constituted group and with follow up actions. With all the parents and children fully engaged and raring to do more in their community, an amazing range of unanticipated positive outcomes had been achieved[10].

Later the group presented the Digital Story to a Neighbourhood Partnership meeting. One conclusion they reached was that the area needed more community facilities and there was hope that a disused building (the Mission, the source of the group's name) could be made into a community centre; the group started to work out how they could do this, asking the Learning Communities and Neighbourhood Partnership staff for advice. So a meeting was called and this was the point at which the remaining members of the current group got involved.

At this stage group members thought they would be attending just one meeting where someone would *'give them all the information'* and *'tell us how they would help'*. What they were offered was indeed some information, and then a course ('Grow your Group') which would help them to 'do it for themselves'. This, of course, is good community work practice which does not 'do for' but supports people to do things for themselves and 'does alongside'. At this point the group also learned, for example, more about issues like compulsory purchase orders and demolition and planning permission and so on than they had really bargained for.

During this phase the group, including the children, made a revised digital story presentation to the MP and others. This time some older children were involved, which was organised through the help of one of the teachers from the local secondary school. *'We interviewed some of the older kids to get their views.'* The group learned how to carry out these interviews - informally - but did not at this stage do a community research course, though this was something that some members were becoming interested in by the time I was working with them. The group agreed that *'this was really fun doing things with the older kids'.* The secondary school students tended to agree with the group's findings and photographs and reiterated the key issues which needed change in the community.

As well as the need for more community facilities, it was also agreed that play was a big issue locally. The two issues were perceived to be linked: *'there's nowhere for adults to get together - no pubs even and no cafes really - and especially there's nowhere if you don't have kids. There used to be a park but the closest one now is 10 - 15 minutes walk away and there are no toilets there. The kids wanted somewhere to play. That was their main thing.'*

To address these needs the group agreed to do some more courses including 'Play in Action' which was run by Playing Out[11]. The idea behind the group Playing Out was about making your community more playful. The Playing Out website stated:

> 'A playing out event is an after-school street play event led by neighbours for neighbours and only publicised within the immediate streets. It is timed to coincide with children's journeys home from school, usually 3:30-5:30. A residential road is closed to traffic to ensure safety and freedom of movement for participants, with volunteer stewards at each

---

[10] Based on an unpublished article by Victoria Appleton and Jane Taylor, Learning Communities, City of Bristol.
[11] http://playingout.net/
Recently featured on Woman's Hour and in the Guardian newspaper (21/6/12)
Playing Out is a not-for-profit information and advice resource for street play. They aim to increase children's safe access to informal play in residential streets.

road closure point to redirect traffic and give parents peace of mind. Parents and carers are responsible for their own children. The emphasis is on free, unstructured play and people usually bring out their own toys - skipping ropes, bikes, scooters, etc. Children are simply given the space and permission to play in the street, whilst adults have a chance to meet and get to know their neighbours better and experience a car-free street. The only costs involved are photocopying flyers and possibly hiring road signs [...]'.

The MISSH group had hoped to be able to run a Playing Out session in their street but had not managed to get all the residents to agree; they were hopeful at our first meeting of being able to try again and were developing new ideas and skills to help them communicate better with other residents to explain the benefits to them so that they would agree.

In addition, a staff member from the Youth and Play service had become very involved and was a key supporter of the group. They now had Play Rangers one day per week in the area and some of the group members had trained to work with Play Rangers and with the Play Pod. One group member said that she loved the play training and trying to get more play facilities but added: 'though I wouldn't want to work with children - I've got six of them'.

Another activity in which the group had taken part was to attend a woodcarving course. They made community notice boards in the summer holidays (2011) but were waiting still for City Council estates to put them up as apparently there had been delays in obtaining planning permission. These kinds of frustrations were felt by the group to be the kinds of things that deter local people from getting involved in their communities.

Another key strand of the group's activities emerged from the identified need for a community centre or other community resource. Again the group participated in a course to help them go through the issues including planning and seeking permission for the conversion of a derelict building. The group made much of the fact that they had needed to try to understand the processes of compulsory purchase orders. Ultimately the group was not successful in persuading the authority to grant permission for the use of the building. There were several unintended and positive consequences for group members. The first of these was that they started to look out for possibilities of raising money to build a community centre from scratch. Some architecture students from the University of the West Of England (UWE), undertaking work experience, were given a brief to compete to design a new building for a potential site in the St Anne's Park. Some group members found this very exciting and learned a great deal in the process, but of course to realise any of the plans would mean a major fundraising effort and to deal with all the politics, regulations, permissions and search for sustainable funding that would be needed. The group did not yet feel ready to deal with this level of involvement but had stayed optimistic that these plans would one day come to fruition; however, they appeared to be relying on unnamed external people/groups/organisations for taking this work forward with no plans for how these contacts would come about or how they could be persuaded to provide support.

During their investigations, some group members had become very interested in local history, discovering and writing up more about the St Anne's Well and surrounding wood. This led to the development of some aspects of the play work, and to some members getting involved in the conservation projects and to all of the group to get involved in leading and running the festival which took place in July 2011, close to the date of St Anne's Day. The process of developing and running a local event for the first time proved quite a challenge to the group. Considerable help was offered from various local bodies and organisations, including the City Council, the Neighbourhood Partnership, and School.

The group agreed that the combined activities had, to an extent, helped them to get to know people in the neighbourhood that they didn't know previously. They strongly agreed that they had got to know an enormous amount more about their area than they had previously, despite having lived there for

many years and for most all their lives. They also agreed that they had learned a great deal about how local decisions are made and about some aspects of the Council. However, the group also realised that they had not sufficiently evaluated any of their activities to date and that they also did not have a clear plan for continuing their work. They were working in ways which responded only when something came up, rather than deciding what they would do and taking the steps to become a 'proper group'.

3.4 The view from desk research and the practitioner interview

The documents provided beforehand and the interview with the Learning Communities worker supported the perspectives I discussed with the group. These sources also revealed how group members had all contributed to the project in different ways and that for some of them this had been in unexpected areas such as finding an interest in the history of the area and finding out about the history of St Anne's Well and the existence of St Anne's Day which had been celebrated in the past.

Some of the history is contained in this extract from the documents:

> 'In 2005, Bristol City Council established the Bristol Learning Communities Team – funded by the Learning and Skills Council (now the Skills Funding Agency) to engage adults without a full Level 2 qualification and to support their progression to further learning and work. From the beginning, this team has worked 'bottom up' through an expert team of Development Workers working in partnership with a range of community intermediaries to build a menu of responsive 'first step' learning opportunities. As part of a targeted community learning 'offer', our curriculum menu includes short courses in a range of thematic areas: learning for work, functional skills (literacy, numeracy and ICT), family learning and learning for personal development. Until recently, our learning for community development curriculum has been relatively under-developed. Programmes to promote community engagement and change have proven difficult to develop in isolation from a more intensive community development process. Some pilot work in one community, supported through our local Neighbourhood Partnership Team, has now unleashed an innovative stream of community development courses[12].'

I was interested to follow up a quotation from Paulo Freire in the draft article that I had been sent. The practitioner interviewee did not know much about this as the head of service had written those elements of the article. The practitioner was excited though about the way this work with The MISSH Group had provided an opportunity for external reflection. From her perspective this had enabled a change from the usual practice; normally Learning Communities is very focused on the delivery of very practical outcomes, the learning and skills work leading to developing skills and preparation for employment or other opportunities for the learners. However, this neglected what she referred to as the 'philosophical side' of their work, which she felt they should do more of both as practitioners and with learners. She told me more about the way Learning Communities worked.

Development workers in the Learning Communities Team were free to choose directions and develop different strengths and passions according to the neighbourhoods where they worked which meant that they engaged in genuinely bottom up work and could roll it out, based on learner need. This enabled the practitioner I interviewed to follow up the MISSH group's interests to try to meet identified needs. The team established broad strategic headlines and '*good tutors [could] work with this to develop appropriate and strong programmes*' so they could genuinely ask learners what they want and develop learning opportunities to address those issues, thus '*handing power back to the learners*'. The strengths were then within this flexibility; '*sometimes groups don't want too much flexibility and that is also fine*'. '*The St Anne's Park group is a good example of them showing us what they want and we respond.*' Practitioners have been able to work with companies and organisations from outside to deliver what is wanted. The interviewee also

---

[12] From an unpublished article by Victoria Appleton and Jane Taylor, Learning Communities, City of Bristol.

suggested that not all development staff were comfortable with this level of partnership. She reflected too that: *'as ever with community work there is a risk of over-promising; at the moment this could be the issue of the community centre but so far the group is hanging onto this as a kind of vision but not in an unrealistic way - this vision has been driving them so far'*. The practitioner and I agreed that the planned workshop with the group needed to be carefully facilitated so that there would not be an opportunity for the attending local practitioners to over-promise or fall into other potential traps. The aim of mutual working and sound community work practice would be respected.

The kinds of courses described in this interview tend to need more input from the development worker or tutor which can take too much time but generally the Learning Communities staff found that the work balanced over time with some groups or learners needing more and some less intervention. The St Anne's Park group also attracted help from outside the Learning Communities team. The input included the Brislington Brook Lottery funded three year project which worked around the woods and the worker attached to this project would be helping the group to organise the current year's St Anne's Day event in July 2012.

Learning Communities had a relatively new community development curriculum, comprising a 'patchwork' / menu of courses. Progression was certainly possible through the matrix and staff were discouraged from running courses for the same learners time after time as a way of supporting the growth or sustainability of a community group. Nevertheless the majority of members of the St Anne's Park group had participated in more than one course and could also usefully have undertaken more. The sustainability of this group was due in part to the impact of external organisations and the group being in a position to take up opportunities that arose. For example, the focus on Play was brought about because much of what the group wanted to do and what they showed through the digital stories - the lack of play facilities in the area and the changing nature of the demands for play opportunities. The Youth and Play services were able to give an input here and ran the Play in Action programme which was developed together by the Learning Communities service and the youth and play services. The presentations and invitations to meetings that the group were involved in also brought further external interest and involvement such as that from Neighbourhood Partnerships.

According to the practitioner, the involvement with the secondary school was something that the group did themselves, through their own contacts, though there was a connection with the Learning Communities Team. One Learning Communities tutor was a personal friend of the key community development teacher at the school, and some of the group members' children from the primary school were about to be in transition. It was through this connection that they engaged the older children who participated. It is vital to understand and support these kinds of connections when supporting groups. It was striking to me that there were considerable interconnections throughout the communities around the schools and with and between other organisations locally.

A Neighbourhood Partnership meeting and a meeting with the MP had taken place, both of which included some of the children of the group members. Two participated as planned and *'the others watched what was going on and then put up their own hands to ask a question or make a comment - and they were really good. This was not prepared - they did this spontaneously and asked a different kind of question than they would have done had it been prepared e.g. if the MP had been visiting a school'*.

The intergenerational element of the group and its work came about through the first course, Living in St Anne's Park (digital story) being a family learning course. This course was structured as being the first hour adults and then the second hour children and adults. The children really got into it and were very, very engaged with both taking the photos and discussing them. Another piece of work involved comparing all the parks in Bristol and the

children loved that too. That was how it came about that it is the children's voices which are heard on the films in the presentations and their involvement which comes across strongly[13].

It was felt by Learning Communities that the family learning activity had really helped the child of one of the group's members with the potentially difficult transition to secondary school but, in addition, all the children were becoming more engaged with their community and wanting to help improve it. The activity also helped the parents, as they got more involved with the new school as a result of the workers' involvement. In fact Learning Communities has found that the whole of the family learning programme has supported school involvement as many parents find schools to be frightening. In St Anne's Park the whole learning programme focused on the school as the Children's Centre was the only community building there now. Key people from the school are therefore brought into the courses as soon as possible. What has developed has increased confidence, increased communication skills, and an ability to follow up on ideas.

However in the case of the MISSH group it must be remembered that not all the course participants had young children and some group members expressed concern about the potential exclusion of younger adults or adults who don't have children who also have much to offer to the community and to intergenerational work.

Signposting was key to helping groups to develop as well as the individuals. Learning Communities was developing its information, advice and guidance offer. This part of the service used to focus mainly on progression in learning and then on some employment-related advice, but had not really included what is needed for the community development approach, which would include putting people in good touch with the people and organisations who could help them next. The revised community development curriculum had helped to an extent. There were also leaflets about being a volunteer, volunteering courses, becoming a school governor and so on.

In Learning Communities the driver for this approach had been a mix of what the government was hoping to encourage interpreted by the practitioner as '*big society and so on*' and personal commitment from the staff in the service. *The 'My Life in ..' course was like a little seed which soaked up water and grew - and it's become something much bigger with a whole curriculum'.* Community development was now on the radar of all the learning communities development staff. 'My Life in ...' was very powerful and very easy to understand - for development staff and tutors, as well as for learners.

Learning Communities found that the second programme chosen by many groups would often be 'Play in Action', firstly because community group members of this kind generally had children and the intergenerational aspect of the first programme also raised issues which related to the lives of the children and young people. The Play in Action course was delivered by an external organisation which worked closely with Learning Communities. They developed a toolkit to which Learning Communities could contribute. Tutors were more reluctant to propose this course as it involved bringing in outsiders, and practitioners were often concerned to conserve resources inside the service, but this programme had its own funding. The interviewee stressed that this kind of community learning was very reliant on effective partnership working as this course illustrated. A further course which helped groups to carry on was 'Grow your group' which was similar in content to a basic community group programme which a local voluntary sector infrastructure organisation would run.

Learning Communities aimed to create sustainable outcomes, based largely on partnerships with other organisations in the City. For example, Youth and Play services and Neighbourhood Partnerships were ongoing links so long as they remain funded. In turn others needed the group; for example, the Children's Centre needed them as it was forming a CIC and needed the group to support them in their

---

[13] Extract from presentation given by group members

bid. It was the view of the practitioner that community groups like this one learn skills gradually to make them more independent to function as a group and to communicate with each other. However, in my view groups like MISSH would still need quite a lot of community development input after the first phase of courses.

3.5 Workshop

The workshop was attended by almost all the current members and some of the staff from various supporting organisations - the latter for part of the time only. No children or young people attended the workshop which was held, at the group's request, during school hours.

The morning was spent developing a simple evaluation framework and testing it against the experience of the group so far. Further, the session looked at the importance of collecting and using data and evidence to match each question. The focus was on agreeing a basic evaluation tool which the group could use again and again. The tool was based on four basic questions: What went well? (And how do we know?); What was difficult? (And how do we know?); What caused problems? (And what did we do about them?); What did we learn (and how did we learn it/what can we learn from it)?

The framework was tested against three themes, previously chosen during email exchanges with me, as part of the workshop preparation.

> 1. Where it all started and Digital Stories and some information about St Anne's Day, presentations to Neighbourhood Partnerships, MP, school and others.

> 2. Play

> 3. Community centre project, local history and St Anne's Day

> Each theme was covered on the day through mini-presentations, comments, questions, discussion and summarising onto post-it notes.

3.5.1 Workshop – session on evaluation and data

How the group started and Digital Stories

On this topic we heard about the various things that came out of the Digital Stories work and about the presentations given. The Digital Stories work was vital in getting the discussions off the ground and helping the group to come together. Later courses continued this work. Key areas mentioned in discussion included the presentation to an MP. During this meeting a 'throwaway comment' about St Anne's Day led to finding out more about the history, which this has been important for some individuals who have become interested in developing the skills for finding out more about local history, as well as for the group and the community as this is what led to the development of the Festival around St Anne's Day.

2. On the Play theme we focused on 2 areas: a) what went well and why and b) what could have been done better and how?

In summary the group believed that the play training was seen as especially positive and had contributed a great deal to improving lives and the community. The following paragraphs are taken from the post-it notes and flip charts from the day.

What went well?

Some group members had helped to bring about the introduction of a Play Pod into the school playground and had been trained to act as volunteers in it. The Play Pod was a structure with lots of equipment and resources for free play and encourages the children to play individually or together in a constructive way. The Play Pod was available locally but the school had not taken it up until the group supported its introduction. Importantly the Play Pod was still there by the time of this review and was still making an impact. It involved quite a big commitment from the group's and other community volunteers. Firstly they had to be trained and then they go onto a rota of volunteers for each lunchtime. The training for staff and volunteers had improved everyone's understanding of play which they could use in their own lives/practice and showed the value in bringing children together to play. The evidence for this was partly provided by the support teacher from the school who stated that there had been improved behaviour in the school playground, and a reduced number of minor injuries in the school playground. Ground rules for the use of the Play Pod were introduced to school and community staff through training and to the children through assemblies.

A second element of the Play Training had led to the introduction of Play Rangers[14] locally. Play Rangers operated across various areas of Bristol and provide outdoor play after school. Again there was a high dependence of local volunteers to be able to run Play Rangers sessions.

The training had again involved some valuable learning about play which the group had been able to utilise both personally and for the volunteering role. This kind of work was seen as valuable for the community because it brought people together and involved children of all ages playing together. It was felt that one piece of evidence for how well it was going was because there were no problems during the sessions and that lots of people came along. It was believed to be good for the community because '*adults and kids learn to play together*'. Other positives included that it took place outdoors and involved 'safe' risk taking - adventurous play, commitment and taking responsibility.

In terms of numbers, the group said first that a lot of people came; so then they discussed how this had grown as it had attracted just a few people the first time and then it got up to 30 - 60 children plus their parents, the higher number if it was in school/on school premises and lower numbers when on the fields. The Play Rangers project had also enabled good links with Brislington Brook project. The continuation of Play Rangers for the current year was dependent on funding but everyone in the group believed that they would be doing some sessions during this year and that the Rangers had already confirmed their attendance for this year's festival.

The group evaluated some general aspects of play, for which they had found a new respect. Play brings children of different ages together and improves children's behaviour. The stated that play gets children outside and active and gets people talking to each other in the community. The felt that parents and children working together and playing together had been positive. The group members felt that they had benefited from learning about play and using it to bring the community together of all ages and talking to children and adults. In this way they felt that play supported community improvement too. All the play the group has learned about is child-centred and has involved the children and young people being more involved in determining what sort of play is on offer.

---

[14] Play Rangers are specialist outdoor play workers who support children and young people to play in their local parks and green spaces. We provide games and activities that encourage positive behaviour, child led play and an engagement with their surroundings. Play Rangers work with children in their free time, after school, holidays and community events as well as being involved in school sessions. What do we do? We play team games and sports to encourage co-operation and physical activity including football, rounders, skipping, bulldog and many more. Play Rangers have also developed adventurous activities, facilitating safe risk taking via den-building, cook-outs and making rope swings. Arts and crafts promote creativity and free expression. Mask making, kites, lanterns, dance and performance are always popular. We enable children to follow their imagination using fantasy, role play, props and dressing up. www.goplacestoplay.org.uk

Play – what to improve

The group felt that it still needed more training in regard to play - and in particular how to involve the wider community more in enabling and supporting play. A proposed Playing Out session did not happen as not all neighbours would agree to close the road and the group would still want to run a Playing Out session with the right support and success in persuading other residents to agree.

Funding remained a key issue. For example, Play Rangers needed support - and the community needed lighting for the back field so that more sessions could take place. Parental awareness locally and practical arrangements also needed improving as for
Play Rangers children need to bring some spare clothes and change into them after school so that school clothes don't get dirty.

St Anne's Day 2011 – taken from the post-it notes and flipcharts

Overview

Lots of people came. This event was a first for the organisers and although they had made lots of plans, looking back they felt that it had been quite chaotic - but it did go ahead and this was a considerable achievement. Some things that didn't work well were outside the control of the group (keys) but others (not enough helpers) could have been done better. It was agreed that they needed a detailed checklist of what they did to provide a list for the following year / next event

What went well?

People came and there was a good atmosphere which meant that people stayed. The UWE students showed their model of a possible community centre. Since the event more people now go to Neighbourhood Partnership meetings and it appears to be the case that more people now talk to each other. Discussion focused on how the group might try to gain evidence for these types of impact in the future, although without funding, it was difficult to reach definite conclusions. The School had helped out (but now also does their own fair which was not seen as so good) and some funding had been raised from several sources.

The learning

The group had learned that for the next festival, planned for the coming summer, there was a need to be better organised and plan everything in advance. The day went well 'but we were disorganised' and so many aspects could have been better. Much of what hadn't worked well, the group attributed to their lack of experience. Key to improving the day, they decided, would be to plan who is to do what and stick to it, making decisions beforehand and being realistic about what can be achieved.

There was some general discussion about the perceived 'lack of community spirit' in the St Anne's area, although group members believed that they could show that the play work and the Festival have made a bit of difference. However the group is mainly experiencing that there are cuts, that things are not happening and the lack of willingness to, for example, close a road for Playing Out is evidence of an ongoing lack of community being prepared to work together. (Later there was a discussion about changes to benefits which were also anticipated to be likely to have a negative effect in this community.) Transport (or lack of it) was also mentioned as being a big issue locally. We agreed that many of the difficulties faced by this community are also found in many other similar communities and neighbourhoods.

The group members agreed that it was hard to keep things going when there is less outside input such as a course or other support from a development worker or Partnership. However, the group had kept meeting, however infrequently. They were planning for this year's Festival and the meetings had increased again to weekly. The Children's Centre had helped by offering a room to meet in / space to store the group's paperwork.

3.5.2 Workshop planning session

The afternoon session involved planning for the future based on the lessons learned from the morning session. There were two parts to this - planning for the future of the group and planning for St Anne's Day 2012.

Planning for the group

Here it was suggested that again, a simple planning framework could be used, reflecting the basic evaluation tool, and using the data from the morning to do some practical planning for the future.

We took the Planning for the Group first. Everyone stressed how important it is to be realistic about what can be done and the importance of breaking things down into small steps or tasks. People to take on tasks and the group can get help from others wherever possible. A practitioner who was present reminded the group that it is important to let the others know if you are not able to do something that you have said you would do. This started a discussion about the importance of setting some basic ground rules for the group.

The group came up with the following aims:

Long term

Open a community centre
One step towards this might be to have a temporary centre - such as a portacabin /temporary classroom type building in the meantime.

Even longer term

Get the Centre involved in a range of community activities - for example: allotments.

Short term

As a way of achieving the long term plan - develop some ideas and carry them out. For example, this could include creating a pop-up (temporary) shop with a store front, charity shop, art workshop and so on and continuing to do the festival every year. Both these activities give the group visibility in the community and they also help the group to find more volunteers / group members. In addition these potential activities help to raise money for the longer-term goal.

A further task was to register the group or make it more official, both as a way of protecting the group and making it seem more serious and also helping it to raise funds. A discussion was held on how to get help from the right support people including Learning Communities, the City Council and many others. The group believed that the best way to develop the group was through training which would help the group learn to manage and run itself; raise money; running the board; getting registered; community asset transfers etc.

The group felt that it was important from now on to hold regular meetings. Through the short term activities continue to consult and involve the community more; ideas for this included carrying out a survey and a 'talking wall/wall of ideas' at the Festival and when the group does anything else as well as collecting other data and evaluating all the group's activities. The group was particularly keen to continue to collect information about the community and its needs but was also mindful of the need to acquire more skills to help them do this.

The group was keen to get more people involved, but it was agreed that they will only get involved if there is something definite to do, so ask for volunteers to do something specific, for example, to help with one task on the day of or before the festival. Then, if they are interested to know more, the group can persuade them to come along to meetings or to help with something else, maybe just next year's festival if that is what they are interested in.

If the group could be seen locally as a serious organisation with its own identity and purpose it would be easier for the group to be the owner of its own ideas.

It was agreed that it was important to continue the intergenerational theme and to keep young people and children involved in the group through young people taking on volunteering and mentoring of younger children. It would be important also to consult with young people and children and continue the involvement with child-centred play activities.

Planning for St Anne's Festival

This was a detailed discussion of the issues of most immediate concern to the group which was to organise a festival for to take place 3 months after the workshop. The discussion was very practical and focused on organisation and planning, based on the evaluation of the previous year's event, which we had carried out earlier.

Some key lessons from the previous year were about the importance of having a plan and sticking to it. Other lessons had been learned about money; the importance of understanding funders' rules, making clear what charges were for, if any, and how any surplus would be used.

Clear communications with supporters, funders and attendees - as well as with co-organisers were also raised.

We ended the workshop with a discussion on whether the group see themselves as 'active citizens', which they didn't. We also discussed how the group will keep involving young people and children in mutual learning which has been one of its strengths so far. The concluding discussion focused on how the group can continue to collect evidence, reflect on what they are doing and slowly gather and create new knowledge. Some basic data collection and communication skills would need to be part of their next learning programme.

4. Discussion

The development of this research case study used a variety of methods. However, the main aim of the joint piece of work was to gain understanding about active learning for active citizenship and its relationship to intergenerational learning and activity, while simultaneously introducing the community group at its heart to some methods and tools for appreciating the role that research and evaluation can play in the successful development of the group and encouraging them to use those methods in future.

4.1 Active citizenship & active citizenship learning

It is important to reflect here on what was meant by citizenship; as noted above, the group did not see themselves active citizens or the work they were doing as being a demonstration of active citizenship. Once introduced to my understandings of active citizenship they could see why I suggested this description, but did not really relate to the term. The Take Part approach recognises that active citizenship, and any associated research or learning, is likely to be a fluid process, with individuals and groups engaging in different ways at different times; individuals may become involved with a community group or do some voluntary work but that group as a whole may then become involved in running or changing something locally.

The approach to learning taken by the Learning Communities Team and other staff who engage with this case study group overlaps clearly with the approach to learning adopted by the Take Part network, formerly known as Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC) and re-badged more recently. The network promotes community based learning which aims to enable citizens and communities to engage more fully with civil and civic society and to identify needs and bring about changes where needed.

However the Learning Communities staff would also identify closely with a community development learning approach, which has close links with active learning for active citizenship. They see themselves as having an enabling role in relation to community development. At this level they have a commitment to the engagement of all of a community and it is for this reason that they have a clear focus on the involvement in this learning and community decision-making about improvements to communities. In the case of the MISSH group, although starting from basics, the group was able to move quickly into analysing the key issues they identified for improving their communities. It was also important to staff that they did not raise expectations which could not be met, while enabling steps to be taken to understanding the mechanisms for addressing these key points. Learning how to communicate and engage with the appropriate policy makers is an important part of developing active citizenship.

4.2 Policy context

As noted above, intergenerational work and practice has a range of meanings, methods and approaches; much of the intergenerational activity related to active citizenship has traditionally taken the form of rather narrow 'volunteering' in the case of young people (teenagers) visiting lonely older people or doing their shopping. While a slightly stereotyped view of this activity I had thought that it was becoming out of date until recently[15]. There are some notable exceptions. Another view of intergenerational work is that of mentoring; this has been introduced frequently as either a way of encouraging children or young people, particularly those who are considered disaffected, or with low aspirations to achieve their potential and/or to change the behaviour of young people at risk of offending. These do not focus on the mutual learning for community change and empowerment which we are considering here.

Pain (2005) provides a useful explanation of the use of intergenerational work in developing sustainable and cohesive communities. Her paper was written for the previous government but the arguments would pertain today and current government policy is equally keen to develop cohesive communities, supported by active citizens. She drew attention to the changing demographics of western societies with a growing proportion of the populations being older and the background of relatively poor participation in civic and civil activity by much younger people.

Springate et al (2008) provide a detailed review of the potential of intergenerational work to delivery increased participation and positive outcomes for individuals and communities.

---

[15] www.ncvys.org.uk

Family learning, intergenerational work and the so-called 'baby boomer impact' are also relevant considerations in this context. Family and intergenerational work are sometimes used, erroneously, interchangeably; family learning is learning which has traditionally been used to engage parents and sometimes grandparents in their (young) children's learning, though can be used slightly more broadly (NIACE, 2009). Intergenerational work covers anything, learning based or not, which brings two generations together, usually young children or younger teenagers with the older generation meaning people over retirement age. Neither of these narrow definitions is very helpful and we would be better to look at the definition of intergenerational practice from the Beth Johnson Foundation originally cited above [16]:

'people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities, which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contribute to building more cohesive communities'.

The 'baby boomer' impact has been discussed in the press and has even been the subject of a book by a current cabinet minister (Wiletts, 2010). This phenomenon has apparently been brought more to public attention in Germany, particularly, and to an extent elsewhere in western Europe where finances are tight and birth rates are dropping. Commentators and reviewers suggest however that the arguments behind this are doubtful and it is an area where further research would be needed.

The Pinch sets out to show how the baby boomers – those, like Willetts, who were born between 1945 and 1965 – have "stolen their children's future" through their cultural, demographic and political dominance. Willetts (2010) does not quite succeed in proving this charge of intergenerational theft. But in marshalling his case he takes you on such a fascinating journey through British society that you do not feel remotely shortchanged.

His stated thesis is that the big generation of boomers has concentrated wealth, adopted a hegemonic position over national culture and failed to attend to the needs of the future. They have, in effect, broken the inter-generational -contract. It is certainly true that the boomers have done well out of the welfare state, being set to take out, Willetts suggests, approximately 118% of what they'll put in. But this makes them no worse than -previous generations, including those born between 1900 and 1920 (Reeves, 2010). However, the importance here is that in some parts of the popular imagination, reflected in the news and social media, has bought into this concept and is acting on it. This negativity and tension between generations could have an impact on active citizenship and participation and could be addressed effectively by a more mutual approach to intergenerational learning in a reflective and empowering context.

The MISSH Group had heard of the term 'big society' but, again, did not really relate it to their own activities and were quite cynical about what it might mean, suggesting that it contrasted with their experiences of living in a community with few resources and where important services appeared to the threatened with cuts. The practitioners however felt that this type of work was really important for big society implementation.

Neither the MISSH Group nor the practitioners seemed to think that the implementation of a big society approach might change the way the groups could develop or affect its access to funding. Future funding was seen as likely to be very hard to obtain; cuts were already making a big impact locally in terms of services, activities and access to scarce provision for play and youth work. The likely change in the ownership and structure of the Children's Centre was, probably rightly, seen as a threat to one of the few resources locally.

During this discussion it was revealed that the impending and planned further changes to welfare benefits were likely to have a negative impact on individual group members; they felt that this would

---

[16] NB there is also a therapeutic use of the term intergenerational practice but that is not what is referred to in this context.

affect their own benefits and likely employment opportunities as well as impact the ability of them and, even more, their community to take part in group work, volunteering and so on, which they felt might not be 'counted' as part of their skill development towards employment. There is very little employment locally and a poor transport infrastructure. However, not all group members were unemployed and two group members had recently found employment.

Further threats might come about through potential changes to the funding for adult learning. Though Community Learning funding is protected for now, the means of its delivery may well change if current policy experiments, such as Community Learning Trusts, are rolled out, or there are major changes to the local authority's role in adult learning. However, there might be opportunities here which would strengthen the ability of providers to meet the learning needs of this community.

4.3 Analysis for the work done – in the light of the evaluation work carried out with/by the group

We should first look at the group's relationship with evaluation. The workshop day focused mainly on three areas of activity that the group had undertaken in order to illustrate the value of employing a basic evaluation framework and data gathering approach. The group had not previously undertaken any formal evaluation of their activities and the context in which they were familiar with evaluation techniques was in feeding back to the learning providers at the end of periods of training/learning.

To begin with the group struggled with the notion of looking for an even-handed evaluation which was based on evidence they had collected and which, while including their own perceptions, did not give them more prominence than was warranted. The inclusion of 'external' practitioners and intermediaries in the workshop was crucial in helping the group to look at their work from more than one perspective and to use these reflections in developing improved plans for the future.

It was important to build on the evaluation which had inevitably occurred in general conversation and reflection between the group members both during their previous activities and thereafter. This was the building block that they could use to see what evidence they had and to learn to take the process of gathering information and carrying out reflection in a more systematic way. It seemed that it was this systematisation which was most new to the group, who said that they would not have set about it in this way without the joint working with Taking Part.

The work the group had done had in fact been considerable. They had, from very little, and with very little resource, though with the support of various courses and community development practitioners, managed to make a difference locally with the potential for more. All of this was on a small scale of course but the ambitions were longer term and had wider implications for community change.

4.4 Intergenerational work in active citizenship

Is there any difference between intergenerational work in the active citizenship context and active citizenship work in general? At the risk of stating the obvious, intergenerational work in the particular context of this case study is connected entirely to the lives of the people in the MISSH group, the majority of whom has children who they perceive to be at great risk of being excluded from the community around them and whose views on the community are vital for its future as well as its present. In addition, for the group, the involvement of children and young people is of vital importance in preventing trouble and difficulties in the community, which are perceived largely to be caused by young people / children, whether or not this is the case. Further, the group would be united in desiring good futures for its young people and one way to do this was to strengthen their opportunities in every possible way - whether through play or community activity or just gaining access to more resources for the community. It was important to the group to acknowledge that not all of

them had children and they all wanted to see communities where there is integration between the generations rather than not. There is a role for informal and more formal family learning provision in enabling this type of intergenerational work. The importance of play and play training in furthering this work has been worthy of mention as it is a very practical way of addressing some of the issues that were raised from the group's investigative work during the Digital Stories, giving some 'quick wins' in the community and involving both adults and children/young people in the activity.

Intergenerational work is likely to be even more important going forward as we are subject to the demographic changes forecast for many years, while at the same time communities are under great pressure from new challenges, economic crisis and lack of employment opportunities, lack of community resources and diminishing access to services. If tensions arise and cohesion is threatened it is this kind of intergenerational mutual co-operation which is likely to lead to increased cohesion. In fact, rather than intergenerational learning it would be important to try to bring everyone together and this is where we should consider the concept of multigenerational learning, to which we will return. While some of this was suggested by Pain in 2005, she was of course writing before the latest economic crisis. However, in communities such as that where the MISSH Group is based, there was little deep effect of the better economic times, though more people were reported by the group to have had jobs; these types of neighbourhoods had not really ever recovered from the previous economic downturns of the 1980's and 1990's (JRF, 2012).

4.5 Role of the catalysts and intermediaries

While the role of the group is in determining its own way forward, the group agreed that it would not have come about without outside influence. The role of Bristol City Council's Learning Communities should not be underestimated in bringing about the group and bringing its members together. When they set up the original family learning course, 'My Life in St Anne's', the worker could not know that a group would definitely emerge from it, though experience in other neighbourhoods would suggest that it might. In addition the group might have been temporary and unlikely to last beyond the presentation of its findings to others.

In addition the group has had support from the St Anne's Park Children's Centre where it meets and stores its paperwork and so on. The St Anne's Park Primary School too has supported the group's development though the group perceive this to be a relationship which brings a mix of benefits along with some potential dis-benefits which are discussed below.

The importance of play - and therefore the role of those who do play training and bring play to communities - is paramount in this work. This way of engaging the adults and the children and young people in a community has supported all that the group has done. To what extent this was fostered through the original family learning angle could be further explored.

Neighbourhood or area partnerships have also had a role to play in bringing about the group's existence, not least because the local Partnership provides access to its bank account for the little funding the group has had access to already.

4.6 Intermediaries' relationship with the group – from the group's perception

The group is very positive about the Learning Communities Team and what they have provided for the group so far but there is little understanding that what they can offer is limited to learning programmes / community development learning.

The group also perceives the Children's Centre's role as generally positive, but there is concern about the future as its funding is under threat and it is becoming a social enterprise of some kind. The group do not yet have a good understanding of what this involves. While there is the potential advantage that the Children's Centre will have a more mutual relationship with the group, the needs of the Children's Centre will also have to be met from its community involvement and this could take yet more of the group members' limited energy and resources.

The group's attitude to the school was much more mixed; it was important to remember that many of the group's children attend this school and this may affect the perception the group has in terms of the power relations between the school and the individuals (whether adults or children) and the school in relationship to the community. The relationship the group members have with the schools is mixed because of for example difficulties with children's behaviour and the power of the school in the community and in regard to individual children is evident in their discourse. The group members who are parents/grandparents also volunteer at the school, including in play which overlaps with activities they have done as a group (Play Training). There was also in discussion a nervousness about the head teacher and others. While there was some criticism of the school, at other times the group could put all that to one side. The school has opportunities to offer - particularly in relation to play, and the group was happy to pick up these chances and other offers of support. However the group did not necessarily feel respected by the school and the Children's Centre was also perceived to held in 'lesser' regard by the school, though the school had been instrumental in setting up and running the Centre. The group felt that the school's needs would always dominate; for example, from the group's perspective this included the fact that the school constantly swapped meeting rooms, the group had a perception of their ideas being 'nicked' and credit claimed for the group's initiatives; it was seen that the School had set up a festival/fair in direct competition to the St Anne's Day event, which, by being held later in the month to be near to the original St Anne's Day was inevitably during the school holidays and therefore could not get as much support from the school as it would like and that the school had been able to 'take the money' from the community which was then not available to spend later in the month at the festival. This perception was not able to be evidenced absolutely and there was no opportunity to check this independently through the school or other practitioners.

4.7 Role of the community/community groups

The group were becoming increasingly aware of what they needed to do to make changes in their community or to form themselves as a fully functioning group. It was clear that they were not going to have an easy ride. As one member said: 'if you want a community centre you have to get it yourselves'. There was also an oblique reference to the concept of big society when one member added: 'as a society we've got so used to people doing things for you - now we have to do it ourselves, but we do get support'.

There are mechanisms for support for the group to draw on, but they are part of a poorly resourced community and the sources of support that they do have access to are not always themselves in a buoyant position.

The group was well aware of the challenges ahead in their own community and in trying to harness the enthusiasm and support of the community. In this they were facing the perceived apathy of some community members, and the outright hostility elsewhere. Community consensus is a myth put about by policy makers and most community members, including this group, are entirely realistic about having to win people over to their cause through demonstration of success and the art of persuasion. The group's example was their difficulty in achieving agreement amongst a limited number of residents to enable them to hold a Playing Out session. Playing Out could not happen as neighbours would not agree to the temporary street closure which the City Council could only approve if there is agreement between the affected households. Improved communication skills and information sharing by the group and the high profile Playing Out is receiving nationally may enable the group to change minds

and hold a Playing Out session over time. The disappointment that this had engendered in the group was palpable and it had been a hard lesson for them to learn that their enthusiasm would not necessarily be enough.

4.8 Community voice – community identification of key issues and what little changes could make big improvements

The meetings that had been held with councillors, the Partnership and the MP were seen as important but the group also perceived that these were likely to have limited impact in terms of actually bringing about change - any changes were more likely to be brought about by themselves but they doubted their abilities in achieving this as they had very little access to resources, whether personal or as a community. They felt that their voice as an individual or as a community had little power locally as the community had over time received very little by way of extra support. It appeared from contact with the professionals working with the group that this particular community often falls between two stools as it is a relatively small neighbourhood which can be overlooked when the bigger pots of funding are allocated and whose shops and other businesses may not be a priority.

The key issues identified in Digital Stories had been litter and rubbish; play opportunities; youth opportunities; public transport and access to learning and work. Some group members had become Community Learning Champions to encourage more engagement in learning in the community, as low skills and low employment were also identified as difficulties.

4.9 Importance of response from policy and decision makers

When community groups engage with policy and decision makers such as local councillors it is of vital importance that they get a clear response. The group was entirely clear that the responses would not all be to their liking; they did not have unrealistic expectations that all their proposals would be adopted. On the positive side they had been able to bring about some changes through their work with the Neighbourhood Partnership:

[Partnership worker]: I saw the digital stories at a Neighbourhood Partnership meeting and realised that we had some shared objectives. We were able to do some work with our Clean and Green funding to clean the areas identified on the course, and one of our Neighbourhood Partnership priorities for Brislington is to increase community activities and facilities – which is exactly what the group wanted too. K and P were keen to be part of the partnership and to work together to see what we could do to achieve some of our plans. [17]

4.10 Strengthening the group – sustainability for the future

The MISSH Group was interesting for a number of reasons; they were a relatively new group which was not formally constituted; they were in a disadvantaged community with few resources; the group was made up of women and (mainly) their children; the group could be described as 'marginalised' already before it has even begun. Interestingly the group did not reflect while I was there on its make-up (other than to acknowledge that not all group members had children); they were of varying ages and races but this was not mentioned in discussion. This range of backgrounds gives them a good start for building a future group which is inclusive and can bring about greater cohesion.

Now is not a good time to start a new group - particularly one which might need some considerable amounts of funding - as the voluntary and community sector is facing considerable cuts at the local

---

[17] Extract from report prepared by group members for a presentation made by them and support workers.

level[18]. It is evident that this group is prepared to take a long view and take its time building its capacity to bring about the changes it has identified are needed in its community.

One useful angle to continue to pursue is that of family learning and fostering activity which includes young and old across the whole community. There are a number of directions which the group can look at to further these aims which are currently funded by a variety of agencies and authorities. (Examples include: family learning, strengthening links between younger and older people in communities, improving the well-being of local people, especially older people and vulnerable adults, improving play.) In order to do this they can make good use of the evidence that they have already gained.

4.11 The role of research and evaluation in supporting sustainability

It is of key importance to the group to collect evidence of all kinds. They require evidence to help themselves as a group and to help others to support them. They immediately need to show evidence of the needs they intend to address - this will be one of the first questions in any application for funding. Evidence about their community is also needed as again this neighbourhood is at risk of being excluded by policy and decision makers, as it is quite small and not as 'troublesome' as some other areas. To begin with the group did not see its Digital Stories as data and evidence and had not appreciated the need for being systematic in collecting and keeping data, in evaluating and in using any evidence to help them plan, carry out and fund their activities. These examples illustrate the key role that co-working with researchers can bring to active citizenship and intergenerational learning.

5. Conclusions – lessons learned

It is clear that family learning and resultant intergenerational activity has enabled some increase in intergenerational solidarity in the St Anne's Park community. As the Head of Learning Communities wrote:

For the families in St Anne's Park, it hasn't been a choice of 'state' or 'society'. This pilot project has demonstrated how committed and expert local government professionals can work alongside local residents to empower them to bring about positive community change. For adult and community learning services, successful community development learning requires us to adopt a new approach to course design and delivery. Rather than offering a pre-determined curriculum to passive potential learners, tutors will need to have the confidence to co-create the course content to achieve desired outcomes. In the true spirit of Paulo Freire, perhaps we will see tutors and participants acting as learning partners, sharing meaningful knowledge and expertise to bring about lasting social, political and community change.

"For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other." [19]

Many communities are apparently marginalised and the neighbourhood in this case study could be described as one of them; if only because it does not attract many resources and has little by way of community buildings or meeting places. The group too is potentially marginalised, both in its newness and its make-up, being largely formed of women and children/young people, who also have relatively

---

[18] NCVO reporting 500 cuts worth £77 million on www.ncvo.org.uk on 10 July 2012. This figure is updated weekly or more frequently.

[19] From an unpublished article by Victoria Appleton and Jane Taylor, Learning Communities, City of Bristol and citing Paulo Freire (1972) Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Harmondsworth. Penguin.

little access to resources of any kinds. Their relative success so far is testament to the creativity they have as a group and the good quality community development work that has taken place.

The research case study was intended to demonstrate the value of community based research and that its impact could be strengthened through involvement of the community group in learning experientially to find evidence and to use that evidence to further their aims and bring about stronger communities. One key aspect of this work was opening up the space for identifying evidence and entering into dialogue and discussion merely by the group members being offered the opportunity and agreeing to set aside the time from their busy lives to participate.

Prior to working with the researcher, the local community learning staff had a commitment to working in a spirit of dialogue, working with the community groups to create empowerment for individuals and communities. It is clear that family learning and resultant intergenerational activity has enabled some increase in intergenerational solidarity in the local community. As the head of the community learning service wrote:

So that the group could understand how to take its next steps, develop proper plans and reflect effectively on its experience, learning lessons as it went, it was vital for them to acquire some basic research and evaluation skills. These skills would further help to legitimise the group so that it can become formally recognised and apply for funding. The group already had a wealth of data at its disposal but was not yet able to translate that evidence into planning or organisational strengths. Although the group had already presented its findings about the neighbourhood and community to policy and decision makers, there was some way to go in developing follow up. It was useful to keep the evaluation framework straightforward and make it transparent and usable in any context. The group had not seen its Digital Stories as evidence and had not appreciated the need for being systematic in collecting and keeping data, in evaluating and in using any evidence to help them plan, carry out and fund their activities. Co-working with researchers supported this learning and ongoing engagement over a longer period would enable deeper understanding to be developed.

It is particularly difficult for a fledgling group to show evidence of impact and it was in making sense of the evidence they had that this research proved the most positive. As the invited researcher I could inform the discussion by bringing in external experiences, comparisons with other groups in other cities from my experience and relating the findings to policy or practice of which the group had little or no prior knowledge. Many communities are apparently marginalised and the neighbourhood in this case study could be described as one of them. The group too is potentially marginalised, both in its newness and its make-up, being largely formed of women and children/young people, who also have relatively little access to resources of any kinds. Their relative success so far is testament to the creativity they have as a group and the good quality community work that has taken place. The very basic evaluation tools we applied proved successful as a powerful introduction to gathering evidence and evaluating it.

The group struggled with concepts such as active citizenship or intergenerational learning and did not generally identify themselves with them. However to progress as a group and especially to raise funds the group would need to align itself with such concepts and policy developments and again this was where as researcher I could bring in useful external information. New groups need to confront these difficulties but the necessary involvement of intermediaries can lead to potential bureaucratisation of their development without that being their wish. Some groups decide to stay outside the funding environment in order to be able to progress their own active citizenship plans but this would not be possible for a group which wants to open a community centre.

The term 'intergenerational' remains problematic for me as it so often is misconstrued as meaning 'between two generations'. To increase levels of cohesion and empowerment of communities and to reflect more accurately the reality of our communities, it would be better in future to focus on the concept of multigenerational working and learning to bring together greater cross-community

involvement. Through the research, we found that the link between intergenerational, or rather multigenerational, learning and active citizenship needs to be made explicit and the support workers and other intermediaries, as well as the group, need to be very determined to succeed and ensure that it reflects the needs, wishes and capacity of the community. Skilled development work and enthusiastic community groups are required for success. Researchers can bring a positive impact by sharing skills and encouraging the action and reflection processes alongside the community development / learning staff and this was certainly demonstrated through the activity described here, though a connection with me/other researchers over a period of time might prove even more effective. It appears to be difficult to link young people into activity and projects outside of youth / play services and outside of school and yet this was key to the way this group developed, its understanding of local issues and had also helped to determine what it would do next. For the group, involving young people and children was just what they did - the children were in their homes and lives and communities, they wanted to help them develop and the community to be a good place for all of them to live, find work, learn and join in. Support can come from community learning but much of its curriculum does not enable the reflection and action we were building in this example (Foley, 1999).

In reflecting on the research role, I believe that a much longer engagement would have been useful. The activity enabled me to act as a catalyst but risked too little long-term impact. To do more would have had to be couched as a 'course' to have greater intrinsic worth and longer lasting consequences. To counter this though was the support that the group was likely to receive from the agencies around it, which would continue and would remind them of and reinforce the suggestions, made during the joint activities. Methods chosen were practical and the group responded positively, learning much in the process, but I recognise the potentially dubious effectiveness of short term pieces of work and the dependence on other intermediaries to continue support to the group. However, there is certainly scope to develop a deeper relationship between intergenerational work and active citizenship by employing reflective practices in an intentional manner, supported where possible by appropriate intermediaries.

References

Annette, J. and Mayo, M. (2010) Taking Part? Active Learning for Active Citizenship, and beyond. Leicester. NIACE.

Ellis, S. (2004) Generations in action: final evaluation report Beth Johnson Foundation http://www.centreforip.org.uk/res/documents/publication/Generations%20in%20Action.pdf

Foley, G. (1999) Learning in Social Action. Leicester. NIACE

Freire, P. (1972) Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Harmondsworth. Penguin.

Harkness, S. Gregg, P. MacMillan, L. (2012) Poverty: the role of institutions, behaviours and culture. York. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

JRF (2012) 'Working in neighbourhoods, active citizenship and localism'. Findings. March 2012. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Ledwith, M. (2005) Community Development; a critical approach. Bristol. Policy Press

Ledwith, M. and Springett, J. (2010) Participatory practice: Community based action for transformative change. Bristol. Policy Press.

NIACE (2009) Best practice guidelines: Adult learning and children's centres: making learning accessible for parents and families

Ochum,V., Pratten, B., and Wilding, K. (2005) Civil Renewal and Active Citizenship: a Guide to the Debate. London. NCVO

Pain, R. (2005) Intergenerational relations and practice in the development of sustainable communities. Durham International Centre for Regional Regeneration and Development Studies, University of Durham.

Reeves, R. (2010) Review. The Observer. 7 Feb 2010.

Schuller, T and Watson, D. (2009) Learning through Life. Leicester. NIACE.

Springate, I., Atkinson, M. and Martin, K. (2008). Intergenerational Practice: a Review of the Literature (LGA Research Report F/SR262). Slough: NFER.

Tam, H. (2010) 'The importance of being a citizen' in Mayo, M. and Annette, J. Taking Part? Active Learning for Active Citizenship, and beyond. Leicester. NIACE.

Thomas, M. (2009) Think Community: An exploration of the links between intergenerational practice and informal adult learning

Thompson, J. (1997) Words in Edgeways. Leicester. NIACE

Willetts, D. (2010) The Pinch: how the baby boomers took their children's future and why they should give it back. Atlantic Books.